

Euthanasia

Introduction

The topic of euthanasia is widespread throughout the world. I chose this topic because this issue is very interesting and I would like to familiarize readers with it, even though it is prohibited in the Czech Republic.

In this essay, I will focus on the meaning of euthanasia and its types. Then I will explain in which countries and to what extent euthanasia is allowed.

Finally, I will present the advantages and disadvantages of the use of euthanasia.

Text of the essay

Euthanasia is a current and widely discussed subject nowadays, especially due to its ambiguity from an ethical point of view. The ethical standpoint differs between people and each person may have their own opinion on euthanasia. There are concerns about its misuse, some believe that human life should not be ended under any circumstances and that no one should assist in ending it. On the other hand, many think that prolonging the suffering of a terminally ill person who cannot commit suicide and asks to end their life is entirely appropriate, provided that euthanasia is carried out in a country where it is legal and under strict legal criteria. So is euthanasia ethical or not? The answer is yes and no, it just depends on the point of view.

Characteristics of Euthanasia

The meaning of the word euthanasia comes from the Greek "eu" meaning good and "thantos" meaning death. In the past, euthanasia meant helping a dying person, which aims to alleviate the pain and anxiety associated with an incurable disease. Today, it can be considered as intentionally hastening the death of the patient at his or her family members' wishes. Professor J. Vozár defines the concept of euthanasia as the conscious termination of the life of a terminally ill person, fully capable of legal actions, at their own request. Furthermore, euthanasia can be defined as intentional killing with the aim of shortening life in order to alleviate suffering at the request of the patient. Euthanasia involves many difficult aspects such as religious, moral, medical, and non-medical aspects. (Vozár, 1995)

Forms of euthanasia

Euthanasia, in the sense of killing a person, has many forms, which can be different, but at the same time can be intertwined. The most common division of euthanasia is into active and passive. (Dworkin, et al., 1998)

Active euthanasia

Active or direct euthanasia consists in the administration of a lethal preparation at the patient's request. This type of euthanasia is also referred to as the overflow syringe strategy. It is based on the principle of direct intervention in the patient's life and has the effect of shortening their suffering. This kind of euthanasia is based on the patient's request, which is arbitrary. Euthanasia is performed by a lethal agent administered to the patient. In this case, the patient "only" decides that they want to end their life, but leaves the last step to the doctors.

Passive euthanasia

Passive or indirect euthanasia is the interruption of treatment that keeps the patient alive. We can talk about this type of euthanasia as a diverted syringe strategy, where treatment is interrupted, devices are disconnected or drugs that keep the patient alive are discontinued. This type of euthanasia is better accepted than the active type and has more support in the field of law. (Anderson, 1998) I think that it is up to each person who is given a certain diagnosis, whatever it is, to decide whether to undergo treatment and thus be dependent on the care of doctors and the delivery of drugs (chemotherapy, dialysis, radiotherapy...) - of course with an uncertain outcome, or simply accept that the end will come much sooner, but with the attitude that they will do what is possible at their current state of health, such as travelling, hobbies, etc.

Assisted suicide

Assisted suicide is a special form of euthanasia. This is a certain concept of euthanasia, which is requested by the patients themselves and is carried out by administering a lethal agent with the help of a doctor, but the patients must administer the lethal dose themselves according to the doctor's instructions. In my opinion, this method of euthanasia is the most acceptable

in terms of ending life. The patients decide on their own that they want to end their life, and at the same time take the last step themselves.

Countries with legalized euthanasia

Netherlands

The Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize euthanasia in 2002. In the Netherlands, euthanasia is allowed for people over the age of 16, who are fully autonomous. Due to the current legal standard, a doctor who ends a human life undertakes to immediately report to the public prosecutor after the execution. Reporting does not result in a crime. There are certain criteria for using euthanasia.

- *„The doctor must be sure that the patient's request is voluntary and well considered.*
- *The doctor must be convinced that the patient's suffering is unbearable and hopeless.*
- *The doctor informed the patient about his situation and prospects*
- *The doctor, in agreement with the patient, has come to the belief that there are no reasonable alternatives.*
- *The doctor consulted the patient's case with another independent doctor*
- *Ending the patient's life is carried out with due medical care and attention" (Vácha, 2019)*

Belgium

In Belgium, Euthanasia was legalized in 2002. It is the second country in which euthanasia is legal. Legalization was carried out in Belgium under the Euthanasia Act. For euthanasia, there are certain conditions that the patient must meet.

- The patient is an adult or has been declared an adult at the time of submission of the euthanasia request, is capable and sane.
- The request is formulated voluntarily, at discretion and repeatedly, and is not the result of external pressure.
- The patient is in a state of health in which they suffer permanently physically or mentally and this suffering cannot be alleviated, which happened as a result of an injury or a pathological condition that is serious and incurable. (Doležal, 2018)

Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, euthanasia was legalized in 2009. This law protects doctors who perform euthanasia from prosecution. A condition for euthanasia is a request submitted by the patient. (Vácha, 2019)

Countries where euthanasia is illegal

Switzerland

Switzerland has a different legal norm. Direct killing of the patient is not allowed here. Euthanasia has never been legalized in Switzerland, but it is tolerated here. There is an institute where there is passive assistance to kill. Passive assisted dying means that patients are given a poison by a doctor, but they have to drink it themselves. If the patient was unable to drink the poison himself and it was given to him by a doctor, it would be a crime of murder. (Vácha, 2019)

Germany

Germany takes a similar approach to euthanasia as the Czech Republic. Killing another person even if they are terminally ill is considered a crime. The only euthanasia allowed in Germany is indirect euthanasia. In Germany, criminal euthanasia is not passive. In the case of incurable diseases, if the patient does not want further treatment, high doses of opiates can be given to relieve pain. Thanks to opiates, the patient is unconscious and dies of respiratory failure. Active direct euthanasia is prohibited in Germany. (Vácha, 2019)

Great Britain

Euthanasia is outlawed in both Great Britain and Wales. Assisted suicide is also a criminal offense here. Anyone who carries it out faces up to 14 years in prison. Just like in the Czech Republic, direct euthanasia is referred to as murder. All proposals to legalize euthanasia have been rejected in Great Britain. (Vozár, 1995)

France

In 2005, passive euthanasia was legalized in France. Here, it allows doctors to withdraw from the treatment of the patient only if they are terminally ill and are being artificially kept alive. The patient must be able to perceive the whole situation. If the patient is unconscious, doctors follow their last will, which was expressed in a state of full consciousness. Even if the patient has wished for euthanasia, doctors cannot withdraw from treatment that relieves pain. (Mednews, 2021)

General considerations for euthanasia

If there are criteria on which possible legalization is based, they are precisely ethical criteria. When evaluating euthanasia from an ethical point of view, it is necessary to take into account values such as justice, compassion for a terminally ill patient, the need to relieve such a patient from suffering, or the dignity of death. Doctors are not acting unethically if they comply with the patient's wish to discontinue treatment in the final stage of the disease. But what about the pain that accompanies the patient's illness? Is it ethical to let such a person suffer, even if they themselves wished for this? So is it perfectly fine to watch a patient die in excruciating pain? Although this act is legally defensible, there are certain doubts from an ethical point of view. (Ptáček, et al., 2012)

General consideration against euthanasia

The main argument that almost every opponent of euthanasia has in mind is the possibility of its abuse. Yes, it is reasonable to be afraid of such an action that could lead to the benefit of killing someone else. Euthanasia would probably become a tool for killing certain individuals, either for financial gain or because they witnessed a crime. It would be possible to expect that the number of suicides would increase. Euthanasia could also become a means of covering medical malpractice. Through it, medical practices or negligence could be covered up. There would not be abuse of euthanasia only from the outside. In this way, euthanasia could be used as an excuse for actions that caused the patient's death, even if it was not caused by a serious illness. The wrong treatment could become a murderous tool. (Ptáček, et al., 2012)

Conclusion

As I already mentioned here, it is important not to confuse certain types of euthanasia. In each country there are some differences, though sometimes slight ones. Euthanasia of any kind is prohibited in the Czech Republic.

Euthanasia is problematic topic discussed in detail worldwide. However, there is a great effort to fight for its legalization.

A good solution would be to legalize euthanasia in all countries, but under certain and strict conditions. Thanks to this solution, patients with an incurable disease in the terminal stage would not have to live in pain and suffer.

No matter what opinion each person has about euthanasia, it can change over the course of a life due to circumstances. A healthy person, who's family members are healthy, will probably never deal with the seriousness of this topic in the same way as someone who suffers from unbearable pain every day, or who watches someone close to him die in excruciating pain before their eyes and for a long time have not been the person they once knew, but only an empty shell from which life is gradually being drained. If someone has been used to making decisions about their life all their life, it is logical that they want to decide about its end as well and leave at a time when it is still dignified for them. I believe that it is clear from my essay that I am among the supporters of the legalization of euthanasia, but as I already said, strict rules must be established so that this last step in a person's life cannot be abused.

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