

Euthanasia

↳ act of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for mercy → greek

meaning: "good / easy death"

• active: deliberately doing something to accelerate the end of a life (injection, overdose, etc.)

• passive: allowing a being to die from natural causes already ending a life (unplugging life support, refusing surgery)

Active

conscious and competent: do not want the remaining way of life

Lillian Bayes: 70 y/o woman dying from arthritis, pain killers couldn't help; began to beg her doctor to kill her

• Doctor injected her w/ a lethal dose w/ families support → was then convicted of attempted murder

Patricia Diane Trumbull: 45 y/o woman w/ leukemia who refused chemotherapy.

• Doctor prescribed meds. for "insomnia" w/ directions on how many to overdose → Dr. was not convicted

Nancy B: 25 y/o paralyzed from neck down (could only watch TV, couldn't breathe on her own). She went on 2 hunger strikes

and took her case to court to order her doctor to unplug her

→ judge reluctantly agreed: her death was "nature taking its course"

Janet Adkins: recognized she had Alzheimer's and reached out to a doctor that advertised poison

• doctor established that she was sound in mind and aware of the consequences → hooked her to machine and allowed her to inject herself → doctor was convicted of second-degree murder

Unconscious and incompetent: relatives seek to allow a person to die

Nancy Cruzan: died but was resuscitated and put on life support machine in a 'vegetative state'

• family members took her case to court after 5 years b/c the hospital would not let her die → court ruled to let her die

Terrie Schiavo: heart attack put her in a persistent vegetative state

• her husband (legal guardian) appealed to have her feeding tube removed → BUT her parents took legal guardianship back and

wanted to keep her alive → court initially ruled to take out the feeding tube, but then appealed and had to reinsert it

James Rachels

Conventional doctrine on euthanasia → active is always impermissible; passive is sometimes permissible

Argument 1: what's more humane?

- **consider** a patient dying of terminal cancer → one could argue it is permissible to withhold treatment to not prolong suffering: it is humane to allow the patient to die to not extend suffering

→ Rachels' assessment: "slow and painful" vs. "quick and painless"

• once the initial decision is made not to prolong his life of agony, then active euthanasia seems preferable to passive (to minimize suffering)

- **consider** an infant w/ Downs and other defects: infant would die if defects weren't treated w/ simple operation
- parents are told and allowed the option of not treating the defects (and the infant would die)

→ Rachels' assessment: if the decision to let the baby die is already made, then it's cruel to not allow it to receive a lethal injection?

Argument 2: Irrelevant grounds

- **consider** the same situation of the infant w/ Downs and other defects

↳ what is the real issue here? Rachels claims that the issue is not the defects, but the Downs Syndrome, and the matter should be decided on that basis (not on the irrelevant question of if or not to cure the defects): whether the life of an infant w/ Downs is worth preserving

- if it is a life worth preserving: the infant should be allowed to live → do the surgery

- if it is not: parents should be permitted to let it die regardless of if it had other life-threatening defects

↳ and so, any infant w/ Downs and the parents don't want it to live, a lethal injection should be permitted

* the distinction between killing and letting die: usually killing seems morally worse BUT Rachels thinks that assumption is false

- case 1: Smith killed a child by drowning (killed)

- case 2: Jones goes to drown a child, but accidentally drops him on his head into the tub. Jones doesn't kill the child, but watches as he drowns (let die)

→ was one's behavior morally better than the others? Rachels argues that there is no moral difference between killing and letting die. After the decision is made to no longer prolong one's life, active euthanasia is not permitted on irrelevant grounds

* life is not worth preserving → allow active euthanasia