

In thousands of homes across the nation victims of terminal illnesses sit in pain due to their sicknesses. Should these people have to go through all of that pain and suffering just for the end result of death? Should these people have the right to assisted death, to rid themselves of unbearable pain? This topic has been one of the great controversies over the last several years.

Not too long ago if someone was found assisting in suicide, it was seen as a felony crime. But recently there have been court cases taken up in two federal appellate courts that ruled terminally ill patients have the right to seek doctor assisted suicide (Carter 1). These cases took place in New York and Washington. This added two more to the list of states that legalized this means of ending life. However, doctor assisted is still seen as a criminal act in thirty four states (Rosen 1). In my opinion, doctor assisted suicide should be made legal throughout the nation. If a terminally ill patient wants to take his or her life due to excruciating pain, he or she should have the ability to utilize euthanasia. Ultimately, the decision should be that of the terminally ill individual.

The main controversy over this issue, is the question of morality. Is it morally right for a doctor to assist in suicide? Many individuals feel that it is not. It is thought if assisted suicide is legalized throughout the states, it will encourage families with terminally ill relatives to push them prematurely to their demise (Carter 2). This is an outlandish assumption. A family that truly loves one another would not urge a family member to rush any decision as momentous as ending one's life. If there is caring among the family, the suicide would not take place until it was utterly necessary.

Two other important moral questions also arise from this issue. First, do our mortal lives belong to us alone, are we sovereign over our bodies, or do they belong to the communities of families in which we are embedded? Second, will this right give the terminally ill a greater sense of control over their circumstances, or will it weaken respect for life? (Carter 2)

The first question is ridiculous. It seems as though Carter is trying to say we will no longer be in charge of ourselves, and we will be living in a socialistic society. There is no reason why we should not be able to control the destiny of our lives. We, as human beings, are solely sovereign over our own bodies. Therefore, it is the terminally ill patient who should have the ability to choose death over life. It is this person who is experiencing the pain and suffering of their disease, not a relative or close friend, much less the government. The legalization of doctor assisted suicide is no reason to change anything with people who are not terminally ill.

The second question, on the other hand, has some validity and logic to it. Doctor assisted suicide would give the dying a certain sense of control. It would enable the patient to have a certain feeling of power, knowing that he or she has the ability to complete his or her life upon request. This may sound somewhat awkward; however, it is quite possible that it would give the patients a sense of well being. Furthermore, it gives them a chance to end their lives on their terms, instead of letting a disease determine their course in life. As for the second half of this question, it should in no way weaken the respect for life. Losing respect for life is for the weak minded. If anything it strengthens the patient's respect; a person in the last stages of a terminal illness has endured some of the worst life has to offer. It takes away many of his capabilities to perform what would normally be commonplace activities; in short it has overtaken his life and dignity. The ability to perform legal assisted suicide would help to replace some of the dignity which the illness has extracted from a person's life. It would give

the person the capability to end matters on his own terms.

John Stuart Mill, one of the great philosophers of the nineteenth century, derived a theory which is an excellent example as an argument for the legalization of doctor assisted suicide, or all moral crimes for that matter. This theory was deemed the "Harm Principle": a person is wholly sovereign over his body. It is no one else's right to invade a person's body. Therefore, since one is fully autonomous over his physical body, one should have the ability to do as he pleases with it. This holds true until the point where his actions bring harm to another human. Doctor assisted suicide is a perfect example, one's body is his own and only his; therefore, if one chooses not to suffer needlessly for months or even years who is to stop him from utilizing the procedure? Some would argue that this does cause harm to others in an emotional sense, yet this is not the issue, and not how Mill thought it should be interpreted.

Now that the moral issues have been discussed, what about the rights which the Constitution of the United States guarantees its citizens? Under the provisions of the fourteenth amendment, the same amendment the right to abortion is found under, we are provided the right to due process (Carter 1). The argument set forth here, is the fact that not all states abide by this amendment, thirty four to be exact. The reason for this is, they do not feel the "right to die" means allowing a doctor to assist terminally ill patients in prematurely ending their lives. Another reason is the assumption that, if doctor assisted suicide were legalized, it could possibly be used as an excuse for murder (America 1). It is possible that it could occur; however, self defense is also an excuse that is used from time to time. But this excuse does not always work. If a murder case was taken to court for "assisted suicide", it would be justly proven whether it was an act of murder, or, rather, whether it was an act of mercy.

The federal rulings state, "we see no real difference between allowing terminally ill patients to die naturally and taking direct measures to kill them." (America 1) I am in total agreement with their statement. However, I am against what happened to a man by the name of Aaron McGuinn. In 1990 this man tested positive for the HIV virus, and in 1996 he passed away by the means of assisted suicide (Macleans). However, he was not yet suffering, for he had not yet developed full blown AIDS, and was in no pain at all. This decision goes against my personal morals for doctor assisted suicide.

Finally, I support doctor assisted suicide, but only within certain limitations. First, the patient must be within close proximity to a natural death, and this should be documented by a licensed physician. If a patient is in unbearable pain, then it is also understandable to follow through with the procedure. This decision should not be taken lightly in any way, and if it were to become decriminalized, there should be some type of counseling service established for those who are weighing their options with doctor assisted suicide. A person's body is his own and his alone; therefore, when it is all said and done, it should be he who is in full control of his own destiny.

