

Victoria Edwards asks us to consider the case of an infant left to die. While it is legal in the United States for physicians to withhold lifesaving treatment in some situations, it is not legal to administer lethal drugs. Victoria Edwards argues, based on the work of James Rachels on active and passive euthanasia, that in some cases an injection is morally preferable to the withholding of treatment.

Baby Janie
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Janie was an infant who was born with a congenital intestinal obstruction that required surgery. Her parents decided against the operation, so Janie was left in the nursery as a terminally ill patient. Many situations like Janie's occur in the United States and, according to surgeon Anthony Shaw, when surgery is denied the doctor tries to do everything possible to minimize the suffering of the infant ("Active and Passive Euthanasia"). Bound by law, the doctors had to submit to passive euthanasia, the refusal of medical treatment resulting in the patient's death, and could not end her misery without all of the unnecessary suffering. Many people argue that active euthanasia, taking specific steps to cause the patient's death, is wrong because it is contradictory of the Hippocratic oath for a doctor to take the life of a patient, and no one person should legally have the power to end the life of another. However, what about Janie's case? These doctors have the power to end the suffering of a dying infant without any pain or prolonged misery, and yet they are not permitted to do so because it is seen as murder. Is there nothing wrong with standing by and watching an emaciated child die slowly as dehydration and infection take control of her body? Is terminating her pain worse than watching her die when they have the power to

end it? In certain situations like Janie's, actively killing someone is arguably the more humane option than taking no action, thus, active euthanasia should not be seen as morally worse than passive euthanasia.

The Hippocratic oath that doctors take, states that they "will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will [they] make a suggestion to this effect" ("Hippocratic Oath"). I understand that this is a significant part of the oath because active euthanasia could easily be seen, as just another version of murder. However, isn't doing nothing as the patient dies arguably its own form of murder? The most frequently used form of euthanasia performed legally in the United States is withholding food and fluids from patients who refuse them, in other words, starving them to death ("Types of Euthanasia"). The doctor that withholds the food from the patient is inactively doing the same thing as a doctor who chose to give a lethal injection as an alternative. James Rachels argued that, "If a doctor lets a patient die, for humane reasons, he is in the same moral position as if he had given the patient a lethal injection for humane reasons" ("Active and Passive Euthanasia"). If the doctor acted under the best interest of his patient and diagnosed correctly, the method used is not important because the end result of death is the same for both active and passive, therefore, one form of euthanasia is not morally superior to the other.

Another way that active euthanasia can be viewed as acceptable is taking into consideration the immense amounts of suffering that goes along with terminal illness. When life becomes a burden and it is of no further use to the patient, doctors are required by law to take no action and wait until the illness

takes over the person's body. Professor Pence reminds us that, "the suffering of terminal patients is not confined to physical pain, as bad as that is: it involves helplessness, stress, exhaustion, terror, loss and other experiences that are difficult to imagine" (Pence). In most cases powerful narcotics are the only alternative for relief, but they usually reduce the patient to a vegetative state in which they have no further use of their life. In addition, the Hippocratic oath states that the doctor has the duty to practice and prescribe for the benefit of the sick according to their best ability and judgment, as well as keep the patients from harm and injustice ("Hippocratic Oath"). So in the case of excessive pain and suffering where patients ask for final relief, passive euthanasia goes against the ethical practice of medicine that the doctors have to uphold. Also, it is proven that the physical pain isn't even the usual reason for patients to ask for physician assisted suicide, but the anguish that comes along with the slow process of dying (Pence). The cases of terminal illness prove that passive euthanasia is morally worse than active, because the doctors have the tools to help their patients but they choose not use them or they are legally bound not to, therefore, the act of relieving the person of their misery is seen as morally correct.

When euthanasia, of any form, is necessary in a certain situation, the patient's death seems to be no worse than the patient's continued existence. If the patient is better off dead than alive, the cause of death seems to be irrelevant if the doctors have the same intentions of liberation. In contrast to the belief of actively taking someone's life is ethically wrong, in some instances taking the tormented persons life without pain can be seen as better than allowing them to

suffer for longer periods of time. As a result, since both forms of euthanasia result in the death of a suffering patient, no one form should be viewed as morally superior than the other.

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