

Pros and Cons of Euthanasia

By Dr. Maisie M

- 1 Is mercy killing humane? Do we have the right to assess whether a life is worth living? Should euthanasia be practiced for terminally ill people only or even for the debilitated and mentally ill too?



- 2 Euthanasia also known as mercy killing is a way of painlessly terminating one's life with the "humane" motive of ending his suffering. Euthanasia came into public eye recently during the Terri Schiavo controversy where her husband appealed for euthanasia while Terri's family claimed differently. This is a classical case shedding light on the pros and cons of mercy killing. Albania, Belgium, Netherlands, Oregon, Switzerland and Luxembourg are some places where euthanasia or assisted suicide has been legalized. Let's have a look at the arguments that will help us understand the reasoning for / against mercy killing.

Pro Euthanasia Arguments

- 3 Legalizing euthanasia would help alleviate suffering of terminally ill patients. It would be inhuman and unfair to make them endure the unbearable pain.
- 4 In case of individuals suffering from incurable diseases or in conditions where effective treatment wouldn't affect their quality of life; they should be given the liberty to choose induced death.
- 5 Also, the motive of euthanasia is to "aid-in-dying" painlessly and thus should be considered and accepted by law. Although killing in an attempt to defend oneself is far different from mercy killing, law does find it worth approving.
- 6 In an attempt to provide medical and emotional care to the patient, a doctor does and should prescribe medicines that will relieve his suffering even if the medications cause gross side effects. This means that dealing with agony and distress should be the priority even if it affects the life expectancy. Euthanasia follows the same theory of dealing with torment in a way to help one die peacefully out of the compromising situation.
- 7 Euthanasia should be a natural extension of patient's rights allowing him to decide the value of life and death for him. Maintaining life support systems against the patient's wish is considered unethical by law as well as medical philosophy. If the patient has the right to discontinue treatment why would he not have the right to shorten his lifetime to escape the intolerable anguish? Isn't the pain of waiting for death frightening and traumatic?
- 8 Family heirs who would misuse the euthanasia rights for wealth inheritance does not hold true. The reason being even in the absence of legalized mercy killing, the relatives can withdraw the life support systems that could lead to the early death of the said individual.

- 9 This can be considered as passive involuntary euthanasia. Here they aren't actively causing the death, but passively waiting for it without the patient's consent.
- 10 It can be inferred that though euthanasia is banned worldwide, passive euthanasia has always been out there which can also be called as passive killing and moreover law doesn't prohibit it. Disrespect and overuse of (passive) euthanasia has always existed and will be practiced by surrogates with false motives. These are the ones who don't need a law to decide for one's life. Present legal restrictions leaves both the incurable patients as well as pro euthanasia activists helpless who approve euthanasia as good will gesture for patient's dignity.
- 11 Health care cost is and will always be a concern for the family irrespective of euthanasia being legalized.

Cons of Euthanasia - Reasons Against Euthanasia

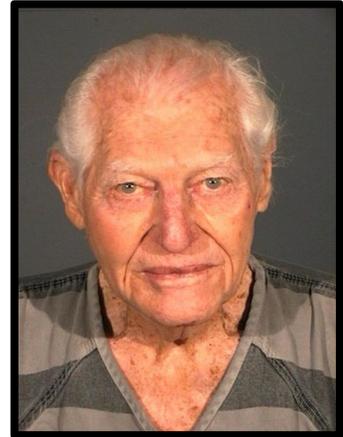
- 12 Mercy killing is morally incorrect and should be forbidden by law. It's a homicide and murdering another human cannot be rationalized under any circumstances.
- 13 Human life deserves exceptional security and protection. Advanced medical technology has made it possible to enhance human life span and quality of life. Palliative care and rehabilitation centers are better alternatives to help disabled or patients approaching death live a pain-free and better life.
- 14 Family members influencing the patient's decision into euthanasia for personal gains like wealth inheritance is another issue. There is no way you can be really sure if the decision towards assisted suicide is voluntary or forced by others.
- 15 Even doctors cannot predict firmly about period of death and whether there is a possibility of remission or recovery with other advanced treatments. So, implementing euthanasia would mean many unlawful deaths that could have well survived later. Legalizing euthanasia would be like empowering law abusers and increasing distrust of patients towards doctors.
- 16 Mercy killing would cause decline in medical care and cause victimization of the most vulnerable society. Would mercy killing transform itself from the "right to die" to "right to kill"?
- 17 Apart from the above reasons, there are some aspects where there is a greater possibility of euthanasia being mishandled.
- 18 How would one assess whether a disorder of mental nature qualifies mercy killing? What if the pain threshold is below optimum and the patient perceives the circumstances to be not worthy of living? How would one know whether the wish to die is the result of unbalanced thought process or a logical decision in mentally ill patients? What if the individual chooses assisted suicide as an option and the family wouldn't agree?

'No Evil in His Act': DA Seeks to Drop Mercy Killing Murder Charge

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1 Carson City District Attorney Jason Woodbury has filed a motion to dismiss the murder charge against an elderly man who shot his paralyzed wife in her hospital bed last year after she reportedly begged to die.

2 William Dresser, 88, was arrested in January 2014 for killing his wife of 68 years, Frances Dresser at Carson Tahoe Hospital. Frances Dresser, 86, had fallen at home and suffered permanent paralysis.

3 Woodbury, who took office a year after the shooting occurred, cited evidence that Frances Dresser expressed a desire to no longer live, her family's request that her husband not be prosecuted and William Dresser's medical condition as reasons that a prosecution isn't warranted.

4 He also cited the fact William Dresser had no criminal history.

5 In an interview, Woodbury said his ultimate goal was to achieve a "just result."

6 "I didn't view there being any component of evil to his act of killing," Woodbury said. "We can talk about judgment, and morally whether it was a right or wrong decision, but I didn't view any aspect of it as evil. That's truly the component you need to have in a murder case is an evil motive and we didn't have that."

7 Woodbury also said his decision to seek a dismissal should not be interpreted to mean assisted suicide is acceptable. Rather, the facts of this specific case justified the decision, he said.

8 "We also wanted to be very cautious to not set a precedent that assisted suicide was tolerated in Carson City," he said. "My role as a prosecutor is not to make the law or those type of policy decisions. It's up to the Legislature to take that kind of act."

9 Dresser, who was released from jail shortly after his arrested 18 months ago, is suffering from advanced-stage prostate cancer. His treatment costs about \$64,000 a year, a cost that would be borne by the state if he were to be found guilty and imprisoned, according to Woodbury's motion.

10 Carson City Sheriff Kenneth Furlong, whose agency investigated the shooting, described the case as tragic and difficult, but said he supported Woodbury's decision not to pursue the murder charge.

11 "I don't condone what (Dresser) did whatsoever, whatsoever," Furlong said. "Law enforcement needs to allow the DAs to make those tough decisions and be supportive of them. I support Mr. Woodbury's decision, as tragic as it is, and to the degree I believe we cannot condone this type of behavior in our society."

12 According to court documents, Frances Dresser suffered a serious injury that left her paralyzed in a fall at her home. Because of her age, surgery was not an option and a decision was made that she would need to be cared for in a nursing home.

13 She told family members several times that she no longer wanted to live and was suffering excruciating pain, according to court documents.

14 "My grandmother was strong-willed, vibrant, curious about the world, charming, perceptive, very funny, and smart," her eldest grandchild wrote, according to court documents. "She loved nature. She loved to tap her feet to good music and hold her great-grandchildren close to her. It is impossible to imagine her living without those pleasures, without her basic human dignity, and in a state of constant physical pain."

15 About two weeks after her hospitalization, William Dresser bought a handgun at a pawn shop, loaded it with four rounds and brought it to her hospital room, court records said. He gave her a kiss while she slept and shot her in the chest.

16 According to court documents, Dresser then tried to shoot himself, but the gun jammed.

17 "William Lyle Dresser killed his wife, but he is not a murderer," Woodbury wrote in the motion. "He saw his wife of 63 years immobile in a hospital bed, paralyzed from the neck down, suffering with no hope of improvement, facing a short existence not remotely resembling a life she cared to live. So he ended that life. And he ended that suffering."

18 Judge John Tatro will decide whether to accept the motion or pursue prosecution.

19 "That's a real challenge for our system," Furlong said. "You can't condone the behavior, but what do you do with it once the behavior occurs? That was the difficult side.

20 "God love Mr. Woodbury, this is one of the most difficult decisions he has had, that any DA would have had, to make."