



Annotated models of disciplinary essays

3. Annotated Philosophy essay

The essay question

The third year Philosophy essay on the following pages was written in response to this question:

“Although we are sometimes justified in withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment from someone who is terminally ill and suffering, we could never be justified in killing such a person.” Critically discuss this claim.

Essay outline

This outline forms the basis of the Philosophy essay

Thesis

Statement of issue and definition of terms

1. outline of first argument for passive euthanasia
2. outline of counter argument

Argument

For the issue: passive euthanasia is already an acceptable medical practice

- supporting information: due to limited resources; end the suffering of terminally ill patients

Argument

For the issue: for passive euthanasia but against active euthanasia

- supporting information: examples
- explanation of doctrine of ‘double effect’
- the moral importance of differentiating between ‘killing’ and ‘letting die’

Argument

Transition to counter argument: there is no real moral difference between killing and letting die

- examine previous evidence from the perspective of motivation
- sub argument: agent’s motivation should decide the morality, not the method. (refute counter argument)

Argument

Argument against the distinction between killing and letting die

- example (include counter argument and refutation)

Conclusion

Summary of arguments for and against. Conclusion: there does not seem any real distinction between active and passive euthanasia

recommendation (validity of maintaining distinction)



1. Annotated History essay



2. Annotated Modern Languages essay



3. Annotated Philosophy essay



4. Annotated Creative Arts essay



5. Annotated Management essay



6. Annotated Engineering essay



7. Annotated Sociology essay

Learning objectives

This module will help you to:

- understand how a well written essay is structured
- understand what a well written essay in your discipline is
- use evidence to support and develop arguments
- incorporate references in an essay
- use academic language



Essay annotations

Annotations are provided in the right hand column. These annotations highlight significant features of the essay, such as structure and how evidence for the argument is built up and incorporated. The annotations in 'text boxes' comment on other features such as academic language and referencing conventions. For further information on these features see the relevant self access module available at the Learning Resource Centre.

Student essay	Comments
<p>Withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment from a terminally ill and suffering patient seems more easily justified than killing such a patient. This appears to be accepted by the majority of the medical profession, and is reflected by present laws in NSW. These prohibit the killing of a terminally ill and suffering patient (active euthanasia). However, they sometimes permit withdrawing or withholding-life sustaining treatment (passive euthanasia), something which is already practised in many cases. There are two ways of arguing that passive euthanasia can be justified while active euthanasia cannot. The first relies on the intuition that killing someone is morally worse than letting him or her die. It is argued that a doctor who kills a patient directly causes the death, but a doctor who withdraws or withholds treatment merely allows that death. The doctor is differently responsible for the two deaths, and this justifies viewing the methods differently. However, many argue that there is not any real morally significant difference between the two. Choosing not to act is itself an action, and we are equally responsible for this. Indeed, as there is no morally significant difference, active euthanasia may sometimes be preferable. The second way of arguing that active euthanasia is never justifiable involves conceding this point. However, it is said to be in our best interests to maintain this fallacious distinction. Permitting active euthanasia would undermine our belief in the sanctity of human life, and start us sliding down a "slippery slope" that would end with a Nazi-like policy of 'euthanasing' anyone seen as a threat to or burden on society. In its most sensational form, this argument is easy to rebut, but we must carefully consider possible negative consequences of justifying active euthanasia, and the respect for personal autonomy that it displays is sufficient justification for such a program.</p>	<p><i>thesis statement of issue</i></p> <p><i>brief definitions of terms</i></p> <p><i>outline of first argument for justifying passive euthanasia</i></p> <p><i>supporting argument example</i></p> <p><i>conclusion to this argument: passive euthanasia is justifiable</i></p> <p><i>outline of counter argument</i></p> <p><i>conclusion: active euthanasia may be justifiable</i></p> <p><i>outline of second main argument for the issue</i></p> <p><i>conclusion and recommendation</i></p>

LANGUAGE FEATURES OF ACADEMIC WRITING:

discipline specific language (bio-ethics): e.g. euthanasia; terminally ill patient; withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment

complex nominal groups, which allow information to be condensed: e.g. [[Withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment from a terminally ill and suffering patient]] seems ... (here a non-finite clause is functioning as the nominal group)

evaluative language in conclusion and recommendations: e.g. we must carefully (*must* expresses strong obligation reinforced by the use of the pronouns *we* and *us*); possible (*medium expression of likelihood*); threat, burden, consequences, sanctity, justification (evaluative language expressed as nominalisations).

murderer than we do for someone who refrains from acting to prevent a murder, even when they could have saved the victim. Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death on a New York street while 38 people heard her screams and failed to act. We condemn them for their cowardice and selfishness, and find their failure to act reprehensible, but we do not bring murder charges against them, and we do not view their actions as morally equivalent to those of her killer⁵.

euthanasia

supporting information: example to demonstrate point

TOPIC SENTENCE rest of paragraph outlines the 'different ways'

This "intuitive" difference between killing and allowing to die can be explained in many different ways. The former involves actually initiating the sequence of events that leads to someone's death. The latter, however, only involves refraining to intervene in an already established course of events leading to death.⁶ And death is not necessarily guaranteed. The patient might still recover, if they were given an incorrect prognosis. We are merely "letting nature take its course". Gay-Williams argues that refraining to treat a patient, when the treatment cannot reasonably be expected to save his/her life, is not euthanasia at all. The patient is not killed, but dies of whatever disease s/he is suffering from. And the patient's death is not aimed at by the person who does not treat them. Instead, the decision is a medical judgment about the value of continuing a course of treatment that aims to avoid further pain, indignity and expense for the patient and his/her family and friends.⁷

explanation of intuitive difference between 'killing and allowing to die' (functions in support of argument passive euthanasia is justifiable)

This sort of argument revolves around the doctrine of double effect. This distinguishes the intended result of an act from any foreseen but undesired consequences it may have. A decision to increase literacy rates is generally a good thing. However, this is often accompanied by increased suicides. This does not mean that it is bad to increase the literacy rate, or that anyone attempting to do this wants to, or is responsible for, increasing the frequency of suicides.⁸ Likewise, there is a difference between merely foreseeing the death of a patient, and actually intending that death. Refraining from continuing with a pointless course of treatment, to avoid further pain and suffering for the patient, has unfortunate consequences, in that the patient dies. But the doctor is not held responsible for this.

explanation of 'doctrine of double effect'

relevance of the double effect doctrine to the difference between 'killing' and 'letting die' argument

Indeed, not accepting there is a difference between killing and allowing to die could lead to some very strange results. By neglecting to send donations to World Vision, we may be

5 *Killing and Letting Die*, ed Bonnie Steinbeck, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980) p. 1.

6 Helga Kuhse, 'Euthanasia', *A Companion to Ethics*, p. 297.

7 J. Gay-Williams, 'The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia', *Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed James E White, 3rd ed (West Publishing Company: St Paul, 1991), p.100.

8 Thomas D. Sullivan, 'Active and Passive Euthanasia,' *Life and Death: A Reader in Moral Problems*, ed. Louis P Pojman, (Jones and Bartlett: Boston, 1993), p.263.

<p>as responsible for the deaths of those dying of famine as we would be if we had sent them poisoned grain.⁹ The difference between killing and allowing to die is “morally important” because it “sets limits to an agent’s duties and responsibilities to save lives.”¹⁰ It is argued that it would be wrong to hold someone as responsible for what they allowed to happen as for what they made happen. It is relatively easy to live your life without killing anybody. It takes an effort to save lives. The former is the basic minimum required of decent people. People who do the latter, however, are often seen as saints. We are generally not as responsible for allowing a death as we are for killing. Consequently, while we may be justified in withdrawing or withholding treatment from a terminally ill and suffering patient, we could never be justified in killing them. The explanations detailed above are said to reflect significant moral differences between active and passive euthanasia that make the latter permissible, and the former impermissible.</p>	<p><i>argument: moral importance of recognising difference between ‘killing’ and ‘letting die’</i></p>
<p>However, it can also be argued that while we may sometimes intuitively sense a moral difference when offered examples of “killing” and “allowing to die,” this is due to other morally relevant features:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Intuitions...are inevitably subjective and unreliable simply because it is impossible to consider it (an act) apart from its context...We are...liable to jump to conclusions about differences by failing to take it into account.”¹¹</p>	<p><i>conclusion for argument: moral differences between ‘killing’ and ‘letting die’</i></p> <p><i>transition to counter argument: there is no real moral significance between killing and letting die, hence there is no real difference between active and passive euthanasia</i></p>
<p>We can concede that Kitty Genovese’s murderer is more morally responsible for her death than those who failed to help her. However, there are other significant differences in this case. The motivations of the murderer and the bystanders are completely different. Likewise, the motivations of the person who fails to save the life of someone dying of starvation in Africa are completely different to those of the person who sends them poisoned grain. Perhaps these, or other differences, account for the differences in our moral judgments. Phillipa Foot, for example, suggests that the difference between the two is that they are both contrary to different virtues. The murder of Kitty Genovese, she might say, goes against justice. She had a right to life, and this was violated. Refraining from assisting her, however, only violates charity.¹² These examples do not illustrate differences in the way we judge killing and letting die differently. Rather, they are examples of killing that happen to be morally wrong, and examples of letting die that are, merely coincidentally, not so morally wrong.</p>	<p><i>examines previous examples from the perspective of motivation</i></p> <p><i>argument: the role of motivation accounts for the difference in our moral judgment on killing and letting die</i></p>
<p>9 Phillipa Foot, ‘The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect, <i>Killing and Letting Die</i>, p. 161-2. 10 Helga Kuhse, ‘Euthanasia’, <i>A Companion to Ethics</i>, p. 297 11 John Ladd, ‘Positive and Negative Euthanasia,’ <i>Ethical Issues /Relating to Life and Death</i>, p. 167. 12 Phillipa Foot, ‘Euthanasia’, <i>Ethical Issues Relating to Life and Death</i>, p.25.</p>	

James Rachels presents us with a more relevant example involving two shady characters, Smith and Jones. Both will gain a large sum of money if their 6-year-old cousin dies. Smith drowns his cousin in the bathtub. Jones, however, walks in just as his cousin slips, hits his head, and falls facedown into the water. He would quite happily have drowned him, but has no need to. If we see Jones' and Smith's actions as being equally morally reprehensible, then, Rachels argues, we should likewise see no moral difference between the actions of a doctor performing active euthanasia and a doctor performing passive euthanasia.¹³

exemplification of point: i.e. motivation influences our moral judgment on killing and letting die argument conclusion from example is there is no moral difference between a doctor performing active euthanasia and a doctor performing passive euthanasia

However, Rachels' opponents argue that this example, also, contains other morally relevant differences that cloud his case. It is not clear that our views about the similarity of the actions of Jones and Smith should be applied to the Euthanasia debate. To these people I offer an alternate example. It involves a doctor, who is the only person able to treat a patient who, while not terminally ill, requires medical care to recover. In scenario one, they refuse to treat the patient, and gleefully watch as they die. In scenario two they administer a lethal injection to the patient. I do not believe there is a morally significant difference between the two cases. Only the means by which they cause their patient's death is different, and both should be seen as guilty of murder. In this example the doctor is just as culpable for an omission as for an act. As Beauchamp argues:

further exemplification of point with example from medical context

REFERENCING
Quotes longer than three lines are indented, and are not enclosed with inverted commas.

Killing is sometimes right, sometimes wrong, depending on the circumstances, and the same is true of letting die. It is the justifying reasons which make the difference to whether an action is right, not merely the kind of action it is.¹⁴

quote from an authority to support argument

Where doctors believe they are acting in their patient's best interests, and the end result is the same (the death of the patient), I do not believe the methods used make any difference to the morality of euthanasia. This seems to be compatible with our intuitions in the case outlined above. I think the arguments of people like Gay-Williams are sheer sophistry. A doctor who discontinues a course of treatment because it is not believed to be in the patient's best interests, and foresees the patient will die because of this, does not intend his/her patient's death. Yet the doctor ceases treatment knowing that the patient will die. And the doctor has made an informed decision that this is the better course of action. The doctor who knows this, and nevertheless ceases treatment has hastened the death of the patient just as much as the doctor administering a lethal injection. It is unreasonable to separate the decision to stop treatment from the realisation

argument: the question of the agent's motivation should decide the morality of euthanasia, and not the method, that is, killing or letting die refutation of counter argument

¹³ James Rachels, 'Active and Passive Euthanasia', *Contemporary Moral Problems*, p.105.

¹⁴ Tom Beauchamp, 'A reply to Rachels on Active and Passive Euthanasia', *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, ed. Beauchamp and Walters, 3rd ed., (Wadsworth: Belmont, 1982), p. 253.

that a patient will die when it is ceased. Often unwelcome consequences prevent us doing something we want to do, and we are unable to avoid responsibility for these by saying we wanted only the positive effects.¹⁵ Why should we accept such excuses in the euthanasia debate, when we do not elsewhere?

This distinction is not only irrelevant, but it can also lead to some terrible results. Being allowed to die can be an incredibly painful process. A lethal injection, however, is less painful. Assuming a terminally ill patient decides he or she does not want to continue to suffer, and a doctor agrees to assist the patient terminate his/her life, surely consistency demands that the least painful form of euthanasia, intended to reduce suffering, is used.¹⁶

Finally, Rachels argues that accepting that there is a distinction between active and passive euthanasia will result in decisions about life and death being made on irrelevant grounds. He offers the example of two Down's Syndrome babies, one born with an obstructed intestine, and one born perfectly healthy in all other respects. In many cases, babies born in such a condition are refused the simple operation that could cure this, and die. It does not seem right that an easily curable digestive ailment should determine whether the baby lives or dies. If a Down's Syndrome baby's life is judged to be not worth living, then both babies should die. If not, they should both be given medical treatment sufficient to ensure their survival. Accepting a distinction between active and passive euthanasia results in unacceptable inconsistencies in our treatment of such babies, and it should thus be abolished.¹⁷

Some philosophers who accept the arguments outlined above nevertheless believe that this distinction, however fallacious, should be maintained in public policy and law. They believe that consequentialist arguments justify this. If we permitted active euthanasia, it is argued that this would undermine our belief in the sanctity of human life. This would begin our slide down a "slippery slope" that would end with us 'euthanasing' anyone seen as a threat or burden to society, as happened in Nazi Germany. If we look at this argument logically, it seems difficult to see how permitting voluntary active euthanasia, for compassionate reasons, and respect for individual autonomy, could change attitudes to killings that do not demonstrate these qualities. As Beauchamp argues, if the principles we use to justify active euthanasia are just, then any further action inspired by these principles must also be just.¹⁸ And if we examine what really happened in Nazi Germany, the facts do not seem to support this sensational claim. A

argument: the distinction between the morality of killing and letting die is damaging

argument against the distinction between active and passive euthanasia

example to demonstrate point

concluding comment and recommendation

argument for the distinction between active and passive euthanasia supporting information

counter argument

supporting information for counter argument

¹⁵ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993), p.210.

¹⁶ James Rachels, 'Active and Passive Euthanasia', *Contemporary Moral Problems*, p. 104.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Tom Beauchamp, 'A reply to Rachels...', *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, p.251

