

## ***On the Case of Child Euthanasia***

Gabriella Foe\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Opponents of legalizing physician assisted suicide (“PAS”) argue that legalization would create a slippery slope leading to the legalization of euthanasia (also known as “mercy killing”). Some believe that if PAS and euthanasia are legalized, then some who are vulnerable will feel coerced to end their lives: they may feel that they are burdening their family and relatives by staying alive, and that they have a duty to die. While the United States has continued to debate the legalization of PAS and euthanasia, parts of Europe have practiced both for some time.

### ANALYSIS

Even many of those who support PAS have qualms against euthanasia because of the idea that doctors should not kill their patients. But euthanasia has been legalized in parts of Europe. In Belgium, for instance, where physicians have legally performed euthanasia on adults since 2002, they are now trying to take it a step further: Belgium is considering the legalization of euthanasia for children. This would mean that if a child is considered competent to make the decision, then they could be euthanized if they wish. To be sure, this brings up a number of arguments against it and, in my opinion, strengthens the slippery slope argument that is often used by those opposing the legalization of PAS and euthanasia. A few points of controversy for this Child Euthanasia Bill follow:

1) At what point does a child become competent? It is unclear whether or not competency should have an age attached to it. The Netherlands already allows euthanasia for children over the age of 12, but this proposed bill in Belgium would not have any age restrictions.

2) How can we be sure that the child is acting voluntarily? For a child to even ask for euthanasia, the idea must have been planted on his/her mind by either his/her parents and/or medical staff. Some might say that this, in itself, is undue influence since the child may start to think and believe that he or she is a burden and no longer wanted, and thus have a duty to ask for euthanasia. Some will say that it is part of informed consent that the choice of euthanasia is told to the child.

\* Gabriella Foe, MS Bioethics

3) Would the parents also have to consent to their child being euthanized? If we follow the logic that this child is considered competent, is presented with all possible choices, and chooses euthanasia, then it should follow that no parental consent is necessary. But most of us would likely think this is absurd. However, if parental consent is required, then how can we say that we are respecting the child's autonomy as a competent person with the ability to make his or her own choices?

## CONCLUSION

There are surely many additional points of debate in this issue, especially when taking into consideration various religious and cultural groups. If we think about normal, daily lives of parents and children, we would think it absurd if parents grant the wishes of their children just because they continually ask for it (especially if parents believe that what they are asking for is not good for them). The rationale behind this would be that children do not yet know what is and is not right or good for them. The continual request for euthanasia would be a criterion to be fulfilled if this bill is passed. Many considerations based on values and morality must be taken into account; the controversy within the adult, global community with regards to euthanasia suggests that we do not agree on what the right thing to do is. So how can we burden a child to make such a decision?

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