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RECOGNIZING PHYSICIAN ASSISTED DEATH (PAD) AS A PART OF MEDICAL AID

Physician Assisted Death (PAD), also known as active euthanasia is the administration or prescription of lethal medication by a physician on the explicit request of a patient wishing to end life in a painless manner.

PAD is a topic of inconclusive debate. Many countries oppose it on moral and religious grounds, while a few countries (Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxemborg, the Netherlands and a few states in the USA) allow it. The objective of this thesis is to analyse a few arguments for and against Physician Assisted Death, and draw conclusions from it. This thesis only considers PAD as form of medical aid only in cases of terminal incurable diseases such as Alzheimer's Disease, ALS, Huntington's Disease etc.

The most common argument against PAD is that of "do no harm", which claims that the duty of the physician is primarily to save lives and that the physician should never resort to any action that causes harm to the patient. However, it can be argued that this rule reads rather differently in the cases of terminal patients especially those suffering from diseases such as Huntington's disease which progressively make the patient's life more painful and miserable, causing them to depend on the assistance of those around them, in turn causing misery to them too. If their continued existence in such a state of misery is causing them insurmountable pain, then it follows that the "do no harm" principle in this case should actually support Physician Assisted Death as a means of alleviating their pain.

There is also the argument that birth and death is not/should not be determined by humans. And that once humans start deciding if a person can live or die, then that could lead down a slippery slope to other harmful practices such as selective denial of treatment, or carrying out of PAD without the patient's genuine consent. While this argument has some truth in it, with the right amount of regulation and oversight such detrimental outcomes can be avoided. As for the idea that death should not be determined by humans, it doesn't really apply in the same way for terminally ill patients, since their death has already been determined and PAD only determines when and how the patient dies.

Death is unavoidable - and just like everybody else patients with terminal diseases also wish to die peacefully surrounded by loved ones and we should not deny them that wish.