



Cases to Examine: Is This Euthanasia?

Read these cases. In writing, answer the question following each case.

Case 1: Joe

Joe has had two surgeries, first for lung cancer and later for colon cancer. Each time he also had radiation treatments and chemotherapy, and he felt awful for months. Now the doctor has just told him that he has a recurrence of lung cancer. Surgery, with more radiation and chemotherapy, could destroy some but not all of the cancer cells. It might give him a few extra months to live. Joe decides not to have the surgery, knowing his life will probably be shorter without the surgery, and he dies a month later.

- Could Joe’s decision be considered a choice for euthanasia? Explain your answer.

Case 2: Nadine and Vince

Nadine and Vince have just had a baby, and medical tests after the delivery confirmed what the doctor suspected: the infant boy has Down’s syndrome, which means that he has some physical abnormalities as well as mental retardation. A relatively simple surgery, routinely done on babies with Down’s syndrome, can correct one of the physical problems and enable the baby to take in food and drink. Without the surgery, the baby will die. Faced with the prospect of raising a child who is handicapped, Nadine and Vince struggle over whether to have the surgery done on their baby boy. Finally they decide against the surgery.

- Have Nadine and Vince made a decision for euthanasia? Explain your answer.

Case 3: Jill and Artie

Jill and Artie have just had a baby girl three months prematurely. The baby weighs only two pounds and has severe heart and lung problems, as well as many other difficulties that make her chances for survival slim, even with the best of care. She will need to be on a respirator and other life-support systems for several months. The medical staff in the neonatal intensive care unit are ready to do everything possible for this baby. Over the next couple of weeks, Jill and Artie watch their tiny baby hooked up to all this equipment, tubes, and plastic bags. They see the caring nurses and doctors rushing to rescue her from several crises and infections, and she seems weaker after each crisis. Finally, Jill and Artie tell the medical staff that they want to have their baby taken off the life-support equipment. The doctors comply with the parents’ wishes, and soon the baby dies in her mother’s arms.

- Was Jill and Artie’s decision an act of euthanasia? Explain your answer.
