Response to Question #1

Question: Critically assess the merits of a utilitarian argument for euthanasia. You must distinguish between at least two forms of euthanasia and determine whether euthanasia (in any form) is morally acceptable.

Response:

Utilitarian’s, put in the simplest way possible, believe that an action is moral as long as it promotes happiness in the long run. Happiness can be brought in many different forms and possibilities, even if the happiness also brings sadness; since you cannot have happiness unless you have sadness, sadness sometimes must be brought in order to have happiness. When determining which action will bring the most happiness, one must understand every consequence, whether it be positive or negative, possible. When understanding all the consequences, you must choose the action that will not only bring you happiness, but will also bring the best results possible, along with the least amount of negative consequence possible. Euthanasia is amongst several “hot-topics” that question the utilitarianism process of choosing the best action with the best result, that result being the most happiness possible. Euthanasia is amongst these topics because the process of euthanasia creates both happiness and sadness for the individuals involved. The process would bring happiness for the individual being euthanized,
for several reasons, and the process would also bring sadness for the loved ones of the individuals being euthanized. The merits of utilitarianism, relating to euthanasia, will be furthermore discussed, as well as whether or not euthanasia is morally acceptable in this paper.

Before viewing the merits of utilitarianism relating to euthanasia may be discussed, a more in-depth discussion of what euthanasia is, as well as examples of different types of euthanasia, is called to order. According to an article written by an unknown journalist on the BBC web page titled *Ethics of euthanasia- introduction*, “euthanasia is the termination of a very sick person’s life in order to relieve them of their suffering” (2). This definition provides information that entails the main reason that euthanasia is used, which is for medical reasons. Medical reasons are not the only reason that euthanasia is used. Euthanasia is also used to enforce laws, whether they be morally acceptable or not. “During the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, in Germany, Adolf Hitler carried out a program to exterminate children with disabilities (with or without their parent’s permission) under the guise of improving the Aryan ‘race’ and reducing costs to society. Everyone now thinks this kind of euthanasia in the service of a eugenics program was clearly morally wrong” (3). This kind of euthanasia that Adolf Hitler used is an example of when, in today’s society, it is morally wrong. Euthanasia is, yes, used for mainly medical reasons, but is, and was, commonly used to end a life that was not seen “worthy.” Using euthanasia for medical reasons is perfectly moral today, even when it is not viewed moral by all parties. The individual being euthanized usually is living with an incurable condition, causing extreme pain or death in the near future. According to BBC, “In many cases, it is carried out at the person’s request but there are times when they may be too ill and the decision is made by relatives, medics or, in some instances, the courts” (2). These types of euthanasia are done under extreme circumstances and are seen more often than thought to be
seen. All in all, euthanasia is the termination of someone’s life, and is done in, most commonly. The most moral way possible.

When euthanasia is undergone, it usually follows one of the many types of euthanasia. A couple examples of the most common different types of euthanasia are active euthanasia, passive euthanasia, voluntary euthanasia, involuntary euthanasia, self-administered euthanasia, and physician-assisted euthanasia. Although there are numerous types of euthanasia, the two focused on in this analysis will be active euthanasia and involuntary euthanasia.

First, active euthanasia, according to the Center for Health Ethics, is “killing a patient by active means, for example, injecting a patient with a lethal dose of a drug. Sometimes called ‘aggressive’ euthanasia” (3). Active euthanasia is commonly referred to as “mercy-killing.” Put in the simplest way put, it refers to someone killing a patient without their actual consent, in order to end a patients suffering. Active euthanasia is amongst the most common types used. An example of active euthanasia, would be a patient, who is under constant drug treatment, being put to death because they are non-coherent to treatments given. This type of euthanasia is constantly being debated as to whether or not being morally justified. With accordance to utilitarianism, active euthanasia is, in fact, morally justified. It is morally justified since the death of the patient is ultimately bringing complete happiness to the patient, since the individual is no longer suffering from pain.

Second, Involuntary, according to BBC, is euthanasia “without the consent of the patient, for example, if the patient is unconscious and his or her wishes are unknown.. Some ethicists distinguish between ‘involuntary’ (against the patient’s wishes) and ‘nonvoluntary’ (without the patient’s consent but wishes are unknown) forms” (3). This type of euthanasia can be seen as immoral in today’s society because it is done without the consent of the individual. If there is not
consent of the individual, how can the health professional know if the certain individual wants the euthanasia or not?

Looking from the same view as a utilitarianism, euthanasia is morally acceptable for one main reason. That reason is the fact that the individual being put down is brought happiness, even though the same happiness may not be brought to those who knew the patient. An author for an online forum titled, *the BMJ*, writes “euthanasia might eliminate physical and existential pain in the person wishing to be euthanased. It might also provide some comfort to anyone who believed that the person would be better off dead., although this sense of comfort would presumably be counterbalanced by the grief of bereavement” (1). The individuals known by the patient, the ones who are brought grief, can commonly also be brought happiness. This happiness is a happiness for the patient, since that given individual is no longer in severe pain or suffering. Overall, the greatest number of individuals brought happiness is maximized through euthanasia. Euthanasia, as much sadness as it can bring, is a certain sacrifice that must be done in order to bring the most happiness possible. In the long run, euthanasia is seen as morally acceptable to those who follow utilitarianism, because the happiness is brought to the most people possible, which is ultimately the best outcome possible.

Wrapping up, euthanasia is a treatment that should be available to any patient wishing to undergo this treatment. Euthanasia has brought happiness to many individuals, as well as families and close acquaintances of patients given the treatment. Utilitarianism would support euthanasia because of the positive result of the outcome that is created. Any type of euthanasia is morally acceptable because it brings the maximized happiness. When the most individuals are brought happiness, than the best results have been acquired.
Sources


3. "The Center for Health Ethics - University of Missouri School of Medicine - Euthanasia."
   The Center for Health Ethics - University of Missouri School of Medicine - Euthanasia.