

EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is frowned upon by most people for a variety of reasons, some valid, others invalid. However, it is widely practised not only among some primitive societies but in our own. In fact, nearly every public hospital denies certain expensive treatments to the elderly ill. For example, a poor man is unlikely to obtain a coronary bypass or a hip replacement: these are luxuries that only the rich can afford.

The usual argument for denying expensive treatment to the elderly ill is the scarcity of resources: since there is only so much that society can afford to pay for health care, the latter has got to be rationed. However, this argument presupposes that the resources are scarce, and it may be argued that they are not/ ill-distributed, scarce but

the rich getting more than their fair share. One may argue that the problem would hardly arise if nuclear peace were attained, and if the waste of natural resources were to be put a stop to. Still, there would always be cases where it would be legitimate to ask whether it would be worth while for society to invest in a life that could be of no use to anyone, not even to the patient himself, as is the case of a person unable to walk by himself, to think clearly, or even to have normal desires. In such cases euthanasia may prove to be the satisfactory solution to everyone concerned, though with three important provisos proposed by Battin (1987): (a) preservation of choice, i.e. the act must be voluntary rather than forced; (b) no fixed age of death (say 65 or 85); and (c) public awareness.