

Reading Questions for November 3

These questions cover an article by James Rachels called “Active and Passive Euthanasia.” The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

We’re going to talk over the next couple of classes about assisted suicide. Today we’re going to focus in on the issue of killing. We’ll start by discussing if and when there is a moral difference between killing and letting die. This reading by Rachels is one of the most important texts on the subject. If we have some extra time at the end of class, we’ll try to connect the issue of killing in the case of assisted suicide with some other issues regarding killing that we talked about regarding the death penalty and war.

*Questions:*

1. What is the distinction between active and passive euthanasia. What did the AMA in 1973 think about the distinction? What does Rachels think about it?
2. What is Rachels’ first argument? Is it plausible, why or why not?
3. What is Rachels’ second argument? Is it plausible, why or why not?
4. Rachels offers a pair of cases involving characters named Smith and Jones. What does Rachels say about these cases and why? What do you think about what he says?
5. Rachels offers what he takes to be the most common argument for the other side. What is this argument? How does he respond to it?