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Report on Research in Progress

“Leviathan” by Thomas Hobbes is one of the classic sources of modern ideas of natural rights. Although his entire work is too large to be relevant or encapsulated by my essay, I still find it essential to incorporate. Specifically, the chapters of great importance are thirteen through fifteen, wherein he discusses modern social contract theory, the state of nature, and natural rights. He is of great importance, within the confines of my essays topic, specifically because he has contradictory views to the ones I currently have. He believes that you can renounce every single right you have except the right to life and liberty. Furthermore, he claims that even if someone were to renounce the right to life and liberty the person should not be taken seriously as the voluntary act of renunciation is done in order to have some good done to the renouncer. Instead he argues, that renouncing liberty and voluntarily being a slave or prisoner while having done no crime, is the same as renouncing your life or the right to defend yourself against death as it yields no benefit to the renouncer, and instead only harms. Hobbes argues that the renouncer does not understand what he meant by renouncing and if he did understand, then he is ignorant of how his actions would be interpreted. He is important in making me consider life as something you cannot renounce and in considering whether the act of rationally renouncing your life is oxymoronic in that you cannot be both rational and decide to renounce your right to life.

“Second Treatise of Government” by John Locke is an early modern text which is perhaps most famous for its work on natural rights. Again, his work is far too large for to me to address, nor is it all that relevant. What I am focusing on is all of his work from paragraphs four to ninety-nine. Although Hobbes and Locke share similar ideas regarding equality in man, they have different opinions of what constitutes a just authority over man. To elaborate, Hobbes believed that man should always be under an absolute monarch and Locke argues that man should live under a constitutional democracy wherein any authority that does more than simply protect man’s natural rights is tyrannical. Here is where I would like highlight the contradiction in Locke’s and Hobbes’ beliefs as they both agree that a government should protect man’s natural rights of life, liberty, and property. What their procedure is, differs, and is irrelevant to my essay so I will not be discussing it. Locke argues that a just government is that which does the bare minimum, meaning it should only protect both your life and liberty, in this context I omit property, and doing any more would be tyranny. So how would a government or any authority consolidate the contradictory ideas of wanting to rid yourself of your life using your liberty. Would it be unjust or tyrannical to stop you from doing so? For the right to life and liberty are both equal thus none can precede in importance over the other. This is one of the major questions I will conclude in my research essay.

John Rawls’ “A Theory of Justice” discusses how we can reach a conclusion whether something is justly set up in a society. I will use this source to argue that if, hypothetically, euthanasia were to be implemented, under what jurisdiction can we make sure that euthanasia is being used fairly and not as a method of eugenics. Rawls argues that to make sure that procedures practiced by any society are fair, we need to have everybody agree to them. The people considering the implementation need to be placed under a veil of ignorance, meaning they know nothing of themselves, their hierarchy in society, their natural abilities, nor their sex, race, nationality. The people under the veil of ignorance also have no concept of the good, and by that I mean they do not know what actions they should take to make their life better, or how they would want to live their life. Thus they cannot skew the laws they are implementing as they do not know how they would skew it in their favour, and they all innately consider the worst possible scenario they would be placed in. This would mean they would try to maximise the outcome for the lowest possible place in society’s hierarchy, so even if they were placed there when the veil is lifted, they would still be able to live comfortably. I will argue that this will actively encourage those under the veil of ignorance to allow euthanasia but only in instances where it cannot be considered eugenics. This is because those under the veil of ignorance can only implement laws that serve as general purpose goods for people that are anywhere on the social hierarchy and for people who wish to lead any sort of life.

“Critique of Pure Reason” by Immanuel Kant introduces the categorical imperative. I will use his deontological moral theory to supplement Rawls’ idea of veil of ignorance in coming to a conclusion on how euthanasia should be endorsed. I will phrase the dilemma using Kant’s second question, which he believed was equivalent to the first, wherein I will argue whether euthanasia respects the goals of individuals rather than merely using them for my means.

A source I have discarded is “A Critique of Three Objections to Physician‐Assisted Suicide” by Dan Brock. This is because although he considers three objections, he does not address them philosophically, instead he uses laws already in place to argue against them, and speculates how the objections would be refuted in accordance to previous supreme court rulings. That is something my essay is not interested in covering.

A source I am considering using is Albert Camus’ “The Stranger” but I am unsure about how I would implement this into my essay, because it is a literary source that focuses on defining the meaning of your life and how it is innately meaningless until you assign it a meaning. I am considering using it to implement an argument based on ontology and metaphysics but am unsure how I would do this, so I’m reserved about incorporating this into my essay.

What my essay is missing is more arguments from the opposing side, so far all I have is Hobbes and his argument that you cannot renounce your right to life or liberty. I might incorporate Jean-Jacques Rousseau or John Stewart Mills to construct an argument of renouncing your liberty is never rational and answering those questions, but I believe that the scope of their questions is essentially contained in Hobbes’ argument, thus adding them would be redundant so I am not sure right now. I am also thinking of incorporating additional information to appeal to pathos either by anecdotal evidence or some other means. The appeal to pathos would need to contrary to the point I am an advocate for, to allow discourse on the topic.

Bibliography

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