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I call my dad's mother "Oma", meaning 'grandmother' in Dutch. When I was younger, she loved to tell me about her life growing up in Indonesia. I remember being shocked at the image of the aged woman sitting before me actually climbing trees and riding bicycles. I was awed at the many joys and sorrows she had known, my respect for her deepening with every story from World War II she told. Because of her experiences, she always encouraged me to live my life and to try new things. She instilled a confidence in me that allowed me to dye my hair pink and wear whatever I choose without caring about what others think. This was why it came as such a shock to discover that my Oma is dying.

The contrasting ideas of self-will and an effective government have been circulating for centuries. This is most clearly expressed by the work done by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who first coined what is now known as the social contract. This concept is centered on the idea that people will relinquish some power over themselves in exchange for the state's protection of their well-being. At first, when this theory was applied only to government, it seemed to adequately fulfill the needs of both the state and society. However, as advances have been made, especially in the medical field, differences have arisen between the state and the people on just which actions qualify as protection of the people's well-being and which ones do not.

A few months ago, Oma's health started failing. After many misdiagnoses, we learned that Oma has non-Hodgkin lymphoma. We tried to shield Oma from the truth for as long as we could. Her mobility diminished until we finally had to relocate her to a rest home, where she was not able to get out of bed. As doctors debated over the best way to keep Oma comfortable for as long as possible, I could see the effects the cancer had as it swept throughout her body. Although she tried to hide it, her cringes of pain became more frequent and noticeable as she sank deeper into a pit of depression.

To be in control of one's own destiny and choices is something every person wants. As humans phase from child to adult, the quest for true independence and autonomy is always on the go. From choosing where to travel or who to visit, one's future is at the tips of his or her fingers. However, the topic of choosing when to die is much shadier and more difficult to navigate. The line between free will and ethical values becomes blurred, of which both sides present valid arguments. The great dilemma is truly between a self-controlled death with dignity, or a prolonged, dependent life.

I remember the day my aunt told Oma she is terminally ill. Oma grasped my hand, silent tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks. My eyes welled with tears as the hospital bed quivered under her noiseless sobs.

Depression completely engulfed Oma. The words she spoke were muted and rare, and she often stared out the grimy window into the courtyard of the rest home, her eyes glassy and her mind in a whole other place, a whole different time. A nurse would come in her room to administer the many shots and pills to keep Oma's calcium levels stable,

which were the cause of her failing liver. Oma took the medicine with indifference. Although she was slowly becoming more physically stable, emotionally she was lost. She lost control of her own bodily functions and had to start wearing diapers, and her pain and humiliation were visible every time the nurses wheeled her away to be changed.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that everyone has the right to life. There exists a basic respect for human life, a deeply essential value in any civilized society. According to some, passing a law establishing aid in dying for terminally-ill patients is a serious violation of this fundamental value. Laws are created to protect the well-being of the people, and in the state's eyes, well-being is defined as quantity, not quality, of life. However, I disagree. Death is not something that should be delayed by artificial means. Humans already have a difficult time grasping with open arms the concept of death. It is seen as something to be feared, rather than accepted. By creating a law to establish aid in dying for terminally-ill patients, the idea of death will not be shoved hastily aside. It will be regarded as the next great adventure, ready to begin at the patient's will.

A few months ago, Oma made the decision to move back into her house and be cared for by my aunt and hospice. She cannot leave her bed and her diaper still must be changed multiple times a day, but she is happy. She now refuses to take any medications designed to stall the cancer; the only drug she will accept is Vicodin to help ease the frequent pain surging through her frail body. My family and I have accepted this. It is her life, and her decision to make. This small act of refusing medication gives back to Oma some control over her own life. Although hospice still focuses on the palliation of her symptoms, Oma now spends her days serenely, knowing that when her time to leave comes, she will be able to enter her next adventure with dignity and control.

Although the system of giving up power in exchange for stability and protection works well for the government, it should not be forced onto other aspects of life. Some might claim that it is not ethical to shorten a life, no matter the quality. However, from my experiences, I believe that it is better to have power over all personal decisions, especially with regard to dying. This enables a person to end his or her suffering while maintaining dignity until the very end.