
Euthanasia Issue

Euthanasia is the intentional and painless taking of the life of another person, by act or omission, for compassionate motives. In contemporary practice it means that someone's life is ended for sympathetic reasons by some active or passive steps taken by another person.

Thus, Active euthanasia is defined as taking an immediate action such as using lethal injection to painlessly put a terminally-ill patient to death. Passive euthanasia is withdrawing treatment while the life of the patient is still dependent on it and when it is believed that treatment is more burdensome than beneficial. Passive euthanasia allows the patient to die naturally and is often considered more acceptable.

Central to discussion on euthanasia is the **notion of intention**. While death may be caused by an action or omission of medical staff during treatment in hospital, euthanasia only occurs if death was intended. For example, if a doctor provides a dying patient extra morphine with the intention of relieving pain but knowing that his actions may hasten death, he has not performed euthanasia unless his intention was to cause death (**Principle of Double Effect**). Euthanasia may be distinguished from a practice called physician-assisted suicide, which occurs when death is brought about by the persons own hand (by means provided to him or her by another person).

The idea of euthanasia is not new. Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato all favored euthanasia in ancient times but only under particular situation.

However, all Religions consider life of a human being to be blessed, condemned euthanasia, morally and ethically, as organized religion flourished. Only God can make a decision about life because the life is given by god.

Thus Euthanasia raises lots of worrying ethical dilemmas like in what condition can euthanasia be justified, is there any ethical differentiation among killing someone and letting them die, is there any right to end the life of an individual who is suffering from serious pain. Should individual have the right to make a choice on issues of life and death? Even though it was ethically right, Based on realistic issues there are lots of arguments.

Some group thinks that euthanasia shouldn't be permitted since it could be roughly treated and used as a cover for murder. Moreover it can be acceptable, by administering toxic medicines or by not doing anything to keep an individual alive .Usually the people use the word Mercy killing instead of euthanasia because it is the only way to get away from permanently sick and intolerable pain. People usually imagine intolerable pain is the major reason for people to request euthanasia, but the surveys and studies in Netherlands and USA shows that hopelessness, fear and anxiety like psychological factors that leads people to think of euthanasia.

However, if the euthanasia was made permissible, those who don't wish to die really would be murdered and the law would be abused.

Hence Euthanasia is an extremely controversial subject.

Euthanasia: Social and Ethical Angle

The basic moral duty of human being towards society is to make efforts to alleviate suffering of others. At the same time, it is impossible to live without suffering, and therefore it makes no sense to talk about a "right" to be completely free of it.

The basic argument that comes up in case of euthanasia is that - every people suffer due to different reasons whether professional, personal and so on. Do we allow them to commit suicide -- because they have the right to determine the end of his life? The question is critical, because either people do not have the right to end their lives in any circumstance, or else they do have that right, and the circumstances don't matter. This is applicable to euthanasia also. Whether we should give right to end one's life to all or should help them to come out of trauma?

People who cannot communicate are also people, also have feelings. A person's inability to function does not make their lives less valuable. People do not become "vegetables." Children of God never lose the Divine image in which they were made. Thus applicability of euthanasia on them will be unethical.

No matter how ill a patient is, we never have a right to put that person to death. Rather, we have a duty to care for and preserve life. But to what length are we required to go to preserve life? No religion or state holds that we are obliged to use every possible means to prolong life. The means we use have traditionally been classified as either "ordinary" or "extraordinary." "Ordinary" means must always be used. This is any treatment or procedure which provides some benefit to the patient without excessive burden or hardship. "Extraordinary" means are optional. These are measures which do present an excessive burden.

Thus a key distinction that needs to be about the intention of the patient.

Different arguments related to euthanasia

- a) With growing waiting lists and a shortage of donors, some doctors and bioethicists are considering the possibility of further re-defining death and/or providing exceptions to the dead donor rule. This would allow the harvesting of organs from people in a persistent vegetative state or irreversible coma. One bioethicist has suggested that bodies of the dead should become public property so they can be used to make up for the growing shortage of transplant organs.
- b) It provides a way to relieve extreme pain. It provides a way of relief when a person's quality of life is low.
- c) In a democracy a person has the right to decide what he or she wishes to do with his or her life. A person who is suffering has the right to choose what should be done with his or her life. He or she may choose to get treated and he also has the freedom to not choose treatment. If treatment is unavailable and a person is unable to bear the suffering, then it is his or her right to end the painful life. Ending such a life in a medically monitored manner is the most rational thing to do. Instead of people who are suffering immensely ending their lives in brutal or horrifying ways, it is better for a doctor and the person's family to assist in the process.
- d) Euthanasia has far-reaching financial implications. There are many people in India who are in vegetative state even if we spend any amount on them they would never recover. One would simply prolong the life of suffering and pain while spending a lot of money. There are thousands of cases where a family has gone bankrupt to ensure medical care for a terminally ill person or to keep up the treatment for an incurable disease. Prolonging such lives would only lead to heartache, financial challenges and eventual futility. Instead, euthanasia allows peaceful death in a medically monitored environment. The person suffering would not suffer. The family or loved ones to be bereaved will not spend a fortune which would yield them no returns.

- e) Euthanasia can save life of many other people- When people become old and especially when they suffer from terminal illness or incurable diseases, they still have vital organs which can be donated. If the person dies naturally and doesn't manage to get the organs donated, then they are of no use. Wrong methods of suicide or prolonging the illness can also damage the vital organs which would be of no use. Euthanasia allows the patients to die under medical supervision and the healthy vital organs can be donated to those in need. This can pave the way for a much better world.

But Euthanasia can be misused. Many psychiatrists are of the opinion that a terminally ill person or someone who is old and suffering from an incurable disease is often not in the right frame of mind to take a call. Such a person deciding to die may not be a rational call.

Family members deciding on behalf of the patient can also lead to abuse of the law legalizing euthanasia. Suppose a very rich person is terminally ill and he has already in his will appointed his relative as his successor. There are chances that in a lust to appropriate property as early as possible this relative might give permission to invoke euthanasia on that rich person even if there are chances to save the person.

With rising healthcare costs, and an aging population, if euthanasia or assisted suicide is legalised, disability activists fear that voluntary euthanasia will soon give way to involuntary or coerced euthanasia. Many health care professionals and bioethicists argue in favour of 'Futile Care Theory,' which measures the value of human life according to the financial cost of keeping the individual alive.

The recent **Aruna Shahbaug** verdict has come up as the landmark judgment related to euthanasia in India.

Prior to Aruna Shahbaug case both active and passive Euthanasia was not allowed in India. In Aruna Shahbaug case the Supreme Court allowed passive Euthanasia, However it did not grant permission for Active Euthanasia.

Still there is no law made by Parliament in India about Euthanasia. The court also clarified that until Parliament enacts a law, its judgment on active and passive euthanasia will be in force.

In Aruna case the supreme Court has held that there is no right to die (suicide) under Article 21 of the Constitution and attempt to suicide is a crime vide Section 309 Indian Penal Code , the Court has held that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity, and in the case of a dying person who is terminally ill or in a permanent vegetative state he may be permitted to terminate it by a premature extinction of his life in these circumstances and it is not a crime as per section 309 of IPC i.e. Euthanasia does not come within the ambit of suicide.

Conclusion

The most common argument against hastening the end of a patient's suffering is that no one can be denied the right to life. However, life is not only a heart pumping blood into vessels; life is not merely a pair of lungs lying behind a heaving chest; life is not various other organs being whipped to work with advanced machines. Life is not just the greenish undulating patterns on the screen of a monitor. Life on 'Life Support System' is merely existence devoid of even basic dignity which is the natural right of every human being. Can we call mere existence, without any awareness of it, life? Is prolonging the sufferings of such victims of fate not a disservice to them? Therefore if a patient is in extremely vegetative state where there are no chances of revival a permission for mercy killing should be granted to him, However in order to ensure that this law is not misused the person's medical condition should be checked by 4-5 different boards of doctor so that it is absolutely confirmed that under no circumstances the patient condition could be brought back to normalcy.