



## Euthanasia and moral debates –an analysis

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### **Abstract** -

Taking life of the other living organism is a serious moral issue as every living creature has the inborn right to survive accordingly in this planet. Euthanasia is a debatable bio-ethical concept as it is related to taking of human life under certain medical conditions where the patient gives consent for dying. Abortion and euthanasia both advocates of depriving of human life, in other means destroying the future of a life whether it is fetus in case of abortion or an inborn life in case of euthanasia. In both cases, the right and wrong is raised, which obviously under the impact of moral principles. In many countries voluntary euthanasia is legalized. In several countries still it is banned. This paper tries to elucidate different forms of euthanasia and attempt to justify euthanasia as moral issue.

**Keywords** – future life, euthanasia, voluntary, morality, non-voluntary

**Methodology** – The method of the study is descriptive. Secondary data are used to find out the objective of the study.

**Objective** – The objective of the study is to justify euthanasia on ethical background.

### **Introduction** –

Euthanasia has a Greek origin, the term means good death. Euthanasia also indicates ‘gentle and easy death’, ‘death with dignity’, ‘physician-assisted suicide’ and ‘cognitive ending of future life’. The terminology of ‘physician assisted suicide’ is now considered as controversial as it links with the negative implication of the word ‘suicide’. So ‘physician assistance dying’ is more appropriate rather using the word ‘suicide’. Generally physician provided the aid in dying to the incurable patients who wants to leave or end life for severe bodily pain.

Generally patients suffering from any non-curable serious painful terminal diseases for a long time desire to end his life which is known as euthanasia. Patients lost the hope of living a future life ahead and take such a bold decision of taking own life. Every human life is considered as most valuable one and the effort and support is to save the lives, not to show the path to end it or kill it. Killing a person in whatever condition is highly condemnable, still abortion (killing of fetus) and euthanasia is legalized in many countries across the globe. Whereas abortion is without the consent of life itself but depends on the decision of mother who carried this life in her womb and in case of euthanasia the terminally ill patients give permission of taking own life. Here the choice, desire, right of living and dying, state of consciousness plays vital role in

making decision about taking own life. There is rationality behind taking decision of one's own life, so in that sense every human has the freedom of taking decision about to continue or end his future living. Yet people try to examine it on moral backdrop because the way of living and dying is evaluated under the periphery of moral principles. The aim of medical assistance is to provide optimum life support to save the human lives. But on the contrary in euthanasia the doctors are requested to end the life of a patient which is termed as 'good death'. It is debatable that the person who wants to die is really in a healthy state of consciousness while giving permission to the doctors to end his life by injecting poisonous drugs in own body. It is also highly debatable that a person who is in irreversible coma( medically dead), can he really take decision of own life. Is it ethical that the family members can give consent to the doctors to end the life of the patients in such condition? Doctors are taught to save the life of the others life, now in euthanasia the preparation is to take the life of other life. It even create moral dilemma to execute the request of the patients for the physician which is almost against their professional ethics. So, the ethical question of right and wrong of action arise in the conscience of the doctors also. Therefore, taking life of others and also of own life is not as simple as generally thought by us; it is always under the inspection of bio-ethics.

### **Discussion –**

Some moral theories considered that killing of others life is totally wrong under any circumstance, no one has the right to kill other creatures. Jainism follows such strict ethical principle as it accord equal value to every respectful life. But when we consider the comparison of value of different live, things totally differs. A mosquito has less value of life compared to a human being. On the other hand the value of a human being is probably less as compared to the existence of an endangered species life in a forest. This comparison of value of different lives also invites another ethical debate that it is inappropriate to determine the value of lives in such a way. Euthanasia as taking of others life comes under consideration in this context.

Bio-ethicians divided euthanasia in three different types under the scrutiny of moral judgments. These are voluntary euthanasia, involuntary euthanasia and non-voluntary euthanasia. Voluntary euthanasia is now legalized and permitted in many countries after long debates on the ground of moral issues whereas Involuntary euthanasia and non-voluntary euthanasia is still on the fire board ,both are highly controversial to make it legal and yet to pass the human ethos.

In today's world voluntary euthanasia is one of the most important ethical issues. In voluntary euthanasia the person who desires death knowingly request the physician to aid him for dying. Here the person not only verbally but give a written consent and therefore it is a voluntary action from the part of the patient who wish for good dying due to intolerable illness. The purpose of the patient is to cease from the unbearable pain, so such a life taking decision is taken consciously. Here the role of the physician to assist patient for die is important. As the patient wants to die painless so overdose of use toxic drug may cause painless death rather than painful one. Voluntary euthanasia is a serious issue as it involves the killing of a cogent human being. After many sharp debates, Netherlands was the first country to give lawful permission of voluntary euthanasia for the patients suffering in severe incurable illness by following certain strict medical guidelines in 2002. Belgium, Spain, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Canada, Cambodia, Australia, USA, New Zealand are the countries legalized voluntary euthanasia and assisted dying in recent years. The British Medical Association still taking a neutral stands neither support nor oppose voluntary euthanasia and assisted dying in terminal illness.

As voluntary euthanasia is a growing demand from the part of the campaigners supporting it. The opponents of any kinds of euthanasia argue that every human life is valuable and God gifted. Only God can take decision and taking of life. So it is quite inappropriate of taking decision about to end own life. Life is for living not for seeking death in any means. Those who oppose euthanasia consider this effort equal to

commit suicide which is condemnable. Another charge against voluntary euthanasia is that people who consciously consent for assisted dying may not be in the same state of consciousness while the act executed. Even there is no guarantee that the person consent for dying make a rational decision, it may be a result of confused state of mind. There may be a chance of psychological pressure from the intimate relatives to choice dying for elders and sick persons. The classical utilitarian holds that rational and self aware being has the fear of own death, so taking own life is not a rational decision. If this charge is true then voluntary euthanasia cannot be considered as voluntary euthanasia. The supporter of anti –euthanasia also pointed out the possibility of medical crime if it is legalized in case of less ignorant patients. What is important is to save live but not to assist to end life. Therefore some physicians also viewed that euthanasia is against the medical ethics. Therefore they conclude that ending of life cannot be justified through any form of euthanasia and vehemently oppose medical assisted dying instead of giving maximum life support to the patients.

On the other hand the supporter of voluntary euthanasia raised the growing demand to legalize it all over the world. Even in the ancient Greek Seneca, the Stoic philosopher said that the wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can continue his life. Socrates also prefers wise living as he said that an unexamined life is worthless living. But these narratives do not directly support euthanasia. But the supporter of voluntary euthanasia in modern world raised some genuine points on the ground of unbearable suffering of the patient and right to die. As there is no alternative to cease from the suffering of terminal illness for the patient so the will, choice and request to end the own future life is logically a good decision according to them. We have to realize the condition of their intolerable suffering and allow them to die peacefully. The right of living and dying also plays a vital role in voluntary euthanasia. As it is an autonomous decision of the rational agent either to continue or stop the living. Without any unavoidable justified reason nobody wants to leave own existence. It is a matter of right to privacy also. It cannot be compared to sudden suicide because voluntary euthanasia adopts formal procedure which helps only the incurable patients of gentle dying. So it should be allowed as per the request of the patient and as per the recommendation of the expert physician where the doctors declare no way to assist with further medical support available to overcome the situation of unbearable pain of the patients. They argued that is not inhumane in nature in terminal illness. So, it should be allowed under certain specific condition of the patients depending on the request of the patient to end the life. Therefore voluntary euthanasia follows right ethical dimension according to the supporters.

Involuntary euthanasia is a type of euthanasia which is very rarely seen when a person who is killed with the motive to release him or her from the unbearable suffering as observed. Here the consent of the person is not asked or the person is not in such a conscious situation to give consent for dying. This form of euthanasia is not legalized yet though the motive is good but it is against the wishes of the person or the patient.

In non-voluntary euthanasia the person is unable to give consent of dying. This category includes the patients that may be in comma, infants suffering incurable illness, severely injured persons fall in accident and old aged sick persons. Basically in most of the cases old persons incapable enough to understand the issue involved in euthanasia. Here there is no expression of the desire to die from the part of the patient but it is executed. Many infants are born with incurable disorders and terminal illness. They are deficient of making rational decisions. With such disorder they continue their life with the aid of parent, family members and medically assisted life support. Those infants who have carried out such types of terminal illness obviously cannot make the crucial decision to choose euthanasia. The same is reflected in the old aged terminal illness patients incapable to make such decision. In both this cases the parent and family members sometimes take decision on behalf of the patients to end the life. Considering all the aspects involve in non-voluntary euthanasia it cannot be termed as euthanasia in proper sense. Because the basic consent from the

part of the patient is absent. The decision of intimate relative that leads to destroy a future life cannot be accepted as it is not a justified ending of life. Non-voluntary euthanasia should not legalize because it is a serious crime against humanity. It also violates the law of right to live and die which solely depends on the person. Therefore non-voluntary euthanasia is murder, it is not euthanasia. It may be appropriate to leave the patient of such terminal illness to continue their life till natural death with maximum life support and pain reducing drugs with a slight hope that the patient may miraculously revive and cured in near future.

### **Conclusion** –

It is observed that involuntary euthanasia and non-voluntary euthanasia is equally condemnable. There is still disagreement even today with any forms of euthanasia as it involves destroy of future life as well to assist the ending of other life. In many countries after long debates and mandate voting process are now a day's legalize only voluntary euthanasia. As voluntary euthanasia is a growing demand all over the world so the moral issue of its right and wrong implication to be highly scrutinized. From the above discussion it can be sum up that only voluntary euthanasia can be legalized with certain strict guidelines monitoring all the aspects and condition of the patients. It should not be treat as a matter of request of the patient of dying and the act of the physician to assist the patients to dying. The request of the patient should be reviewed by a panel of experts including psychologist, bio-ethicians and consulted professional working in this field. They have to check that whether the request is genuine or not, scaling the mental stability of the patient, the rationality behind making such crucial decision of taking own life only and only in case of voluntary euthanasia. We should not consider it as only one time final request from the part of the patient and to execute it without any delay. A time frame should be prepared to examine any alternation of the request from the part of the patient suffering in terminal illness and simultaneously maximum medical assistance should be continue for such patients.

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