

An Ethical Excursion of Euthanasia

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Abstract :

Should an individual, in addition to the right to live, have a right to die? The debate of euthanasia has been a globally controversial and overheated issue for many decades. The word 'euthanasia' is derived from Greek 'euthanos' meaning 'a gentle and easy death'. However, it is now used to refer to the killing of patients who are incurably ill and in great pain and distress, in order to relieve them of their sufferings. Euthanasia can be of three types: voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide or mercy killing (euthanasia performed with patient's consent), non-voluntary euthanasia (when the patient is unable to give consent) and involuntary euthanasia (which is performed on a patient against his will). Euthanasia can be carried out either by administering a lethal dose of a suitable drug (active euthanasia) or letting the patient die by withholding treatment (passive euthanasia). While passive euthanasia is considered legal in many countries (India, Australia, Germany, England, etc) active euthanasia is only legal in Netherlands and Belgium. The person seeking euthanasia often argues that in a civilized society giving everybody the right to a 'dignified death' without pain is ethically acceptable as a universal principle. However, there are many social, political and moral dilemmas legalizing euthanasia. In this dissertation few of them is highlighted.

Key words:

Euthanasia, dignified death, assisted suicide, mercy killing, active, passive, moral dilemma. The ending of life is called death. But murder signifies the destruction of life. People die in regular flow of life in nature. But murder is always follow by a certain motive and a planning¹. This motive might be both beneficial or fatal and sometimes it can be mighty. Now, question may arise - how can murder be mighty? In general, when a person takes life of another person for his vengeance to fulfilled. Again when a person destroys the life of his own, that is called suicide. There is no place for revenge behind suicide and there is no context of destruction of life against one's will. A person is the soul owner of his life and he possesses the right to destroy it. Hence, suicide, though no desired, but is not a crime at all¹.

There is another type of death which is called mercy killing or euthanasia. In this case, a person's life is put to an end out of mercy to relieve the person from his agony of incurable disease. Now the question is, should an individual, in addition to the right to live, have a right to die? Should he have a right to decide, how and when to end his life? The debate of Euthanasia has been a globally controversial and overheated issue for many decades. The debate cuts across complex and dynamic aspect such as legal, ethical, human rights, health, religious, economic,

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