Euthanasia

[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

Author Note

Is Euthanasia Everyone's, Right?

# Literature Review

End of life decision or Euthanasia is also called mercy killing or an act of intentionally painless ending life to relief from the suffering and pain, due to an incurable disease or debilitating physical disorder. Euthanasia is also defined as “an act of painlessly putting a person suffering from painful and deadly disease or debilitating physical disorder, into death or withdrawing from artificial life-support measures”. Literature suggests that there are two types of euthanasia, i.e. active and passive euthanasia. In active euthanasia, doctors perform some action to bring an end to the patient's life. While in passive euthanasia, the patient chooses to die on his own, in the sense that the doctor is not practically involved in patients death. In both cases, the two questions arise, whether it is ethical for a patient himself or a doctor to put human life into death, and is euthanasia everyone's right? Even though the state is supposed to ensure the right to life to everyone, living in the society, it has no right to deny the people's wish to die given the traumatic circumstances(Keown and Keown 2002).

From an ethical and moral point of view, euthanasia is also called death humanisation or “dignified death”. Considering euthanasia as a legitimate right to everyone will bring about a potential change in social attitudes towards illness, old age, physiological illness, disability and role of the medical profession in society(Erimia 2016). Euthanasia is debated over a long period whether it is justified by the ‘individual's right to life’, and the right to make an ‘end of life decision’ with dignity. Many believe that allowing for euthanasia is as similar to allowing for suicide. Those who are suffering from terminal and acute illness think that choosing to die with dignity is somewhat better than being dependent on mock life support measures(Baksheev et al. 2018)

Many religious groups believe that terminal illness or disability is a divine opportunity for a human being to purify his soul. In the Christian worldview, choosing voluntary euthanasia is strictly prohibited. Christianity believes that life is given by God and human beings are God’s images, so they have no right to surrender their life to the death against the will of God (Richmond 2014). However, some other faith groups oppose this way of thinking. According to them, if the Bible says that God has better plans for all his humans, and he loves them a lot, how would he allow his followers to suffer from such a painful experience.

The libertarian argument on euthanasia suggests that death is everyone's mater if it is not harmful to others in society. No one including state and law-making bodies have the right to interfere in someone's decision of voluntary euthanasia. The utilitarian perspective on euthanasia suggests that if a person is no more able to work, it means that their utility has been ended, and he can no longer contribute to the happiness of the society. In this situation, the utility of active euthanasia lets the money to be invested in researching the cure instead of maintaining the life of a patient with acute and terminal illness(Utilitarianism View on Euthanasia | Liberrimus n.d.)

The patients with terminal illness or disability sometimes suffer from extreme pain and their life to be dependent on others. Such a situation forces them to take the possibility of voluntary euthanasia under consideration. They think that it is their right to choose death for themselves, without concerning that either it is active or passive, it is morally wrong(Mokuolu 2017). The problem is that not everyone can afford the pain management facility; this would lead the people to choose for death with dignity through active or passive euthanasia.

In support of active euthanasia, it is argued that if people have a legitimate right to live with dignity, their right to die with dignity should also be legitimised. Some situations are so painful and prolonged that it becomes impossible for medical professionals to assuage the sufferings through palliative care. In the modern view, the unprecedented prolongation of human life is the way of controlling death. Spending time and money on pointless sufferings is a pressure on the patient himself, his/her family and the healthcare system. So the argument is not cruel and mocking to help such patients in bringing their lives to death if they are repeatedly requesting(Right to die? | Brain | Oxford Academic n.d.).

The supportive argument in favour of physician-assisted euthanasia claims no one has any right and role to play in coming into life, but we do have the right to decide how long we remain in existence, especially in traumatic situations when someone keeps fighting with his/her life. However, the right to euthanasia does not mean that it is always a moral right to choose to die.

In opposition to the above argument, the American Medical Association reject the act of euthanasia, according to which "It is incompatible with the prohibition of using medical devices to cause the death to a patient". The Association prohibits the members from participating in voluntary active euthanasia by putting forward a slogan "physicians should not be executioners" (Chekhovska et al. 2019)

Advocates of principles of autonomy assert that everyone has the right to die or choose voluntary euthanasia, but there is no evidence in history for its legalisation. Literature has almost failed to answer the literal meaning of "right to die" and how anyone can decide; rather, it is a rationally defensible proposition. Also, there is no evidence of the link between euthanasia and suicide. Defining suicide clearly is necessary to accept euthanasia as a right of individuals (Scolding 2010).

Activist against voluntary euthanasia argues that legitimating voluntary euthanasia will prove to be a slippery slope towards increasing numbers of nonvoluntary euthanasia. In the countries where euthanasia is legal, there should be strict guidelines, and a necessary second opinion of the physiatrist should be taken as a standardized measure of legalization of euthanasia(Annadurai, Danasekaran, and Mani 2014).

Moving towards the contemporary perspective on “Is euthanasia everyone’s right”, it is found that the Netherlands was the first country in which euthanasia is considered as a democratic right of individuals, with a strict condition; the patient is suffering agonising pain. Their illness must be chronic and terminal, and the demand for voluntary euthanasia made by the patient in full consciousness. According to the rules, patients whose life expectancy is two or less than two weeks are supposed to put in comma which is medically induced, along with the withdrawal of hydration and all kinds of nutrition(staff 2014).

In the United States, doctors are allowed for lethal sedation to the patients with a terminal illness, in only five US states; however, the right to voluntary euthanasia is still not legalised by the state. There is a movement "aid in dying" against active euthanasia is gaining much attention, but the issue is still controversial. Around 300 patients with terminal illnesses are suggested for lethal medication; among them, 230 people died as a result of this step. Many other countries, including Belgium, Germany, France, and Switzerland, are also stepping ahead to legalise both active and passive euthanasia as an individual's autonomous right(staff 2014).

Modernised view of dealing with death suggests that, same as everyone has a right to life, he/she is autonomous to make his end of life decisions. So euthanasia is an individual's right to choose whether to live with the sufferings or die with dignity, instead of depending on other people and life support measures. This is because a person who is terminally ill, dependent on others and is no more a contributor to societal happiness is already virtually dead. The first and foremost reason why a person exists in this world is to socialize with others and enjoy life. One of the major issues with both active a passive euthanasia is whether it is beneficial for a person to be dead or remain alive. Legalizing any type of euthanasia conveys a powerful message of double standards of ranking human's life in terms of inviolability.Legalising euthanasia as everyone's right willresult in the legalisation of assisted suicide as a healthcare choice. At times it will result in a perceived or real pressure on the elderly, terminally ill, disabled, and other persons with acute illness to opt for euthanasia. It is just like someone else is taking the end of life decision for a patient without his/her consent.

The arguments in support and criticism on considering euthanasia as everyone's right, reflects the shift of focus towards the legalization of assisted suicide. The three conclusive reasons are relieving the sufferings from pain, respecting the autonomy of the patient and protecting the dignity. Whereas the arguments against euthanasia emerge from societal considerations of moral principles and ethics, apart from the sufferer. The societal principles always remain the same, but the democratization of euthanasia is more humane than to linger on the suffering of a patient with painful life-saving measures. However, people should be allowed to use these rights on reasonable groundsto make the decision legal and justified.

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