

Euthanaisa



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Euthanasia - The Challenge for Society in the New Millennium Introduction

Perceiving euthanasia from the mere literal translation of the word euthanasia does not give cause for any of the concern associated with its use for it literally means "good death", or death without suffering. Yet, due to the moral, legal, philosophical, and ethical concerns associated with it, euthanasia is turning out to be one of the most challenging issues that society will face in this new millennium¹.

Euthanasia

Providing a definition for euthanasia that is universally acceptable is difficult given that its meaning has changed over time and now is associated with a larger conundrum of the meaning of dying with dignity. ²

Therefore it is better to view euthanasia or assisted suicide under its different classifications. The first such key classification is active euthanasia.

Active euthanasia happens when deliberate action is taken by medical professionals or other persons like care givers to cause a patient to die.

Passive euthanasia happens when there is omission of action by medical professionals or other persons like care givers in doing what is necessary to keep a patient alive, leading to the death of the patient. Active or passive euthanasia stems from voluntary or involuntary actions, and hence the terms voluntary or involuntary euthanasia. Voluntary euthanasia happens through a request for death by the patient, while involuntary euthanasia happens even when the patient may want to continue living, but the medical professionals or care givers decide that it is better for the patient to die. This is the case when the patient is in coma or unable to choose between a meaningful life and dignified death. Finally, there is indirect euthanasia, wherein the treatment that is provided has a side effect of speeding up the

end of the patient. The subtle difference between active euthanasia and indirect euthanasia is that in active euthanasia the action taken is with the object of bringing about the end of the patient, while in indirect euthanasia the objective in the treatment is to alleviate some discomfort of the patient, like pain, and yet the treatment leads to the death of the patient. 3

The issue of euthanasia or what may also be termed assisted suicide has become more forceful in society due to the enhanced life spans that advances in medical science have bestowed on humankind. Death is something that humans prefer to avoid, yet, due to the aging processes and diseases; it is quite possible that for some individuals' extension of life through medical advancements is no longer a suitable because of issues like immobility, unconsciousness, agony of pain, and dependence on others.

Euthanasia or assisted suicide then becomes a suitable option. 4

The issue of euthanasia came to the forefront through the actions of Dr. Jack Kevorkian also known as ' Dr. Death' through the several times he had assisted patients to die, advocating death was the most suitable option. With the legal view that no individual has the right to take one's life, Dr. Kevorkian was sentenced to 25 years in prison. His stand on euthanasia demonstrates the divide in society over Euthanasia. 5

Proponents of euthanasia base their key arguments in favor of euthanasia on the explicit right of an individual to die; such deaths do not harm others, and so the state and others have no business to interfere; allowing such death reduces strain on the scant health resources; the philosophic support that euthanasia satisfies the moral criterion that all rules must be universal; and that death is really not a bad thing. Key arguments of those who oppose euthanasia include that no individual has the right to take life, and only God

has that right; the sanctity of life will be weakened; voluntary euthanasia will only lead to involuntary euthanasia; untimely death of an individual has its impact on the family; euthanasia is not easy to regulate; unnecessary powers in the hands of doctors; killing of undesirable individuals; and exposure of avoidable pressures on the very sick. 6

Conclusion

Euthanasia pertains to assisted suicide by patients through the help received from medical professionals and care givers, so that the individual has a good death with dignity. However, assisting a person to die is associated with moral, legal, ethical, religious, and societal concerns, which has led to it becoming a controversial issue. There are those who support it and many against it, which has led to a continuing debate on whether euthanasia should be allowed in society or not, which is likely to extend over the new millennium, and remain one of the hotly debated topics.

Works Cited

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