

The Interaction of Religion and Ethics in Preparing for Battles against Yourself: Suicide and Euthanasia



Narinder Kour

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab)

Abstract

The present paper is about practical ethics, that is, the application of ethics or morality to our everyday problems regarding moral choices. Ethical principles have relevance only when they are applied to our everyday social and moral situations. Earlier, ethics was seen as the science or a theory whose purpose was to devise principles independent of the actual situations. Later in the 20th century ethics has been seen as a practical science. R.M. Hare, for example, sees ethics as a prescriptive discipline whose purpose is to tell us what to do in a particular situation. In this paper, the issues of Euthanasia and Suicide have taken up. In every society there has been some prohibition on the taking of life. Presumably no society can survive if it allows its members to kill one another without restriction, but when a person is severely ill, and has no chances of being cured by medicine and he is also suffering from pain then the question arises should he allow to die and also the question that do we have freedom to die? Both the problems Euthanasia and suicide are concerned with this very question. An attempt has been made to analyze the problems regarding these two issues along with to offer some solutions to the problems.

Keywords: Euthanasia, Ethics, Suicide, Killing, Mercy Death

Introduction

Euthanasia and Suicide are two most interesting topics widely discussed in philosophy, Religions and other multidisciplinary studies. Some countries have even legalized Euthanasia. But it goes against the fundamental principles or axioms of the normative ethics. According to Ethics, human life is precious and to kill one's life or other's life by one's consent goes against this normative principles. There are other fundamental principles of the ethics like, not to kill or harm any living creature, not to lie, not to perform bad activities and so on. The issue of suicide and Euthanasia is very much significant in present day. According to some thinkers, Euthanasia is also a form of suicide and while some thinkers are justifying that Euthanasia is right and one's individual right.

Suicide and Euthanasia

Suicide is derived from a Latin word "Suicidium", that means "to kill oneself". Hence suicide is the act of intentionally causing harm to your own body with an intention to end your life. Suicide is usually committed due to despair, fear of failure or any other reason, because of which is frequently attributed to mental disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism, or drug abuse. Stress factors such as financial difficulties or troubles with interpersonal relationships often play a significant role. Euthanasia is defined as the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. An act of Euthanasia may involve killing someone or it may involve refraining

from trying to prevent death (*permitting someone to die*). The 'Euthanasia' is derived from the Greek word '*euthanatos*' signifying 'well death', so 'Euthanasia' literally means 'a gentle and easy death'. But in the modern content it means, 'killing of those who are incurably ill and in great pain or distress, for the sake of those killed, and in order to spare them from further suffering or 'distress'. If we take this as the definition of Euthanasia then Euthanasia refers to the killing of persons under the following circumstances:

1. The person who is subjected to Euthanasia must be incurably ill or
2. He/she must be in great physical pain or mental distress.

Euthanasia aims at sparing such persons from the further suffering and must be applied for the benefit of such persons for whom death is preferable over the continuation life. However, it has also been interpreted, especially in the 20th century, to mean 'mercy killing', legally a form of murder in most countries of the world. In using the term 'Euthanasia' to stand for both mercy killing and allowing someone to die, we seriously blur a very necessary and important distinction between an act of murder and what is merely good medical practice (*allowing people to die of natural causes, without using any extraordinary or heroic measures to keep them alive*). It is stated further that even though "Euthanasia" once meant "happy death", it no longer has that meaning, but rather means mercy killing or murder. Therefore, we will not use this term but will substitute three other phrases:

1. Allowing someone to die,
2. Mercy death and
3. Mercy killing.

A Philosophical Analysis of Ethical and Legal Issues of Suicide and Euthanasia

In clear and accessible language, Neil Gorsuch offers a comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary ethical arguments surrounding assisted suicide and euthanasia. He examines evidence and case studies from the Netherlands and Oregon, where these prac-

tices have been legalized. Gorsuch also analyzes libertarian and autonomy-based arguments for legalization, as well as the influence of significant U.S. Supreme Court rulings on the ongoing debate. Furthermore, he investigates the historical development of laws and societal attitudes towards assisted suicide and euthanasia in America. After a thorough assessment of the arguments for these practices, Gorsuch presents a nuanced, innovative, and compelling moral and legal argument against legalization. This argument is grounded in the principle that human life possesses intrinsic value and that intentional killing is inherently wrong, an idea that has been largely overlooked in this discourse. Simultaneously, his argument accommodates individual patient autonomy and the right to refuse unwanted medical treatment and life-sustaining care, allowing for intervention only in instances where there is an intention to kill. Both proponents and opponents of assisted suicide will find Gorsuch's analysis to be a thoughtful and thought-provoking contribution to the discussion surrounding this highly contentious public policy issue.¹

Steven Luper wrote in his work "*The Philosophy of Death*", that many individuals spend their lives battling various diseases that ultimately lead to their demise, particularly in the United States. The likelihood of death from accidents is relatively low at 5 percent, while fatalities from assaults account for only 0.7 percent. Approximately 1.4 percent of individuals will die by suicide, according to 2004 statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The question arises: when and how should we approach the end of our lives? It is often reasonable to fight against diseases or injuries that are ultimately fatal, as our lives are at stake. In such cases, seeking aggressive medical treatment, including pain management through drug therapy, is frequently the most appropriate option. However, this is not universally applicable. For some individuals, it may be more beneficial to forgo treatment and allow the natural course of death to occur.²

Conversely, for others, a more proactive approach may be advisable, particularly when their quality

of life is diminished by a chronic condition that is not immediately life-threatening or progresses slowly. In situations where continued existence is contrary to our best interests, choosing to end our lives with the assistance of a medical professional can be a rational decision. This assistance may manifest as support in the form of assisted suicide or euthanasia, particularly for those who lack the capacity to end their lives independently. Ultimately, the choice to end one's life, whether with or without assistance, is one that should be deferred for as long as possible. When life remains of value, it is indeed a significant loss to choose death. Nevertheless, for some individuals, making this decision may be both prudent and morally acceptable.³

Robert Louis Stephenson in British Medical Bulletin 1926 also depicted that 'although more than 3000 years have passed, the dilemma posed by euthanasia still generally divides society—a vexed question which has been debated in the medical, legal, philosophical and theological literature. In ancient times, active euthanasia and suicide were significant topics of discussion. The majority of philosophers and dramatists rejected active euthanasia, viewing it as a violation of individual autonomy and contrary to divine will. Keown, D., (1998) in *"Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia": A Buddhist Perspective*. Journal of Law and Religion writes that 'right to die' has been a very debatable issue in contemporary times and argued that there is no constitutional right to physician assisted suicide or euthanasia.⁴

Michael S. Bryant (2005), *"Confronting the Good Death" (Nazi Euthanasia on Trial, 1945-1953)* provides the critical studies for scholars of Holocaust studies, legal history and human rights. To eradicate the mentally ill, Hitler unleashed the final solution to annihilate European Jews. As many as 270000 peoples were mass murdered by gassing and lethal injection. Michael Bryant confronted this "Good Death" and analyzes the U.S. Government and German judiciary's attempt to punish the Euthanasia killers after the war.

In *"Euthanasia, Abortion, Death Penalty and Religion" (The Right to Life and its Limitations:*

International Empirical Research) Hans-Z.G. and Francesco Z. (2018), considers that the termination of life may be accepted in view of general obligations to protect life. It features more than 10 papers from 14 countries that offer comparative empirical research.

Jennifer M. Scherer, Rita J. Simon (1999) points out that the Right to Die and Euthanasia are examined in light of Social, Legal and Religious point of view in reference to wide range of countries in "Euthanasia and the Right to Die" (A Comparative View).

Religious Views

In various religions the issue is discussed in different ways. A single religion also presents different perspectives. As an example one section of Buddhists accepts Euthanasia as a mercy to the patient but many are critical of the procedure. An important value of Buddhism is compassion. Buddhists used Compassion as a justification for euthanasia as they believe that the by this the person suffering gets relief from pain. However, it is still immoral "to embark on any course of action whose aim is to destroy human life, irrespective of the quality of the individual's motive". In Theravada Buddhism a lay person daily recites the simple formula: "I undertake the precept to abstain from destroying living beings. For Buddhist monastics (*bhikkhu*) however the rules are more explicitly spelled out.

"The Declaration on Euthanasia" represents the Church's official stance on euthanasia, issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1980. Catholic doctrine categorically condemns euthanasia as a "crime against life" and a "crime against God." The Catholic Church's teachings on euthanasia are grounded in several fundamental principles of Catholic ethics, including the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the human person, inherent human rights, due proportionality in case-specific remedies, the inevitability of death, and the significance of charity. While some may argue that these positions are relatively recent, the Roman Catholic Church's perspective remains unequivocal, regardless of individual beliefs.

Within Hinduism, there are two perspectives on euthanasia. One viewpoint suggests that by assisting in the end of a painful life, an individual is performing a virtuous act and fulfilling their moral responsibilities. Euthanasia may also be deemed acceptable if motivated by selflessness. Conversely, another perspective holds that by ending a life, even one marked by suffering, an individual disrupts the natural cycle of death and rebirth, which is considered detrimental. Those involved in euthanasia may incur the residual karma of the patient. Death is recognized as a natural process that will occur in due time (Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita). The Vedas indicate that a person has two reliable companions in life: Vidya (knowledge), which is essential and beneficial, and Mrityu (Death), which is inevitable and sometimes unexpected. It is not the act of euthanasia itself that is deemed sinful, but rather the worldly attachment that frames euthanasia as such. Even a Sannyasin or Sannyasini may choose to end their life with the aspiration of attaining Moksha, or the liberation of the soul.

Muslims oppose euthanasia, as they believe that all human life is sacred, being a gift from God. They hold that God determines the duration of each person's life, and human beings should not interfere with this divine plan. It is considered forbidden for a Muslim to intentionally foresee or plan the timing of their own death.

Jainism is fundamentally rooted in the principle of non-violence (Ahimsa) and is widely recognized for this tenet. The tradition advocates for voluntary death, known as Sallekhana, for both ascetics and householders at the end of their lives. Sallekhana, which is also referred to as Santhara or Samadhi-marana, consists of two components: "Sal," meaning 'properly,' and "Lekhana," meaning 'to thin out.' Thus, Sallekhana signifies the proper thinning out of passions and the body. A person is allowed to fast unto death or take the vow of *Sallekhana* only when certain requirements are fulfilled. It is not considered suicide as the person observing it, must be in a state of full consciousness. When observing *Sallekhana*, one must not have the desire to live or desire to

die. Practitioner shouldn't recollect the pleasures enjoyed or, long for the enjoyment of pleasures in the future. The process is still controversial in parts of India. Estimates for death by this means range from 100 to 240 a year. Preventing *Santhara* invites social ostracism.

Affects of Religions on Suicide and Euthanasia

An examination of the association between the religion of US adults and their observation on euthanasia was done in order to observe how they unite. The findings completed that the religious association one acquaintances with does not essentially connect with their stand on euthanasia. Research indicates that while many individuals identify with a specific religion, they may not consider all aspects of that faith to be relevant to their lives. Some metadata analyses support the hypothesis that nurses' attitudes toward euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are influenced by their religious beliefs and worldviews. An increased emphasis on religion appears to correlate with a decreased likelihood of agreeing with euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. A 1995 study on public opinion revealed that the perception of a distinction between active euthanasia and suicide was significantly influenced by religious affiliation and educational background. In Australia, physicians without formal religious affiliations were more likely to express support for active voluntary euthanasia and acknowledged having practiced it compared to their religiously affiliated counterparts. Among those identifying with a religion, individuals with Protestant affiliations exhibited attitudes and practices that were intermediate between those of agnostic/atheist and Catholic groups. Catholics demonstrated the most opposition; however, even 18 percent of Catholic medical respondents reported taking active steps to assist in the death of patients when requested.

The basic notion and the original structural and central ideas incorporated in the philosophical and religious texts are actually deep rooted and are based on practical experience acquired since the beginning of the universe. The textual incorporation of ideas and inkling/intimation in these

great Granths and philosophies is actually applicable for one and all which need to be brought in lime light for the welfare of the human mankind.

Analyzing the Intensity of Problems and Remedies

Suicide is a serious issue that is not only prominent in our country but a cause for concern in all parts of the world. Stress factors such as financial difficulties or troubles with personal relationships, hard competition or fear of losing something important often play a major role in driving a person towards ending his life.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth between 10 to 19 years of age in our country. According to different surveys about 800,000 to a million people in the world die by suicide every year, making it the 10th leading cause of death across the globe.⁷

There are an estimated 10 to 20 million non-fatal attempted suicides every year. Almost every person committing or preparing for suicide is in a different state of mind, so is the condition and state of mind of the person who is being subject to or subjected to euthanasia. Some even don't have the ability to decide on their own and might have lost the ability to take decision even for themselves. So all cannot be treated with the same rules in vogue nor can all the cases be decided by the courts. So the need arises for looking into our old philosophical, religious and other sacred texts for the ultimate tackling of this problem.⁸

It is estimated that around 20 students take their lives in India every day and every 10 minutes someone in this country commits suicide. It is really tragic to see the alarming rate of suicides across the world. Psychiatrists attribute this trend to various factors; it is not an outcome of a single reason. The alarming suicide rate among students highlights the reality that our younger generation is really prone to this problem of suicide and it is very important to find ways to deal with this problem. Youth in India forms one of the most vulnerable groups, who on the one hand are expected to be the growth leaders and form the backbone of India's future, while on the other hand, and are

a browbeaten and baffled cluster. Hence there is a strong need to get the things right.⁹

How the philosophy and religions can cover and handle these burning and alarming issue under 'ethics' will also proven to be a eye opener for all the modern sciences, which actually fails to cope up these burning problems; as we see, the suicide rate are increasing day by day and the cases of "Right To Die" are also reaching the legal courts of justice. Also it remains usually under-reported epidemic due to various social, legal and economic stigmas as the incidents of Suicide and Euthanasia remains mostly unreported. So let us heal the world from silent pain and sorrows through the most trusted philosophical findings and religious texts.

Conclusion

Religious outlooks on euthanasia are both diverse and complicated. Whilst one's view on the matter doesn't unavoidably connect openly to their religion, it often affects a person's opinion. Whereas the control of religion on one's analysis toward palliative care does make a difference, they frequently play a lesser role than one may believe.¹⁰ Religions are against suicide and euthanasia. Religious knowledge implies that humans are sacred creation of the God. God has made human life precious. But there is a rational and empirical stance on suicide and Euthanasia which implies that there is a need of Euthanasia and they justified euthanasia. Many countries have legalized euthanasia on rational and empirical basis. But we have to find out whether euthanasia and suicide are wrong or it could be morally right. We must be aware about the consequences of euthanasia and is euthanasia and Suicide. Of all our moral convictions; the belief that human life is sacred is the most deeply rooted in our nature and traditions. This modern tendency to excuse suicide on grounds of insanity is matched, at the other extreme, by the traditional Judaeo-Christian condemnation of it as a moral sin. All religions teaches us to live with purity, honesty and bravely and not to interfere into the natures decision making process. The human interference brings further miseries and sorrows for humans'

inspite of happiness. The time has come that the world shall follow and apply in practical the words of *Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita*- "Prepare for battles against yourself".

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