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The Ethical Difference Between Active and Passive Euthanasia: A Comparative Discussion

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Abstract

According to utilitarianism, the act that brings more happiness or pleasure than suffering is good. Euthanasia therefore reduces human suffering and at the same time provides stability to the family. Professor Peter Singer has spoken about Preference utilitarianism in this context. We have a right to life, which allows the person concerned to live according to his decisions. Now if a severely mentally ill person decides to euthanize, then we should help him by respecting his individuality. The only difference between these two types of euthanasia is that in active euthanasia, the act is done intentionally, but in passive euthanasia, death is not caused intentionally. Euthanasia is often compared to murder. There are different interpretations of euthanasia and I have discussed here what kind of euthanasia is acceptable.

Keywords: suffering, kill, medical science, live, right to die, euthanasia.

In our daily practical life, although suicide cannot be supported morally, many people support euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in certain cases. Although this ethically presents some important liberation in the case of suicide. In contemporary applied ethics, especially medical ethics, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have attracted everyone's attention. Although suicide is a heinous crime, many ethical philosophers have shown the scope of physician-assisted suicide.

The etymological meaning of the word 'Euthanasia' is 'comfortable death', that is, the death of a person who wants to die is peaceful. The word 'Euthanasia' comes from two Greek words – 'Eu' and 'thanatos'. The word 'eu' means easy or comfortable and the word 'thanatos' means death. So 'euthanasia' means a peaceful and easy death. To end life easily and peacefully to get rid of the endless pain of an incurable disease. Again, It is also seen that if the fetus is suffering from serious diseases, such as brain neural tube defects, organ defects etc, the disabled and congenitally ill child is not capable of living, or if there is no possibility of survival for a person suffering from a terminal disease, euthanasia is a method of hastening death to relieve them from their suffering.

However, many consider euthanasia to be a reprehensible and immoral act. Since the fifth century BC, Western physicians have also followed the oath of Hippocrates, the father of medical science. and have shown an anti-euthanasia attitude. The oath is no one shall be

given a lethal drug even if he wishes it, nor shall any person be advised against using such a drug. Although euthanasia is now legally recognized in many countries, including Belgium, Netherlands, and Switzerland. This is still debated in many other countries.

Recently, in 1973, the American Medical Association issued a statement stating that euthanasia has been called unethical. The intentional killing of another person by one person is unethical. However, in practical ethics, death is not considered wrong. The death of a person is called 'disadvantageous' only when the person who killed him is considered guilty. Suicide is the act of killing someone voluntarily, but when a doctor helps someone die by giving them drugs or other substances, and the person kills themselves with that help, that suicide is called physician-assisted suicide. Euthanasia is when a doctor or health worker provides a less painful death to a patient suffering from a terminal illness.

However, there is a difference between suicide and euthanasia. The person who is going to commit suicide wants to die, to be free from his own life. On the other hand, the person who wants euthanasia wants to die peacefully, to be free from a painful death. Euthanasia is differentiated in various ways. There are two types of euthanasia, the method of causing this death.

- i) Active euthanasia
- ii) Passive euthanasia

In order to give the patient direct relief from the suffering and misery of the patient, the arrangement of his death or euthanasia is active. The act of killing the patient by killing him with a deadly injection is called active euthanasia. When we say killing in general, we do not make much difference between this type of euthanasia. Here the matter of killing is to be as painless as possible, its arrangement is made here. However, this type of euthanasia has not yet been recognized in our India.

On the other hand, in passive euthanasia, the patient is allowed to die by withdrawing treatment or life-sustaining measures. Here, the patient is pushed to the brink of death. In this context: Peter Singer gives an example of a fatal childhood disease called spina bifida. In this case, the child is born with a hole in the back and the spinal cord of the child comes out through a hole in his body. This was not the case until the first half of the twentieth century and the patient would die within a few days. By 1957, the treatment of this spina bifida disease began with a device called the Holter valve, but it is seen that those who survive this treatment live horribly. Such as in most cases they are paralyzed or have no control over their bodies and more than half are mentally retarded. In view of their condition, a British doctor has proposed that it is not necessary to treat every child with the Halter valve method, but only those born with minor birth defects. Others: When treatment is withdrawn from children, those children die early. Active measures are being taken to cause the death of these children, only a life-giving measure is being withdrawn. This is called passive euthanasia.

In 1973, the American Medical Association approved passive euthanasia, although it was supported from a humanitarian perspective, but active euthanasia was declared prohibited. For example, the intentional killing of a people by one person by another is against medical ethics, but there are many cases where the death of the patient is inevitable, where the patient or his relatives can hasten the death of the patient by interrupting the medical process. Doctors in England also declared this passive euthanasia, although he supported it, he did not accept active euthanasia.

But now the question is, can this kind of treatment be stopped and the path of death made easier in terms of humanity? In this context, Dr Anthony Shaw has said in his article 'Doctor, do we have a choice?' that the goal of the doctor is to prevent death and knows how to slowly and gradually kill children without treatment. It is an easy matter to stop the treatment for severely disabled children and end their death, to simply relieve them of their pain. but to see a child dying of infection and dehydration in a medical center is a tragic matter.

Let us take another example, the case of a patient suffering from cancer, which is incurable and cannot be cured. In the present modern medical system, even if it is possible to save him alive for a few days, the patient, who is suffering from unbearable pain considers death desirable and requests his doctor to cause his death. But here, the doctor does not allow the proposal of the patient, because passive euthanasia is not acceptable to die. Undoubtedly, the passive process is inhumane because, the patient dies due to the interruption of treatment and the person who has been suffering for a long time ends his life. The disease is incurable and the prognosis is unbearable, then for the sake of humanity, only active euthanasia is acceptable. It is possible to cause the death of the patient by administering lethal drugs.

1. Withdrawal of medical treatment and suspension of medical treatment:

Many people believe that there is a moral difference between withdrawing life-sustaining medicines and devices and not starting treatment. When a doctor removes a respirator from a patient who is unable to breathe on his own, the doctor causes the patient to die. On the other hand, a doctors cause the patient to die by not putting the patient on a respirator and not starting treatment. In the first case, the doctor causes the event and in the second case, the doctor allows the event to happen. If the patient dies because of stopping the treatment, then the doctor is responsible for the patient's death, but on the other hand, if the patient dies because of not starting treatment, the doctor cannot be held responsible for the patient's death.

We usually act of commission and act of omission- these are two different doctrines. Again, in some cases we consider act of omission to be more desirable than act of commission. Then, we may think that if a doctor kills a disabled child or a cancer patient by administering a lethal drug, it would be an improper action. On the other hand, stops the treatment of that disabled child or cancer patient in every way and helps them die, it would be a proper action. In another way, we can say that act of omission is also a kind of act of commission (performance of action)- both actions are essentially optional actions. Some ethicists have drawn this distinction between action and omission, eventually drawing a distinction between killing a patient and letting a patient die in decision-making.

Therefore, there is no moral difference between performing and abstaining from performing an action, between killing by administering lethal drugs and killing by withholding drugs. To illustrate this point, James Raichels cites two examples - one in which a person is actively killed and the other in which he is passively allowed to die. First example: If somehow the six-year-old cousin dies, Smith will inherit a huge fortune. One evening, the six-year-old child went to the bathroom to bathe in the bathtub, and Smith secretly entered the room, drowned the child, and killed him, and decorated the scene in such a way that it would appear that the child had drowned in some supernatural way.

Second example: If the six-year-old cousin somehow dies, Jones will inherit a huge fortune. Similarly, one evening, a six-year-old child went to the bathroom to bathe in the

bath tub, and at that time Jones secretly entered the room and saw that while bathing, the child had slipped and fallen, hit his head and was lying face down in the puddle, unconscious. Jones was very happy to see the incident and stood still for a while by the bathtub, hoping that if the child did not die, he could keep the child immersed in the puddle, otherwise the child would not be able to get out of the bathtub and the child would die due to the sudden fall.

In the first example, Smith killed the child in a deliberate manner (Active Euthanasia), which is called Killing, and in the second example, Jones passively refrains from acting, resulting in the child's death (Passive Euthanasia). Which can be called letting die.

If we judge from a moral point of view, it is difficult to say which of these is better and which is worse. In his defence, Jones did nothing intentionally to harm the child here but remained passive and watched the child die. Although this argument was acceptable in the eyes of the judge in court, from a moral perspective, it can never be acceptable. From a moral point of view, motive and intention are the things to be judged. In that case, the intention of both Smith and Jones here is the death of the child. In order to achieve this purpose, in the first case, Smith has acted in an active manner and in the second case, Jones has acted in an inactive manner, but Jones's passive action is also deliberate and intentional. Therefore, from a moral point of view, both examples are considered as wrong actions. The only difference between these two examples is that in the first example, Smith was ready to kill, but in the second example, Jones was not ready to kill.

2. Arguments against euthanasia:

i) Prolonging life is the true religion of living beings. People have future plans and want to live to realize those plans. If euthanasia is supported, the future plans of some people will not be possible. The possibility cannot be denied that if the dying person lived a little longer, they could have written a high-quality research book according to their plan and presented it to our society, but euthanasia hinders the person's future plans, which may not be beneficial for society either.

ii) Only in cases where the disease is incurable and fatal is the request for euthanasia made. But is there any certainty that the disease is incurable and that the cure is not possible? It may also be that the doctor has made a mistake in diagnosing the disease. The disease is not incurable at all. In fact, it may be that today's incurable and extremely painful cancer patients Doctors keep alive in the hope that tomorrow the true cause of cancer will be discovered and the disease will be cured. Therefore, if the possibility of curing the disease and alleviating the pain is accepted, euthanasia can never be supported.

iii) The desire for voluntary euthanasia is natural. It may be that the patient does not actually wish to die, but wants to live, because his illness is so severe, he wishes to die to relieve the pain, so the need here is to relieve the pain, not to cause death. If the wish for death is not the goal, then it cannot be said that the killing is the person's desire and will be considered as murder.

Again, when a dying person wishes to die, the patient is allowed to die due to the insistence of relatives who are unwilling to bear the cost of that wish. This is also a type of direct killing.

iv) If the legal form of euthanasia is supported, there is a risk that many frauds and deceits will be accepted as legitimate. It can be feared that even for the greed of huge wealth, a person who wants to die is being killed by giving him a name for euthanasia. Basically, due

to all these problems, euthanasia has not been supported in various countries (except Netherlands) even today.

v) Euthanasia destroys the patient's morale to live a healthy life free from disease. The essence of survival is the desire to survive, if that desire is lacking, the disease cannot be cured by relying only on medicine. Sometimes, hearing this euthanasia creates despair in the patient's mind. It is not desirable in practical life.

This relief from death is also justifiable from the point of view of utilitarianism. According to utilitarianism, actions that cause more pain than pleasure are bad, inappropriate actions, and actions that cause more pleasure than pain are good, appropriate actions. As a result, rather than keeping a person suffering from a disease and suffering immense pain alive, it is better to kill him peacefully without causing him any pain. Every human being has the right to wish for death to achieve liberation. Therefore, euthanasia can be supported.

Conclusion:

It is very difficult to differentiate between active euthanasia and passive euthanasia. These two types of euthanasia are all the same. The main point is that here the patient dies. In some cases, the death is caused by the patient himself and in some cases the death is caused by someone else. Just as active euthanasia cannot be supported in the same way as passive euthanasia is not acceptable. The only difference between this two euthanasia is that in active euthanasia the act is done intentionally but in passive euthanasia the death is not intentionally caused.

It is very difficult to differentiate between active euthanasia and passive euthanasia. Both types of euthanasia - active euthanasia and passive euthanasia are the same. The main point of these two types of killing is the patient's death. The only difference is that in the case of active euthanasia, the patient is being killed directly, and in the case of passive euthanasia, the patient is being killed indirectly. Active euthanasia is compared with killing, and passive euthanasia is letting die.

In some cases, this euthanasia can be called a proper action. For example, in the case of a patient suffering from incurable cancer, we can support euthanasia and free the patient from their suffering. Where the person in agony is fighting with the agony of death. Maybe it is not possible to cure their disease with treatment. In that case, euthanasia can be used, but It should be noted that the diagnosis in that case should not be wrong. A person suffering from an incurable disease knows that they want to be freed from their long-lasting pain, then this euthanasia can be supported from an ethical point of view. However, if euthanasia is legalized, there is a possibility of much fraud and deception, which is never supported in practical ethics. Euthanasia can be supported in special cases.

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