

ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS ON EUTHANASIA

ABDI O. SHURIYE

*Department of Science in Engineering, Faculty of Engineering,
International Islamic University Malaysia,
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

shuriye@iium.edu.my

ABSTRACT: This paper is an analysis on euthanasia from ethical and religious perspectives. Historically, the classical Greek thinkers including Aristotle had categorically accepted euthanasia with the main reason of minimizing pain. However, as science develops ethical and religious issues related to the subject have increasingly created fervent debates on euthanasia.

ABSTRAK: Kertas ini mengkaji euthanasia dari perspektif agama dan etika. Sejarah telah melihat para pemikir Greek termasuk Aristotle secara kategorinya menerima Euthanasia dengan sebab utama untuk mengurangkan kesakitan. Bagaimanapun, apabila sains berkembang, perbincangan mengenai isu-isu agama dan etika tentang Euthanasia telah meningkat dengan nyata.

KEYWORDS: *mercy killing; religion; ethics; morality; euthanasia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Euthanasia is the idea of intentional killing by act or omission of a dependent human being for his or her alleged benefit. It could be voluntary when the person whose life is terminated has requested so; and it could be unpremeditated when the person involved provided no consent. It could also be by action if action is performed to the life of the person; or it could be based on omission when necessary care is not provided. The objective of this paper is to study the religious and ethical implications of euthanasia. It explores the Qur'anic views and relates to the history and practices. The methodology employed in this study is collection of academic references including books and journals, as well as other reliable references.

2. UNDERSTANDING EUTHANASIA

The etymology of euthanasia reflects "good death or mercy killing" though no one has thus far understood the meaning of good death or killing with mercy. Nonetheless, what is understood is the fact that the term implies gentle and easy process of death. Authorities in the subject talk of "decision of shortening life" as the main definition of euthanasia [1]. Authorities also agree that euthanasia involves decision which have the effect of shortening life. Euthanasia is also limited to the medical context. It involves patients' lives being shortened by doctors [1].

Keown argues that the method used could be active as well as intentional, according to him in most cases euthanasia refers to the active or the intentional termination of a patient's life by a doctor who thinks that death is the ultimate benefit for the concerned

patient [2]. The doctor is shortening the patient's life, in the process, without a purpose or intention the doctor would have no business in the issue. Keown refers to a report on euthanasia and related matters by the UK House of Lords Select Committee on medical ethics. The report defines euthanasia as "deliberate intervention undertaken with expressed intention of ending a life to relieve intractable suffering" [2].

Two types of Euthanasia are relevant; active and passive. Active euthanasia would mean the use of particular methods which cause death to the patient. It is this aspect or type of euthanasia that we usually refer to as "mercy killing". The method used in passive euthanasia is quite diverse from active methods, discontinuation of treatment is one method used in this type of euthanasia. In other words, doctor or whoever performs the act withdraws or withhold certain treatment that could keep the patient alive. If the physician provide the drug which could be used for the same purpose with the patient without actively or passively involved directly by himself, this type of euthanasia is termed as "Physician Assisted Euthanasia" [1].

There are also, so to speak, voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia. The idea of voluntary or otherwise reflects the patient's involvement in the decision making. It would be considered voluntary if the order is given to the physician by the patient, without the will of the patient however it becomes involuntary [1].

3. ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS ON EUTHANASIA

The moral characterization of bringing about someone's death is incompatible with the values of his or her life. Allowing to be killed or cooperating in the process or even been indifferent about it could be morally interpreted as suicide. When one brings about one's own death, we, most of the time attempt to justify in one form or the other, *Shahid* or Martyr who had killed himself could be interpreted as suicide? The martyr been a Muslim, Christian or Jew acts on the assumption of been on the other side of moral grounds and consider himself or herself a hero. On the same grounds from amoral point of view voluntary euthanasia is not different from other cases of suicide. The motive of committing suicide is mainly to get rid of a particular problem. Stressed individuals in economically advanced societies commonly commit this agreeably unethical act [1].

Religion plays a role, the more a society is highly committed and conscious about its faith in God the less the rate of suicide cases. Western authors for instance have recognized that fact that Muslims have the lowest rate of suicide cases, but they hardly attribute this to the faith in Islam. Western scholars have agreed that "suicide rates are generally low in Muslim countries, where there has traditionally been strong condemnation on suicide in any circumstances" [1]. Generally religion provides, to a certain level, some sort of broad conceptual guidelines that control the bio-behaviour and internal inconsistency which may result from external factors.

Other roles of religion include to infuse some values to life that may, otherwise, individuals become destroyed from its comprehensive aim, and in fact some individuals have complexity in comprehending the specific objectives of life. The spiritual harmony provided by religion is imperative to balance the level of disorder. It is for these reasons that all religions consider suicide unethical, invalid and improper, as it sinfully violates the teachings of all Holy Scriptures including the Qur'an and the Bible [1].

Muslim's for instance, punctually attend the congregational prayers to beat stress, to gunner stronger security and wider network, to increase the degree of integration and discard threat. Like euthanasia, suicide is unreligious, with no moral grounds, despite this

fact however, suicide take place in various ways, a clear indication that religious tenets, though important, are becoming non-essential to the committers [1].

Christianity is one major world religion; it does not sanction suicide, and on the contrary recognizes that through religious rites the complex problems could become lighter. Christians in general are of the opinion that killing be it mercy killing, or self inflicted killing is an atheistic act against the dominant tenets of Christianity. Like other faiths, Christianity provides ease to the problem. But religion and ethical rules alone will not be adequate to deter mercy killing or suicide instead counseling and comprehending how to control the situation may be employed as effective measures to counter the causes of this immoral and unethical acts [1].

On a related aspect of the issue, it is worthwhile to note that the code of ethics of the American Medical Association recognizes the distinction and officially encodes that passive euthanasia is morally acceptable. The code however, does not recognize active euthanasia. Moral theorists also have disagreed with the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of sustaining life. Some subscribe to the opinion that it is morally justifiable to withhold extraordinary means of life support but ordinary treatment should go on. The apparent unjustifiable double standards among western philosophers are due to the inconsistency of their religious outlook [1].

The injunction that “do not harm” in the *Hippocrates Oath* which clearly specifies that a physician “will neither give a deadly drug to anybody.... Nor make a suggestion to this effect” mounts direct opposition to the permissibility bestowed by the western philosophers upon the passive euthanasia, though we all know that the removal of the life support system from the patient constitutes an act of killing the person on immoral and illegal grounds, even the patients with dead brain will fall under this categorization [1].

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up this analysis, I must downrightly state that the argument of this paper revolved on the premises that good death is ethically and religiously debatable. In comparing the two core arguments, paper observed that Western ethicists see the right to die purely from human dignity perspective, whilst Muslims look at life as trust from God. As such Muslim ethicists categorically contend that trust should be preserved and protected, as the Qur’an orders man not to cast themselves into perdition by their own hands. Unlike abortion all forms of mercy killing, passive or active, suicide, or assisted, are prohibited by Islam. Although, it must be noted, some Muslim Jurists have permitted the removal of the machine from the brain dead patients. Nonetheless, the mainstream Muslim jurists are in agreement on the notion that in Islam death means total separation of the soul from the body, as such the death of the brain stem should not be considered as death or reason for killing. The protection is for the soul in the body, with brain-death the soul could be weak but at the same time it may come back, if one believes that things are in the hands of God, therefore the weak and unconscious souls have equal rights to life.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Qur’an al-Karim
- [2] Abdi O. Shuriye, Islamic Ethical Values on Bioengineering Practices: Issues in Genetic Engineering. Research Management Centre, IIUM, pp. xiv- xvi, 2006.
- [3] John Keown, Euthanasia: Ethics and Public Policy and Argument against legislation, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.11