

A SHORT MORAL ANALYSIS OF EUTHANASIA: KANTIAN AND INDIAN

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Introduction: It is a universal truth that death is common to all living beings. No one has been able to avoid or overcome death. No philosophical pursuit, religious worship or scientific invention till now has succeeded in efforts to overcome death. So it is not exaggeration that death is a defining characteristic of living beings. As it is impossible to have the experience of individual death because no one has returned after getting expired to share his share his experience with others so we have no actual concept of death, we just observe the behavioral changing of living beings. Some of us would like to overcome death, some people afraid of death, some love the death and so on. Socrates sought death as equal to life. R.N. Tagore thinks death is equal to lover. He said, “Moron re tuhu mama shyama samaan”. Whatever the concept of death may be, ethics engages to highlight on the nature of death of human being, with its moral parameter--- good/bad, right/wrong, should, ought to etc. Euthanasia or the physician assisted suicide, in this context, is a burning issue of modern human civilization. The term “Euthanasia” has been originated from Greek word – ‘ÉÚ’ means well and ‘THANATOS’ means death. So, euthanasia means peaceful and dignified death of a man who is incurably ill. Though euthanasia has been legalized in some countries, yet the basic moral question is surviving forever that, ‘Is euthanasia morally right or wrong?’ there is a continuing tussle regarding this question from the past to present in the global ethics.

Kantian view

In response to this question Kant rules out euthanasia. According to him death should never be merely a means. No one should accept euthanasia in order to reduce suffering or save money. Kant held ‘respect for persons’ in such high esteem. The concept of human rights does not contradict Kant’s theory, which could be used to argue for the right to die with dignity. Kant was totally opposed to taking the consequences of an action into account. The end does not in any way justify the means according to his deontological theory. On this ground, euthanasia cannot be undertaken. It has been opposed by Kantians due to the following Kantian axiom.

1) **Moral Law:** Euthanasia raises the problem of relation between law and morality. Kant emphasizes on human freedom which indirectly defends voluntary euthanasia, but he does not support euthanasia. For him it is universal duty to preserve life. A duty to kill one would therefore undermine the stability of society on which the duty of life depends. For Kant if freedom is the condition of life, it cannot be employed to abolish life and so to destroy and abolish itself. To use life for its own destruction, to use life for producing lifelessness, is self contradictory. Kant believed that any action taken for a deliberate end, whether it is happiness or some other goal, is morally neutral. An act is good if it is good as a matter of principle as it derives from duty, not from psychological inclination. If euthanasia were good, it should be the duty of everyone, at least everyone in that situation. But euthanasia cannot be a universal duty, and therefore, it cannot be a good duty, and therefore, lacks moral value. In Kantian Ethics, motive and good will are important. Nothing in the world can possibly be conceived which could be called GOOD without the qualification except good. This would seem to promote euthanasia; however, he only permits will to be good if it entails acting from respect of moral law. Thou shall not murder--- is a moral law. Therefore, a Kantian approach being deontological would never permit euthanasia.

2) Categorical imperative: Kant's principle of categorical imperative says that human beings should be treated as the end in themselves, not as means to achieve some benefit. Man, as the highest point of creation, requires moral protection. We have a duty to seek happiness of others as long as the actions are legal and that they do not break the freedom of others. Man cannot have the power to dispose his life. So euthanasia would never be permitted. Kant believed that permitting euthanasia universally would destroy our understanding of the intrinsic value of human life. In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* he stated that it is immoral to commit suicide to evade a painful life because there is a contradiction in a system of nature whose law would destroy life by means of the very same feeling that acts so as to stimulate the furtherance of life. The feeling he refers to is self-love, and it has the function of preserving life. A contradiction results from the idea that individuals have no capacity to love themselves if they do not exist. Thus, Kantian philosophy seems to give an absolute prohibition to suicide. In his categorical imperative Kant argues that when an action cannot be universalized, that action is absolutely prohibited. Suicide is not universally beneficial; thus, it would seem that Kant universally prohibits this act.

3) Good Will: Kant holds good will at the centre of ethics. For him, the supreme thing on earth is the development of a good will, and to act from a sense of duty. Kant believed that good will is the only thing that is good in all circumstances. Kant thinks 'ought' implies 'can' and therefore what we ought to do must be under our control. Kant formulates the Categorical Imperative in three different ways. Kant presented the first formulation as a principle that one should only do something if one can will at the same time that everyone else should be able to do it too. So Kant would never agree with euthanasia if the decision to grant a request was solely concerned with hypothetical imperatives: that is, with the assessment of the benefit of the action to the patient and his/her family. In other words, the granting of euthanasia to a terminally ill patient because of pain or poor quality of life has no merit to a Kantian since these are consequential concerns. Any action undertaken with the sole intention of killing a patient because they are a burden on their family would go against Kantian principles of Good Will.

Indian View

The issue of euthanasia has been riddled with controversies with arguments for and against it. In India practice of ending one's life voluntarily is very old and intact, it exists even now. In India, euthanasia and assisted suicide are illegal. It appears justifiable in cases of incurable diseases, doctors should be doubly careful since they run the risk of attracting punishment for murder under the Indian Penal Code Act. Accordingly in Indian philosophy we may have distinct idea death basically euthanasia, as mentioned below---

Hindu Tradition:

The central belief of Hinduism is in Eternal religion (Sanatana Dharma). According to Hindu philosophy, religion is essential for accomplishing material and spiritual goals and for the growth of the individual and society. It is the guiding principle of life. The Hindus lead their lives according to their moral duties and responsibilities. Hindus believe in the action-theory (*KARMAVADA*), which directs that the doctor should not accept a patient's request for euthanasia as the soul and body will be separated at an unnatural time. The result of it will damage action of both doctor and patient. Suicide is generally prohibited in Hinduism, on the basis that it disrupts the timing of the cycle of death and rebirth and therefore yields evil action. It also has dire consequences for the soul's spiritual progress. Killing in the form of euthanasia, murder, suicide interferes with the killed soul's progress towards liberation. It also brings evil action to the killer, because of the violation of the principle of nonviolence. When the soul is reincarnated in another physical body, it will suffer as it did before because the same action is still present. Same argument suggests that keeping a person artificially alive on life-support machines is also a bad thing to do.

i) **Action, Liberation and Non-Violence:**

In India, ethical tension about end of- life choices is rooted in the three main values--- action, liberation and ahimsa (non-violence). Action is the net consequence of good and bad deeds in our life. It determines the nature of the next life. Ongoing accumulation of evil action prevents liberation from the cycle of rebirth, which is the ultimate goal of Hinduism. Non-Violence is a fundamental principle. The Hindus proclaims, non-violence is the highest form of virtue. In all the Hindu paths, and especially, Jaina and Buddhist, non-violence is a paramount virtue. It extends to all living beings, and therefore, protection of environment, natural habitats and vegetarianism are natural derivatives of the concept. One must consider all living beings in the image of one's own self and thus not commit acts of violence in thought, word or deed against other living creatures. Thus, the practice of euthanasia will breach the teachings of non-violence.

ii) **In the Jaina View:**

The Jainas believe that euthanasia is wrong as the destruction, consciously or subconsciously, of any living being. Although, they are against any form of suffering, and would want to prevent suffering as far as possible. They believe the preservation of life is more important as any life is better than none. Also the doctor who performed the task would have a great amount of evil action as well as anyone who wills euthanasia to take place. The Jainas have the sacred vow of Sallekhana which is slow death by starving. This may make Jainas more compassionate to euthanasia as it is also a form of purposeful death. Overall a Jaina would believe it a bad thing for euthanasia to be generally the option taken, however could be more accepting to its practice because it relates to their vow of Sallekhana.

iii).**Buddhist view:** Buddhists are not unanimous in their view of euthanasia, and the teachings of the Buddha don't explicitly deal with it. Most of the Buddhists are against involuntary euthanasia. Their position on voluntary euthanasia is less clear. Buddhists regard death as a transition. The deceased person will be reborn to a new life, whose quality will be the result of their action or performance. Both the "Vakkali Sutta" and the "Channa Sutta" describe the situations in which monks take their own lives to end the physical suffering of terminal illness. **In the Vakkali Sutta** the monk Vakkali, who is sick, afflicted, gravely ill, tell other monks of his intention to use a knife to commit suicide. Upon learning of Vakkali's intention, the Buddha personally visits Vakkali to speak with him. In the course of their discussion, it becomes apparent that Vakkali is well progressed on the path to enlightenment--having already gained direct and genuine insight into the impermanent, self-less, and ultimately unsatisfactory nature of existence. Buddha delivers a message to Vakkali that his death will be a good one; his death will not be a bad one. After Vakkali receives this message from the Buddha, he kills himself. **In the "Channa Sutta** the monk Channa, who is suffering intensely due to sickness, tells the monks Sariputta and Mahacunda to kill himself using a knife. None had done it, but he committed suicide.

Conclusion: In the concluding remark regarding the euthanasia in the view of Kantian ethics and Indian ethics, it can be said that the debate, whether euthanasia should be permitted, will remain constant. It seems that Kantian view on freedom or autonomy of human beings permits the physician assisted suicide (PAS). Kantian ethics mandates PAS for individuals who can foresee the full onset of dementia though it in most circumstances is a malevolent act to the self or others; it is an act of beneficence to both the self and others in the context of approaching dementia. In the same way, physicians should have permission to use euthanasia towards those with severe dementia as an act of beneficence towards both the patient's family and society as a whole. Kant was one of the most passionate advocates of human autonomy. For him, there is no value more than important than individual freedom. Indeed, freedom takes precedence over life itself. Therefore, we as humans should have the freedom and will to die with dignity and respect. But this is actually our analysis or logical assumption. Kant fundamentally believed 'man cannot have power to dispose of his life.' Therefore, euthanasia would never be permitted Practically Kant never has inclination for euthanasia and Kantian ethics especially good-will, universal moral law, categorical imperative etc. do not match with PAS.

On the other hand, Indian Philosophy has also some defects to defend their arguments against euthanasia. The proponents and opponents both are active in India because medical science currently can prolong life by artificial means. Hence, end-of-life issues are becoming major ethical considerations in the modern-day medical science in India. All Indian ethicists are not unanimous for permitting euthanasia. From one perspective, a person who helps other end a painful life and thereby reduces suffering is doing a good deed and will gain good action. From the other perspective, euthanasia interrupts the timing of the cycle of rebirth and both the doctor and patient will take on bad karma as a result. Freedom of Will is an important postulate of moral philosophy. An individual can be held responsible for his actions only if it is performed without any compulsion. The concept right, wrong, good, bad, reward and punishment pale into insignificance, if the postulate Freedom of Will is not taken into consideration. As per Free Will, we can go in for euthanasia (PAS), but it is wrong for us to do so.

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