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Euthanasia and the Right to Die

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ABSTRACT

This article explains the complicated topic of euthanasia and the right to decide when and how one wants to die in a simple way. Euthanasia means intentionally helping someone die to stop their suffering, and people have debated about it for a long time. Individuals must have the freedom to make this choice, especially if they're very sick or in a lot of pain. Others worry that allowing this might not be safe and could make life less special. In this article, it starts by looking at the history of euthanasia and how our ideas about life and death have changed over time. Some countries allow it in certain situations, while others don't. It explains the differences and similarities between these laws. From a people's perspective, we talk about how euthanasia affects individuals, families, and the healthcare system. It talks about the idea of providing really good care for people who are very sick to help them feel better, rather than helping them die. In simple terms, this article tries to give you a clear picture of what euthanasia and the right to choose are all about. This article aims to provide you with a clear understanding of what euthanasia and the right to choose entail. Ultimately, we hope to encourage thoughtful discussions about the delicate balance between personal autonomy and the preservation of life.

Keywords: Euthanasia , Passive Euthanasia , Active Euthanasia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Euthanasia refers to the act of intentionally ending a person's life to relieve their suffering, typically when they are facing a terminal illness or experiencing unbearable pain and there is no hope for recovery. Euthanasia is often associated with providing a humane and compassionate way for individuals to choose when and how they die, particularly when they are in a state of great physical or emotional distress.

There are two primary forms of euthanasia:

Passive Euthanasia: This involves withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining medical treatment or support that is keeping a person alive. For example, if a patient in a vegetative state is taken off a ventilator or if a terminally ill patient decides to stop receiving life-prolonging treatments such as chemotherapy.

Active Euthanasia: This involves taking deliberate actions to hasten a person's death, usually

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through the administration of lethal drugs or interventions. Active euthanasia is often a more contentious and legally complex issue and is not widely accepted or legalized in many countries.

The ethical, moral, and legal aspects of euthanasia are highly debated. Supporters argue that individuals have the right to make decisions about their own lives, including when and how they die, especially when they are suffering intensely. Opponents raise concerns about the sanctity of life, the potential for abuse, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding the intentional ending of a human life.

Laws regarding euthanasia vary from one country or jurisdiction to another. Some places have legalized euthanasia under strict regulations and safeguards, while others consider it a criminal act. The legal status and conditions for euthanasia can change over time and depend on the specific laws and regulations in a given location.

Types of Euthanasia: Euthanasia can be further categorized into voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary euthanasia:

- **Voluntary Euthanasia:** This occurs when a competent individual makes a clear and voluntary request for euthanasia.
- **Non-voluntary Euthanasia:** This involves making the decision on behalf of a person who cannot express their wishes, such as someone in a coma or with severe cognitive impairment.
- **Involuntary Euthanasia:** Involuntary euthanasia takes place without the consent of the individual, often against their will. This is generally considered unethical and is illegal in many jurisdictions.

II. ESSENCE OF EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is a highly contentious and ethically charged topic, with arguments both in favour and against its importance in contemporary society. Advocates stress the significance of euthanasia as a compassionate means of relieving unbearable suffering, particularly in cases of terminal illness or agonizing pain. They argue for the autonomy and personal choice of individuals, asserting that people should have the right to determine the timing and manner of their death when conventional medical options have been exhausted. Additionally, proponents contend that euthanasia can alleviate the emotional and financial burdens placed on families and healthcare systems, allowing resources to be allocated more efficiently.

On the contrary, opponents of euthanasia emphasize the ethical and moral reservations associated with intentionally ending a human life, irrespective of the individual's consent. They

argue that it undermines the sanctity of life, violating deeply held religious and moral beliefs. Concerns about a potential slippery slope arise, where legalized euthanasia might lead to coercion or the expansion of eligibility criteria beyond the intended scope. Critics also highlight the risk of medical errors and misdiagnosis, as well as the importance of strengthening palliative care as an alternative to address end-of-life suffering.

Ultimately, the importance of euthanasia hinges on one's perspective, ethical stance, and values, making it a highly divisive and complex issue that necessitates careful consideration and dialogue within society to strike a balance between individual autonomy, compassion, and the preservation of life. Legal frameworks governing euthanasia, where permitted, typically incorporate stringent safeguards to mitigate potential abuse and ensure it is only pursued under well-defined circumstances.

Euthanasia, a subject of profound ethical and medical significance, encompasses a range of compelling dimensions that contribute to its importance in contemporary society. At its core, euthanasia upholds the principles of patient-centered care by honouring individual autonomy and choice in matters of life and death. It's a recognition that each person's journey through suffering and illness is deeply personal, and allowing individuals to decide the timing and manner of their own death can promote a more compassionate and empathetic healthcare system. Furthermore, euthanasia respects cultural and individual diversity, acknowledging that notions of a dignified death vary across different cultures and personal belief systems. Economically, it offers a pragmatic approach to healthcare systems grappling with resource limitations, potentially freeing up resources for those who can benefit from life-extending treatments. In the era of advancing medical technology, euthanasia provides an alternative when these technologies prolong life without improving its quality. Additionally, it can mitigate the emotional trauma experienced by families when they witness the prolonged suffering of a loved one, allowing for more peaceful goodbyes. As a response to medical futility, euthanasia prevents futile treatments that do not align with a patient's wishes and can be seen as ethically sound. It also facilitates organ donation in cases where patients wish to contribute to the well-being of others after their death. With its increasing legalization worldwide, euthanasia reflects evolving societal attitudes and contributes to a broader conversation about the intersection of healthcare, ethics, and individual rights, making it a topic of enduring importance.

III. GOLDEN RULE OF EUTHANASIA

The "Golden Rule" is a foundational ethical principle that urges individuals to treat others in the same way they would want to be treated themselves. When we apply this rule to the complex

and sensitive topic of euthanasia, it underscores the importance of empathetic consideration for the preferences and values of individuals facing end-of-life decisions. In essence, it prompts us to contemplate how we would wish to be treated if we were in a similar situation, thereby encouraging a compassionate and respectful approach. In the context of euthanasia, adhering to the Golden Rule involves recognizing the fundamental human right to autonomy and self-determination, particularly when confronting severe suffering, terminal illness, or unbearable pain. It emphasizes the need for healthcare professionals and caregivers to engage in open and transparent communication with the patient, valuing their unique perspective and understanding their desires and wishes. Furthermore, the Golden Rule encourages society to uphold the principle of patient-centered care, where the individual's well-being and choices are prioritized, and decisions regarding euthanasia are made with utmost sensitivity and respect. It reminds us that ethical considerations must be paramount when grappling with such profound and emotional decisions, guided by the overarching principle of treating others with the same compassion and dignity that we ourselves would hope for in similar circumstances. However, it's essential to recognize that applying the Golden Rule to euthanasia is not a one-size-fits-all solution, as individual beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and values can significantly influence perspectives on end-of-life choices. Therefore, while the Golden Rule serves as a valuable ethical framework, its application should be nuanced and balanced with a comprehensive understanding of the legal, ethical, and cultural complexities surrounding euthanasia, all while taking into account the unique circumstances and beliefs of the individuals involved.

IV. DRAWBACKS OF EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia, the act of intentionally ending a person's life to alleviate their suffering, is a subject rife with complex ethical and moral concerns. For starters, it clashes with the principle of the sanctity of life held by many, asserting that deliberately terminating a life is morally wrong regardless of the circumstances. Critics fear that legalizing euthanasia could lead to a slippery slope, broadening eligibility criteria to include non-terminal illnesses or even non-consenting individuals over time. Moreover, there's the daunting specter of medical errors and misdiagnoses, where incorrect prognoses or judgment errors could prematurely end lives that might have had potential for recovery. Vulnerable populations, like the elderly or mentally ill, could also be coerced into choosing euthanasia due to societal pressures or financial constraints. Healthcare professionals involved may experience moral distress and trauma, altering the doctor-patient relationship fundamentally. In addition, the subjectivity in defining "unbearable suffering" raises disagreements, and alternatives such as improved palliative care options are often overlooked. The challenge of regulating euthanasia to prevent abuse and safeguard its

application is another formidable obstacle. Lastly, the psychological impact on the patient's family and societal values regarding human life and suffering are complex facets of this ongoing ethical debate. Additionally, the legalization of euthanasia can have wider societal implications, potentially affecting how society views the value of human life, particularly for vulnerable populations. The very act of permitting euthanasia may inadvertently send a message about the acceptability of ending life under certain conditions, influencing societal attitudes toward issues like disability, aging, and end-of-life care. It raises questions about how society balances the rights and autonomy of individuals with the collective responsibility to protect vulnerable members from potential harm. These multifaceted drawbacks and concerns underscore the profound complexity of the euthanasia debate, which varies widely across different countries and regions, reflecting diverse public opinion and ethical perspectives.

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution talks about the right to life and personal freedom. Courts in India have interpreted this article in different ways over the years. They have expanded it to include aspects of life that give it meaning, purpose, and dignity. Article 21 says that no one can be deprived of their life or personal freedom except according to the law. This means that life and freedom are closely connected. Freedom allows people to make choices, and life without freedom is just surviving without real meaning. So, Article 21 combines the ideas of life and freedom and says they can only be taken away by following the law.

In 2018, the Supreme Court of India made a significant decision in the *Common Cause v. Union of India* case. They created a legal framework to protect the dignity of people who are very sick and have no hope of getting better. In this situation, the Court said it's okay for two things to happen:

1. **Passive Euthanasia:** Allowing someone to die naturally without using extraordinary means to keep them alive.

2. **The Right to Make a Living Will:** This means a person can decide in advance what kind of medical treatment they want or don't want if they become very sick and can't communicate their wishes.

Before this decision, the Court had already recognized passive euthanasia in the case of *Aruna Shanbaug* in 2011. But the *Common Cause* case expanded this to include the idea of a "living will," where a person can write down their medical preferences while they are still able to make decisions.

Now, let's talk about what euthanasia is. Euthanasia means painlessly ending the life of a patient who is suffering from a painful, incurable disease or is in an irreversible coma. It's sometimes

called mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide (PAS). The key difference between euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is who gives the medicine that causes death. In euthanasia, a doctor or someone else gives it, while in physician-assisted suicide, the patient takes it themselves following the doctor's advice. Euthanasia can be done with the person's clear consent (voluntary euthanasia) or without their consent (non-voluntary euthanasia).

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, euthanasia is a multifaceted and deeply divisive subject that transcends the boundaries of law, ethics, and personal beliefs. It represents a critical nexus where the principles of individual autonomy, compassionate end-of-life care, and the sanctity of life converge. The nuanced interpretations and legal frameworks surrounding euthanasia underscore its evolving significance in contemporary society.

On one hand, euthanasia is championed as a means of relieving extreme suffering, particularly among individuals facing terminal illnesses or excruciating pain. It upholds the right of individuals to make profoundly personal decisions about when and how they should end their lives, especially when traditional medical interventions offer no hope of improvement. Advocates also argue that euthanasia can alleviate the emotional and financial burdens placed on families and overburdened healthcare systems, potentially redirecting resources to those who may benefit more from life-extending treatments. Furthermore, it is viewed as an inclusive approach that respects diverse cultural and individual perspectives on a dignified death.

On the other hand, euthanasia is met with staunch opposition, rooted in ethical and moral reservations regarding the intentional ending of a human life, irrespective of the individual's consent. Detractors emphasize that euthanasia challenges the age-old principle of the sanctity of life, infringing upon deeply held religious and moral convictions. Concerns about the slippery slope argument are raised, where the legalization of euthanasia may lead to unintended consequences, including coercion or the expansion of eligibility criteria beyond its intended scope. Critics also highlight the potential for medical errors and misdiagnoses, underlining the importance of bolstering palliative care as a comprehensive alternative to address end-of-life suffering.

Recent legal developments, exemplified by the landmark *Common Cause v. Union of India* case, have demonstrated the evolving nature of euthanasia discussions, particularly in India. The recognition of passive euthanasia and the right to create living wills reflect a growing acknowledgment of the complexities surrounding end-of-life decisions. However, these discussions must be approached with sensitivity, recognizing the deeply rooted beliefs and

cultural diversity that shape individuals' views on euthanasia.

In essence, the importance of euthanasia lies not only in its legal and ethical dimensions but also in its capacity to foster a nuanced dialogue about the delicate balance between individual autonomy, compassion, and the preservation of life. As legal and ethical frameworks continue to evolve, the debate surrounding euthanasia will persist, necessitating careful consideration and empathy for the diverse perspectives and values that shape our understanding of this complex issue.
