

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES OF EUTHANASIA: A DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

The people have limited orientation about the concept and application of euthanasia. Euthanasia-related attitudes vary largely based on the cultural context, cultural diversity, end of life care and changes in trends. The euthanasia-related thoughts are associated with finance, religion and health associated issues. Religion and spirituality are known to influence health by helping patients and families cope with an illness, by developing a positive state of mind, and by maintaining emotional integrity. Hindu, Christianity and Muslims are not in favor of euthanasia. In Jain religion, explicitly allows a shrvak (follower of Jainism) full consent to put an end to his or her life. Moreover, Jewish thinkers strongly disapprove voluntary euthanasia, but there are few thinkers who support and advocate voluntary euthanasia in limited circumstances and selected situations. While in Shinto, the religious organizations agree with the act of voluntary passive euthanasia. Euthanasia is still a taboo as per religious thoughts. As per religious perceptions, euthanasia has positive and negative aspects. There is no uniform thought towards euthanasia but majority of religions are against euthanasia.

KEYWORDS: Euthanasia, Religious Perspective, Spirituality, Hinduism.

INTRODUCTION

Euthanasia is still a taboo in the world. The people have limited orientation about the concept and application of euthanasia. In the different areas of the world, there are mixed views towards euthanasia. Euthanasia-related attitudes vary largely based on the cultural context, cultural diversity, end of life care and changes in trends. The euthanasia-related thoughts are associated with finance, religion and health associated issues.^[1] In ancient India, suicide was regarded as permissible in some circumstances. In the Chapter titled "The hermit in the forest," Manu's Code says –"He may set out walking straight and steady fastly in a north-easterly direction, subsisting on water and air, until his body sinks its repose". It is clear that in ancient India, a voluntary death by starvation was considered to be a befitting conclusion of a hermit's life.^[2-3] Religion and spirituality are known to influence health by helping patients and families cope with an illness, by developing a positive state of mind, and by maintaining emotional integrity.^[4] A study explored the religious practices about to major end of life issues and explains the changes in end of life decision

making by physicians and patients based on their beliefs and religious teachings.^[5]

Religious perspectives of euthanasia

Religious thoughts and perceptions towards euthanasia are varied and complicated. An individual's view about euthanasia is not necessary to connect directly to their religion; it often impacts a person's opinion. Every religion has different aspects towards end of life and euthanasia.

Hinduism

The Hindu Sculpture also says that life and death is the gift of God and no human being has right to take away the said gift. According to Hinduism, life never comes to an end. The soul never dies although body may decay. The soul is continuous and perpetual which is not merely a biological identity, death is not end of life but only a transformation of the body. In ancient Indian religion, sanctity was attached to a Yogi (a person who has mastered the art of regulating his involuntary physical and mental functions, at will) can discard his/her mortal coil (body) through the process of his/her spiritual practices called yoga. Such state was known as

'Samadhi'. But there was no concept in ancient India/mythology of putting an end to life of another human being which was always regarded as crime and against 'dharma'. The suicide is disapproved in Hindu way of life and it is believed that those who commit suicide did not attain Moksha or Salvation from the cycle of life and death.^[3]

In "Bhagavadgita" Chapter II Verse 22 (as translated in English), it is stated by Lord Krishna

"As a man shedding wornout garments, takes other new ones, likewise the embodied soul, casting off wornout bodies, enters into others that are new."^[6]

Life is the lamp that continuously burning out and further suggests that if one wants to have life, one has to die every moment for it. "A good death certifies a good life. Traditional Hindu religious culture also emphasizes the death as a reflection of the quality of life that preceded it. If a good dignified death is attained, it is perceived as evidence of having lived a worthy life because "the manner of one's passing out-weighs all previous claims and intimations of one's moral worth." However, the use of a life-support machine as part of a temporary attempt at healing would not be a bad thing. The ideal death is a conscious death, and this means that palliative treatments will be a problem if they reduce mental alertness.^[7]

Buddhism

There is no doubt that Buddhism would agree with this principle up to a point, since the doctrine of karma advises that individuals have free will and are responsible their actions. *If one who is sick ceases to take food with the intention of dying when medicine and nursing care are at hand, he commits a minor offence (dukkata). But in the case of a patient who has suffered a long time with a serious illness the nursing monks may become weary and turn away in despair thinking 'when will we ever cure him of this illness?' Here it is legitimate to decline food and medical care if the patient sees that the monks are worn out and his life cannot be prolonged even with intensive care.* (VA.ii.467).^[8]

At the same time, nobody wants to have a tragic end to life. We all want to leave the world in a peaceful manner. In this sense, the term 'euthanasia' which has its origin in Greek language signifies 'an easy and gentle death'.^[9]

Christianity

Christianity also disapprove taking of one's life. Bible says that human being is a temple of god and the spirit of God dwelleth in the body and no man can defile the temple. In the modern day world, the most vigorous opposition to euthanasia has come from the Roman Catholic Church, with the late Pope John Paul II describing euthanasia as an example of the "culture of death" in western societies. "Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person."^[10] The Roman Catholic Church regards euthanasia as morally wrong. The Church has always taught the absolute and

unchanging value of the commandment "You shall not kill". Christianity believes that the image of God is revealed in Jesus and through him to human kind..... When a man sins, he loses his human dignity. He becomes an object.^[11]

Muslim

Muslims are against euthanasia. They believe that human life is sacred because it is given by Allah, and that Allah chooses how long each person will live. Human beings must not interfere in these divine powers. The Muslims also strongly condemn suicide as they believe that life and death of a person depends on Allah's will and human beings are prohibited in going against his will.^[12]

Jainism

Mahavira Varadhmana explicitly allows a shravak (follower of Jainism) full consent to put an end to his or her life if the shravak feels that such a stage would lead to moksha. Salvation can be achieved through self sacrifice.^[13]

Judaism

Jewish medical norms are divided on the belief about ending one's life. Usually, Jewish thinkers strongly disapprove voluntary euthanasia, but there are few thinkers who support and advocate voluntary euthanasia in limited circumstances and selected situations. It can be said that there is division of thought in Judaism.^[14]

Shinto

In Japan, the dominant religion is Shinto. 69% of the religious organizations agree with the act of voluntary passive euthanasia. In Shinto, prolonging the life using artificial means is a disgraceful act and hence against life. There are mixed views on active euthanasia. 25% Shinto and Buddhist organizations in Japan support voluntary active euthanasia.^[15]

Religiosity was a significant certain of attitudes towards euthanasia.^[16] The persons who adhere with traditional religious groups and exhibit lofty levels of religiosity are poor likely to agree with euthanasia.^[17]

DISCUSSION

There is considerable differences exist among religious denominations towards euthanasia's legalization.^[18] Nienke P et al revealed that elderly population's poor traditional religious thought suggests that the late modern decrease of ancient religious frameworks offers both self-determination concerning euthanasia and independent creed.^[19] Religion and the importance of religion/spirituality in daily life were the most significant factors ($p < 0.005$) for the interviewees to hold a negative posture in each of the three scenarios.^[20] The Hindu Sculpture also says that life and death is the gift of God and no human being has right to take away the said gift. According to Hinduism, life never comes to an end. The soul never dies although body may decay.^[6-7] Koodamara NK et al observed that Muslims are not in favour to assisted dying on the basis that life is sacred and once

can live longer span where the God wishes.^[21] Christians believe that nobody can allow the killing of an individual. The late Pope John Paul II describing euthanasia as an example of the “culture of death” in western societies. “Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person.” In Jain religion, explicitly allows a shravak (follower of Jainism) full consent to put an end to his or her life if the shravak feels that such a stage would lead to moksha. Jewish medical norms are divided on the belief about ending one’s life. Usually, Jewish thinkers strongly disapprove voluntary euthanasia, but there are few thinkers who support and advocate voluntary euthanasia in limited circumstances and selected situations. While in Shinto, the religious organizations agree with the act of voluntary passive euthanasia. The prolonging the life using artificial means is a disgraceful act and hence against life. There are mixed views on active euthanasia. 25% Shinto and Buddhist organizations in Japan support voluntary active euthanasia.^[10-15] Various studies have showed a relationship between religion or the world view and nurses' attitudes regarding euthanasia. The variation in attitude were found to be affected by religious thoughts, practices, and personal importance attributed to religion or world view. Every religion has its own perspective towards euthanasia. Some individuals have a different thought to their religion. The ancient religious thoughts were against the euthanasia but nowadays individuals have different aspects towards euthanasia.^[22]

CONCLUSION

The findings concluded that the religion is directly or indirectly associated with the perception of individual on euthanasia. Research has shown that mixed thoughts are there in religious aspect of euthanasia. Religion and spirituality in daily life were the most important variables to define a positive posture and change an original negative posture to a positive one in a legal context. Euthanasia is still a taboo as per religious thoughts. As per religious perceptions, euthanasia has positive and negative aspects. There is no uniform thought towards euthanasia but majority of religions are against euthanasia.

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