CHANGEMAKER: AN ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF IDEAS
ISSN: 2348-7747

Received on: 14 November 2025
Revised on: 12 December 2025
Accepted on: 29 December 2025

Euthanasia in Medical Ethics: Between Compassion and Moral Prohibition

Dr. Kongbrailatpam Vidyarani
Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Philosophy
Waikhom Mani Girls' College, Thoubal Okram, Manipur
vranishrm@gmail.com

Abstract

Euthanasia's direct resolution to ethical questions in modern medical philosophy is a result of its connection to the experiences of suffering, autonomy, and professional practice boundaries. This has led to ongoing discussion about this matter. The analysis of euthanasia within the realm of medical ethics highlights the conceptual conflict between human will and compassionate intention when it is intentionally used to end someone's life, as presented in this paper. By examining deontological, utilitarian, virtue-ethical, and existential perspectives, the study seeks to determine whether euthanasia aligns with professional healthcare ethics. Euthanasia is not easily categorized by moral standards as it arises from conflicting opinions on autonomy, dignity and the inviolability of life. The research supports this claim. According to the research, palliative care is being increasingly recognized as an ethical approach for managing end-of-life suffering. The term euthanasia, which is derived from the Greek words Av (good) and Thanatos (death), denotes an intentional substitution of someone's life to alleviate severe pain. Ethical questions regarding end-of-life care have been heightened by advances in medical technology, which have also increased life expectancy and the capacity to artificially sustain life. Supporters of euthanasia assert that it is an act of empathy and respect for individual freedoms and the right to death in times of need, whether for terminal illness or severe pain. They believe that this type of dying is a matter of dignity. Conversely, opponents argue that euthanasia undermines the value of life, morals and ethics in medicine, and can lead to people being coerced or even abused. It discusses the ethical, philosophical and legal aspects of euthanasia while emphasizing the conflict between endorsing pain for a compassionate purpose and conflicts with moral prohibitions against wilful murder. The study examines the significance of balancing individual rights with social and professional obligations by exploring key ethical principles such as beneficence, non-maleficence/malfeasance, autonomy, and justice.

Keywords

Euthanasia, bioethics, medical ethics, assisted dying, autonomy, suffering, dignity, palliative care, end-of-life decisions

Introduction

The issue of euthanasia is one of the most intricate and contentious issues in modern medical ethics, prompting inquiries into life, death, human dignity, and the duties of healthcare professionals. Euthanasia is derived from the Greek words EU (good or well) and Thanatos (death), which respectively mean "better death." In contemporary medical terms, it generally denotes the purposeful endangerment of someone's life to alleviate unbearable suffering caused by terminal illness, severe disability, or irreversible medical condition. The term "eucaryptogenetics". The idea has been present in different ways throughout human history, but the emergence of modern medicine and life-sustaining technologies has led to increased scrutiny of its ethical and moral implications.

The advancement of medical technology has significantly boosted the capacity of healthcare practitioners to extend human lifespan. While these developments have saved many lives and improved healthcare outcomes, they have also given rise to situations where patients may not survive despite significant suffering, loss of autonomy, or a decline in their quality of life. As a result, ethical questions arise about whether it is always in the patient's best interest to extend life at all costs. The practice of euthanasia becomes a divisive issue in such scenarios, challenging established views on medical care and the ethical accountability of healthcare providers.

Euthanasia is a debate about the fundamental clash between compassion and ethical prohibition. The supporters of euthanasia maintain that it is a manifestation of compassion and the appreciation of human dignity. The argument suggests that individuals with untreatable illnesses should have the autonomy to determine the manner and date of their passing. The belief that individuals have a moral responsibility to make appropriate choices about their own lives and physical health is central to this viewpoint. Proponents argue that making terminally ill patients suffer inhumane treatment is unethical and goes against the principles of medicine. According to them, euthanasia is about conserving dignity, lessening pain, and upholding the values and preferences of individuals who are dying.

Nevertheless, detractors of euthanasia prioritize the dignity and worthlessness of human existence. According to them, intentionally causing the death of another human being goes against fundamental ethical and moral principles, regardless of motive. Life is considered sacred in various religious beliefs, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, which assert that human beings lack the moral authority to end it. Moreover, opponents contend that euthanasia goes against the traditional role of physicians as healers and caregivers. In medical practice, the Hippocratic Oath is a customary practice that stresses the physician's obligation to prevent harm and save lives. The morality of medical practice may be altered by euthanasia, which could undermine public confidence in healthcare institutions from this perspective.

The ethical considerations surrounding euthanasia are complicated by social justice concerns, as well the potential for vulnerability and misuse. The legalization of euthanasia is

being opposed by some who fear that it could expose elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged patients to subtle forms of coercion or pressure. They caution against a "slippery slope" that could result in the gradual expansion of exceptions made for extreme cases to include more diverse patients. Such concerns underscore the need for strong ethical safeguards and rigorous legal oversight where euthanasia is considered lawful.

Euthanasia is a topic of debate in various fields, including medicine, philosophy, law and religion−in addition to the question of public policy.). Philosophers have debated for a long time about whether moral actions should be judged according to their consequences, intentions or conformity to general principles. While euthanasia is commonly supported by utilitarian scholars who argue that it reduces pain and promote health, deontological ethicists tend to oppose it because they view intentional killing as intrinsically wrong. Euthanasia laws differ widely across countries and jurisdictions. Certain forms of euthanasia or physician-assisted death have been made legal in certain countries, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada, while many other countries still prohibit it.

Euthanasia poses a significant ethical challenge in the modern age, which is marked by advancements in patient rights and medical technology. This compels society to confront challenging inquiries about the interpretation of dignity, the boundaries of individual autonomy, human dignity and the roles of healthcare professionals. ". It is important to take into account competing ethical standards, cultural norms, and legal regulations when interpreting these issues.'

The paper examines the ethical implications of euthanasia in medical settings, delving into the conflict between empathy for humanity and the morality of intentionally taking lives. Its aim is to offer a balanced, all-inclusive understanding of euthanasia and its continued relevance in modern healthcare and moral philosophy by considering ethical theories, medical principles, religious perspectives, and legal developments.

Classification of Euthanasia

Euthanasia can be classified into various categories based on the death method and level of consent involved. To grasp the implications of euthanasia, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with these classifications. Among the various methods are active and passive euthanasia, voluntary, non-voluntary (choice control), and involved suicide (medication assistance).

Active euthanasia is the practice of deliberately killing a patient without any intervention. This could involve the use of lethal injections or any other form of deadly weapon. The fundamental goal is to alleviate excruciating pain by delivering a speedy and pain-free death. Advocacy advocates assert that euthanasia can be an emotionally palpable method for individuals experiencing terminal illness and intense suffering. Critics argue that it is

intentional killing and breaches the moral duty of medical professionals to maintain life. In only a handful of countries, active euthanasia is legal and subject to strict regulations.

Example:

The medical practitioner administers a lethal dose of medication to ill patients who have repeatedly appealed for help in ending their suffering.

Passive Euthanasia

When medical treatment is not provided or taken from the patient, it is called passive euthanasia; this allows them to die naturally from an illness. Typical examples are discontinuation of ventilator care, artificial feeding, hydration, or lifelong treatment.

Active euthanasia is not as deadly as passive but instead allows disease to progress naturally. When the patient's wishes or best interests are respected, passive euthanasia is generally considered lawful and ethical in many regions.

Example:

A patient in a persistent vegetative state is removed from life-support equipment after receiving consent from the patient or legal representatives.

Voluntary Euthanasia

If a capable and informed patient requests assistance in ending their life, it is known as voluntary euthanasia. It is a voluntary decision, and the patient understands what has occurred.

The right to self-determination and the freedom to choose who is right are often cited as reasons for voluntary euthanasia. Most states that allow euthanasia also require voluntary consent. Why?

Example:

A terminal cancer sufferer repeatedly and knowingly requests euthanasia to prevent future suffering.

Non-Voluntary Euthanasia

When the patient is unable to choose between dying or living on account of unconsciousness, severe cognitive impairment, infancy, or other unintended consequences, non-voluntary euthanasia occurs.

Typically, family members, legal guardians, or healthcare providers make decisions based on the patient's best interests. The ethical implications of this type of euthanasia are significant because the patient's actual wishes may not be known. Why?

Example:

A decision is made regarding a patient who is permanently unconscious and has no prior request for end-of-life care.

Involuntary Euthanasia

If someone is given life without their consent or contrary wishes, resulting in death against their will (involuntary euthanasia), then it may be justified. The practice of euthanasia is widely condemned and is typically classified as homicide. Involuntary euthanasia is strongly refuted by ethical and legal experts due to its violation of the values associated with autonomy, human rights, and personal dignity.

Example:

A patient who desires to live is subjected to a death sentence with no option.

Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS)

While euthanasia is frequently discussed, physician-assisted suicide varies in one important aspect. However, it remains the same. The patient in PAS is responsible for executing the final act of death, even though their physician typically prescribes lethal medication. While the physician makes this happen, it's ultimately up to the patient to decide what medication they want to give them. Certain countries and jurisdictions have legalized physician-assisted suicide due to strict regulations.

Example:

A physician prescribes a lethal medication to ill patients, and the patient takes it on their own.

Ethical Significance of the Classification

Euthanasia is classified as such because the type of death involved often affects ethical and legal decisions. In some cases, voluntary and passive euthanasia is more ethical than involuntary death, although it is generally considered morally objectionable. Differences between categories centre on patient autonomy, informed consent, medical responsibility, and human dignity in end-of life decisions. The categories differ from one another.

By examining the different types, one can gain insight into how to handle the ethical debate surrounding empathy for patients in pain and the moral prohibition against intentional human slaughter.

Ethical Foundations in Medical Practice

Medical ethics is commonly characterized by four primary standards:

a) **Beneficence**

Beneficence imposes on healthcare providers to act in ways that are beneficial to patients. Why? Euthanasia is occasionally justified as a form of compassionate care, particularly in cases where pain and suffering become irreversible.

b) **Non-maleficence**

The principle of non-maliciousness imposes a responsibility to avoid harm. It goes against the customary understanding of euthanasia, as it involves intentional dying.

c) **Autonomy**

Individual self-determination is viewed as a moral imperative by autonomy-based reasoning.

To deny a competent person the option of assisted death may be considered an abuse of personal freedom (Mill).

d) **Justice**

The concept of justice brings forth other social issues, such as unequal access to healthcare, the potential harm it causes to marginalized groups, and the possibility of end-of-life outcomes that involve indirect pressure on individuals.

Philosophical Interpretations

1. **Deontological Ethics**

In Kantian moral philosophy, euthanasia is not accepted because of the inherent moral value of human life. Any act of violence, whether intentional or not and intended to be an act is considered immoral under the principle of treating humanity as one's own end (Kant).

2. **Utilitarian Ethics**

Utilitarian reasoning considers moral actions in relation to consequences. The ethical rationale for euthanasia may be that it reduces suffering and improves net well-being. But opponents say that way of thinking risks undermining confidence in our medical systems, and damages trust for weak patients."

3. **Virtue Ethics**

Virtue ethics moves away from rules and towards moral character.? The main matter is whether participating in euthanasia aligns with virtues like empathy, practicality, and respect. Furthermore, it prompts inquiries into how the repeated participation in life-ending rituals could influence one's moral character.

4. **Existential Perspective**

In this view, Existentialist philosophy places great emphasis on human freedom and the construction of meaning in times of suffering.

5. **The Physician's Ethical Position**

In the past, doctors have been guided by the Hippocratic promise to prevent death and life. Healthcare today is increasingly focusing on quality-of-life factors and patient-centred care.

Physicians are confronted with an ethical dilemma due to this change:
Obligation to preserve life.
Responsibility to relieve suffering.
Maintenance of professional trust.
Boundaries of clinical authority.
Thus, euthanasia casts doubt on the traditional notion of doctors being healers.'

6. **Compassion and Moral Boundary**

Although many people use the word "euthanasia" to advocate for end of life, it also involves deliberate killing. A constant ethical contradiction is present in this dual relationship.

While compassion is commonly recognized as a medical virtue, its application in euthanasia is still debated due to:
It has the potential to go against established medical responsibilities.
This raises questions about the ethical boundaries of clinical intervention.
It could lead to a redefinition of the scope of medical practice.
Emotional and intention-based reasoning are not sufficient to justify euthanasia; it must be normative.

7. **Legal and Institutional Considerations**
Various ethical and cultural considerations shape the international response to euthanasia. Why is this? Certain regions allow for regulated assisted dying, while others prohibit it entirely.

The central issues in policy are:
A) Safeguarding voluntary and informed consent.
B) Preventing coercion of vulnerable populations.
C) Ensuring transparency in medical decision-making.
D) Maintaining public confidence in healthcare institutions.
Euthanasia is not just a moral dilemma, but also an issue of governance, as demonstrated by these concerns.

8. **The Ethical Response to Palliative Care**
Palliative care offers an alternative approach to reducing suffering without intending to end life. Why is this so? Pain control, psychological assistance and dignity are the main focus when dying.
Through addressing the fear and distress associated with terminal illness, empirical and ethical debates have suggested that improved access to palliative care can greatly decrease the number of people who choose to undergo euthanasia.

9. **Analytical Discussion**
There are still fundamental disagreements surrounding the moral status of life and the boundaries of autonomy that have lingering in the ethical debate on euthanasia. The arguments for autonomy prioritize individual freedom of choice, while the deontological and institutional views prioritize lifelong or professional integrity.
Euthanasia cannot be resolved by a single ethical theory, according to this analysis. Why? In contrast, it presents a moral dilemma with multiple dimensions that necessitates interconnected philosophical, clinical, and legal scrutiny.

Conclusion
The act of euthanizing is situated at a morally complex intersection between the pursuit of empathy and the prohibition of wilful murder. Although some arguments for autonomy and suffering are justified, major questions persist regarding moral limits as well as institutional trust and social consequences.

A sound moral judgment demands the reinforcement of palliative care systems, the maintenance of robust regulatory safeguards, and persistent philosophical reflection. Euthanasia remains an important moral question that goes beyond medicine and other related ethical questions of human dignity, suffering, and mortality.

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