

Theocracy; Islam and Mercy Killing: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The act of Murder is a crime right from the time of the first man created Adam. With the ever evolving of man’s rules, ethics, morals and technologies, a lot of things have changed and principles have been subjected to “Surgical operations” which most times it is on the decline side and murder has also been subjected to same “Surgical Operation” which now has a branch called ‘Euthanasia’.

The aim of this paper is to consider the moral compass of Islam on mercy killing, and the monopoly of giving and taking of life by Allah, and medical reasons against assisted suicide.

Availability of advanced medical technology has generated various new moral issues such as abortion, cloning and euthanasia. The use of medical technology, therefore, raises questions about the moral appropriateness of sustaining life versus taking life or allowing someone to die. Moreover, the world-wide discussion on euthanasia has assumed different dimensions of acceptance and rejection. The modern advanced medical technology has brought this issue under extensive focus of philosophers and religious authorities.¹

Keywords: Islam, Murder, Euthanasia, Medical oath, Ethics, Qur’an and Sunnah.

Introduction

Etymologically, euthanasia comes from two Greek words, eu, meaning 'well', and thanatos, meaning 'death', so it means a good or easy death. In the course of time, the meaning of the term gained the connotation of 'mercy killing'. Euthanasia in fact means ending a patient's life according to certain principles and under certain circumstances, where medicine cannot cure or provide a life of acceptable quality. 2 Islam is against it, it's against medical ethics.

History

The first recorded use of the word euthanasia was by Suetonius, a Roman historian, in his *De Vita Caesarum--Divus Augustus* (The Lives of the Caesars--The Deified Augustus) to describe the death of Augustus Caesar:

"...while he was asking some newcomers from the city about the daughter of Drusus, who was ill, he suddenly passed away as he was kissing Livia, uttering these last words: "Live mindful of our wedlock, Livia, and farewell," thus blessed with an easy death and such a one as he had always longed for. For almost always, on hearing that anyone had died swiftly and painlessly, he prayed that he and his might have a like euthanasia, for that was the term he was wont to use. "3

Euthanasia in the western world has gained momentum. Efforts to change government policies on euthanasia of human lives in the 20th and 21st centuries

have met limited success in Western countries. Human euthanasia policies have also been developed by a variety of NGOs, most notably medical associations and advocacy organizations. As of June 2016, human euthanasia is legal in the Netherlands, Belgium, Colombia, and Luxembourg. Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland, Germany, Japan, Canada, and in the US states of Washington, Oregon, Vermont, Montana, and California.⁴

Islam and Euthanasia

Islamically, the monopoly of life and death belongs to Allah alone, this means that, Allah is the only one with the right and power to give or take life. Human soul in Islam is so sacred to the extent that, whoever that takes a soul that is forbidden is equated to have killed the entire human race and whoever that kills a Muslim intentionally and unjustly is promised a tormenting punishment. To these Allah said respectively;

“Because of that we ordained for the children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land it would be as if he killed all mankind. And if anyone save a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.” Qur’an 5 v. 32

“And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him” Qur’an 4 v.39

Furthermore, Islam as a comprehensive and detailed religion has catered for all the facets of human life including his time of ease and hardship and Panacea to his problems. The Messenger of Islam, Muhammad (P.B.U.H), buttressed the saying of Allah that asked the Muslims to seek help through patience and prayer in some of his traditions, explaining that bearing patience in

time of sickness and pain is a way by which Allah expiate His servants shortcomings. The Messenger of Allah is reported to have said;

“Nothing will afflict a believer be it distress, melancholy, sorrow, even fork of thorns except that Allah expiate his sins”⁵

The Prophet also discourages a believer from asking Allah to terminate this life and forbids him from committing suicide;

“None of you should wish for death because of a calamity that has befallen them; but if it is unavoidable to do so, let them say, ‘O Allah, make me live as long as life is better for me and make me die if death is better for me.’”⁶

Also he said;

“Anyone who kills themselves with a piece of iron (a weapon) will have that piece of iron in their hand and will be stabbing their stomach with it in the Fire of Hell forever, abiding eternally therein. Anyone who drinks poison and kills themselves will be drinking it in the Fire of Hell forever, abiding eternally therein. And anyone who throws themselves from (the top of) a mountain and kills themselves will be throwing themselves down in the Fire of Hell forever, abiding eternally therein.”⁷

In view of the above it’s apparent that Islam forbids suicide, homicide and Euthanasia and killing of soul that is sacred on whatever disguise.

Types of Euthanasia

In classifying Euthanasia, different denotations have been used for it, among which are Voluntary euthanasia and Non-voluntary euthanasia, Active and Passive euthanasia.

Active Euthanasia

Active euthanasia is when someone uses lethal substances or forces to end a patient's life, whether by the patient or somebody else.

Active euthanasia is more controversial, and it is more likely to involve religious, moral, ethical, and compassionate arguments.⁸ According to Ayuba; Active euthanasia is a 'narrow construal' of euthanasia. This is real euthanasia because it refers to intentional death of a terminally ill patient by action. Technically, active euthanasia excludes suicide, assisted suicide and physician assisted suicide. Suicide is self-killing while assisted suicide occurs when someone provides an individual with information, guidance and means to take his or her own life with the intention that it will be used for this purpose. Likewise, when it is a doctor who helps another person to kill the patient it is called physician-assisted suicide. Therefore, the definition of active euthanasia is: A physician's act that causes a terminally ill person's death intentionally for the reason of mercy.⁹

All the Islamic scholars regard active euthanasia as forbidden (Haram) and there is no difference between Sunni and Shiite schools. The moment of death, ajal, is under the control of Allah and the human has no say in this matter; the human cannot and should not attempt to hasten or delay the ajal. The prohibition on life applies equally well whether for self, suicide, or others, homicide or genocide. The concepts of autonomy, freedom and individual choice does not apply here for these two reasons:

- A. life does not belong to the human; and
- B. taking life will cause harm to the family and society in general.

An individual's freedom of choice is constrained by the harm it causes to others. Justifying the stance of advocates of euthanasia on the basis of other factors such as economic concerns, consideration of resources that could otherwise be utilized by other patients and death with dignity does not seem plausible because of crime nature of mercy killing in Islamic point of view.¹⁰ The

popular Egyptian scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, recently issued a fatwa, or religious ruling, equating euthanasia with murder, but allowing the withholding of treatment that is deemed useless.¹¹

Passive Euthanasia

Scholars are of divergent views when it comes to passive euthanasia, some are even of the opinion that it is not euthanasia according to Ayuba.

Passive euthanasia is when life-sustaining treatments are withheld. The definitions are not precise. If a doctor prescribes increasing doses of strong painkilling medications, such as opioids, this may eventually be toxic for the patient. Some may argue that this is passive euthanasia. Others, however, would say this is not euthanasia, because there is no intention to take life.¹² Ayuba posit that, passive euthanasia is also known as euthanasia by omission or as negative euthanasia; this happens when one withholds or withdraws the necessary and extraordinary medical treatment from a terminally ill patient, thus allowing the patient to die. There are some scholars who do not treat passive euthanasia as euthanasia. Outright rejection or permission of passive euthanasia would not be appropriate without making it clear what it is and how different cases under it could be categorized.

Some forms of passive euthanasia are:

- Withdrawing medical treatment from terminally ill patients.
- withholding medical treatment from terminally ill patients.
- Pain medication that may hasten death of a terminally ill patient as a side effect.
- Discontinuing life support systems such as ventilators.
- Refusing medical treatment to terminally ill patients.
- Do Not Resuscitate (DNR).

Passive euthanasia, as explained above, does not mean one single method but a

variety of options a physician and patient face. Since it is unanimously held that passive euthanasia is not about failing to implement medical treatment for patients to recover, but for those patients who die due to underlying diseases, the question arises: when and in what circumstances is it permissible to withhold, withdraw, refuse and induce pain medication that will suppress the pain and hasten the death?¹³

Ayuba explains further that, taking a comprehensive view of the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and the opinions of jurists based on such traditions, it seems that Islam encourages medication. However, when medication is seemingly useless, refusing, withholding, withdrawing and discontinuing such medication is allowed. Moreover, according to Motlani, some scholars argue that withdrawing or withholding treatment need not constitute a form of euthanasia. While some Scholars consider withdrawing extraordinary treatment as ‘passive euthanasia’, others consider it a standard or conventionally accepted practice from a medical, spiritual and economic viewpoint. However, scholars such as Warnock, Macdonald and Rachels believe that there is no moral difference between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ euthanasia since the intention and outcome may be the same in both cases, while scholars like Craig and Putilo believe that lack of clear intention may also make it difficult to morally distinguish ‘active’ euthanasia from ‘passive’ euthanasia.¹⁴

On permissibility of suspension of treatment, al-Qaradawi says:

“As for the suspension of medical treatment via preventing the patient from his due medication which is, from a medical perspective, thought to be useless, this is permissible and sometimes it is even recommended. Thus, the physician can do this for the sake of the patient’s comfort and the relief of his family. Nothing is wrong in this”. While commenting on the importance of medication and its suspension in Islam, Muhammad Salih Al-

Munajjid says:

“If there is no certainty that treatment will be of benefit and indeed, it is likely to cause suffering to the patient, there is nothing at all wrong with not giving the treatment. The patient should not forget to put his trust in Allah and seek refuge in Him, for the gates of heaven are open to those who call on Allah. He may also seek ruqya treatment by reciting Qur’an such as reading al-Fātihah, al-Falaq and an-Nās over himself. This will benefit him psychologically and physically as well as bringing him reward. Allah is the Healer and there is no healer but He.”¹⁵

According to medical ethics, euthanasia is against the hippocratic oath. The original oath included, among other things, the following words:

"I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect."¹⁶ This shows that even in the pristine medical rules, assisted killing is a crime.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can say that the Islamic position is that life belongs to Allah. It is He who gives and takes away life. No human can give or take it. Muslims are against euthanasia. They believe that all human life is sacred because it is given by Allah, and that Allah chooses how long each person will live. Human beings should not interfere in this. This article has tried to explain euthanasia from a Muslim perspective. Its two types; active and passive were analyzed. The prohibition of active euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is based on the prohibition of killing an innocent person on which the two primary sources are explicitly clear. Regarding the second type – passive euthanasia, because of its complexity and lack of preciseness, the issues which could be grouped under it are withholding, withdrawing and refusing medical treatment, DNR and discontinuing life support machines, among others. The Muslim

position was once again based on the Muslim primary sources and the resolutions of Muslim jurists.¹⁷

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