

Thought for the day

## 2. Euthanasia

The topic has been the subject of passionate debates for a long time. Those who are not familiar with the terminology, ‘euthanasia’ is the act of mercy killing – painless killing of people for their own benefit. It is the act of killing people suffering from incurable illness or pain with no hope of a cure. It is the killing of people too old to sustain a life of any meaningful quality or people who are considered to be unbearable burden to relatives or the community or the local government authority.

Although sounds like a humane act, the topic of euthanasia raises many moral and ethical issues - issues such as, who, when and how it may be decided to execute such an irreversible decision! Does the consent or the will of the sufferer create a human right issue? What if the person is unable to make such a decision? Have his or her kith and kin got any right to make such a decision? Should we be playing God? At the centre of the ethical conflict between the ‘pro-life’ camp and the ‘right to die’ camp are the different ideas that people have of the meaning and value of human life. Additionally, the conflict centers on the question - whether human beings have the moral and ethical right to decide issues of life and death for themselves. If we morally justify euthanasia now what is next? Will cannibalism be morally acceptable in future for starving people?

It is generally believed that severe pain and suffering without any hope of a cure is the only reason people want euthanasia. A survey in the USA and Netherlands has shown that less than one third of people wishing to terminate their lives were for reasons of unbearable pain. In the majority of cases psychological factors such as depression, fear of loss of control or dignity of their lives, feeling a burden or dependent on others etc. cause people to think of euthanasia.

All forms of suicide and any action that may help others to kill themselves are strictly forbidden in all religions including Islam. It is forbidden for a Muslim to plan, or come to know through self-will, the time of his own death in advance. If a Muslim were to decide in advance when he himself would die, then it is believed that this would be an insult to Allah. In fact, a Muslim who commits suicide is not even given burial rites. The precedent for this thinking comes from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) having absolutely refused to bless the body of a person who had committed suicide, despite the fact that the person killed himself to relieve himself of severe pain from an incurable disease.

I lived through different times and in different worlds. I lived in a remote village in Bangladesh nearly half a century earlier and in later in the United

Kingdom in modern times. I find life and living in this modern time and in this very materialistic western society so different to those I have experienced in the past that it unsettles me greatly. In my world as a child in a village in Bangladesh I noticed that we did not have painkiller tablets, or anti-depressant tablets, neither did we have asylums or prospect places for dumping so called 'terminally ill' people. However, pains and illness were there. People did get old and fragile and dependent on others. But we never heard of the word 'euthanasia', neither from the mouth of the sufferer nor from the people who cared for them. What we had was the feeling for the sanctity of human life. We could not give the suffer pills or physical comfort in a place for the people waiting to die. We could, however, give them love and affection and the feeling of being wanted. We did care for them and we gave them hope. Those worked more effectively than the modern medicine to alleviate the suffering or withstand the sufferings.

We work hard, raise our children, make saving for our old age to enjoy the last days of our lives in peace and happiness. If we have to worry with the thought that one day somebody will decide that we have gone over our sell-by-date, it is a somber thought. We need to teach our children through examples that life is a God's gift and while we do not have any control over death we need to make it beautiful and worth living by bestowing love and hope and care for those less fortunate than us.