

From Compassion to Controversy

Posted at: 24/06/2025

From Compassion to Controversy: The Ethics of Euthanasia

Context:

The **UK Parliament** has recently passed the **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill** in the **House of Commons**, allowing **terminally ill patients** in **England and Wales** with less than **six months to live** to legally opt for **assisted dying** under specific conditions.

About the UK Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill

What is it?

A legislation that **permits terminally ill adults** to end their lives voluntarily through **assisted dying**, under **strict medical and legal safeguards**.

Key Features:

- Applicable in **England and Wales**.
- Only for patients with **less than 6 months of life expectancy**.
- Requires approval from:
 - **Two doctors**
 - **One psychiatrist**
 - **A senior lawyer**
 - **A social worker**

What is Euthanasia?

- Derived from Greek: “eu” (good) + “thanatos” (death) → “**Good Death**”.
- It refers to **intentionally ending a life** to relieve **unbearable suffering** when there is **no hope of recovery**.

Types of Euthanasia:

- **Active Euthanasia:**
Direct action to end life (e.g., **lethal injection**).
- **Passive Euthanasia:**
Withholding life-sustaining treatment (e.g., **removal of ventilator**).
- **Voluntary Euthanasia:**
Done with the **patient's informed consent**.
- **Involuntary Euthanasia:**
Without the patient's consent — **illegal and unethical**.

Ethical Debate on Euthanasia

Arguments in Favour:

- **Right to Autonomy:** Individuals should decide when and how to die.
- **Compassionate Relief:** Helps end **unbearable pain**.
- **Dignified Death:** Allows choosing **peaceful and respectful end**.
- **Support for Families:** Reduces **emotional and financial burden**.
- **Better Resource Allocation:** Focus healthcare on those with **better recovery chances**.

Arguments Against:

- **Sanctity of Life:** Life is **inviolable**, regardless of suffering.
 - **Risk of Coercion:** Vulnerable groups may be **pressured**.
 - **Palliative Alternatives:** Advanced care can relieve most suffering.
 - **Slippery Slope:** May lead to **misuse** or endanger non-terminal patients.
 - **Medical Ethics:** Erodes **doctor-patient trust** and healing role of medicine.
-

Judicial Stand in India

- **Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996):**
Denied **Right to Die** under **Article 21**.
 - **Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011):**
Allowed **Passive Euthanasia** under strict guidelines.
 - **Common Cause v. Union of India (2018):**
Recognised **Right to Die with Dignity**; permitted **Advance Directives** for terminally ill.
-

Philosophical Perspectives

- **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's Humanism:**
Life's **meaningful experience** matters more than its **biological continuation**.
 - **Hans Jonas' Ethics of Responsibility:**
Warned against **technological overreach** that may devalue life's natural course.
-

Conclusion

The euthanasia debate is a reflection of the **conflict between personal liberty, ethical responsibilities, and societal values**. As nations revisit end-of-life policies, **India too must**

strike a balance between **dignity, compassion, and regulation**. Clear **judicial guidance**, **ethical safeguards**, and **public awareness** are essential for shaping a **humane and sensitive policy**.

Dr. Shivakumar's



AKKA IAS ACADEMY
www.akkaias.com