Non-religious arguments to discuss pediatric euthanasia: why should pediatric palliative care use them

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Context

Pro-euthanasia voices are increasingly heard globally. The debate is sensitive and raises complex ethical concerns.

Netherlands
April 2001 (2002)
Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide (>12 y)

Netherlands
September 2014
Groningen Protocol (<1 y)

Belgium
Euthanasia – no limit of age (Feb 2014)
3 minors were granted euthanasia [2016-2017] (9, 11, 17 y)
Holding Hands or Turning’s one back?

There is a growing tendency for those who support euthanasia to represent opposition to it as the result of religious faith, and to suggest that religious faith is at odds with clear reasoning.

**Reasoning**
- Science
- Evidence based
- Autonomy
- Laic society

**Faith**
- Spirituality/Religion
- Transcendence
- Sanctity of life
- Uncertainty- odds

*Fact or a myth?*

*How can this interfere in the quality of the debate in a laic society?*
The starting point

Debate surrounding euthanasia is often embed with unclear definitions and messages- sanctity of life, euthanasia, obstinacy and palliative care

Palliative Care and Ethics are historically linked with religion.

Spirituality is an important part of PPC, specially in end of life (broader than religiosity)

In a laic society, overlapping arguments with religious convictions can underestimate the quality of the debate and the accuracy of the arguments

Arguments are multidimensional: ethical, psychological considerations, state of the art or cultural and legal framework
The doctrine of double effect

Permissibility of an action that causes a serious harm

sometimes it is permissible to cause a harm as a side effect
(or “double effect”) of bringing about a good result

1.1. Act morally good or at least indifferent

2. Good effect and not the evil effect be intended

3. Good effect be not produced by means of the evil effect

4. Proportionately gave reason for permitting the evil effect

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-effect/
Many requests for euthanasia or assisted suicide are made in order to draw attention to specific causes of emotional distress and despair. Those can often be reversed with appropriate support.

None of the following should be seen as euthanasia:

- **Withholding treatment** that will do more harm than good
- **Withdrawing treatment** that will do more harm than good
- **Sedation** that is necessary for relief of distress caused by refractory symptoms
Media bias?

In a statement on Friday, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia of the Pontifical Academy of Life, said: “We should never act with the deliberate intention to end a human life, including the removal of nutrition and hydration.

“We do, sometimes, however, have to recognise the limitations of what can be done, while always acting humanely in the service of the sick person until the time of natural death occurs.”

How can this interfere on the quality of the debate?

Religious convictions and palliative care on the same track?

If I am Catholic what option should I defend?

Is withdrawal of medical interventions ethically permissive?

What is the value of sanctity of life, quality of life and dignity?

How to go defend child's best interest?

...
New ethical challenge?

Vatican-backed hospital proposes charter of rights for incurable children

The child has right to have access to the best available experimental treatment

The child has the right to be respected as a person even in the end-of-life phase, refraining from therapeutic obstinacy

The child has right to continue care and palliative care

The child has right to transboundary healthcare

Conclusions

Debate surrounding pediatric euthanasia is inescapable, challenging and emerging worldwide.

Reducing the debate to religious arguments alone [amplified by the bias of media coverage] impoverishes the debate and perpetuates misunderstandings.

The misperception that opposition to euthanasia is the result of religious conviction undermines the debate, and so threatens the possibility of improving the care of children at the end of life.
Conclusions

Defenders of PPC against euthanasia must set out convincing, well-reasoned arguments and avoid reinforcing the illusion that opposition to euthanasia is driven by religious conviction alone.