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Aestheticizing Bare Life : Disability, Euthanasia, and Sovereign Power in *Million Dollar Baby* and *Me Before You*

Abstract

This paper critically analyzes the cinematic representation of euthanasia in Million Dollar Baby (2004) and Me Before You (2016) through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's concepts of bare life, homo sacer, and the state of exception. These films tend to construct disabled bodies as lives unworthy of continuation, framing euthanasia not merely as personal choice but as a biopolitical mechanism that excludes disabled individuals from social, legal, and narrative recognition. The protagonists of the selected films embody homo sacer, biologically alive yet socially and politically abandoned, rendering their deaths as morally justified acts of liberation. This study situates the films within broader cultural and institutional debates on euthanasia, revealing how cinematic narratives often bypass complex ethical and political contexts in favor of emotionally satisfying closure. The paper critiques the ableist ideologies reinforced by such portrayals and calls for more nuanced cinematic storytelling that affirms disabled lives as fully livable and politically significant.

Keywords: Euthanasia, Disability, homo sacer, Agamben, biopolitical, etc...

Introduction

Euthanasia or mercy killing remains one of the most ethically fraught issues in contemporary discourse, touching upon legal, medical, religious, and philosophical domains. Euthanasia is the practice of ending a life to relieve suffering, typically in individuals with terminal or incurable illnesses. It involves active euthanasia, where a lethal substance is administered to cause death, or passive euthanasia, where life-sustaining treatments are withdrawn or withheld allowing the underlying condition to cause death. The concept of euthanasia is complex and controversial, with different countries and legal systems having varying perspectives on its legality and acceptability. Countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and Switzerland have legalized some forms of euthanasia or assisted dying, whereas others such as India, Ireland, and most U.S. states either ban the practice outright or allow only passive withdrawal of treatment. Medical practitioners are ethically divided, and major religious traditions tend to reject euthanasia regarding life as sacred and non-negotiable. One of the key aspects of euthanasia is the idea that individuals have the right to choose their own death, particularly when facing terminal illnesses and unbearable pain. There is a growing