

# How Do Individuals View Euthanasia In Different Cultural Backgrounds Based on Different Ideas of Moral Psychology

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**Abstract.** To this day, euthanasia remains a topic of lively discussion. The debate over whether it should be practiced or not never stops. This paper presents basic information about euthanasia and analyzes different people's views on euthanasia in the context of religious beliefs and philosophical ideas based on moral psychology. People who grow up in different cultures will have different views on euthanasia. This paper argues that Catholicism, Christianity, and traditional Confucianism are associated with the central idea of deontology (absolute regularity) and tend to reject euthanasia. In contrast, Taoism is associated with the central idea of utilitarianism (the pursuit of the greatest happiness of mankind) and tends to accept the practice of euthanasia. Various ideas have their reasons for rejecting or accepting the practice of euthanasia, each of which thoroughly explains their respective claims. Each idea also has its staunch followers. But regardless of the view one supports, one should be cautious regarding issues related to their own life.

**Keywords:** Euthanasia; Moral psychology; Religion.

## 1. Introduction

As today's world continues to evolve and technology continues to advance, a method has been researched that can hasten the death of a human being. It allows people to end their lives without pain. People afflicted by illness may find relief from their suffering through this technique. The specific definition of euthanasia, as stated by the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, is "a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, to relieve intractable suffering." [1].

Commonly, euthanasia is categorized into two types of cases, namely voluntary euthanasia and involuntary euthanasia. The former is claimed to occur when a competent patient makes an informed request for a life-ending procedure, and the latter may be employed if a patient does not provide informed and explicit consent for such treatment [1].

Several countries around the world now support and legalize euthanasia. These countries include the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Canada and New Zealand. Of course, many countries remain steadfast in their rejection of euthanasia, such as China and most states in the US. People living in different countries have different cultural backgrounds. Catholicism and Christianity are the more prominent religions in the West, while in the East, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism permeate every aspect of people's lives. According to cultural psychology, which first appeared in the 1990s, human psychology and the cultural environment are mutually productive and influential, and moral concepts are thus inevitably influenced by the cultural milieu in which people live [2].

The debate over the morality of euthanasia has likewise appeared among philosophers of different schools of thought. Most prominent is the debate between utilitarianists and deontologists. Bentham contends that when faced with a choice between social politics or alternative acts, people should always opt for the course of action that will have the best overall results for all parties involved [3]. This is the central tenet of utilitarianism. From a deontological point of view, morality is an "absolute rule." There are fixed norms of behavior that people must not violate. One of the key figures in contemporary philosophy was Immanuel Kant. He claimed, for instance, that lying is always wrong, regardless of the situation [3]. For utilitarianism, which seeks the most incredible human happiness, euthanasia tends to be an acceptable behavior. At the same time, a deontologist, determined to uphold

the rules, cannot accept it in any way. It is also well worth exploring the differences between these two ideas of moral philosophy.

Euthanasia remains an event of discussion and concern until today, and the debate about it never stops. This essay aims to summarize the information in the previous literature and explore the different views on euthanasia and the religious and cultural ideological reasons behind it in different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, this paper will explore the connection between cultural backgrounds that influence people's moral views and the claims of different philosophical schools, which will provide references and new ideas for developing laws concerning euthanasia.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Moral Behavior and Euthanasia

Before exploring the morality of euthanasia from different perspectives, it is essential to define what constitutes a "moral behavior." According to Haidt, harm, fairness, community (or group loyalty), authority, and purity are the foundational hues of our moral sense [4]. "Harm" has the closest relationship with euthanasia. The essence of euthanasia is the ending of a person's life, which is very different from natural death. Even though the decision to euthanize is often made out of the patient's own volition, a large portion of the population finds it difficult to accept the act of ending someone's life. However, others believe that euthanasia is based on creating the most "painless" life for the person who is to be euthanized. These people consider euthanasia an "optimal solution" for the dying person, which is still a moral act. As a result, the debate began to center around the morality of euthanasia - whether it is permissible to end a person's life, even if the act is done in good faith.

There are two types of euthanasia. One is active euthanasia, and the other is passive euthanasia. John Finnis mentions in his article that the distinction between using "a deliberate intervention" for the same goal as "passive euthanasia" and using "deliberate omissions" (or forbearances or abstentions) to end life (active euthanasia) is morally irrelevant [5]. Therefore, this paper will not focus on the distinction between the two types of euthanasia. Instead, they will be referred to as "euthanasia" throughout the text.

### 2.2. Factors

#### 2.2.1 Religion

According to Smith, the best way to define "religion" is as a collection of socially imposed rituals predicated on beliefs about the presence and nature of superhuman abilities [6]. There are many different religious beliefs in the world. This paper will focus on Catholicism and Christianity in the West, as well as Taoism and Confucianism in China.

In the West, most people believe in Catholicism and Christianity and will regulate and discipline their behavior according to the norms of these two religions. They believe that since God gave us life as a gift, only he can determine when it will end [3]. Any form of deprivation of human life is not permitted. When a patient cannot remain conscious, and the hospital is not making much progress in saving him, his family chooses to carry out euthanasia. Perhaps this killing is done with good intentions, but killing is not permitted in the Catholic and Christian viewpoint. Taking another person's life is wrong, regardless of whether it is done with good or evil intentions. Believers in these religions declare that it is vital to reiterate that nothing and no one can ever, under any circumstances, accept the killing of an innocent human being, whether they be a fetus, an embryo, an infant, an adult, an older adult, someone who is sick or in the latter stages of their life [7].

Furthermore, no one is allowed to request this act of killing, either for themselves or for another person in their care. They are also not allowed to give their express or tacit approval, and no authority is allowed to propose or approve such a course of action appropriately. Because it involves a transgression of the holy law, a crime against humanity, a crime against life, and an assault on humanity [7], based on this information, we learn that Catholicism and Christianity are the two

religions that are almost entirely opposed to euthanasia. People living in this culture would also be less accepting of euthanasia.

In the East, especially in China, traditional Confucianism permeates every aspect of people's lives. People raised in this culture have views on euthanasia similar to those of Catholic and Christian faiths. Confucian tradition holds that an individual's body and life originate from their parents, that people should stay with their terminally ill family members until they die to fulfill their filial piety, and that they should never rush them to an early death, or else they will be charged with unfilial righteousness [8]. "Filial piety" is an essential part of Chinese culture. It is often said that filial piety and respect for one's parents are the first virtues. If a person does not understand filial piety and respect for their parents, it is hard to imagine that they will love the country and its people. It can be seen that filial piety is an absolute rule in traditional Chinese culture. People like Catholicism and Christianity cannot break this rule for any reason. Therefore, from the perspective of traditional Confucian thinking, euthanasia is unacceptable too.

However, Taoism in Chinese culture has a very different view from the above ideas. Taoism advocates following nature and making the world governed without seeking to do anything about it. Now, it also refers to the method of governance that is *laissez-faire* and unrestrained. Compared with Confucianism, Taoism in the attitude of life and death shows more transcendence. The Taoist reverence for nature will be placed on a higher level of the meaning of life and in a continuation of the spirit: in Zhuangzi's view, life is a kind of distress, death is the relief of life's suffering, but also the path to peace and happiness [8]. Taoist thought allows people to live in a way that allows them to go with the flow and pursue inner bliss. Therefore, it does not have many rules to regulate people's behavior. If life is painful, it is not wrong to insist on living or to die as a way out, as long as it is the decision that the individual feels best within themselves. In this culture, death is not scary for people and, at the same time, does not violate any taboos. Therefore, people who support Taoism are very tolerant of euthanasia.

### 2.2.2 Utilitarianism and Deontology

Utilitarianism is an idea that promotes the pursuit of happiness that satisfies the greatest number of people and considers behavior that considers the majority's happiness to be moral. The Greatest Happiness Principle states that the ultimate goal, about and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are thinking about our welfare or the welfare of others), is an existence as free from suffering as possible and as abundant in pleasures as possible, both in terms of quantity and quality [9]. For example, a terminally ill older man finally couldn't stand the pain of his illness after three years. He has several children, so he pleads with his children to end his life with a gun for ultimate relief. Although they felt terrible about the incident, several of the children complied. There may be those who would strongly condemn what these children did as a highly immoral act. But from a practical point of view, the old man and his children's behavior did not harm any uninvolved person, and the old man got "the greatest happiness." This behavior can be considered moral. This case is very similar to the "euthanasia" scenario described in this article. When people can't bear the pain of living, death is the greatest happiness they can pursue, and this behavior doesn't harm anyone else. In summary, utilitarians are incredibly likely to be more inclined to endorse the practice of euthanasia.

Deontological ideas differ from utilitarian ideas. Deontology asserts that morality has rules that cannot be violated without being immoral. Unlike many other ethical theories, deontology does not emphasize the results of an individual's acts because Kant considered that people do not always have logical control over their emotions; personal emotions that motivate behavior are likewise disregarded in Kantian deontology [10]. Instead, the purpose of the chosen activities is much more critical, and therefore, regardless of the actual outcomes, deontology proponents evaluate activities following what the majority of people believe to be morally right [10]. For example, it is widely believed that killing, or rather, ending another person's life, is immoral and that people shouldn't do it. In this context, the act of "euthanasia" has been scrutinized in moralistic terms. From a moralistic point of view, ending a person's life is wrong; it is a rule that cannot be violated. The reason why one person ends the life of another becomes irrelevant. Therefore, euthanasia is evaluated as an immoral act. No

matter the reason, whether it is for the relief of one person or the happiness of more people, as long as another person's life is ended, such an act is absolutely immoral. Therefore, it can be inferred that deontologists tend to reject the practice of euthanasia, which is a very immoral act in their eyes.

### 3. Influence of euthanasia

Putting aside the views of different schools of thought on euthanasia, euthanasia is a technique with two sides. It can be a great tool or an agent that fuels people's inner demons.

On the positive side, people dying and suffering intolerable pain can choose to use painless methods to end their lives. They can be freed from torture. From a profit standpoint, their loved ones are saved from the expense of having to keep up with treatment and feel better when they see them go without pain. For example, when a terminally ill person cannot bear the pain or when their family can't bear to see the person live in pain, euthanasia would be the most extraordinary relief for them. When the desire to live becomes a delusion, people will seek the path to death. The most unacceptable thing a person can do is not to be able to live and not to be able to die. But euthanasia undoubtedly provides an option for these people. This is one aspect of euthanasia that is beneficial to people.

However, on the negative side, people may lose their reverence for death. When death becomes something that is easily attainable or the norm in a given situation, people will place less importance on it. And there will always be the curious who make the final decision without thinking about it. Perhaps the world will lose a lot of lives as a result. In the worst-case scenario, euthanasia might be a tool for several people to commit murder. Take a vegetative person as an example. Perhaps they do not want to end their life, but since they are unconscious and unable to express and communicate, they can only be disposed of by others. The relationship between euthanasia against one's will and homicide to end someone's life is an issue that needs to be explored and researched. These are the dark sides of euthanasia.

### 4. Conclusion

Through the above statements, it is easy to realize that there is a connection between the views of different religious beliefs on euthanasia and the views of different philosophical ideas on euthanasia.

Catholicism, Christianity, and traditional Confucianism all have absolute rules governing human moral behavior. At the same time, euthanasia violates these rules and is considered immoral. This coincides with the idea of deontology. Their definitions of morality are based on fixed, unbreakable rules, and any violation of these rules is immoral. Since these ideas have the same core, it is possible to categorize Catholicism, Christianity, and traditional Confucianism as "deontology-centered ideas."

Taoism, which advocates pursuing one's heart and letting nature take its course, is similar to practical thought, which seeks to maximize happiness. Both of them are more inclined to support euthanasia. It is an act that pursues the individual's mind, which the individual perceives as their greatest happiness. Similarly, given the similarities at the core, Taoism can be categorized as a "utilitarian-centered idea."

In conclusion, Catholicism, Christianity, and traditional Confucianism are consistent with the central idea of Deontology that people should not violate any moral rules, no matter the reason for doing that. These few religions and ideas tend to view euthanasia as a very immoral act and reject its implementation. In contrast, Taoism is consistent with the central idea of utilitarianism, which states that people aim to pursue collective ultimate happiness as much as possible without affecting others and obey life's instructions. These two ideas view euthanasia as a moral act and accept its implementation.

Euthanasia is viewed differently by different religions and philosophical ideas. This article will hopefully shed some light on the legislation and implementation of euthanasia in conjunction with several religious and philosophical ideas. It also provides a reference for understanding euthanasia and those correlated religions and ideas. However, no matter what, life is precious, and people only

get one chance to live. Regardless of which religion or philosophical idea a person subscribes to, they should be careful when considering life-related issues.

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