

Slide 1:

Hello everyone. Today I will examine whether there is a morally significant difference between active and passive euthanasia.

This debate is central in medical ethics and philosophy. I will begin by defining the two concepts, then explore traditional views, philosophical arguments from thinkers such as James Rachels and Thomas Aquinas, and finally consider Christian ethical perspectives. I will conclude by evaluating whether the distinction between active and passive euthanasia is morally meaningful.

Slide 2:

This presentation will first clarify what we mean by active and passive euthanasia.

Then I will explain the traditional moral distinction between killing and letting die.

After that, I will examine philosophical arguments both supporting and challenging this distinction.

I will include perspectives from philosophers such as James Rachels and ideas connected to Thomas Aquinas and the doctrine of double effect.

Finally, I will discuss Christian ethical perspectives before offering a conclusion.

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Active euthanasia involves directly causing a patient's death, typically through an action such as administering a lethal injection.

Passive euthanasia occurs when life-sustaining treatment is withheld or withdrawn, allowing the patient to die naturally.

Examples include turning off life support or stopping artificial feeding.

Both practices occur in medical contexts involving terminal illness and suffering.

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Traditionally, many moral frameworks distinguish between killing and letting die.

According to this view, actively causing death is morally worse than allowing someone to die naturally.

Because of this belief, active euthanasia is illegal in most countries, while passive euthanasia may be permitted when treatment is futile or when a patient refuses treatment.

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The doctrine of acts and omissions claims that actively causing harm is morally worse than allowing harm to happen.

In the euthanasia debate, this idea supports the view that doctors should not intentionally kill patients but may sometimes allow death to occur by withdrawing treatment.

Supporters believe actions involve stronger moral responsibility than omissions.

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Philosopher James Rachels challenged the traditional distinction in a famous 1975 article.

He presented a thought experiment involving two characters, Smith and Jones. Smith actively drowns a child in a bathtub to gain an inheritance, while Jones plans to do the same but merely watches the child drown accidentally.

Rachels argues that both are equally morally blameworthy, suggesting that the difference between killing and letting die is not morally significant.

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From a utilitarian perspective, morality depends primarily on consequences rather than the type of action.

If active euthanasia reduces suffering more effectively than passive euthanasia, a utilitarian might argue that it could be morally preferable.

The main goal in this framework is maximizing well-being and minimizing suffering.

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Deontological ethics, associated with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, emphasizes duties and moral rules.

From this perspective, actively killing an innocent person may be considered morally wrong regardless of consequences.

Therefore, some deontological thinkers support the distinction between active and passive euthanasia because it preserves a rule against intentional killing.

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Christian ethical thought has been strongly influenced by Thomas Aquinas and natural law theory.

Aquinas argued that human life has intrinsic value because it is created by God.

The doctrine of double effect, associated with Aquinas, states that an action causing both a good and bad effect may be permissible if the harmful effect is not intended.

In medical ethics, this principle is sometimes used to justify treatments that relieve pain even if they may indirectly shorten life.

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Many Christian traditions emphasize the sanctity of life, meaning that life is sacred and should not be intentionally destroyed.

Because of this belief, active euthanasia is often rejected. However, many Christian ethicists accept withdrawing extraordinary or burdensome treatment when death is inevitable.

This reflects a balance between respecting life and showing compassion for those who are suffering.

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Supporters argue that maintaining the distinction between active and passive euthanasia protects vulnerable individuals.

It reinforces the medical principle that doctors should not intentionally kill patients.

They also argue that allowing active euthanasia could create risks of abuse or pressure on patients who feel they are a burden.

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Critics argue that the intention behind both active and passive euthanasia is often the same: ending suffering.

In some cases passive euthanasia can lead to a slower and more painful death.

Therefore, they claim the moral focus should be on compassion, autonomy, and reducing suffering rather than the difference between action and omission.

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In conclusion, the question of whether there is a morally significant difference between active and passive euthanasia remains widely debated.

Some ethical theories emphasize duties and the sanctity of life, supporting the distinction between killing and letting die.

Others focus on outcomes and suffering, suggesting the difference may not be morally important.

Ultimately, the answer depends on which ethical framework one finds most convincing.