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# Comparison of Attitudes on Euthanasia

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COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES ON EUTHANASIA

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A Survey

Presented to

Dr. James Berryman and Dr. Joe Nix

Ouachita Baptist University

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In Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Courses

Honors Special Studies H492 and H490

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by

Allen Hampton and Mark Bowles

Spring Semester 1969

# 193

## COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES ON EUTHANASIA

### Hypothesis

Students entering full time religious work will tend to disfavor the practice of Euthanasia, whereas students in the area of pre-med will advocate the practice.

### Purpose

The aim of this study is to observe the attitudes of persons in different areas of study at Ouachita Baptist University concerning the subject of Euthanasia.

### Method and Procedure

A questionnaire (see pages 2-4) was designed to gather information pertinent to the subject of Euthanasia. The validity of this questionnaire was reviewed by Dr. Weldon E. Vogt of the Psychology Department of Ouachita Baptist University. The following groups were selected for the study: (1) Social Science Students, (2) Religion Students, (3) Psychology Students, (4) Natural Science Students, (5) Professors in the aforementioned academic fields of study. Questionnaires were disseminated among the five groups mentioned above. The following classes at Ouachita Baptist University participated in the study (1) Social Science; Greek and Roman History (2) Religion; Living Religions, Greek, and Biblical Interpretation (3) Psychology; Psychological Testing, Counseling (4) Natural Science; Chemistry 114.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

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Euthanasia is the painless putting to death of persons suffering from incurable diseases. The practice is more commonly called "mercy killing." The purpose of this questionnaire is to compare the attitudes toward euthanasia among persons in different fields of study. Please express your views by circling "yes" or "no" to the following questions.

1. What is your field of study? (circle one)  
(a) social science  
(b) natural science  
(c) psychology  
(d) religion
2. Are you a professor in your field?      yes    no
3. Are you a pre-med student?      yes    no
4. Do you intend to enter the field of full-time religious work?      yes    no
5. I would agree with the definition that life is the totality of spiritual, mental, and physical capacities.      yes    no
6. I think "mercy killing" is a sin.      yes    no
7. If a person desires euthanasia there should be a legal provision allowing "mercy killing."      yes    no
8. I disagree with "mercy killing" for I believe nature should be allowed to take its course.      yes    no
9. If I were suffering from a terminal disease which caused my family great financial difficulty, I would submit to euthanasia.      yes    no
10. If a person is incapable of responding to his environment (a "vegetable"), I would say he possesses human life.      yes    no
11. It is wrong for a doctor to see how long he can keep a "vegetable" alive.      yes    no
12. I agree that euthanasia is not a legal matter.      yes    no
13. Those who say "leave it to God" must realize that prolonging life as well as taking life is going against the laws of nature.      yes    no
14. A doctor is playing God when he administers euthanasia.      yes    no
15. I agree that "in some cases it is indecent to go on living."      yes    no

16. The taking of any human life, regardless of the circumstances, is murder.    yes   no    (if your answer is "no" list exceptions)  
       (a)  
       (b)
17. Euthanasia should be a legal matter decided upon by a court of law which has considered the testimony of the patient's doctor, the desires of the family, and the wishes of the patient.    yes   no
18. "Mercy killing" reminds me of Hitler eugenics (annihilation of the weak).    yes   no
19. The patient should make application to be mercifully killed.    yes   no
20. "As long as there is life there is hope" so life should be preserved no matter what the cost or conditions.    yes   no
21. The question of euthanasia is a humanistic one rather than one of a moral or spiritual nature.    yes   no
22. Euthanasia would be an open door for murder and suicide.    yes   no
23. "Mercy killing" should be indirect instead of direct, by omission rather than commission.    yes   no
24. The Hippocratic oath which doctors take states: "I will give no deadly drug to any though it may be asked of me." This would lead me to believe that "mercy killing" is wrong.    yes   no
25. Should the patient be in a coma, or some other state of oblivion, and the doctor recommended euthanasia, the family would decide the issue.    yes   no
26. I think that "mercy killing" would be morally wrong no matter what the conditions.    yes   no
27. I would favor a law allowing the withdrawal of life-sustaining drugs from terminal cases.    yes   no
28. Through the laws of nature God gives and takes life; and therefore, we are scarcely in a position to decree what the future of an afflicted person may be.    yes   no
29. The patient should be mercifully killed by a euthanasia official.    yes   no
30. Man must yield to the reason that God has placed within him and thus be merciful where nature is cruel.    yes   no

31. To deliberately terminate life whether by suicide, direct abortion, euthanasia, or any other means is wrong in the sight of God.    yes    no
32. Murder is still murder by law: words like "mercy" and "compassion" do not change murder.    yes    no
33. "Thou shalt not kill" is a law that must be applied disregarding the circumstances.    yes    no
34. The Hippocratic oath which doctors take states: "The regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patient according to my ability and judgment, and not for his hurt or any wrong." This statement would lead me to believe that euthanasia is justified.    yes    no
35. If you condone euthanasia, the most desirable type would be:  
(circle one)
- (a) administering a death-dealing drug
  - (b) termination of life-sustaining drugs
  - (c) withholding any form of treatment.

### Analysis of the Data

The first four questions of the questionnaire were used as a basis for dividing the participants into the five groups of study. The first question gave the field of study, and the second question separated the professors from the students. Questions three and four served as indicators of which students were studying pre-medical courses, and which students were planning to enter full time religious work. Thus, questions three and four were also used as the basis for determining the validity of the hypothesis.

Although the questions were designed to distinguish between pro and con arguments concerning Euthanasia, several of the questions measured other issues instead. Question nineteen (see Questionnaire, page three) was to measure one of the legal aspects of Euthanasia. The question was part of the proposal by the British Euthanasia Society and supposedly a yes answer would approve while a negative answer would not approve Euthanasia. However, some of those being questioned were not aware of the British Euthanasia Society's proposal and could not possibly express their views through a response to this question. Some saw the question as saying, "You can murder as long as I consent first." One professor in the Natural Science field said, "Question is loaded - you're assuming that I agree to mercy killing, which I don't." Due to these weaknesses, question nineteen was eliminated from the study.

Some of the other questions were invalid measures of the Euthanasia question, but were valid measures of issues related to the question of

Euthanasia. For example, the question of legalizing Euthanasia was a problem. Some of those polled were in favor of Euthanasia but objected to the law as the controlling force over the issue. One individual stated for example, that "Question seven does not measure Euthanasia but measures whether the law should have any say in the issue." As a result of this observation, not only question seven, but also questions twelve, seventeen, twenty-seven, and thirty-two were placed in a separate legal column (see questionnaire, pages 2-4).

Still other questions did not truly measure the issue of Euthanasia, but measured a variety of issues associated with Euthanasia. For instance, question sixteen (see questionnaire, page 3) was a question of interest where the person was to list what circumstances, if any, would justify the taking of human life. Some of the typical answers were mercy killing, war, self-defense, manslaughter, suicide, therapeutic abortions, capital punishment, and even abortions in the case of rape. Question twenty-three measures the method of Euthanasia that is to be used and assumes that one is in favor of Euthanasia (see questionnaire, page three). Question twenty-five prescribes who will decide the issue instead of distinguishing negative or positive attitudes toward the issue. Question twenty-nine decides who will administer Euthanasia, and finally question thirty-five gives opinions on the method of dispensation. All these questions are thus placed in a variety of categories for evaluation.

The remaining questions were thus used as a basis for the measurement



of attitudes toward Euthanasia. These questions were designed so that various issues concerning Euthanasia could be evaluated. The three basic issues concerning the main issue are (1) definition of life - Is life the totality of facilities or is there life where there is breath? (2) natural law versus mercy - Let man mercifully relieve pain or let nature take its course which could be very painful? (3) medical morals versus civil law - What does civil law rule when a physician preserves life or mercifully kills? For example of how these sub-issues are important, see questions five, ten, fifteen, and twenty which are concerned with issue number one (definition of life). Likewise, questions eight, thirteen, twenty-eight, and thirty are concerned with issue two (natural law versus mercy), and questions seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-seven, and thirty-two are measures of issue three (civil law versus medical morals.) On the basis of these smaller issues, the larger issue of mercy killing is measured.

The method used in grading the questionnaires is that of a plus - minus, yes - no basis. The yes or no answer to a certain question would indicate a pro or con Euthanasia attitude and was given a plus (pro) or minus (con) evaluation. For instance, a yes response to question six (see questionnaire, page 2) would indicate an attitude against Euthanasia and would be given a -1 evaluation. Likewise, a no response could indicate a response in favor of Euthanasia and would be given a +1 value. Another example would be question 9 (see page 2). A yes or no response would take just the opposite plus or minus value to the answers to question 6. A yes answer could indicate a pro attitude

towards Euthanasia and would thus be given a +1 value. In question six, a negative response could therefore be an attitude against Euthanasia and would be assigned a -1 value.

Once all the values have been assigned and compiled, the actual plus values and the actual minus values were compared with the possible plus and minus values. See percentages of the Psychology students (on Table I, page 18). How are the percentages 70% in favor, 26.5% against, and 3.5% no answer discovered? After assigning a plus and minus value to each yes and no response, each yes and no response was recorded and a plus or minus value given as was described above. The total plus one and minus one values were then added to arrive at the figures of +236 and -89. There were a total of sixteen psychology students who took the test and a total of twenty-one questions that measured attitudes concerning Euthanasia. Therefore, if all of the students answered all of the questions in favor of Euthanasia, there would be a total of  $16 \times 21$  plus values or +336. Likewise, if every student answered all the questions against Euthanasia, there would be a total minus value of  $16 \times 21$  or -336. Then by dividing the actual plus and minus values by the potential plus and minus values, a percentage for and against the issue can be determined. The psychology students results would be as follows:

$$\frac{236}{336} = 70\% \qquad \frac{89}{336} = 26.5\%$$

The two percentages are then added:  $70\% + 26.5\% = 96.5\%$ . This total is then subtracted from 100% to arrive at the percentage (3.5%) of the

questions not answered.  $100\% - 96.5\% = 3.5\%$ .

The same procedure is then followed for each of the groups to gather the data included in Tables I and II (see pages 18 and 19). The identical procedure was also used in finding the legal percentages as well as the percentages to questions twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-nine, and thirty-five. After obtaining the data and analyzing the questions as described above, the following analyzation of attitudes was made. Although much of the data is inconclusive and needs further study, several interesting trends were observable in the following analysis.

Psychology students favored Euthanasia more than the other four groups (see Table I). Seventy percent (70%) of the psychology students favored Euthanasia while only 26.5% objected to its dispensation. The general attitudes of the psychology students seems to indicate first hand contact with hopeless cases in mental institutions, hospitals, etc., so that Euthanasia is highly favored. This first hand contact could be a possible explanation.

Fifty-five percent (55.5%) of those going into full-time religious work favored the idea of Euthanasia while pre-medical students favored mercy killing by only fifty-four percent (54%). Thus according to this survey, the general hypothesis has been disproved; however, the fact that a majority of the pre-medical students were of freshman classification could also have an effect on the data. Approximately half of the pre-medical students in particular were freshman, while the other groups were of predominately higher classification. This fact could account for the nature of the natural science and pre-medical

opinion.

Another interesting observation is that although pre-med students favored the practice of mercy killing, this group also had the highest percentage against the practice of any of the student groups for forty-six percent (46%) of them responded negatively. A possible explanation here could be that if Euthanasia is practiced, the decision is the physicians' to make. As one natural science professor stated, "The physicians I have talked with seem against the idea (mercy killing) because they just don't want the responsibility of deciding who should live or die." The fact that natural science groups tend to define life as being "biological life" may also be a factor in the pre-medical students attitudes. "Biological life represents the results of metabolism and does not include metaphysical qualities," is a statement by one natural science student that summarizes the thoughts of a good number of pre-medical students. One can see clearly here how argument I (definition of Life) might be a factor in determining Euthanasia attitudes.

The religion students favored the practice, and although more study would be needed to determine the why of this result, there are several possible explanations. First, the religion students could be in favor of the idea of mercy over the idea of a legalistic moral code. Second, these students could be for determining on the basis of the individual cases (almost fifty-fifty percent data). Third, religion students give the term "life" metaphysical qualities and thus are merciful. Last is the possibility that the sample was not a true random sample so that the

true attitudes have not been measured.

Members of the social science student group favored the practice slightly by fifty-three percent (53%) with forty-five percent (45%) against and two percent (2%) of the questions unanswered. These statistics are rather consistent with many of the social science comments. Generally speaking, the social science student is accustomed to making case studies and then finding solutions to these on the individual case basis. The social science comments indicated the feeling of "it depends upon the case" as did the percentages (+53% and - 45%) which were close to a fifty-fifty split on the issue. Several social science students answered many of the questions with the qualification of "depends upon the case". One social science student indicated the relevance to the situation even in the method of dispensing Euthanasia. He states, "If a person had cancer, or something like that, withhold any form of treatment. If a person is a vegetable with no prospect of dying soon, and the family desires it, with court approval, administer a death dealing drug." However, as one professor pointed out, "a withdrawal of treatment is not mercy killing because this could cause much unmerciful pain." The main issue of the social science students, however, was that it depends upon the individual case.

The legal aspect (see column headed legality in Table I) should now be considered. A quite interesting observation is that although seventy percent (70%) of the psychology students favored the dispensation of Euthanasia, only fifty-four percent (54%) felt that the practice should

be legalized. A psychology professor noted that "no law is needed - the issue is a medical problem." From the percentages, many of the psychology students who favor the practice seem to agree at least with the first part of the professors comment (no law is needed). The members of the social science, natural science, religion, and full-time religious work groups were rather evenly divided on the issue of the legal element. By comparison, the pre-med students were quite against the idea of legalizing for fifty-six percent (56%) responded negatively to the legal issue. Another natural science professor expressed a comment similar to the comment already sighted above. He stated a very credible observation on legality by saying "A large number of doctors feel that it (Euthanasia) would be justified in some cases but few want the responsibility of expressing it."

As mentioned above, question thirty-five was used to decide the most desirable form of Euthanasia. The pre-medical students favored the use of (A), a death dealing drug, with sixty-four percent (64%), more than any other student or professor group. This may seem rather contradictory to their attitudes as a whole but might also indicate the truth of the natural science professors above. Where the legal element is a factor, the pre-medical students are less for the practice than in question thirty-five where legality is not so much a factor. The religion students were second in supporting (A) with a percentage of fifty (50%). These students in religion also favored the use of (B), termination of life sustaining drugs, and (C), withholding any for of treatment, more than any group with percentages of ten (10) and thirty

percent (30%). This favoring of (A) is explained by a student comment which said, "That's (B + C) absurd - a lot of unnecessary suffering can occur before nature takes its course."

Question 23 measured the method of Euthanasia to be used, assuming one is in favor of mercy killing. None of the groups favored Euthanasia by omission of drugs. The religion students showed the most dissent with sixty-five percent (65%) of them voting against such a practice. This then is consistent with the majority view of question thirty-five that a death dealing drug should be administered. Those in full-time religious work also highly objected by fifty-nine percent (59%).

The members of the social science group were consistent by being evenly divided on the issue. Forty-six and a half percent (46.5%) of the social science students were for, and forty-six and a half percent (46.5%) were against the omission of drugs.

Question twenty-five prescribes who will decide the issue of mercy killing. The question was a controversial one. Students in the social science and natural science favored letting the family decide the issue for sixty-one percent (61%) of both groups favored this issue. In contrast, only thirty-five percent (35%) of those in religion favored such a practice with sixty-five percent (65%) objecting. Students in psychology, pre-med, and full-time religious work disfavored such a practice. There were not enough comments concerning this question to see any possible reasons for the responses.

Question twenty-nine considers the question of who should administer the Euthanasia. All of the groups were against the idea of Euthanasia officials and especially those in psychology with sixty-three percent (63%) against, religion with sixty-five percent (65%) against, and pre-medical with sixty-four percent (64%) against. From this study, one can not determine the reasons for this result; however, the idea of a "Euthanasia official" seems rather "cold" and unattached to the situation.

The most interesting comparison would probably be that of psychology students to their professors. Whereas the psychology students were seventy percent (70%) in favor of Euthanasia, their professors responded sixty percent (60%) against the practice. This can be possibly explained by the fact that all the psychology professors polled are Southern Baptist ministers. However, a comparison of the religion professors (also Southern Baptist ministers), who were seventy-six percent (76%) for the practice, with the psychology professors does not seem to indicate such a reason as valid. Probably the answer lies in the fact that there were only two (2) psychology professors at Ouachita to be polled, and the data is insufficient as a result.

The social science professors were fairly evenly divided on the issue (50% in favor, and 48% against). This is consistent with the social science student results; however, only two (2) social science professors responded. Thus, this data is most likely insufficient.



The natural science professors were fifty-eight percent (58%) in favor of Euthanasia whereas their students were only forty-three percent (43%) in favor. Again, the fact of the natural science students having a great number of freshman students could be a factor.

The religion professors were seventy-six percent (76%) in favor of Euthanasia as compared to their students with a positive response of fifty-five percent (55%). This difference can probably be explained by insufficient data since only three (3) religion professors responded. Not only were the religion professors' percentage higher on Euthanasia in general, but also concerning the legal aspect, their percentage of seventy-three percent (73%) was higher than any other group. This could indicate a high degree of consistency among religion professors opinions. The psychology professors objected to the legal element by a percentage of fifty (50%) which also could indicate consistency in their thoughts since this is the highest percentage against legalizing.

An interesting point is that on question thirty-five, none of the professors considered (A), a death dealing drug, as desirable. (B), withdrawal of life sustaining drugs, was the primary choice of all professor groups except the religion professors who were split fifty-fifty between (B) and (C).

In response to question twenty-three, eighty-six percent (86%) of the natural science professors thought that "mercy killing" should be indirect rather than direct. Professors of psychology (indirect 50% and direct 0.0%), professors of social science (indirect 50% and direct

0.0%) shared the "indirect" method also. However, the religion professors had fifty percent (50%) for direct method and fifty percent (50%) for indirect method. A very interesting observation is that by comparison to professors, students had overwhelming opposition to indirect methods.

In question twenty-five, sixty-six percent (66%) felt that the family should decide the issue of Euthanasia should the patient be in a coma. Conversely, religion students were sixty-five percent (65%) against such a practice. A possible explanation here is that all of the religion professors are heads of a family whereas the students are not. The natural science professors were against the practice by fifty-eight percent (58%) while natural science students were only twenty-six percent (26%) against. The reason sighted concerning religion professors and religion students could be a possibility here. The only difference is that a majority instead of all of the natural science professors are heads of families.

In question twenty-nine, the professors' responses were quite similar to that of the students' views. In fact, only one of the professors in all groups favored the idea of being put to death by a Euthanasia official.

The main observation gained from the analysis of the data is that most individuals have rather "mixed emotions" concerning Euthanasia. A student summed up what the analysis of data has shown when he said,

" I don't condone it (Euthanasia) - neither do I condemn it - I don't like it though!" On the basis of the analyzed data of this study, the following conclusions were formed.

TABLE I

STUDENT PERCENTAGES

Student Group	Euthanasia			Legality			Ques. 35			Ques. 23		Ques. 25		Ques. 29	
	+	-	N.A.	+	-	N.A.	A	B	C	+	-	+	-	+	-
Psychology (16)*	70.0	26.5	3.5	54.0	42.5	3.5	50.0	25	0	25.0	56.0	44.0	56.0	31.0	63.0
Social Science (28)*	53.0	45.0	2.0	46.5	49.0	4.5	46.5	28	7	46.5	46.5	61.0	39.0	43.0	50.0
Nat. Science (23)*	43.5	44.5	12.0	47.0	53.0	0.0	52.0	26	4	26.0	56.5	61.0	26.0	26.0	56.5
Religion (20) *	55.0	43.0	2.0	50.0	48.0	2.0	55.0	30	10	35.0	65.0	35.0	65.0	35.0	65.0
Full-Time Religious Work (29)*	55.5	41.0	3.5	48.0	47.5	4.5	55.0	24	7	38.0	59.0	38.0	62.0	31.0	65.0
Pre-Medical (14)*	54.0	46.0	0.0	43.0	56.0	1.0	64.0	29	0	29.0	57.0	36.0	57.0	36.0	64.0

\* Number of students polled

TABLE II  
PROFESSOR PERCENTAGES

Professor Group	Euthanasia			Legality			Ques. 35			Ques. 23		Ques. 25		Ques. 29	
	+	-	N.A.	+	-	N.A.	A	B	C	+	-	+	-	+	-
Psychology (2) *	14	60	26	20	50	30	0	50	0	50	0	50	50	0	100
Social Science (2)*	50	48	2	50	40	10	0	50	0	50	0	50	0	0	100
Nat. Science (7)*	58	38	4	51	46	3	0	57	0	86	14	29	58	0	86
Religion (3)*	76	21	3	73	20	7	0	50	50	50	50	66	33	50	50

\* Number of professors polled

### Conclusions

- (1) The first conclusion is in regard to the hypothesis which stated, "Students entering full-time religious work will tend to disfavor the practice of Euthanasia whereas pre-med students will advocate the practice." According to this study, the hypothesis was disproved, (+55.5 vs. +54.0%) respectively.
- (2) Psychology students and religion professors were most in favor of Euthanasia. Psychology students favored by 70% and religion professors favored by 76%.
- (3) Natural science students showed less support (+43.5%) for Euthanasia than any of the other student groups, and also showed most indecision (12.0%). Pre-med students, a sub-group of natural science students, showed the most opposition (-46.0%) to Euthanasia.
- (4) Psychology professors indicated less support (+14%), most opposition (-60%) and the most indecision (26%) to Euthanasia.
- (5) The psychology students group (+54%) and religion professors (+73%) were most in favor of legalizing Euthanasia.
- (6) The natural science students (-53.0%), the sub-group pre-med (-56%) and the psychology professors (-50%) indicated the most opposition to legalizing.
- (7) Question 35 - Pre-med students favored (64%) use of death dealing drug more than other group. All student groups thought this the most desirable type of Euthanasia.

- (8) None of the professors indicated the use of a death dealing drug as a desirable form of administering Euthanasia. Their choice was (B), the withdrawal of life sustaining drugs.
- (9) Question 23 - All student groups opposed the practice of indirect mercy killing whereas the professor group favored its practice. This is consistent with the views of these groups on question 35 (see Conclusion 7 & 8).
- (10) Question 25 - The religion professors (66%), social science (61%), and the natural science students (61%) were most in favor of the family deciding the issue of Euthanasia should the patient be in a coma.
- (11) In contrast, religion students (65%) and natural science professors (58%) were most opposed to the family deciding the issue (see Conclusion 10).
- (12) Question 29 - All groups objected to the idea of a Euthanasia official as the dispensator with psychology professors and social science professors 100%, and natural science professors 86% against the idea.
- (13) The above conclusions, because of limited data, should be considered suggestive of trends rather than conclusive.