
RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*The Ethics of
Euthanasia*

"Euthanasia: A Sympathetic Reappraisal" by Robert Wennberg, in *Christian Scholar Review* (vol. 9, 1977), 955 La Paz Rd., Santa Barbara, Calif. 93108.

Among the Greeks and Romans, euthanasia enjoyed a degree of acceptance and was defended by Plato and Seneca. Christians subsequently rejected the idea of taking the life of a hopelessly ill person, even with his consent. They based their position on the Sixth Commandment, which forbids the "harmful" taking of human life. However, Wennberg, a professor of philosophy at Westmont College, argues that euthanasia, when grounded in mercy and compassion, can be compatible with Christian morality.

Opponents of euthanasia, Wennberg writes, are generally more critical of active euthanasia (or "mercy killing"—the administration of a lethal substance to a terminally ill patient at his request) than of passive euthanasia (or "mercy dying"—withholding treatment from that same patient). In fact, passive euthanasia can at times be compatible with orthodox Christian belief, as when "in the face of imminent death" a person refuses "extraordinary" treatment to prolong his life.

Wennberg contends that there is no moral distinction between passive and active euthanasia. "If it is in our power," he concludes, "to shorten an agonizing death by actively intervening and we do not do so, then we are responsible for the consequences of not doing so, as we would be should we choose to intervene."

*Skepticism,
East and West*

"Jansenism and the Crise Pyrrhonienne" by Thomas M. Lennon, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Apr.-June 1977), Humanities Building 749, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa. 19122; "Nature and Function of Skepticism in Chinese Philosophy" by Chung-ying Cheng, in *Philosophy East and West* (Apr. 1977), University Press of Hawaii, 2840 Kolowalu St., Honolulu, Hawaii 96822.

Skepticism, as a method of philosophical inquiry, has been practiced at least since the fourth century B.C., when the Greek philosopher Pyrrho founded the School of Skeptics. Applied differently in the West and East, however, the skeptical approach has led philosophers to very different conclusions.