

QUESTIONING THE IGBO-AFRICAN STANCE ON THE MORAL CONCEPT OF EUTHANASIA

Emedo, Chinyere Christian

Abstract

Euthanasia remains one of the controversial ethical issues perturbing man globally, but in Igbo and broader African culture, it is widely rejected based on moral, religious, and communal values. The African perspective on life and death is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs, the sanctity of life and ancestral reverence. This paper critically examines the moral concept of euthanasia within Igbo/African traditions, exploring how African ethical systems differ from Western individualistic approaches. It discusses euthanasia in the context of African communalism, the role of religion, legal prohibitions, and the philosophical rejection of assisted death. By analyzing African metaphysics, religious doctrines, and cultural practices, this study highlights why euthanasia remains largely unacceptable within the Igbo moral framework. The paper also considers whether contemporary African societies can reconcile traditional values with modern medical ethics.

Keywords: Euthanasia, Igbo culture, African ethics, communalism, religion, moral philosophy

Introduction

The moral debate on euthanasia has sparked global controversy, with Western societies increasingly accepting physician-assisted death as a right to personal autonomy. However, in Igbo and broader African cultures Mbiti (1990:140) depicts, "euthanasia remains largely unacceptable due to the deeply ingrained beliefs in the sanctity of life, communal responsibility, and spiritual repercussions." Complementing on this, Iroegbu (1995:144) says, "African ethical thought does not prioritize individual choice in end-of-life decisions, but rather emphasizes on the interconnectedness of life and death within the context of families and ancestral traditions." This discourse will critically explore the Igbo people's moral perspectives on euthanasia with much focus on examining how African traditional religion (ATR), Christianity, Islam, as well as cultural communalism thoughts contributed to the rejections of the assisted dying. The research will in furtherance engage with African metaphysical thought wherein Gyekye (1995:119) describes the word death as, "the spiritual transition rather than mere biological event." Comparing African moral stance with the Western ethical arguments for euthanasia, the paper will want to know if the traditional Igbo values accommodated contemporary bioethical debates.

Conceptual Analysis of the Framework of the Discourse

This will reflect both the etymological, lexical and scholarly definitions of the keywords that constitute the topic of the paper namely: Euthanasia, Igbo- African Culture, African ethics, Communalism, Religion and Moral Philosophy.

What is Euthanasia?

The answer to the question on the meaning of euthanasia will center on both the etymological definition, scholarly conceptions, and moral debates. The term "euthanasia" originates from the Greek words "eu" (εὖ), meaning good or well, and "thanatos" (θάνατος), meaning death. Thus, etymologically, euthanasia means "a good death" or "easy death." The concept dates back to ancient Greece and Rome, where it was sometimes associated with the idea of a peaceful, painless passing. However, in its modern sense, euthanasia has evolved to refer specifically to the intentional act of ending a life to relieve suffering. The term was first used in the 17th century by English philosopher Francis Bacon, who described it as a physician's duty to provide a gentle and painless death when a cure was not possible. Over time, euthanasia has taken on various legal, ethical, and medical implications, shaping debates on human dignity, suffering, and the right to die. Euthanasia is the practice of intentionally ending a person's life to relieve suffering, especially in cases of terminal illness or severe pain. It is often classified into different types viz:

(1) Voluntary Euthanasia

Discuss on the meaning and context of voluntary euthanasia here will reflect a deeper exploration with Igbo-African ethical perspectives and few real-life legal cases in the Western society.

Voluntary euthanasia is a situation where a seriously ill person consciously consented to end his/her life the suffering from pain. This according to Keown (2002:14) is, 'the intentional termination of a person's life at their own request, typically to relieve intractable suffering due to a terminal illness or irreversible condition. Unlike involuntary or non-voluntary euthanasia, voluntary euthanasia is initiated and consented to by the person in question, with full mental capacity and understanding of the implications.' This can be either active (e.g., administration of lethal drugs by a physician) or passive (withholding life-sustaining treatments). The practice provokes philosophical and ethical questions about the meaning of life, autonomy, suffering, and death.

Igbo-African Ethical Views on Voluntary Euthanasia

The traditional Igbo worldview like other African indigenous worldviews regards human life as being sacred and interconnected with spiritual and communal dimensions. In Igbo metaphysics according to Iroegbu (1994: 63), "human life is a divine trust from Chukwu (God), therefore, ending it prematurely—whether by suicide or euthanasia—is considered unnatural and morally wrong." Commenting on the sacredness and communal value of life, Metu (1987:108) says, "Life (ndu) in Igbo ontology is not merely biological; it is spiritual, ancestral, and social. It belongs not only to the individual but to the family, lineage, and community. Ending one's life undermines this collective identity and can sever ancestral links." Speaking about how Africans reject individual autonomy as being supreme, Gyekye (1996:45) argues, "while the Western ethics emphasizes individual autonomy as a basis for euthanasia, Igbo ethics for example, privileges communal responsibility and relational autonomy. Thus the decisions affecting life and death are not made in isolation but involve extended family, elders, and spiritual considerations." Reflecting on the moral status of human suffering, Mbiti (1990:150) says, "in Igbo - African thought, suffering may carry moral or spiritual significance. It is not necessarily a justification for euthanasia but may be seen as part of the divine plan or a test of character. It is also believed that enduring suffering may lead to a more honorable transition to the ancestral realm."

Western Practice and Legal Cases of Voluntary Euthanasia

Several countries of the world legalized voluntary euthanasia (physician-assisted dying), and reflected on evolving societal values about autonomy, compassion, and dignity in human dying. The countries, however, include:

Netherlands

Netherlands was the first country to legalize euthanasia. This took place in 2002, under strict legal conditions. One notable case according to Lewis (2007: 201), "involved a woman with severe dementia whose prior written consent for euthanasia raised legal questions when she was unable to reaffirm it verbally."

Belgium

Belgium allows euthanasia for adults and minors under strict medical supervision. Downie and Sherwin (2015:12), narrated the case of deaf twin brothers, who are also going blind, decided to chose euthanasia in 2013 sparked international debate on disability and quality of life."

Canada

Canada legalized Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) in 2016. But recent amendments allow euthanasia for those human beings suffering from intolerable mental or physical conditions, even if not terminally ill. These changes continue to provoke ethical concern.

United States of America

In some parts of the United States of America, like Oregon and California, assisted dying is permitted under what is called the principle of "Death with Dignity Statutes (DDS)". Quill (2004:121) gave example of this by portraying how the case of Brittany Maynard in the year 2014, a young woman with brain cancer, popularized the right-to-die movement across North America .

Africa

Euthanasia remains illegal in most African countries. In South Africa according to Cowley (2018:82), "the Stransham-Ford case in 2015 briefly recognized the right to die with dignity, but the ruling was later overturned, reaffirming the continent's conservative position."

Ethical Tensions and Igbo-African Dissonance

This emphasizes on the following sub themes viz: Autonomy vs. Sacredness of life: Contending on the sacredness of Life in Western contexts, Okeke (2011:89) says, "personal autonomy is often the moral foundation for euthanasia. In contrast, the Igbo-African context maintains that life is sacred and cannot be disposed of at will, regardless of suffering or individual consent ." Slippery Slope Concerns: Critics argue that permitting voluntary euthanasia could lead to abuses, especially among the vulnerable—disabled, elderly, or mentally ill. This concern according to Eze (2010:147) is, *amplified in African

societies where medical resources are limited and safeguards might be weak." Cultural Incompatibility: Speaking on this, Udoabata Onunwa (1990:134) made it clear that:," Voluntary euthanasia challenges African communalism, spiritual beliefs, and reverence for ancestors. An individual who chooses euthanasia may be denied ancestral life, and thus disrupts cosmological balance.

Voluntary euthanasia obviously is an ethically and legally complex dilemma that continues to provoke global debate. While it is legally recognized in many of Western societies, it's frowned upon in the Igbo-African ethical thought, because it contradicts the fundamental beliefs about the sanctity of life, communal values, and the spiritual dimensions of death. As African societies modernize and confront global bioethical trends, the conversation must respect indigenous worldviews, spiritual legacies, and communal ethics while grappling with medical realities.

Meaning and Concept of Involuntary Euthanasia

Involuntary euthanasia refers to the act of intentionally ending a person's life without their consent or against their will, typically to relieve suffering or because the individual is deemed unfit to continue living due to illness or incapacity. It is distinct from non-voluntary euthanasia, where the patient cannot give consent (e.g., comatose individuals), and voluntary euthanasia, where the patient explicitly requests to die. In involuntary euthanasia according to Somerville (2001), "the individual is conscious, competent, and may oppose the decision, yet is euthanized nonetheless. This form of euthanasia is generally considered ethically unacceptable and legally equated to murder in most parts of the world. Western scholarship usually views involuntary euthanasia as a violation of human rights and medical ethics."

Western Scholarly Perspectives on Involuntary Euthanasia

The Western discourses on involuntary euthanasia are reflected on the following points:

Ethical Rejection and Human Rights

In Western medical ethics, involuntary euthanasia is largely rejected due to its contradiction with the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence. The Western legal framework emphasizes the sanctity of individual rights, and taking a life without explicit consent is viewed as both morally reprehensible and legally criminal. John Keown (2002) strongly argues that involuntary euthanasia breaches core legal and moral standards by denying individuals the right to life and self-determination. Similarly, "Margaret Somerville (2001) underscores that such acts undermine trust in the medical profession and risk opening a "slippery slope" toward systemic abuses."

Historical Precedents and Nazi Euthanasia Program

One of the most infamous examples of involuntary euthanasia Lifton (1986) narrated, "occurred in Nazi Germany (1939–1945) under the T4 Program, where individuals with physical and mental disabilities were euthanized without consent under the guise of racial and genetic purification. This historical misuse, he stresses, has had a lasting impact on Western bioethics, reinforcing strong opposition to non-consensual life termination."

Bioethical Frameworks

Contemporary Western thinkers like Beauchamp and Childress (2019) emphasize that all forms of euthanasia must meet stringent ethical criteria, particularly in respect for patient autonomy. Involuntary euthanasia, by definition, fails this test. The emphasis is on patient rights, informed consent, and shared decision-making in medical care.

Igbo-African Scholarly Views on Involuntary Euthanasia

In traditional Igbo-African thought, life is sacred, communal, and spiritually ordered. Ending life—especially without the consent of the person Metu (1987) contends, is, "viewed not only as morally wrong but also as an abomination (alu) that disturbs spiritual and cosmic harmony."

Communal Ethics and Sacredness of Life

According to Metuh (1987), life in Igbo-African cosmology is not owned by the individual but is considered a divine trust from Chukwu (God). Decisions around life and death involve elders, the family, and spiritual consultations. Thus, any act of ending life—especially without communal consensus and the individual's consent—is seen as sacrilegious. Iroegbu (1994) emphasizes on the importance of "enwisdomization"—a philosophical process that connects ethical reasoning with spiritual wisdom. Involuntary euthanasia is irrational within this framework because it disrupts the natural transition to ancestral existence, prohibits reincarnation (ilọ ụwa), and potentially condemned the individual to spiritual wandering.

Moral Abomination and Social Disharmony

Okeke (2011) contends that, "the unnatural termination of life—particularly without the person's will—incurs moral and spiritual consequences for the family and the community. Such acts can bring curses, ancestral disapproval, or misfortune to the lineage." Furthermore, Onunwa (1990:135) notes that, "the traditional rituals associated with death, such as proper burial rites and libations, are denied to those who suffer unnatural or shameful deaths (including suicide and involuntary euthanasia), thereby severing their link to the ancestral realm."

No Room for Autonomy Without Consensus

While the Western views focus heavily on individuals rights, according to Gyekye (1996:47) "the Igbo-African ethics blends personal autonomy with communal guidance. Even if a person were terminally ill, the family's moral obligations to care for the sick and uphold the dignity of life until its natural end are paramount."

Involuntary euthanasia remains deeply controversial ethical issue. Western scholarship broadly condemns it because of its violation of individual autonomy and human rights. But, the Igbo-African philosophical traditions reject it on moral, spiritual, and communal grounds. In both contexts, involuntary euthanasia is perceived as a grave violation of person's life's integrity, though grounded in different ontological and ethical frameworks. Understanding these worldviews is crucial for developing globally sensitive bioethical policies and practices.

Nonvoluntary Euthanasia: Here is an in-depth discussion with focus on the Igbo-African position. This will emphasize on the following sub themes:

Understanding Non-voluntary Euthanasia

Euthanasia refers to the practice of intentionally ending a person's life to relieve pain and suffering. It is generally categorized into three types: voluntary, nonvoluntary, and involuntary. While voluntary euthanasia involves the explicit consent of the individual, nonvoluntary euthanasia occurs when the person is unable to give consent—either because they are in a coma, too young (such as infants), mentally incapacitated, or otherwise unable to make their wishes known. In such cases, the decision is made on their behalf by family members, physicians, or legal authorities.

Nonvoluntary euthanasia is ethically contentious and raises profound moral, legal, and cultural concerns. It presents a moral paradox: while intended to alleviate suffering, it involves making a life-ending decision without the direct consent of the individual concerned. This form of euthanasia is typically considered in situations involving persistent vegetative states, irreversible coma, or severe congenital disorders in infants. Nonvoluntary euthanasia is legally permissible in a few countries under strict conditions, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, but remains illegal and ethically debated in most parts of the world.

The Igbo-African Worldview on Life and Death

To understand the Igbo-African stance on nonvoluntary euthanasia, one must first appreciate the underlying ontological and ethical framework of the Igbo people of Nigeria. The Igbo worldview is deeply rooted in communalism, ancestral reverence, and the sacredness of life. Life is not just biological existence; it is a continuum that stretches from the physical realm to the spiritual, connecting the living, the dead, and the unborn in a spiritual web known as Uwa (the world). Among the Igbo, life is considered a divine gift from Chi (a personal god or destiny), and only the deity or the supernatural has the ultimate authority over life and death. This belief creates a profound respect for human life, regardless of its physical or mental condition. Illness, suffering, and even deformity are seen as part of a person's destiny or spiritual journey, which must not be prematurely terminated by human intervention.

Communal Responsibility and the Ethic of Care

The communal nature of Igbo society further complicates the notion of nonvoluntary euthanasia. Decisions about life and death are not seen as individual matters alone but as communal concerns. A person belongs to their family, kindred, and community; therefore, their suffering is shared, and their fate becomes a collective concern. The idea of ending someone's life, even in extreme suffering, would be seen as a violation of communal ethics and the principles of *ndụ bụ ndụ* (life is life). This communal ethic translates into a strong emphasis on caregiving. Even when an individual is terminally ill or in a vegetative state, the family and community are expected to provide care, support, and presence. Withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment—let alone active euthanasia—is typically perceived as abandonment, betrayal, or even an act of *nsọ ala* (abomination).

The Role of Ancestral and Religious Beliefs

Igbo metaphysics views death as a transition into the spiritual world of ancestors. For a death to be meaningful or “good” (ọlụ ọma), it must occur naturally and be ritually acknowledged through proper burial rites. Death that results from unnatural causes, especially suicide or intentional killing, is often considered *ajo ọnwụ* (a bad death) and may bar the soul from joining the ancestors. Nonvoluntary euthanasia, by this logic, is likely to be viewed as inducing an “abominable” or “unnatural” death. This perception impacts not only the deceased’s transition into the ancestral realm but also the social standing of the family, who may be stigmatized or required to perform rituals of atonement.

Moral Implications and Contemporary Realities

Although traditional Igbo society largely opposes nonvoluntary euthanasia, modern medical challenges such as brain death, terminal illnesses, and severe disabilities have led to some reconsideration, especially in urban or diasporic settings. Some educated elites or healthcare professionals may argue for passive forms of euthanasia—such as withholding extraordinary medical interventions—as a more compassionate response to suffering. However, even in such cases, decisions are made with extreme caution and usually framed within the context of *onye kwe, chi ya ekwe* (if one agrees, their spirit agrees)—emphasizing the moral and spiritual gravity of such choices. There is still strong reluctance toward any form of active, life-ending intervention without clear spiritual or communal consensus.

Nonvoluntary euthanasia, though sometimes motivated by compassion, fundamentally conflicts with the Igbo-African understanding of life, death, and communal responsibility. The sanctity of life, the importance of communal care, and the religious belief in natural transition to the ancestral world form a robust cultural resistance against any form of life termination without the individual’s explicit consent. While debates around bioethics and medical technology continue to evolve globally, the Igbo ethical framework remains firmly grounded in spiritual values and collective human dignity.

Certainly! Here's an elaboration on the meanings of active and passive euthanasia, and how they relate specifically to Igbo-African perspectives:

Definitions of Active and Passive Euthanasia

Active Euthanasia

This refers to the deliberate act of causing a patient's death through direct intervention, such as administering a lethal dose of medication. The goal is to end suffering by hastening death. This form of euthanasia is usually intentional, medical, swift, and is called “mercy killing.” It is illegal in most countries and highly controversial ethically and religiously.

Passive Euthanasia,

This on the other hand, involves allowing a patient to die by withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatments such as ventilators, feeding tubes, or medication. The death is not directly caused by an act of killing, but rather by letting nature take its course, often with palliative care to manage pain. The ethical distinction often centers around action versus inaction. In active euthanasia, death is caused; in passive euthanasia, death is allowed to occur.

Igbo-African Ethical Framework: Life as Sacred and Communal

In Igbo-African thought, life (ndụ) is sacred, viewed not just in biological terms, but spiritually and communally. Human life is a divine trust from Chi (personal god) and Chukwu (the Supreme God), and no one, including the individual, is perceived to have the moral authority to terminate it prematurely. Life belongs to the entire community—not just the individual—so decisions about death are communal and spiritual rather than private and clinical. Every person is part of a larger cosmic cycle involving mmadu (human being), mmụọ (spirit), and ndichie (ancestors).

Active Euthanasia in the Igbo Context

Active euthanasia is typically regarded as taboo (nsọ ala) in traditional Igbo society. The intentional taking of life—even for compassion—is seen as:

- (a) A violation of divine will, as it interferes with the destiny (akụkọ ndụ) given by Chi.
- (b) An offense that may attract spiritual consequences, including ancestral disapproval or spiritual impurity.
- (c) An act that disrupts the natural transition into ancestral life, possibly rendering the deceased an “evil spirit” (mmụọ ojoo), and bringing shame upon the family.

Even in extreme cases of suffering or terminal illness, active killing is rarely considered acceptable. Rather than seeing it as mercy, it is often interpreted as ịgbu mmadu n’ihu chi ya—“killing someone before their god’s appointed time.”

Passive Euthanasia and the Igbo-African Position

Passive euthanasia, while still sensitive, may be more morally tolerable in the Igbo-African context, especially when framed as “not interfering with nature.” This includes: Withdrawing excessive or extraordinary medical support in hopeless situations (e.g., brain death or irreversible coma). Allowing death to take its natural course in line with ndụ ka ọ dịrị onye (let life be as destined for the person).

Passive euthanasia may align with the Igbo belief in chi kpatara ihe (everything has a divine cause) and onye kwe, chi ya ekwe (if a person agrees, their spirit agrees). In such cases, some elders and families might interpret it not as killing, but as allowing destiny to fulfill itself, especially if continuing life support is seen as prolonging suffering rather than preserving life. However, this decision would still require collective deliberation involving elders, family members, traditional healers, and possibly religious leaders. The community’s consent is critical to avoid spiritual offense or guilt.

The Thin Line in Modern Contexts

In urban and diasporic Igbo communities where Western medicine is integrated, the line between active and passive euthanasia becomes blurred. For instance, turning off a life support machine may be seen by some as passive euthanasia, but by others as active involvement in death. Withholding CPR in terminally ill patients might be justified through traditional beliefs in ime ka chi si dee ya (let it be as destiny has written it).

Despite the increasing exposures to the global bioethical debates, most of the Igbo families—particularly in rural areas—still favor natural death over any form of euthanasia, rooted in the belief that death must come through natural and divine processes. Flowing from the Igbo-African people's perspective, active euthanasia is largely rejected as an unnatural, sacrilegious act that violates spiritual, moral, and communal codes. While passive euthanasia is more cautiously considered, especially when it aligns with the perceived natural end of life and divine will, though it must be approached communally and respectfully. These attitudes however, are grounded in the holistic view of life, spirituality, and community ethics, where the dignity of the dying is preserved not by hastening death, but by caring and supporting them through their natural transition to the ancestral world.

The morality and legality of euthanasia vary worldwide, with some countries permitting it under strict conditions, while others prohibit it entirely.

Euthanasia, Beauchamp and Childress (2019:75) defined, "as the intentional termination of persons life to relieve suffering, is often classified as either active (directly causing death) or passive (withholding life-sustaining treatment)." Western scholars, especially the physicalists arguments for euthanasia are focused on autonomy, that's the right to die with dignity, and the alleviation of suffering. In African cultures, the justifications of the physicalists Hallen (2008:62) depicts, "are often conceived as inadequate because they overlook communal and spiritual dimensions of life."

The questions on the meaning and relevance of Igbo-African culture revolves around understanding its core values, traditions, and how they shape identity, morality, and social development. It explores what constitutes the Igbo-African culture—such as language, customs, religion, philosophy, and communal living—and examines its role in contemporary society. Culture as simply defined is the people's way of life. This reckons on the elements enlisted in the context above. Further answers to the meaning of Igbo African culture will explicitly emphasize on what makes it unique? How elements like ancestral veneration, respect for elders, and communalism define it? It will focus on its relevance, how Igbo - African culture adapt to modernization and globalization, whether it's still influencing moral decisions, governance and social norms. It will discuss the challenges the culture has encountered, that's how colonial history, Westernization and technological changes impact the survival of their tradition. It will also emphasize on Igbo - African culture's moral, and philosophical perspectives, that is how its thought contributes to ethical decisions, such as euthanasia, justice and human dignity.

Igbo-African culture is unique due to its deep-rooted traditions, communal values, and spiritual worldview. It is characterized by a strong connection to ancestry, a high regard for elders, and a collectivist way of life.

1. **Ancestral Veneration:** The Igbo believe that ancestors play an active role in the lives of the living, serving as spiritual intermediaries between humans and the divine. Hence, offerings, rituals, and prayers are performed to honor them, to ensure their continued guidance to the living
2. **Respect for Elders:** Elders are seen as the custodians of wisdom and tradition. Their words and decisions carry great weight in family and community matters. This respect reinforces social stability and ensures the transmission of cultural values across generations.

3. **Communalism:** The Igbo prioritize community well-being over individual interests. This is reflected in their extended family structure, cooperative farming, and shared responsibilities in social and economic life. The concept of “Igwebuike” (strength in unity) therefore, highlights the importance of collective effort. These elements shape Igbo moral philosophy, including perspectives on life, death, and ethical issues like euthanasia.

Igbo-African culture has adapted to modernization and globalization by integrating Western education, technology, and economic systems while preserving key traditional values. Urbanization, Christianity, and global trade have reshaped many aspects of governance, social structures, and moral beliefs. However, Igbo cultural norms are still influencing moral decisions, governance, social life as well as communalism, respect for elders, and ethical considerations like justice and fairness. Traditional institutions, such as town unions and age-grade systems, coexist with modern political structures, ensuring cultural continuity. Despite Western influences, core Igbo moral values, such as respect for human dignity and community welfare, continue to shape societal norms and decision-making processes.

Colonial history, Westernization, and technological changes significantly impacted the survival of Igbo-African traditions by altering cultural, social, and economic structures. Colonialism imposed foreign governance, Christianity, and Western education, leading to erosion of indigenous belief systems, including traditional religion and governance. Westernization further deepened this shift by promoting individualism over communal living, replaces the indigenous knowledge with Western ideologies, and thus influences loss of indigenous language through English dominance. Technological advancements, such as modern communication and digital media, have both eroded and preserved traditions—while they contribute to cultural homogenization, they also provide platforms for revitalizing Igbo heritage through digital documentation and global networking.

Igbo-African Thought and Ethical Decisions on Euthanasia, Justice, and Respect for Human Dignity

Igbo-African thought is deeply rooted in communal values, spirituality, and respect for life. These foundational principles significantly shaped the ethical decisions regarding the practice of euthanasia, justice, and human dignity.

1. **Euthanasia:** In traditional Igbo thought, life is sacred and given by Chukwu (God). The concept of *ndu* (life) is not just biological but spiritual, meaning that taking life—whether by means of suicide practice, assisted death, or mercy killing—is largely condemned. Suffering for the Igbo people, is described as part of one's destiny (*akụkụ chi*), hence instead of indulging in euthanasia, the community will play its role by providing supports to one another irrespective of the health conditions, though, there are also the nuanced perspectives wherein some elders or terminally ill individuals may express a desire for a dignified transition.
2. **Justice:** Igbo ethics emphasize on the concept of *ime ezi omume* (righteous conduct) and *omenala* (customary law), which ensure fairness and communal harmony. Justice is restorative rather than purely punitive, focusing on reconciliation through dialogue and reparations. The concept of *ikwu eziokwu* (truth-telling) is vital in resolving disputes, and elders meditate on conflicts based on wisdom and precedent rather than rigid legal codes.

3. **Respect for Human Dignity:** The Igbo belief in *mmadu bu sochie uwa* (human being is the dignity of the world), underscores the intrinsic worth of every individual. Social structures, including *umuada* (women's councils) and *ndi ichie* (elders), uphold respect for all, ensuring that individuals are valued, even in death. This belief also extends to ethical concerns such as caring for the elderly and disabled, reinforcing the importance of collective responsibility. Igbo-African thoughts generally provide a moral framework which prioritizes life filled fairness, and communal support in shaping ethical decisions on issues like euthanasia, justice, and human dignity.

Igbo-African Notion of Euthanasia

Explaining the term euthanasia in African philosophical Perspectives generally, may be jeopardizing, thus the context is trimmized down to the Igbo people's perspective in particular. In Igbo language, there is no direct equivalent term for euthanasia, but it can only be described using phrases that convey its meaning. the possible way to define the concept of euthanasia in Igbo Language Emedo says is, "*Ikwusi ndu mmadu n'uzo ebere maka mgbaka ahu ya na'oria nke na-adighi agwo agwo* (ending a person's life mercifully to relieve the person's unbearable suffering from an incurable illness). This she stresses, could, in the other way round be expressed as *Ikwusi ndu onye no na oria ananweghi olile anya igwota n'obi ebere ka o ghara itabiga ahuhu oke tupu ya n'anwu*(Stopping someone's life to prevent them from severe pain before death)." In the traditional Igbo-African culture, life and death are deeply entangled to the spiritual concepts, hence the idea of deliberately ending life is generally viewed with caution, and often influenced by moral, religious and legal beliefs systems.

Igbo African Culture on the Morality of Euthanasia

African morality, similar to the Western and Asian societies, is enrooted in questioning the conducts of human beings in relation to social existence. Culture is relative, hence what one society abhors, another society may absorb it African morality according to (Iroegbu, 1994: 134) is, "largely communal and spiritual, viewing human life as a sacred trust given by a higher power." Concurring to Iroegbu, (Mbiti 1990:141) says, "unlike the Western individualism, African ethical systems emphasize duty to the community, where life decisions are not solely personal but involve the collective family and ancestral spirits." Emphasizing on the communal ethics, Uchendu (1965:156) upholds that, in Igbo society, "a person's life is not their own but belongs to the family and ancestors. Hence the decision to end life prematurely is seen as an act of selfishness that disrupts the moral order." Stressing on the spiritual beliefs of Igbo-African culture, Nwoye (2009:323) contends that, "death is regarded as a transition to the ancestral world. Thus, unnatural death, such as euthanasia, could lead to spiritual disturbances, reincarnation as an *ogbanje* (a restless spirit), or rejection by the ancestors." Pointing to the moral responsibility naturally imposed on African human being according to Uba (1986:94), "traditional healers and family members assume the moral duty to care for the sick, reinforcing the idea that suffering must be endured rather than actively ended."

Religious and Legal Stances of African People on Euthanasia

Discourse here will reflect on the Christian and Islamic beliefssystems Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions in Nigeria, reinforce African moral opposition to euthanasia. the Christian Bible in (Exodus 20:13),"upholds the sanctity of life and thus rejects the practice of euthanasia."Following suit, Pope John Paul II (1995:124) condemned euthanasia as a "grave moral disorder." African churches according to Mbiti (1990:140), "rejected the practice of euthanasia, and emphasizes suffering as part of divine will rather than something to be actively escaped." The Islamic Quo'ran17:33) similar to Christianity,"prohibits the taking of life, and reinforces that euthanasia is against Allah's will. Islamic bioethics Barry (2002:75), stresses that, "the palliative care forbids active life termination."

Legal Prohibition of Euthanasia in Africa

Most of the African countries including Nigeria, Chukwuma (89) depicts, "has zero tolerance on the practice of euthanasia, hence they criminalized, and treat it as a form of homicide." The Nigeria Criminal Code of Conduct Bureau (2024:326),"explicitly states thatassisting suicide practice is punishable by life imprisonment," Concurring to this, Uchendu(1965:157) states that,"irrespective of the legal debates in South Africa, where courts have occasionally considered euthanasia cases, no other African country has fully legalized it."

Conclusion

Euthanasia remains morally unacceptable in Igbo and broader African culture due to communal ethics, spiritual beliefs, and religious doctrines. Unlike the Western societiesthat have morally prioritized personal autonomy according to Beauchamp and Childress (2019:75-86),"African morality views life as a sacred trust that connected to family, ancestors, and the divine, etc."Legal and religious prohibitions reinforce this stance, making euthanasia an ethically impermissible act.However, the challenge perturbing African societies is how to balance tradition with contemporary medical realities. While active euthanasia is unlikely to gain acceptance, discussions on palliative care and passive euthanasia could provide ethical alternatives that align with African moral frameworks. Ultimately, African morality must preserve its core values while remaining open to ethical evolution in the face of modern medical challenges. Reflecting on whether the contemporary African society can reconcile their traditional values with biomedical ethics, the reconciliation is possible, but it requires deliberate efforts and sensitive dialoguing between African indigenous cultural frameworks and modern biomedical principles. To achieve this, the following key points must be in consideration: (1) There must be shared moral foundation: Traditional African ethics must emphasize on the communal well-being, respect for elders, and the sanctity of life—values that are not inherently at odds with the biomedical ethics. This however, can form a basis for reconciliation. (2) There must be cultural contextualization of ethics: Western bioethics is often grounded in individual autonomy, while African ethics leans more toward communalism. Reconciling the two involves adapting to medical ethical principles like informed consent or end-of-life care to be meaningful within the contexts of the communal decision-making. (3) There must be inclusivity in dialoguing: For example, the inclusion of traditional healers, community leaders, and religious figures in healthcare policy discussions can ensure that medical practices are culturally respectful and ethically sound within the African context. (4) Education and sensitization must be considered: In this scenario, healthcare providers need cultural competence training in navigating the conflicts that existed amidst the biomedical approaches and traditional beliefs—especially regarding issues such as reproductive health, mental illness, or death and dying.(5) Case by Case Harmonization is another point that must considered in this. Ethical problems like

euthanasia, organ donation, genetic testing etc, require context-specific resolutions that considered the modern medical standards and traditional African moral values, etc.

***Emedo, Chinyere Christian**

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Anambra State, Nigeria

Email: cc.emedo@unizik.edu.ng

Mobile Phone: 08037724040

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