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**Secular Humanism and Buddhism: Differences and Similarities Regarding Bioethics**

It would be a fool’s errand to try to compile a list of ways that religion has impacted the world. In fact, religion is so impactful that religion has impacted every aspect, or almost every aspect, of an individual’s life. Furthermore, religion has not just impacted the individual in society but religion has in fact impacted society as a whole. Religion’s ability to be impactful means that very few issues, such as political, ethical, moral, or social issues, have not been touched upon or influenced by religion. Understanding how impactful and how influential religion truly is, even in the “modern world” where more and more people are declaring themselves atheist or agnostic (Lipka 2016), is imperative in order to have any form of discussion regarding religion. Another crucial and necessary point to make regarding religions is the fact that all religions, no matter how large or small, share similar inherent characteristics. What’s so fascinating about the fact that all religions share similar characteristics, and that these similarities are inherent to the religions themselves, is that all religions also have differences and these differences help the followers of said religions and the world as a whole define said religion. Equally as important is the fact that some of these differences between religions, which are essentially systems of belief, hold a more “relative weight” meaning these differences are the main, most impactful, and most divisive of said differences. However, some systems of belief, have more fundamental differences than similarities. A perfect example of two systems of belief that hold more fundamental differences from one another than similarities is the belief system of Secular Humanism and Buddhism. For the purpose of this paper when referring to Buddhism I am referring to Damien Keown’s interpretation of Buddha’s teachings and when referring to Secular Humanism I am referring to A.C. Grayling’s Secular Humanism. In order to properly determine if one system of belief has more fundamental differences than similarities one must use a comparative category to compare the two systems of belief. By using a comparative category one will be able to see how many similarities or differences a system of belief has concerning that particular category. For the remainder of this paper the comparative category I will use to display that Secular Humanism and Buddhism do in fact have more differences than similarities is bioethics with a focus of end of life decisions including passive and active euthanasia. In both Grayling’s Secular Humanist tradition and Keown’s Buddhism there are more fundamental differences than similarities regarding bioethics and end of life decisions due not to historical accident but instead due to the very nature and values that these two systems of belief hold dear.

Since the comparative category implemented to exhibit the inherent differences and similarities between Secular Humanism and Buddhism is bioethics with a focus on end of life decisions such as passive and active euthanasia it is therefore critical to understand how Secular Humanism defines death and how Buddhism defines death for without a concert definition from both it is impossible to progress and understand why there are more differences than similarities. Furthermore, understanding the two systems of belief definitions of death and why the definition is the way it is offers a look into the some of the systems of belief’s most fundamental principles, which is what truly causes these differences. For it is common in systems of belief for some of the most fundamental principles of said system of belief to be found concerning life and death. To start, Grayling’s Secular Humanism defines death as the permanent cessation of all bodily functions. Secular Humanism came to its definition of death through the use of medicine and technology. The use of medicine and technology shows one of the fundamental pillars of the belief system that Secular Humanists hold dear. This pillar or main tenet is that Secular Humanism is a belief system that is committed to utilizing scientific tools and theories in determining answers to questions therefore it is not unreasonable that when constructing a definition of death Secular Humanists use the most scientific means to create said definition: medicine and technology.

The Secular Humanist tradition’s definition of death is not far from how Keown’s Buddhism defines death which is the “irreversible loss of integrated organic function” (Keown 158). To understand this definition of death one must understand what integrated organic functioning encompasses when it comes to the body. Integrated organic functioning includes certain bodily functions that occur within the body such as respiration or a pulse. Since Buddhism requires that for an individual to be declared dead said individual must have the irreversible loss of integrated organic functioning Buddhism rejects that death occurs when one has an irreversible loss of their consciousness or higher mental faculties. This distinction between definitions means that in the Buddhist tradition a patient who happens to be in a coma and appears to exhibit an irreversible loss of consciousness and higher mental faculties would not be considered dead due to the fact that this same patient could still display and have integrated organic functioning.

While the Secular Humanist criterion for determining if a patient is alive or dead is determined through westernized medicine and technology and is relatively simple the Buddhist criterion for determining if an individual is alive or dead is slightly more complex. According to Damien Keown, the Buddhist’s criterion for death is “the irreversible loss of functions of the brainstem” (Keown 158). This criterion is supplemental to Buddhism’s definition of death for without brainstem functions organic function comes to a halt. Buddhism’s process of determining if an individual is in fact dead does not stop there. In fact, there are conditions to test Buddhism’s criterion of death. These conditions play a pivotal role in determining if an individual is dead. These conditions to determine if an individual is dead also show some of the fundamental principles of the religion. For example Buddhism expresses a great distaste for the famed Harvard Tests due to the fact that the Harvard Tests don’t take into consideration *cessation* (a Buddhist term that means an individual closely resembles death but will eventually regain full consciousness and all vital signs). In fact, an individual in a state of *cessation* would fail all the Harvard Tests used to determine if an individual happens to be alive. Under the Harvard Tests the individual in a *cessation* state would be declared dead even though said individual is not actually dead. For example, just because a patient is unresponsive (the first condition of the Harvard Tests) does not mean that said patient is unaware. A patient may be aware of external stimuli without being able to respond to said stimuli. Buddhism also has issues with the second condition of the Harvard Tests, which is the respirator is turned off for three minutes to see if the patient can’t breathe spontaneously, due to the fact that the brain can survive without oxygen for longer than three minutes. The third condition of the Harvard Tests is not free from scrutiny either due to the fact that “the unusual circumstances of patients who are dependent upon technological devices may render their physiological responses abnormal in some way or so make the tests unreliable” (Keown 157). However, under the tests set out by the Conference of Medical Royal Colleges in 1976 a patient in a state of *cessation* would not be considered dead therefore Buddhism tends to favor these tests.

By examining both Secular Humanism’s and Buddhism’s definition, criterion, and conditions or lack thereof for each system of belief one can observe some of the fundamental differences that separate these two systems of belief. Secular Humanism creates its definition of death based on science, or more specifically based on tests that utilize scientific technology and scientific fields such as medicine, while Buddhism’s definition, although utilizing scientific aspects such as loss of organic functioning and the tests created by the Conference of Royal Medical Colleges in 1976, has to comply with the teachings of the Buddha (the scripture). For example the reason Buddhism’s criterion for determining death is so is not entirely due to science but instead the criterion has to respect all four of the phenomena mentioned in the ancient sources. These four phenomena are vitality, heat, life-faculty, and *prana* all four of which are needed in an individual if said individual is considered to be living. *Prana* is the most important of the four due to the fact that *prana* is the “vital force of life and its function is to regulate the other humors responsible for bodily functions, such as breathing and swallowing” (Keown 152). When creating a criterion for death Buddhism had to relate *prana* to an actual part of human anatomy. Due to the integrating function of *prana* the part of human anatomy that resembles *prana* the most is the brainstem. Therefore when the brainstem is alive all four phenomena are present but when the brainstem is dead all four phenomena, *prana*, vitality, life-faculty, and heat, are absent meaning said individual is considered to be deceased. This necessity to create a criterion to determine death that must respect the ancient sources shows a stark contrast to Secular Humanism reveling that Buddhism relies on scripture or interprets the teachings of the Buddha, while Secular Humanism does not, for guidance. The point is further strengthened by the fact that in all likelihood a Secular Humanist would accept the Harvard Tests as conditions to determine death while a Buddhist will not because said tests ignore the *cessation* state, an important element in Buddhist culture that finds its origins in scripture, *The Greater Discourse on the Miscellany.*

With the definition, criterion, and conditions under which to test if an individual is indeed dead, from both systems of belief, understood it is possible to discuss the main topic that separates these two systems of belief regarding bioethics. This difference that is being referred to is euthanasia in both active and passive forms. Once again it is imperative to define euthanasia and its two forms. Euthanasia, in general, is defined “as the act or practice of causing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (such as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy-called also *mercy killing*”( Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The distinction between the two forms of euthanasia, active and passive, is made from how euthanasia is administered. This is evident in the definitions of passive and active euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is often distinguished from active euthanasia due to the fact that passive euthanasia is often defined as the intentional or deliberate causing of death by an omission while active euthanasia is often defined as the deliberate killing of one person by an act, such as ending a life by lethal injection. Secular Humanism believes there is not a moral difference between active and passive euthanasia and believes that euthanasia should be allowed as an option for all in end of life situations while Buddhism is against all forms of euthanasia except for special cases calling to question whether a physician is prolonging death, which is prohibited in Keown’s Buddhism. The reasons for this disagreement regarding the morality between the forms of euthanasia in general exemplifies some of the fundamental principles of these two systems of belief.

A Secular Humanist believes that there is not a moral difference between passive and active euthanasia due to the fact that a Secular Humanist tends to believe that when one deliberately does not do something it is as much of an act as doing something. This is a concept that is often known as sins of omission and sins of commission. In A.C. Grayling’s book *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and For Humanism,* Grayling touches upon the lack of difference between sins of omission and sins of commission thus displaying the lack of moral difference between active and passive euthanasia. Grayling asserts that “But there is, in fact, no moral difference between passive and active euthanasia, because deliberately not doing something is as much an act of doing something. The concept of theological ethics of ‘sins of commission and omission’ embodies a recognition that equal responsibility attaches to deliberate withholdings of action and choices not to act, just as it does to failing to act when action is required” ( Grayling 231). Essentially both sins of omission and commission, therefore passive and active euthanasia, are no different. Both involve choices that are made deliberately and they both garner the same outcome. Furthermore Grayling asserts that the only reason passive euthanasia is regarded as more acceptable is out of sentiment and that said sentiment is coming from “laypersons and moralists rather than those engaged in the care of the suffering and dying” (Grayling 231). A Secular Humanist also believes that euthanasia in general is permissible and that all human beings have the right to die just as they have the right to live. The fact that a Secular Humanist believes that euthanasia as a whole is permissible tells an individual a great deal about one of the main tenets of Secular Humanism which is the fact that Secular Humanism utilizes a Consequential Ethical System instead of a Command Ethical System, which is often found in systems of belief that are rooted in scripture and the systems’ morals are determined by an individual or deity whose followers are trying to emulate him and her. The weight of the difference between the two systems of ethics is perhaps the primary reason there are in fact more differences than similarities between these two systems of belief.

Unlike Grayling’s Secular Humanism, which believes that there is no moral difference between active and passive euthanasia and is open to euthanasia regarding end of life decisions in general, Keown’s Buddhism is against all forms of euthanasia except in certain circumstances. The reasons why Buddhism is, for the most part, against all forms of euthanasia are numerous. However, according to Damien Keown the main reason why Buddhism is against euthanasia, in both of its forms, is due to the fact that by administering and approving of euthanasia one is essentially saying that life is not one of the Three Basic Goods, which are life, knowledge, and friendship. Keown claims “In our view Buddhism is opposed to euthanasia essentially because of its affirmative valuation of life. To value death above life by ‘making death one’s aim’, or ‘eulogising death’, and so forth, is to deny that life is a basic good” (Keown 186-187). More specifically, Keown’s Buddhism is against active euthanasia because active euthanasia blatantly violates one of the Five Precepts. The Five Precepts are essentially guidelines for moral conduct. In a sense they are similar to Christianity’s Ten Commandments. The Five Precepts forbid the following: taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. The precept that active euthanasia, by its very definition, clearly violates is the first and arguably most important precept; taking life. The reasons behinds Keown’s Buddhism’s resistance against passive euthanasia is slightly more complex. Essentially Keown’s Buddhism’s is against passive euthanasia due to the fact that the doctor acts as the “knife bringer” or instrument of execution. It is worthy to note that Keown is using the same argument that Grayling argues to defend euthanasia, in both active and passive form, to refute euthanasia. This argument is that both active and passive euthanasia are morally equivalent. Keown asserts that if one acts as the “knife bringer” therefore helping catalyze the dying process, it is morally equivalent to actually killing an individual. It is also worthy to note that one of Buddhism’s three basic goods, life, comes into play regarding the morality of euthanasia. According to Keown “The notion of intentional killing always represents a failure to respect the inalienable dignity of living creatures” (Keown 45). Active euthanasia is clearly the intentional killing of a living creature.

However, there are exceptions or at least a gray area when it comes to passive euthanasia in the Buddhist tradition. In Buddhism it is strictly prohibited, by the Five Precepts, to take a life. With that being said, in Buddhism there is no duty to go to extreme lengths to preserve life at all costs. In fact, according to Keown, “Buddhism would have no objection in principle to doctors discontinuing a treatment which was either futile, or excessively burdensome to the patient in relation to its expected benefits” (Keown 167). Furthermore there is no requirement in Buddhism to treat patients who happened to be in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) that develop subsequent complications like pneumonia. At first glance this seems like a blaring contradiction regarding end of life matters. How is not treating a patient for an infection they develop while in a PVS condition by withholding treatment of said infection, therefore letting them die which is passive euthanasia, any different than being the “knife bringer”? Is not treating a patient’s infection, which will cause the patient to die, the same as being the instrument of execution? The answer to the following questions is no. Keown asserts that when dealing with patients in the PVS condition, where euthanasia, especially passive, is most likely to be considered, “any course of treatment which is contemplated must be assessed against the background of the prognosis of overall recovery” (Keown 167). Essentially Keown is saying that it would be useless to “embark on a series of piecemeal treatments, none of which would produce a net improvement in the patient’s overall condition, it would often be appropriate to reach the conclusion that the patient was beyond medical help” (Keown 167). It is the fact that the patient was beyond medical help that deems the withholding of treatment morally acceptable and not a case of one being the instrument of execution.

By examining Keown’s Buddhism’s stance on both active and passive euthanasia and the morality of the two it is clear, once again, that Buddhism came to these conclusions regarding the morality of passive and active euthanasia, and in a larger sense euthanasia as a whole, through the interpretation of scripture and the Buddha’s teachings, a fundamental difference that separates Secular Humanism and Buddhism. In fact, the reasons, explained above, why Buddhism is against euthanasia comes directly from the teachings of the Buddha. For example Keown tells the story of a group monks who killed themselves through the aid of Migalandika, a “sham recluse” who killed the monks with a large knife. Halfway through slaying the monks Migalandika apparently felt some remorse. However, when feeling this remorse the devil appeared and told Migalandika that he was doing the monks a favor by killing them, thus implying that death is better than life. What is truly important in the story is the Buddha’s apparent response. Essentially the Buddha claimed that whoever kills a monk outright or “Looks about to be his knife-bringer” are both morally at fault. In a more modern sense this story shows that the Buddhist Precepts prohibit killing even when the person being killed requests assistance in dying. Cleary this can be applied to passive and active euthanasia which, as one can assume, Buddhism has in fact applied this teaching of the Buddha to euthanasia. It is important to note that Buddhism is against euthanasia because it is against the fundamental values of the system of belief and the Buddha’s teachings. Buddhism finds fundamental morals through scripture and the Buddha’s teachings and applies these morals to make moral decisions, a stark difference, in fact a fundamental difference from the way Secular Humanism makes moral decisions.

Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism are not different in every way. In fact Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism both believe in bodily autonomy. With that being said, the reasons why these two systems of belief believe in bodily autonomy are different and in the case of Buddhism there are more “guidelines” a follower must abide by. In the case of Grayling’s Secular Humanism the case for autonomy is simple: since one’s body does not belong to a deity one can do what they please with their own body as long as one does not harm others in the process. In fact, according to Grayling “The great sin, as this implies, is harming others” (Grayling 194). Furthermore, autonomy is one of most important aspects of Grayling’s Humanism. Humanism is the ethics behind Secular Humanism. The importance of autonomy is exemplified when a Humanist is confronted with the question “What is the meaning of life?”. Grayling asserts that from a Humanistic perspective the only reasonable answer is “What you make it” (Grayling 162). The fact that the meaning of life is determined by the individual and not a higher power further displays the fact that autonomy plays a huge role in Humanism. With that being said Grayling’s Secular Humanism is not without certain “requirements”. Grayling claims that the one obligation all humanists must have is *to think*. Moreover, Grayling also claims that if one is to call themselves a Humanist one must be willing to think about philosophical questions in life and be willing to change his or her views if a more logically sound view backed by evidence is presented.

In regards to bodily autonomy in Keown’s Buddhism there are even more conditions to abide by. According to Keown an individual has bodily autonomy but said individual must attempt to follow the Nobel Eightfold Path, The Five Precepts, and the Three Basic Goods. In a grander sense an individual practicing Buddhism must follow the teachings of the Buddha. The word of the Buddha’s teachings are referred to as Dharma which is the “immutable laws of both natural and moral orders of which they are expression” (Keown x). An individual who practices Buddhism must also attempt to follow the Nobel Eight Fold Path which, according to Kewon, “is a programme for right living which emphasizes three things: moral cultivation, meditation, and knowledge of the true nature of the human condition” (Keown x). Furthermore, an individual that practices Buddhism also must abide by the Five Precepts (Not taking a life, not stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and not taking intoxicants) in respect to moral conduct. Lastly, an individual who wishes to practice Buddhism must attempt to follow the Three Basic Goods. The Three Basic Goods are values that Buddhism holds dear. The Three Basic Goods according to Kewon are life, knowledge, and friendship. As stated before, these “basic” goods are fundamental values in the Buddhist tradition due to the fact that if an individual follows these basic goods said individual can “transcend limitations such as ignorance and selfishness and come more fully what their nature allows” ( Keown 44).

It is obvious that although Keown’s Buddhism does believe in and values bodily autonomy there are many conditions one must follow while maintaining bodily autonomy. It is also worth noting that the conditions that Grayling’s Secular Humanism has concerning bodily autonomy and the conditions Keown’s Buddhism has concerning bodily autonomy are vastly different. The conditions for Grayling Secular Humanism are less detailed and regimented than the conditions concerning Keown’s Buddhism. Furthermore, the conditions surrounding bodily autonomy in Buddhism find their origins in the teaching of the Buddha while the conditions surrounding bodily autonomy in Grayling’s Secular Humanism are derived from the ethics of Humanism. This is an important distinction because this distinction shows that although both systems of belief believe and value the same thing, bodily autonomy, the restrictions the two systems put on bodily autonomy come from very different sources. Sources that are fundamentally different in nature thus leading to fundamental differences between these two systems of belief.

It is clear that these two systems of belief, Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism, differ more than concur regarding bioethics. The reasons for these differences though are not due to historical accident. These differences did not just appear. The differences between Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism are in fact due to the very nature and values these two systems of belief hold dear. This statement is not unreasonable in any sense of the word. All one has to do to see how the differences between Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism are caused by the very nature and values the two systems of belief hold dear is by looking at how these said systems of belief stand on certain issues and why these systems of belief have differing particular stances on certain issues.

As mentioned in a previous section in the paper Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism have a different definition of death. It was made clear that the reason why these two systems of belief had a different definition of death was that these two systems of belief constructed their respective definitions relying on two different sources. Secular Humanism constructed its definition through science while Keown’s Buddhism constructed its definition through science but had to respect the teachings of the Buddha. This is evident through the fact that Keown’s Buddhism rejects the Harvard Tests as a method for testing if an individual is indeed dead due to the fact that the Harvard Tests do not take into consideration the state of *cessation,* a state that is important in Buddhism. Secular Humanism on the other hand would be more than willing to use the Harvard Tests to determine if an individual is dead. This difference between ways to determine if someone is indeed deceased shows a fundamental difference between the two systems of beliefs. Grayling’s Secular Humanism relies on science and technology to determine if an individual is deceased while Buddhism always has to respect and consult the teachings of the Buddha in determining whether an individual is deceased. This fundamental difference between these two systems of belief is caused by the very nature of the beliefs. Buddhism must respect and consult the teachings of the Buddha when dealing with moral or ethical problems while Grayling’s Secular Humanism does not have to consult any sort of scripture or teachings. It is very the nature of the systems of belief that cause the difference in constructing their respective definitions on death.

Another value that is the cause of differences between these two systems of belief is that Grayling’s Secular Humanism places a huge emphasis on thinking for oneself. In fact it can be argued that the ability to question other philosophies and even other ideas in general is a fundamental value to Humanism, the ethics behind Grayling’s Secular Humanism. In fact when formulating on opinion or view in Grayling’s Secular Humanism the one condition an individual must follow is that the individual must be willing to change his or her opinion or view if a better more logical view is presented, backed by evidence. In Keown’s Buddhism however, one must trust one’s opinion. This is not to say that Buddhism prohibits or frowns upon one’s personal opinion it’s just that one’s opinion is not as definite concerning ethical matters. This test is used to see if one’s “opinion may work successfully in cases where there is a scriptural precedent for the matter at hand” (Keown 14). Keown also acknowledges Buddhagos’a comprehensive hermeneutical strategy which is used for guidance when the question one is asking is not directly in a canonical source. The hierarchy is as follows: 1.Scripture (sutta) itself 2. That which is ‘in conformity with scripture’ (suttanuloma) 3. The commentarial tradition (acariyavada) 4. Personal opinion (attanomati). What is important to note about this hermeneutical strategy is the fact that one’s personal opinion is ranked last on this hierarchy. In Grayling’s Secular Humanism the ranking would be the opposite, with one’s personal opinion on top of the hierarchy. The emphasis placed on personal opinion in Grayling’s Secular Humanism, and the fact that thinking for one’s self is a fundamental value of Secular Humanism, and less emphasis placed on personal opinion in Keown’s Buddhism causes differences between the two systems of belief regarding bioethics mainly due to the fact that autonomy is directly related to the ability’s to think for one’s self thus is directly related to one’s opinion. How is one supposed to have bodily autonomy if one cannot think for themselves? In Keown’s Buddhism one has the ability to think for one’s self but one must attempt to live life according to the teachings of the Buddha while in Secular Humanism all one must do is think and not harm others. This necessity to live by the teachings of the Buddha (follow the Noble Eightfold Path , Obey the Five Precepts etc.) and make moral and ethical decisions off those teachings is a necessity that Secular Humanism does not have thus leading to differences regarding bioethical matters.

Although the role science and scripture play in both Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism and the emphasis, or lack thereof, placed on thinking for oneself are values and important aspects of these two systems of belief that lead to differences regarding end of life matters, the main overarching reason Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism disagree more often than agree regarding bioethical issues is because Buddhism employs a Command System of ethics while Secular Humanism employs a Consequential System of ethics. In fact the very nature of Secular Humanism is that it utilizes a Consequential Ethical System just like at Buddhism’s core there lies a Command System of ethics. It is not unreasonable to state that the relative weight of this difference between ethical systems, Command, and Consequential, is the greatest of all the differences between these two systems of belief. The reason why the difference between ethical systems is the greatest difference between these two systems of belief is because every ethical and moral decision, and discussion in general, steams from these two ethical systems. All the other difference these two systems of belief have regarding bioethics can be traced back to the fact that these two systems of belief have different ethical systems. Before getting into examples of how these two ethical systems are so impactful it is important to define what a Command System of ethics is and what a Consequential System of ethics is. A Command System of ethics is defined as ethics in which right and wrong are defined in advance generally by a divine being or a being whose followers believe has some form of moral superiority while a Consequential System of ethics is defined as ethics that are judged by results.

Now that the definitions of a Command Ethical System and a Consequential Ethical System are understood it is now appropriate to discuss how these two ethical systems lie at the heart of Keown’s Buddhism (Command) and Grayling’s Secular Humanism (Consequential) and how they are the main difference, the fundamental difference with the most weight, that truly cause there to be more differences than similarities between Keown’s Buddhism and Grayling’s Secular Humanism regarding bioethics. Buddhism clearly fits into the Command Ethical system based on the fact that moral rights and wrongs (The Five Precepts) and an ethical framework (The Three Basic Goods) are already in place from the teachings of the Buddha. Just as Keown’s Buddhism fits nicely into the mold of Command Ethics Grayling’s Secular Humanism fits perfectly into the mold of a Consequential Ethical system by emphasizing autonomy and freedom of thought. In fact Humanism, the ethical portion of Secular Humanism, is consequential in nature. It is worthy to note here that systems of belief that reject a divine being tend to employ a Consequential System of Ethics. Secular Humanism rejects religious values and the presence of a divine entity further supporting the fact that Secular Humanism does indeed employ a Consequential Ethical system.

As mentioned before all differences between Keown’s Buddhism and Grayling’s Secular Humanism stem from the differing ethical systems employed by the two systems of belief. For example Keown’s Buddhism is against euthanasia, except for treatments of futility in respects to passive euthanasia, due to the fact that euthanasia and the arguments surrounding it, insinuate that in some cases death is better than life. Keown’s Buddhism is against the line of thinking based on the fact that insinuating that death is better than life, in some instances, is against the teaching of the Buddha. The fact that Buddhism is against euthanasia due to pre-determined morals and an ethical frameworks created by an “enlightened” clearly shows the employment of a Command Ethical System. Therefore, the scriptural reasons Keown’s Buddhism has for resisting euthanasia can be linked back to the fact that at Buddhism’s ethical core there lies a Command System of ethics. Grayling’s Secular Humanism is for both forms of euthanasia because Grayling asserts there is no moral difference between active and passive euthanasia. This lack of moral difference between active and passive euthanasia, according to Grayling’s Secular Humanism, is because of a Consequential Ethical System. Through both forms of euthanasia the patient ends up deceased. Therefore, since in a Consequential Ethical System ethics are judged by results, and the result is the same (the patient is dead), the morality is also the same. It is clear through these two examples that all the differences between Keown’s Buddhism and Grayling’s Secular Humanism can be traced back to the two very different ethical systems that lie at the heart of each system of belief.

Religion is without doubt one of the most impactful and influential elements on the planet. There is not an issue, be it social, ethical, moral, or political that religion has not impacted or at least noticed and touched upon it. It is also true that all religions, which are essentially systems of belief, share similar characteristics. However, some systems of belief share more differences than similarities. The perfect example of this is A.C. Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Damien Keown’s Buddhism. The comparative category used to determine if these two systems of belief do indeed have more differences than similarities is bioethics with an emphasis on end of life decisions. Through the differences in definitions, criterion, and conditions that determine if an individual is deceased and the differing opinions on the morality of both active and passive euthanasia and euthanasia in general it is clear that Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism have more differences than similarities regarding bioethics and end of life decisions. Furthermore, the reasons for these differences are not due to historical accident but instead due to the values and nature of the systems of belief themselves. Although many values play a role in the reason why Grayling’s Secular Humanism and Keown’s Buddhism disagree on many aspects of bioethics the most impactful is the fact that Buddhism at its very core utilizes a Command System of ethics while Secular Humanism utilizes a Consequential System of ethics to determine moral right and wrongs.

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