



Voluntary Death to Alleviate Suffering: Euthanasia and suicide according to the Pali- canon, several Pr?timoks?a rules and some Chinese ?gama-s?tras

By R.C. van Oosterwijk



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If craving for existence leads to suffering, one might conclude that suicide is a solution, but if the desire for death is also a form of craving, it is also an origin of suffering. However, there are suttas which describe suicide by monks, and the Buddha did not always condemn those monks for their actions. This book discusses why some specific cases of suicide were not condemned. The author investigates in which cases suicide falls under the transgressions as determined in canonical Buddhist doctrines, and in which circumstances it does not.

On first sight Euthanasia seems to transgress The First Buddhist Precept (not to kill). The Pali-Vinaya mentions the case of helping some monks to die voluntarily and includes this in the rule against killing a human being. Does any relationship on these points exist between the canonical Pali texts, other Pr?timoks?a rules or the Chinese ?gama traditions?

The author concludes that euthanasia is against the canonical Pali rules in all cases, based on canonical Pali texts of the Therav?da-Buddhism, as well as by the texts of several other traditions. He suggests that suicide is implied in the rule about killing a human being in the Pali Vinaya. Since there is craving involved, it is difficult to believe that monks who committed suicide were Arahants at the moment they decided to kill themselves.

This study is written for those who are intrigued by seeming contradictions in the positions of Buddhism regarding suicide and euthanasia. It gives all the relevant canonical quotes in English so you can draw your own conclusions.



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