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Negotiating Dignity in Human Suffering: Moral Reasoning about Pain and Suffering and Its
Interactions with the Valuing and Flourishing of Life

By

Yuna Kim

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Elliot Turiel, Chair

Professor Laura Sterponi

Professor Glynda Hull

Spring 2026

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By

Yuna Kim

Abstract

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Professor Elliot Turiel, Chair

Despite universal consensus on life's intrinsic value, the coordination of context-specific considerations, and the subjectivity, or interpretative nature of moral issues, lead to varied interpretations of this value, and varied expressions of the shared desire to preserve life. The subjectivity of moral judgments obtains salience in situations of pain and suffering, requiring the moral, psychological examination of people's reasoning about philosophically oriented issues of living, dying, and pain and suffering. This study sought to examine reasoning about (1) the value of life, including about the presumed goodness of its preservation, in the context of diminished quality of life due to experiences of pain and suffering, and (2) the interaction between experiences of pain and suffering and eudaimonic interests, and conceptualizations of the meaning, purpose, and value of suffering. The study newly coded and analyzed existing clinical interview data from adults of two age cohorts ($N = 87$), including college students ($n = 48$, $M_{age} = 20.17$, $SD = 1.09$), and older adults ($n = 39$, $M_{age} = 39.13$, $SD = 4.40$), from a larger, ongoing study on the value of life. Two general, abstract questions addressed concepts of the right to live, and the permissibility of ending life, which were grounded in two contextualized, hypothetical situations about ending one's life due to illness, and death as punishment for ending another's life. Participant evaluations showed cooccurring majority support across age cohorts, for the right to live, and for permissibility of the exceptional ending of life, including in the context of greatly diminished quality of life due to serious illness. Evaluations also showed majority rejection of death as punishment, revealing the ultimate goal of the upholding of human dignity across situations. Justifications for evaluations were primarily classified into the moral domain of social knowledge across questions, except for that regarding illness, which primarily involved concerns of the personal domain. The predominantly moral nature of issues of living and dying does not limit application of the intrinsic value of life to a strict prioritization of the continuation of life, but rather allows for interpretations of the preservation of personhood and dignity. Moral responsibility pursues options for the preservation and negotiation of dignity within the circumstantial unfulfillment of human functioning and flourishing, in a way that coexists in necessary tension, with the conviction of the universal, intrinsic, and sacred value of life.

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Chapter 1: Value of Life

The pervasive reality of pain and suffering has posed a problem for the meaning and value of life evident in philosophical, religious, and psychological and scientific thought. The matter of the preservation of life and prevention of harm represent the crux of moral concern. This desire for the preservation of life presumes the goodness of the existence and continuation of human life, and yet the reality of the quality of life often fails to afford the sense of flourishing through which an individual deems life to be good, or worthy of living. This apparent tension stems from the universal acceptance of the intrinsic, sacred or inviolable value of life (Dworkin, 1993) in the midst of lived experiences that appear to lack intrinsic goodness in significant domains of life, signaling the vulnerability inherent to the human condition, in the context of a flawed world. In fact, experiences of pain and suffering can make living feel less like flourishing than the ending of life. This study examined how people reason about the value of life, including about the presumed goodness of its preservation, in the context of diminished quality of life due to experiences of pain and suffering. The study also examined reasoning on the interaction between experiences of pain and suffering and eudaimonic interests, and conceptualizations of the meaning, purpose, and value of suffering. These questions require an exploration of the moral, psychological dimensions of the concepts of pain and suffering that capture its frustrations, as well as its interactions with human functioning and flourishing, and the construction and coordination of moral knowledge (Nucci, 2014; Nussbaum, 2000; Turiel, 1983).

Intrinsic Value

A proper examination of the apparent dissonance between the presumed goodness of the preservation and continuation of life, and the variability of the quality of life and ability for flourishing, requires an analysis of the value of life, with a particular focus on the related concept of dignity. The unique immeasurability and irreplaceability of human life endow it with a value distinct from that associated with other goods. Value refers to both measure and the notion of immeasurability. Often associated with economic worth, it also exists outside of customary systems of measurement. Intrinsic value is characterized by the latter, but it carries its own, unique brand of worth. Intrinsic value differs from value stemming from utility, characteristic of useful material goods. This kind of instrumental value refers to the worth of objects which without their utility, would cease to be valuable. Subjective value refers to the attachment of individual favor to the attribution of value. Most people hold their lives with subjective value (Dworkin, 1993). According to Dworkin (1993), human life possesses an intrinsic value, and specifically, that which is sacred or inviolable. This value differs from an intrinsic, but incremental value, as it is not necessarily preferable to have more of life simply because extant lives are valuable. The sacred quality of the intrinsic value of human life reflects the irreplicable individuality of each human life. This irreplicable intrinsic value cannot be multiplied and must not be commodified, for it exists in the very being or object of value (Dworkin, 1993). The inability to replicate life at will contributes to the mystery of its existence and pull toward preservation, for it exudes a rarity. This rarity, or preciousness, applies regardless of the great number of human beings in this world. Indeed, it carries an element of unknowing from the moment of entry into consciousness and again at its exit, and in this sense, it is unable to be fully

manipulated according to human will. The concept of the value of life is intimately familiar, and simultaneously foreign.

Sacredness

The quality of inviolability or sacredness distinguishes the value specific to human life from other forms of intrinsic value, and its transcendence of both calculable, reproducible value warrants further exploration. According to Dworkin (1993), the first marker of sacredness is when intentional destruction would violate what otherwise deserves honor. Human lives, as well as artistic works, on a different level, are imbued with creation value. This creation value is held in the highest esteem, as evidenced by the unparalleled, visceral reaction to the suggestion of, or actual, extinction of human life. There is a selectivity about this attribution of value, however. The loss of creation perceived as natural, including human cultures and languages, species of animals, or even human-made artistic works, is considered more tragic than that of inorganic, human-made objects like vehicles (Dworkin, 1993). Thus, sacredness includes the quality of being irreplaceable. The prime example of this notion is, of course, captured by human life. Human life has a “spark” (Nussbaum, 2000), also reflected in human-made creations, to different degrees, for there is a transfer of that productive value; creation reflects the one who has created, functioning as an extension of being. Appreciation and respect for this creation value, whether it stems from beliefs of the divine, the processes of evolution, or both, greatly contribute to the sacredness of life (Dworkin, 1993).

Investment History

The second element of sacredness presses into this notion of creation, or productive value. Dworkin (1993) describes people as works of art, due to the investment history of each life. Each life is uniquely valuable because it possesses, and is a product of, a unique set of dispositions, purposes, accomplishments, developmental history, and relationships. Each life operates in a past, present, and future web of attachments. Death sheds a unique light on this investment history. Because life is intrinsically valuable, it is also intrinsically tragic when life ends prematurely (Dworkin, 1993). It is the threatening prospect of life’s extinction that allows for the most intimate examination into its value, prompting a look into why its preservation ought to be desired. This element of threat to life often appears in hypothetical dilemmas seeking to assess people’s responses to questions of life and death. Ceasing to exist extinguishes the value inherent to this life, as it is based in the being, creating a frustration of prior investment. Investment of the self and others in an individual life likely increases with the passage of time. Thus, the longer the period of investment, or life, the greater the frustration of productive value in death (Dworkin, 1993). Each death represents a waste of investment, but death perceived as untimely draws greater attention to this dynamic of wasted past investment and future productive potential. This dynamic appears in variations of hypothetical moral dilemmas that place the value of human lives against one another. As Dworkin (1993) illustrates, the death of a teenager would be more tragic than that of an infant due to this subtle balance of time and investment. However, this perception may change if one were to know that this teenager possessed an extremely flawed character and would perpetuate great future harm onto others, and that the infant would grow up to become a person contributing a medical cure that would save many lives. This kind of thought experimentation can stretch on endlessly, producing a hypothetical gambling with questions of life and death, and introducing an unease to the notion of intrinsic value. Nevertheless, this hypothetical weighing depicts nuances reflected in realistic decisions about life. Rather than

undermining the sacredness of life, it shows that judgments about life and death cannot be removed from their context, which brings into consideration qualitative distinctions attached to each individual life. The intersection of intrinsic, instrumental, and subjective value is complex in social judgments about life. For example, one can understand the intrinsic value of all human lives, while also regarding the life of a loved one with subjectively greater value than the life of a stranger. Instrumental value may stem from self-oriented thoughts and emotions of desire and need for a person to remain in one's life (Dworkin, 1993). The personal and collective labor involved in the sustaining and flourishing of each life from birth to death produces a sense of responsibility for its continued preservation and flourishing.

Personal Value and Dignity

Identification of intrinsic value alone, confines the value of human life to an existential realm. The reality of human embodiment necessitates the parallel exploration of the subjective, or personal value of life, with which humans regard their own life. Most people subjectively value their life, and they also have an investment in matters of the end of their life. The application of subjective value, otherwise attributable to non-critical objects, to human life, elevates the significance of this personal value to one inherent to each individual's right to live. Therefore, intrinsic value, which exists independently of perception of desire or need, is intertwined with the personal value that grants each individual an urgency of the preservation of their life (Dworkin, 1993). A proper examination of the value of life thus addresses the non-dichotomous, intrinsic and personal values inherent to the human experience. Iglesias (2001) describes the universality of human beings, and the distinction of individual "human persons," stating, "our humanity is of a personal kind" (p. 118). The types of value that Dworkin (1993) attributes to human life appear to align with his (Dworkin, 2011) components of dignity. The principles of self-respect and authenticity comprise the concept of dignity, and function as essential conditions for living well. Self-respect concerns the seriousness with which one approaches the undertaking of their life, without wasting their chance at life. This acceptance of the weightiness of life pairs with authenticity, or the personal determination and pursuit of the requirements of living well particular to oneself. The pursuit of a dignified life begins with, and extends beyond one's foundational conviction of the intrinsic value of life, to ground this conviction in the personalized expression of one's intrinsic value. This expression of authenticity involves an integrity evidenced by an alignment of one's pursuits toward, and beliefs about living well, contributing to a coherence of one's lived narrative. Individuals possess a personal responsibility to uphold the dignity of their own lives through the pursuit of value, and not intentional waste, even in cases of limited autonomy (Dworkin, 1993, 2011). This requirement of the moral treatment of one's life accords with FitzPatrick's (2013) conception of dignity as a "moral status" (p. 1), which grants unearned worth and prompts respect. The value of life relates to dignity, which based on the equal worth of all people, makes human beings deserving of respect and the liberty to pursue a life they deem good, and of moral treatment as ends in themselves rather than means for the goals of others (Dworkin, 1993, 2011; Nussbaum, 1999).

Interpretations of Intrinsic Value

Exploration of the value of life ought not to dispute the presence of intrinsic value, but rather assess the intricacies and discrepancies in judgments among those arriving at the point of decision-making involving questions of life and death, especially when these differences are perceived to threaten or conflict with one's own interpretation or expression of the importance of

the value of life (Dworkin, 1993). Furthermore, questions of life and death belong to, and in a fundamental way, shape, the issue of morality, for morality according to Turiel (1983), concerns justice, rights, welfare, and the prevention of harm within human interactions. Rationality reacts, at the very least, with a deep sense of unease to significant moral violations. The universality of the belief of the inherent value of life affords its objectivity. Dworkin (1993) likens recognition of the value of life to a gravitational force, referring to an undeniable pull toward the preservation of existing life. Agreement on the inherent value of life suggests that something other than the actual value of life is at the core of why people disagree and argue. Dworkin proposes that the paradoxical universality of appreciation of life and disagreement around issues of living and dying, stem from the different interpretations of the value of life. Judgments made in interaction with individual contexts introduce complexity to the foundational consensus around life's significance. Because of this consensus, effective engagement with the issue of the value of life requires not only an exploration of notions associated with the value of life, but also the processes involved in individual judgments leading to the complexity of interpretations around life and death (Dworkin, 1993; Turiel, 2010b).

The process of naturally arising opportunities requiring decision-making contributes to the formation of people's views on these issues. It is generally difficult to predict which unique collection of experiences will shape each individual throughout the span of their life (Dworkin, 1993). This illustrates both the natural process of judgment, arising from experiences and interactions in the world, as well as the complexity and variety of circumstances and reactions characteristic of human life. As with other elements of social knowledge, humans develop understandings about the value of one's own and others' lives through their experiences in the world. The primary classification of situations involving the value of life into the moral domain of knowledge suggests that these issues invoke some of the deepest experienced beliefs and emotions. It is characteristic of issues of the value of life to attain high profile controversy with the manifestation of universal beliefs in diverse, individual contexts. The intensity of these beliefs may be partly attributed to the inherent awareness of the "spark" of life unique to humans, but it is through interactions with the world that people form theories that translate into the application of their beliefs and coordination of the different considerations involved in each situation (Dworkin, 1993; Nussbaum, 2000; Turiel, 1983).

Psychological Concepts of the Value of Life

Concepts of the value of life, and issues concerning the quality of life have been extensively analyzed in philosophical thought, but lack representation in psychological research. The following section presents an overview of the limited, but nevertheless significant psychological research relevant to the value of life, through the constructivist, structural-developmental approaches to moral development following in the tradition of Piaget (1932/1997) and Kohlberg (1969). Through what was a revolutionary study of moral development via the structural-developmental approach in his time, Kohlberg (1971) aimed to establish "definitional-philosophical groundings" for the psychological study of morality, or the necessary alignment of psychological exploration of morality and moral development, with the philosophically established universality of moral concepts, rather than from abounding theories based in non-empirical phenomena (Kohlberg, 1971; Turiel, 2008, p. 22). It was necessary to separate from theories built on transmission of information from the environment, or unconscious thought, to define moral judgments as part of the construction of reason. The gravity of the study of moral

development stems from the fact that, as Turiel (1983, 2015) writes, morality concerns social relationships based in welfare, rights, justice, and the prevention of harm.

In his work on moral development, Piaget (1932/1997) conceives of two universal stages, in which social relationships are defined first by constraint in heteronomy, and then by cooperation in autonomy. He bases his analyses on his observations of children's games of marbles, interpreting these interactions as representative of children's perceptions of authority and societal practices. He also gathers information from hypothetical situations regarding acts of wrongdoing. Piaget determines that heteronomy stems from unilateral respect, or respect for rules given by adults in authority. Children's thinking that accords all-knowing to adults in authority prevents mutuality and the exercise of autonomous choice in the relationship (Kohlberg 1963/2008; Piaget, 1932/1997). This stage of thinking also involves moral realism, which consists of total obedience to rules as fixed, and objective responsibility. Objective responsibility refers to the literal interpretation of an action according to the rule without consideration of the intent of actors. Children progress from this cognitive state of egocentrism, and lack of differentiation between self and other, to understandings of other perspectives. The stage of autonomy appears with the shift from egocentric to reciprocal interactions. Children are released from seeing rules as fixed, through the development of, and reliance on peer relationships as the main medium for interaction, rather than relationships primarily with parents as in the younger years. The characteristics of the heteronomous stage prevent the formation of noncontingent moral judgments, as also shown by responses of Piaget's subjects to hypothetical situations. In a set of hypothetical situations exploring the dynamic between judgment of wrongdoing, and unintended or intended damage, children consider the actual amount of damage as the appropriate gauge for wrongdoing, rather than the intent. For example, Piaget's subject, six-year-old Geo, believes it to be wrong that the boy in the proposed situation broke multiple cups, despite acknowledging that it was not on purpose. He believes to be less naughty, the character who broke one cup while attempting to retrieve the jam without permission. Reliance on external sources of morality, as well as the inability to accurately understand notions of intent and appropriate guilt illustrate the challenges involved in children's moral judgments within the Piagetian perspective. Judgments about life and death especially require an ability to discern intent. The sacredness attributed to rules, along with the lack of understanding of intent, discourage the ability to recognize the sacredness of the value of life, inherent to judgments about life and death (Fleming, 2005; Kohlberg, 1963/2008; Piaget 1932/1997).

Kohlberg's Treatment of the Value of Life

Kohlberg (1963/2008) formulates a presumably universal, six-stage model of moral development based on analyses of qualitative interviews with children and adolescents involving a set of hypothetical moral dilemmas assessing concepts of obedience to authority and concerns of welfare. In the Kohlbergian model, moral value exists in distinct *value-orientations* divided into three levels consisting of the *pre-moral*, *morality of conventional role-conformity*, and *morality of self-accepted moral principles* (Kohlberg, 1963/2008, p. 9). The first of Kohlberg's six stages centers on obedience and punishment, egocentrism, and objective responsibility, characteristics shared with Piaget's (1932/1997) heteronomous stage. Conscience fittingly manifests as a fear of external punishment. Interestingly, Kohlberg does not see the primary role of the awe of adults and their rules, as conceived by Piaget, even in the earlier stages of children's moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1963/2008). Also pre-moral, the second stage centers

primarily on self-satisfaction, motivated by a desire for personal and material benefit. Newly introduced elements of mutual reciprocity and benefit are tempered by lingering egocentrism. The third stage, or the “good boy/girl” stage involves an orientation toward approval and people-pleasing, especially of those closest to the child, motivated by the possibility of disapproval from others and guilt (Kohlberg, 1969). The fourth stage involves an orientation toward respect for authority, duty, and maintenance of the social order, motivated by the possibility of dishonor. Kohlberg believes that most adults, though not all, operate at this stage, with attainment of the near philosophical ideas of the upper stages reserved for a few individuals, including Martin Luther King Jr. With a focus on conformity to shared standards, the fifth stage, or the social contract stage, introduces an understanding of an arbitrariness of rules or expectations for the purpose of consensus. This is motivated by respect for individuals and community, including an element of self-respect. In the sixth stage, morality takes the form of universal principles, as the motivation turns inward to avoid self-condemnation for violating one’s own principles. Here, conscience becomes the final determinant of right and wrong (Fleming, 2005; Kohlberg, 1963/2008, 1969).

Kohlberg (1971) applies these value-orientations to the value of life in an organization of his *Six Stages in Conceptions of the Moral Worth of Human Life*, with advancement through the stages marked by greater differentiation of previously conflated concepts. According to this model, the conception of the value of life begins with a lack of differentiation between the moral, and the physical or status-based values of life, seemingly contingent on the perceived importance of the individual. In the second stage, life takes on an instrumental value relative to the desires of the individual or others, with a preliminary capacity to differentiate between one’s value to self and others. The value of life becomes contingent on empathy or affection in the third stage, with differentiation between relational, human love, and the, at times, instrumental attachment to animals. In the fourth stage, the value of life takes on a sacredness in its orientation toward respect for duty and maintenance of, and attachment to the moral or religious order. The fifth stage transforms attachment to order, into a respect for community welfare, and introduces a conception of life as a universal human right, independent of other values. The sixth stage differentiates the moral value of the individual as beyond acknowledgement of their rights (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971).

Both Piaget (1932/1997) and Kohlberg (1969, 1971) approach moral development with a focus on cognitive developmental progressions. Like Piaget, Kohlberg’s theory of moral development includes not only a pre-moral stage, but it also deems the second level of conventional role-conformity, a form of morality. Although the stages replace, and are reorganizations of, rather than additions to the knowledge of prior stages, it is not until the sixth stage that individuals process moral value from a position of internally and independently motivated choice. Therefore, it makes sense that Kohlberg’s stages do not map onto, and have significant differences from Piaget’s stage advancement. For Kohlberg, these value-orientations are not necessarily chronologically more moral as they are qualitatively different. Nevertheless, both theories support the increasing capacity to make moral judgments, but the different interpretations of the substance and progressions of moral value necessitate further clarification of the process of moral judgments. Furthermore, it appears to have been not only an issue of the substance of moral value, but more so one of the conflation of moral and non-moral concerns. Kohlberg’s dilemmas were designed to have subjects select from obedience to convention and

concerns related to human welfare, even as judgments about life transcend straightforward moral and conventional considerations.

In line with his value-orientations, Kohlberg's design of his moral dilemmas centers on a conflict between two predetermined issues conceived as moral. For example, the classic Heinz dilemma assesses judgments of the permissibility of a husband stealing a drug that would cure his wife's cancer, which he can only obtain from a pharmacist who requires a large payment the husband cannot afford, hence a conflict between theft and saving a life. A dichotomous presentation of the supposedly moral values of the preservation of life, and compliance with the law positions participants to select between the predetermined values, with arguments in support of theft interpreted as support for the preservation of life, and arguments against theft interpreted as support for the law (Colby et al., 1978). This forced selection between the moral issue of the preservation of life, and the issue of the law, inaccurately classified as a moral concern, in the context of a realistically complex and multi-faceted moral case, reveals the importance of a more open-ended approach to the assessment of people's reasoning about moral situations. Despite conceptual and methodological constraints pertaining to the substance of moral value as well as a hierarchical conflation of non-moral and moral concerns, Piaget's and Kohlberg's attention to cognitive processes in development, their support of interactions with the environment rather than transference of morality, and their identification and exploration of moral judgments as distinct, to an extent, from other social judgments, contribute to psychological understandings of the value of life (Turiel, 2008).

Social Domains

Consideration of judgments about the value of human life first requires an examination of the structure of thought through which humans make social judgments. In line with Piaget's emphasis on action as the source of thought (Ginsburg & Oppen, 1988; Piaget, 1932/1997), Turiel (1983) establishes that humans construct knowledge through reciprocal interactions with and experiences of the world. These interactions generally congregate into domains, or the "organizing component for actions, in the form of transgressions, reactions to those actions, communications, and dialogues," which feed into social judgments (Turiel, 1983, p. 50). These experiences are organized into categories of social knowledge. The moral domain involves judgments about justice, rights, welfare, and the prevention of harm within human interactions. Moral judgments are obligatory, universal, and independent of rules. The social-conventional domain involves judgments about context-specific social interactions, involving rules and regulations. Criterion judgments determine the bounds for differentiated moral, social-conventional, and other judgments. These judgments are based on criterial dimensions, which consist of "obligatoriness, impersonality, alterability, universality, relativism, social consensus, and institutional status" (Turiel, 1983, p. 52). The social domains involve a third category of judgments concerning "persons, self, identity, and internal states" (Nucci, 2014, p. 538). Unlike the moral and social-conventional domains, the psychological, or personal domain concerns not right and wrong, but matters of personal choice and preference considered one's own business and affecting the self, such as actions regarding one's own body (Nucci, 1981; Turiel, 2015). Finally, a fourth, pragmatic category of judgments focuses on acts with practical consequences that can interfere with the goals of involved actors (Dahl & Campos, 2013; Dahl & Kim, 2014). Children's domain-specific knowledge shows qualitative changes, while maintaining the unique arrangement of criterial dimensions of each domain. The study of judgments about the value of

life must recognize that people, throughout the course of development, differentiate between judgments of distinct domains. The study of the value of life must, therefore, begin with an understanding of domain-differentiated judgments (Turiel, 1983). The concept of coordination, or the weighing of different, at times multi-domain considerations comprising moral reasoning (Turiel, 2015), illuminates the complex interaction of judgments involving welfare and the prevention of harm. Through their interactions with, and experiences of the world, people engage with events comprising competing moral concerns like welfare and the prevention of harm to self and others, as well as nonmoral elements involving self-interest (Jambon & Smetana, 2014; Smetana, 2006).

Turiel's (1983) theory of social domains addresses the proposed states of undifferentiated confusion in early development by instead showing that individuals develop distinct, domain-specific categories of knowledge in the early years. Non-moral judgments do not transform into moral judgments, as suggested by hierarchical perspectives, due to criterial differences. Therefore, rather than through a process of differentiation and integration, knowledge develops uniquely within each domain. Because of the classification of thought into domains, children also develop moral understandings earlier than previously conceived. By the ages of four to six, children differentiate between judgments of morality and social convention, as shown by the breadth of research conducted by Turiel and others working with social domains (Turiel, 1983, 2008, 2015). Errors in reasoning reveal not lack of cognition, but the process of reasoning in action, as children develop increasingly advanced understandings (Turiel, 2010a). For example, the necessary understanding of intent for moral judgments, as discussed by Piaget (1932/1997), follows developmental progressions. Pnevmatikos (2018) explores children's consideration of leniency in judgments about killing, and especially their navigation of hypothetical situations warranting mitigation, or reduction of blame. These situations involve self-defense, accidental killing, and killing animals for consumption. Although recognition of intent develops earlier than conceived by Piaget, preschoolers still fixate on the most harmful facets of the hypothetical situations, as well as experience difficulty with coordination of considerations, and particularly in the absence of intent. Because of these confusions in their reasoning, children's appropriate extension of leniency occurs more significantly after the age of six (Pnevmatikos, 2018). This increasing understanding of intent adds complexity to the early recognition of moral violations (Turiel, 2015).

In addition to moral justifications, considerations of the conventional or personal realms factor into decisions about living and dying. Judgments about the value of life reflect universal, but not absolutistic realities of moral judgments (Turiel, 2008, 2018). Kantian morality emphasizes the duty of the preservation of life. People will go to great lengths for the sake of life. Ending one's own or another's life violates the categorical imperative through the casting of life as means rather than end (Kant, 1785/1895; Sandel, 2009). However, as Kantian morality is defined by the motive of duty, which involves doing good for the "right reason," irrespective of the outcome, Kant regards lying to be categorically wrong even for the sake of the preservation of life, which illustrates the challenge of imposing categorical rules on morality, despite noble intentions (Kant, 1785/1895; Sandel, 2009). Moral judgments are noncontingent on context, but human capacity for reasoning prevents moral absolutism, or the belief in a set of unnegotiable rights and wrongs, apart from context. The significance of domains lies in the differentiation of categories of thought, rather than the constant prioritization of moral or ethical concerns (Turiel

2018). Humans realistically violate moral as well as social-conventional standards despite recognition of wrong, illustrated again by ongoing debates involving competing interests, and rights to life (Dworkin, 1993). In cases illustrating the *doctrine of the double effect*, or the acceptance of an indirect, negative outcome for the sake of obtaining a direct, positive one (Foot, 1967), much of the difficulty of reasoning stems from the coordination of considerations, amidst the violation involved in making life the means to an end. Even decisions concerning the universal, intrinsic value of life, and the moral goal of the preservation of life, involve context-specific and subjective considerations (Dworkin, 1993).

Subjectivity of Moral Judgments

A full appreciation of moral reasoning about the issues of living, dying, and pain and suffering, as pertinent to the current study, requires further consideration of the interaction between judgments of the moral and personal domains. This interaction brings into prominence the understanding of the complexity of humans as “psychological systems” (Smetana, 2006, p. 121). The subjectivity of experiences of pain and suffering coexists with the universal recognition of these experiences as harm to one’s welfare. In this way, human psychological complexity accommodates recognition of the universality of moral concerns, along with the individuality of interpretation of moral events that contributes to variations in resulting moral action (Turiel & Wainryb, 1994). The extensive body of social domains research evidencing people’s differentiation of domain-specific judgments shows variations are not indicative of a denial of the constancy of moral concepts, or lack of recognition of the uniquely intrinsic consequences of moral events (Smetana, 2006). Instead, the individuality of interpretation involves variations of situational features, which influence the perception of events, and determination of the *object of judgment*, and focus of the moral evaluation (Smetana, 2006; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994, p. 298). Informational assumptions refer to understandings of reality, and contribute to shifts in the object of judgment (Smetana, 2006). Participant evaluations of the permissibility of an act shift based on their understanding of the hypothetical actor’s belief about reality (Smetana, 2006; Wainryb, 1991). Belief of the functionality of the act of parental spanking, as shown in Wainryb’s (1991) study on informational assumptions, shifts the object of judgment from the harmful elements of spanking to the functionality and benefit of the disciplinary act.

Engagement with the process of *social construal* (Smetana, 2006, p. 132) consists of making sense and meaning of interactions with the world, including of one’s own and others’ actions. This involves objective as well as subjective, interpretive elements, of internality of states of mind, and intention, of which increasing psychological knowledge provides the capacity for symbolic interpretation (Recchia et al., 2015; Wainryb et al., 2010). Context alters the presence or absence of psychological harm in the same event (Helwig et al., 1995). Thus, individual perceptions of the relevant concerns involved in an event, and the coordination of these concerns, produce moral action (Wainryb et al., 2005). Understanding of the notion of “well-intentioned, necessary harm,” like that for the purpose of defense of self or others (Jambon & Smetana, 2014, p. 22), and the reality of “not-quite-intentional and not-quite-unintentional” harm (Wainryb et al., 2005, p. 82) resulting from the coordination of the goals of the involved actors, and subjective interpretation of the greatest moral good in the situation contribute to the formation of the complex notion of self as a moral being (Wainryb et al., 2005). Development of moral agency involves knowledge of self as one capable of receiving harm and harming others,

and the interaction between welfare and prevention of harm with other interests (Wainryb et al., 2005). The interpretive nature of moral concepts aligns with the coexisting intrinsic and personal values of life (Dworkin, 1993, 2011), also reflected in the universality and subjectivity of cognitive-affective judgments relevant to living and dying.

Cognitive-Affective Judgments about Life

Nussbaum's (2001b) distinction between *background* and *situational* emotion-judgments illustrates how concepts like the value of life inform moral judgments. Background emotion-judgments refer to evaluative judgments, consisting of cooccurring beliefs and emotions, that remain unchanging through various circumstances, seemingly operating nonconsciously due to the extent of their pervasiveness, until they are brought to consciousness through specific circumstances. Emotion-judgments reflect the concurrence of affect and cognition, and the intensity of beliefs about an object mirror the intensity of feelings involved. Some emotion-judgments are closely aligned with background feelings and thoughts, and some with situational ones. Nussbaum's example of the background emotion-judgment of love for one's friends and family exists alongside more fleeting sentiments of everyday life, including for instance, feelings of momentary irritation with a loved one (Nussbaum, 2001b). Such beliefs relevant to the value of life include the reality, "badness," and fear of death, as well as one's vulnerability to harm, including illness or death (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 70). These evaluative judgments have a "psychological reality" that shapes people's actions, and also operate along with episodic, or situational emotion-judgments, as illustrated by the strengthening of grief over a loss with the fear of one's own eventual death (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 70). The conception of the value of life is characterized by a similar quality of generality, due to the inherency of the understanding of life as sacred or inviolable. Because of the necessarily strong universal beliefs about life's significance, the transcendence of context does not preclude shared valuing of human life. Sentiments capture the meaning of, and underlie justice, rights, and welfare inherent to judgments of the moral domain.

Turiel's (2022) conception of the value of life as one of three sentiments, along with respect for persons and human dignity, emphasizes the significant role of these "emotional-conceptual senses" in the upholding of welfare and other moral concerns within human interactions. Sentiments are general orientations that serve as "backgrounds to morality" and as "organizing features of moral orientations" (Turiel, 2010b, p. 573). According to Turiel, sentiments refer to the shared "emotional-conceptual sense" that transcends thoughts and emotions associated with specific events for individuals. Instead, sentiments are inherent to the understanding of selves and others, playing a broader guiding role in human interactions (Dworkin, 1993; Turiel, 2010b). In addition, the sentiment of respect for persons, conceived by Piaget (1932/1997) as an element of the autonomous stage, is key to mutual relationships. This mutual respect also represents genuine respect as opposed to the unilateral way heteronomous children view adults (Piaget, 1932/1997). The inherent uniqueness of the human condition calls for human dignity, the final sentiment. The dignity of life positions humans to deserve fundamental rights. Turiel describes the presence of elements of respect for persons in the sanctity of life. The background emotion-judgment, or sentiment, of the value of life, and associated evaluative judgments of the preservation of life and prevention of harm, are essential to the formation of moral judgments and actions, and salient in cases of moral reasoning about life and the ending of life (Nussbaum, 2001b; Turiel, 2022).

Underlying these judgments is the undesirability of harm. Through their experiences in the world, children form these theories from a young age (Turiel, 1983, 2010b). According to Turiel (1983), the undesirability of one's own experience as victim, or the connection of one's own painful experiences to observations of others' painful experiences, in addition to the understanding of the motive for harm, contribute to the formation of moral judgments. Children develop increasingly complex understandings with age, of inflicting and receiving harm, that move beyond universal understandings of the wrongness of direct, unprovoked harm (Nucci & Turiel, 2009), including that of internality, or mental states and intentions, psychological harm and painful emotions, and the ability to reflect on and regret wrongdoings (Recchia et al., 2015; Turiel, 2022; Wainryb et al., 2005). The experience of pain, and the related concept of harm, has a significant role in the construction of social and moral knowledge.

Alternate Interpretations of the Value of Life

Exploration of the value of life as a cognitive-affective sentiment parallels the philosophical underpinnings of the value of life as intrinsic, but it also counters research that overemphasizes the role of emotions, and specifically noncognitive ones, that supposedly dominate in moments of decision-making about life and death. Emotion cannot exist without cognition, because the belief is what carries into concurrent existence the attached emotion. The strength of the emotion supports even more, the weight of the internal conflict, rather than serving as evidence for an absent mind (Nussbaum, 2001b). Different frameworks for analyses are illustrated by the interpretation of the trolley car dilemmas. These classic philosophical thought experiments explore people's judgments about the saving of lives by citing two situational variations, footbridge and switch. The recognition of the trolley car dilemmas as a hypothetical lens for the analysis of people's understandings of the value of life makes it a worthwhile and necessary issue for exploration. However, the common interpretation of the situating of the trolley car dilemmas reflects the classic shortcomings of theories that tout dichotomous distinctions between cognition and emotion. In the situations, a runaway trolley car is traveling toward five people on a train track, with a bystander who has the option to intervene. In the footbridge variation, the bystander stands on a bridge with another person, whose physical mass, if pushed down onto the tracks, would stop the car. In the switch variation, the bystander can pull a switch to redirect the train to a track with one person. The intent of this philosophical thought experiment was to illustrate the conflict between two *hard cases*, involving the violation of one moral rule for another, which in this case means the taking of life to preserve lives (Dahl et al., 2018; Foot, 1967). This conflict illustrates the doctrine of the double effect, or the acceptance of a negative outcome for the sake of obtaining the positive. Findings show that most participants support the permissibility of pulling the switch, but reject that of pushing someone off a bridge. Although on the surface, this hard case involves the potential taking of one life to preserve five, the situations were actually designed to emphasize the multiple considerations apart from the utilitarian concern with number of lives saved (Dahl et al., 2018; Foot, 1967; Turiel, 2022). Greene et al. (2001) contribute to this separation of cognition and emotion through their misinterpretation of the trolley car dilemmas. Greene et al. propose that the footbridge variant, which involves pushing a large person off a bridge to stop the trolley, engages people's emotional processing, as shown by differences in brain activity, in a greater way than the seemingly more impersonal switch variant, which involves pulling a switch to redirect the train to a track with one person. Creating a *moral-personal* and *moral-impersonal* dichotomy in

respective reference to the footbridge and switch variants, Greene et al. assume both the greater appropriateness and personal relevance of taking a life via switch versus pushing someone off a bridge, identifying emotional engagement as the key difference in the variants (Greene et al., 2001, p. 2106).

Dahl et al. (2018) interpret people's moral reasoning in a way that illuminates the intent of the design of these dilemmas. The often employed dual-process interpretation divides thought and emotion, attributing affective and unconscious responses to the footbridge variation, and conscious thought to the switch variation. Although the footbridge variation presents the additional burden of pushing a human off the footbridge, and therefore, a more visceral engagement with the act of killing than pulling a switch, its likely increased emotional difficulty does not translate to an unconscious action. Taking responsibility for one's own and others' lives is an inherently motivated action; the bystander's intervention illustrates this pull toward preserving even the lives of strangers. The trolley car dilemmas draw on both the general sentiment of the value of life, as well as specific sentiments, or emotion-judgments, relevant to each of the situations (Turiel, 2010b). Rather than unconscious reactions, the inherent nature of the value of life ensures strong beliefs and emotions characteristic of moral concerns, and especially those of violating life, which exceed utilitarian arguments. In addition to number of lives saved, often cited to justify the bystander's intervention, subjects recognize the intrinsic rights of those involved, as well as for the bystander, concerns of integrity, and psychological effects of their actions. With the added burden of pushing someone, the footbridge variation emphasizes considerations like the natural course of events, responsibility for, and consequences of, intervention in events, and direct taking of life (Dahl et al., 2018; Foot, 1967; Turiel, 2022). A participant from Dahl et al.'s (2018) study states, "That person still has intrinsic worth but coming from a utilitarian standpoint, it might make more sense to kill one person than five persons but I believe that each individual has their own intrinsic worth and so it's not morally right to kill them, any of them" (p. 54). This response captures the conflict between the logical desire to save more lives and the understanding of the intrinsic value and irreplaceability of human life. The intrinsic value of life necessitates preference for situations involving the least amount of harm to human life. Analysis benefits from consideration of the psycho-emotional difficulties of the taking of life, due to the weight of the value of life. Philosophical experiments centered on moral problems like the trolley car dilemmas, when engaged with and interpreted fully, present contextually rich opportunities to learn more about people's multi-faceted judgments about hard cases (Dahl et al., 2018; Foot, 1967; Turiel, 2010b, 2022).

Chapter 2: Quality of Life

Following the exploration regarding the intrinsic value and dignity of life, the current study considers the dynamic between the value and quality of life, as expressed by Dworkin (1993): “But once a human life has begun, it is very important that it flourish and not be wasted” (p. 74). An examination of the above dynamic requires an analysis of existing concepts related to the quality of life. The World Health Organization defines quality of life as “an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). This definition reflects a subjective, relativistic orientation in its reference to one's perception of their contextualized position in life. The perception of one's quality of life is necessarily subjective. However, the universal, intrinsic nature of the value of life requires a moral standard for the determination of a good quality of life, even if not exclusive or universally applicable. The WHO's definition of the quality of life excludes the word *health*. It instead separately defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1946). The lack of one objective set of standards to which each life can be held renders the determination of a good quality of life an obscure task. The concept of the quality of life exists in some ambiguity despite its frequent usage in multi-disciplinary spaces (Brock, 1993), necessarily leaning on philosophical foundations for its meaning. This philosophical necessity refers to the underpinning of considerations of the quality of life with the recognition of the dignity inherent to human life. In the current study, the quality of life is conceptualized as broadly ranging from states of functioning and flourishing to experiences of pain and suffering. The following multi-faceted exploration of the quality of life thus begins with the concepts of functioning and flourishing, and concludes with the concepts of pain and suffering. This analysis engages with perspectives from political and moral philosophy, as well as the psychological and health sciences, for the purpose of identifying concepts relevant to individual quality of life.

Concepts of Functioning: Capability and the Exercise of Choice

Conceptualization of the quality of life as a range of states benefits from an initial exploration of the base state of functioning, to be addressed through the framework of the capability approach to well-being, formulated by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000). Sen (1993) considers “functionings,” or the “doings and beings” (p. 31) that comprise the state of an individual, along with capability, or the measure of “substantial freedoms” (Sen, 1999, p. 4) or opportunities for choice and action actually available to an individual to achieve valuable living, in the determination of quality of life (Mackenzie, 2013; Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1993). In other words, individual perception of quality of life involves not only ability, but the freedom of choice of the specific incorporation of those functionings that possess relative value into one's life (Sen, 1993). In her related work with the capability approach, Nussbaum (2000) identifies capabilities, or minimum central human functions, to consider “what people are actually able to do and to be” (p. 71), rather than what they can access within the limits of their actual position in life. With special attention to the inequality of capabilities available to women throughout the world, Nussbaum establishes a list of universal, *threshold* level of capabilities, with the failure to meet the threshold level of each capability signifying a lack of opportunity for proper human functioning. As noted above, the determination of a good quality of life requires the moral

satisfaction of the requirements of human lives of universal, intrinsic value and dignity. Each of Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) ten specific capabilities possesses distinct, intrinsic value, and the moral nature of the development of these human abilities precludes the remediation of the lack of one with the surplus of another. These capabilities are more specifically, *combined capabilities*, or one of three types of capabilities. Innate functions, or *basic capabilities* generally available at birth, serve as the foundation for the development of mature states, or *internal capabilities* which develop with environmental supports. The availability of internal capabilities, such as the exercise of political choice, does not guarantee its functioning within the context of an individual life. The combined capabilities represented by Nussbaum's list, involve the combination of internal capabilities with external conditions necessary for its functioning. Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities ranges from basic to higher-level functions, and includes the following:

- *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
- *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way...Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid unnecessary pain.
- *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development).
- *Practical Reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78-79).

Determinations of quality of life ought to present normative standards for functioning through some form of universal capabilities to uphold the value of life, which also allow for plurality in the specific expression of these capacities, or relative interpretations of a good life, including the choice of exercise of an available capability. The capacity for choice to determine one's functionings that enables a standard of living reflective of human value and dignity, is not guaranteed due to the inequality of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 1999). Human rationality requires an affordance of opportunity without the coercion of functioning within that capability. This respect allows for individual determination of whether the incorporation of specific functionings fits with one's conception of a flourishing life (Nussbaum, 2000).

Functioning, Vulnerability, and Autonomy

The capacity for choice allows for the exercise of autonomy, or the right to decision-making regarding the course of one's own life. Autonomy protects the ability to act according to one's values and interests. In line with the objective of the capability approach to allow for, rather than enforce functioning, promotion of the right to autonomy requires an acceptance of the reality of the flawed choices of reasoning human beings, which seemingly contradict their best interests (Dworkin, 1993; Nussbaum, 2000). The need for normative standards of functioning points to the ineliminable existence of human vulnerability, or the necessity of some extent of protection of the welfare of the human being as “vulnerable subject,” in a flawed world, with vulnerability as “universal and constant, inherent in the human condition” (Fineman, 2008, pp. 1-

2), even as it is individually experienced (Fineman, 2010). Fineman (2008) comments on the ontological form of human susceptibility, “Human vulnerability arises from our embodiment, which carries with it the imminent or ever-present possibility of harm, injury, and misfortune” (p. 267). Dworkin (1986) writes about the complexities of making decisions about living and dying that honor an individual’s personhood and autonomy in the midst of reduced or eliminated reasoning capacity caused by dementia or states without consciousness. However, reasoning capacity need not be compromised for the presence of vulnerability inherent to human rationality (Bagnoli, 2016). Without denying the harms of institutionally created vulnerabilities of social injustice, Bagnoli (2016) reframes the problematic nature of vulnerability, including its bodily and temporal manifestations, as “constitutive constraints” (p. 21) that uniquely comprise human agency. The status of humans as non-ideal, irrational agents involves failures of reasoning and right action. Moreover, human rationality exists within the bounds of time, but not necessarily to its detriment, as “agency acquires meaning and significance only within the framework of mortality” (Bagnoli, 2016, p. 16). Recognition of the contribution of vulnerability to the formation of a uniquely human rationality reframes its problematic nature for the exercise of autonomy (Bagnoli, 2016; Straehle, 2016).

In addition to an acceptance of its flawed manifestation, the proper exercise of autonomy requires contextual supports, as Fineman (2010) denies the inherency of autonomy to the human condition. According to Raz (1988), the exercise of autonomy requires mental ability, adequate options, and independence. The mere presence of choice does not equate the adequacy of dignifying options, as individual perception of the opportunities and goods available to oneself shapes the formation of desire, producing adaptive preferences within perceived limitations (Nussbaum, 1999, 2001a). Even with reasoning capacity and choice, lack of independence through coercion, or the reduction of options through subjection to the will of another, prevents the full exercise of autonomy (Raz, 1988). Determination of individual quality of life thus requires a foundation of normative standards appropriate for the moral requirements of human lives of value and dignity, provision of choice in the pursuit of relative value, and recognition of the reality of adjustments to the formation of preference (Nussbaum, 2001a, 2001b). Even as one’s social environment influences desire, Nussbaum (2001b) states about the universal, rational desirability of the fulfillment of basic capabilities, “it is always rational to want them whatever else one wants” (p. 88).

Concepts of Flourishing: Rationality and the Selection of Value

The importance of choice in Nussbaum’s (2000) capability approach reflects Aristotle’s belief about the necessity of choice for the honoring of human dignity, and the necessity of protection of the development of human abilities in the context of human vulnerability (Nussbaum, 2000, 2004). In line with this conception of human functioning, the following section begins with an exploration of the relationship between function and flourishing in Aristotle’s arguably most influential account of living well, or *eudaimonia*. According to his *Nicomachean Ethics*, if the good is “that which all things seek,” Aristotle identifies the greatest good, or the end which one seeks for its own sake, as happiness (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1094a1–3). The following use of the term *happiness* requires clarification, due to the influence of utilitarianism on misinterpretations of *eudaimonia* as happiness, in the sense of a state of pleasure or satisfaction (Nussbaum, 2001b; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Despite the role of satisfaction in the conception of a good life, a eudaimonic account of living well addresses the

question, “How should a human being live,” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 32) rather than the pursuit of happiness (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Eudaimonia, or a good “external guardian spirit” (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 319), more closely represents one’s conscience (Lomas et al., 2021), or self-realization (Ryff & Singer, 2008), in Aristotle’s usage. The following exploration benefits from Aristotle’s account of the pursuit of the greatest good, or function of man, and the role of supportive external conditions and goods, as well as negative events, in the activity of living well (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009).

According to Aristotle, lesser virtues sought for the sake of happiness, such as pleasure, lack the self-sufficiency of goodness which enables a desirable life (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009). To identify the *end* of living well, Aristotle examines human function, as “the good—their doing well—seems to reside in their function, so too it would seem to be for the human being, if indeed there is some function that belongs to him” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1097b25-30). This human function lies in the rational principle, or the capacity to exercise thought, distinct from mere perception. This uniquely human life of rationality consists of the “activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, and it belongs to a good man to perform these well and finely” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1098a10-15). Thus, the activity of living well consists of the worthwhile pursuit of learning and training, for “to hand over the greatest and finest of things to chance would be too much out of tune” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1099b25-26). Despite the seeming self-sufficiency of happiness which precedes the lesser virtues, Aristotle acknowledges the importance of external, instrumental goods like social relationships, wealth, and political power, stating, “Nevertheless it clearly also requires external goods in addition, as we have said; for it is impossible, or not easy, to perform fine actions if one is without resources” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1099a31–33). The cultivation of the self-sufficient goodness of virtue, helped by external supports, is further influenced by the role of external events, “given that many things happen by chance” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1100b23-24). As the nobility of activity, rather than states of mind, comprises Aristotle’s notion of living well, considerations of rational workings toward a good life must be paired with the reality of the fragility of noble activity, attributable to external events interpreted as *tuché*, or chance, fortune, or luck (Nussbaum, 1986). Aristotle states about the events of fortune, “if they turn out in the opposite way, they crush and maim one’s blessedness; for they bring on pains, and obstruct many sorts of activities” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1100b28-30). Aristotle validates the duality of rational activity and the uncontrollable movements of misfortune, contributing to the conditionality of the state of flourishing (Nussbaum, 1986).

Although various forms of human vulnerability interfere with the exercise of choice, and contribute to possible distortions of unconstrained preference, Nussbaum (2001a) draws on Aristotle to interpret desire as “reaching out for ‘the apparent good’” (p. 83). In line with Aristotle’s identification of the greatest good as an end pursued for its own sake, Nussbaum’s (2001b) eudaimonic conception of flourishing extends beyond the universal, minimal human functions to include all of those things to which an individual assigns intrinsic value, and values as ends in themselves, rather than for their instrumental role in one’s satisfaction (Dworkin, 1993; Nussbaum, 2001b). These intrinsic goods include those “vulnerable things” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 42) external to one’s control, of which loss produces distress correlated to the intensity

of one's belief of their value and necessity for one's flourishing. This personal investment is both intertwined with, and distinct from the universal sense of the importance of these goods.

As with Nussbaum's (2001b) background emotion-judgments about the reality of vulnerability and death, Dworkin (1993) identifies the critical judgments operating in the background that appear to automatically shape people's conceptions of, and choices in pursuit of a good life. The intrinsic value of these *critical interests* differentiates them from the *experiential interests* (Dworkin, 1993, p. 201) sought for the pleasures brought by the experiences, but not as ends in themselves. While the lack of fulfillment of experiential interests does not significantly worsen life, and its associated displeasures often fade with the passage of time, the failure to fulfill one's critical interests does worsen life. The individuality of the intrinsic value of critical interests does not undermine its weightiness, as it determines the rightness of a good life, which is one's own. Unlike capabilities, critical interests, though overlapping among individuals, necessarily lack universality. The lack of recognition of one's critical interests produces a sense of indignity (Dworkin, 1993). Returning to the notion of the integrity and coherence of one's life narrative, misalignment between one's actual pursuit of, and beliefs about living well, does not necessarily indicate an intentionally wasted life. The existence of disadvantageous circumstances, and the intrusion of negative, external events can make a life well-lived into a holistically bad one (Dworkin, 2011).

Perspectives from the psychological and health sciences offer more definition to the goods of intrinsic value required for flourishing. Lomas et al. (2021) classify the literature on well-being or happiness into two forms. The hedonic form concerning *subjective well-being* (Diener, 1984) focuses on life satisfaction and related positive or negative affect, while the eudaimonic form focuses on the development of character, and meaning and purpose, extending beyond measures of short-term satisfaction to consider long-term pursuits and values like social relationships, autonomy, purpose, and growth (Ryff, 1989). As recognition of human vulnerability underlies the purpose of the health sciences, health disciplines benefit from a movement toward the interpretation of well-being as more than a neutral state of the absence of ill health, with attention to the presence of positive features of flourishing (Lomas et al., 2021). Drawing from philosophical and spiritual perspectives to write from the context of the health sciences, VanderWeele (2024a) conceives of health as wholeness and intactness, not lacking essential parts, and functioning as intended. VanderWeele defines full flourishing as an ideal "state in which all aspects of one's life are good" (p. 15), identifying a nonexclusive list of several, commonly shared and desired domains of flourishing, or areas of life that may or may not be deemed good, and sought for its own end, rather than as a means to another good. These domains of flourishing consist of bodily and emotional health, happiness, meaning, character, relationships, community, and spirituality (VanderWeele, 2024a, p. 24). In an effort to incorporate eudaimonic features into the measure of well-being, VanderWeele (2017) proposes a measure of flourishing that includes questions representative of various domains in addition to health. The following questionnaire items address elements of the domain of *Meaning and Purpose*: "Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?" and "I understand my purpose in life" (VanderWeele, 2017, p. 8154). The meaning of life consists of three factors, including purpose, or goal-directedness, coherence, or a sense of the consistency of one's life, and significance, or the sense of the worth of one's life and activities (Lambert et al., 2020). VanderWeele's (2024b) conception of flourishing as an ideal, captures both the inability

for complete fulfillment during earthly existence, as well as the relative nature of the perceived desirability of specific arrangements of universal goods. The World Health Organization's (1946) definition of health as a "state of complete...well-being" appears to resonate more with conceptions of flourishing than functioning. Nevertheless, flourishing begins with the satisfaction of minimal functions that enable a dignified human life (Nussbaum, 2000).

Concepts of Pain and Suffering, and Personhood

The inability to pursue a good life across different domains of functioning and flourishing allows for a multitude of opportunities for the confirmation of the universality of experiences of pain and suffering (Cassell, 1982). This section examines pain and suffering through a eudaimonic approach, beginning with concepts of pain and the elements that characterize pain as suffering. Despite the common pairing, and shared elements of pain and suffering, these experiences have distinct characteristics. The International Association for the Study of Pain (2011) defines pain as "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with actual or potential tissue damage," later expanded to include the following four out of six additional points:

- Pain is always a personal experience that is influenced to varying degrees by biological, psychological, and social factors.
- Through their life experiences, individuals learn the concept of pain.
- A person's report of an experience as pain should be respected.
- Although pain usually serves an adaptive role, it may have adverse effects on function and social and psychological well-being (IASP, 2011).

The last point identifies the negative impact of pain on social and psychological well-being (IASP, 2011). Cassell (1982) determines that pain produces suffering when it is overwhelming, unknown, indicative of something urgent, or chronic. Cowden et al. (2022) and VanderWeele (2019) define suffering as a subjectively undesirable state or experience involving the loss of some good. The presence of the undesirable experience does not automatically indicate the presence of suffering, however, as understanding of the pain, including its source and meaning, controllability, and expected end, serve to lessen the suffering. Suffering necessarily involves the desire not to experience it, and becomes a harmful affective experience (Cassell, 1982; Cowden et al., 2022). While suffering encompasses a variety of experiences, VanderWeele's (2019)

Personal Suffering Assessment measures the following shared characteristics:

1. To what extent are you suffering
2. The intensity of what I have been experiencing feels intolerable
3. The length of time I have been suffering, or expect to suffer, feels intolerable
4. I feel powerless to stop my current experience of suffering
5. The suffering I have been experiencing affects all aspects of my life
6. Certain purposes of my life have been badly disrupted because of what I have been experiencing
7. What I have been experiencing threatens who I am as a person (VanderWeele, 2019, p.

61).

As conveyed by this assessment, suffering is the subjectively determined experience of the one who is suffering, and cannot be measured apart from the subject (VanderWeele, 2019). As stated by the International Association for the Study of Pain (2011), "a person's report of an experience as pain should be respected," and a report of the extent of one's suffering also

requires respect. The second and third items of the *Personal Suffering Assessment* refer to the intensity and duration of the suffering, both of which characterize experiences of suffering (Cowden et al., 2022; VanderWeele, 2019). The entirely subjective determination of the intolerability of the intensity and/or duration of the experience stems from the subject. Referring to the temporal constraint contributing to human vulnerability, Bagnoli (2016) states, “Humans represent their own agency within the horizon of death; they conceive of their own agency as a perishable good” (p. 17). The final four items of VanderWeele’s (2019) assessment touch upon different elements of the loss of personhood. The sense of helplessness to eliminate, or remove oneself from the undesirable experience interferes with the full exercise of one’s autonomy. Nussbaum (2001b) conceives of the negative cognitive-affective response to the loss of good as a recognition of one’s own vulnerability, lack of control, and passivity. The pervasiveness of the suffering and hindrance to the pursuit of one’s flourishing, described by the fifth and sixth assessment items, contribute to the holistic and unbounded threat to one’s personhood (Cowden et al., 2022; VanderWeele, 2019).

As earlier stated, the right to autonomy protects the ability to act according to one’s values and interests (Dworkin, 1993). Suffering interferes with one’s goals in a way that impacts one’s identity and sense of psychological well-being, with suffering being linked to reduced psychological flourishing (Cowden et al., 2022). Pain produces suffering as it becomes prolonged and intense, threatening one’s autonomy over the selection of desirable experiences, and the ability to flourish (Cassell, 1982). Raz (1988) states regarding the harmful reduction of autonomy, “To harm a person is to diminish his prospects, to affect adversely his possibilities” (p. 414). Writing from a psychological perspective, Nucci (2014) draws on Piaget’s (1932/1997) emphasis on autonomy in moral development. Children’s interactions with adults based on constraint, and a lack of differentiation between self and other, hinder the development of an autonomous, moral self in the heteronomous stage. Relations of cooperation and reciprocity with peers in the autonomous stage of morality allow for one’s construction of moral judgments (Nucci, 1996, 2014; Piaget, 1932/1997). The exercise of autonomy within a personal realm contributes to psychological well-being, and the construction of moral judgments, including increasing engagement with more general concepts of freedoms or civil liberties (Helwig et al., 2014; Nucci, 1996, 2014). The concerns of the personal realm involve moral harm when the denial of autonomy prevents flourishing. Constraints of the personal realm produce psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, especially in adolescent-parent relationships (Nucci, 2014). Adolescents interpret interference in personal domain matters as psychological control (Hasebe et al., 2004). Although the moral and personal domains represent distinct categories of social knowledge (Turiel, 1983), the lack of conditions conducive to the development of appropriate boundaries around a personal realm negatively impacts moral development. The interaction of the understanding of concepts of personal choice and freedom, and the promotion of the welfare of others allows for the construction of concepts of moral responsibility (Nucci, 2014), necessary for judgments involving the preservation of life and prevention of harm.

Preservation of Dignity and the Meaning of Life in Contexts of Suffering and Expected Death

The sense of loss of perceived good produces a desire not only for an end to the experience of suffering (Cowden et al., 2022), but also for the compensation of one’s losses

(VanderWeele, 2019). Even in cases in which limited functionality due to disability, illness, and injury interferes with the typical range of opportunities of a life, remaining opportunities to select among alternative, reasonable life plans positively impact one's quality of life and allow the individual choice, control, and dignity (Brock, 1993). The subjectively intolerable duration of suffering finds neither immediate culmination nor compensation of loss, at times, but rather continuation with severe limitations to autonomy, bound by the expected end of life. The psychological reality, even more than the physical pain involved, may produce the desire to hasten death, as the intensity and duration of suffering can render the experience bereft of meaning and purpose (VanderWeele, 2019). Although the fundamental reality of dignity remains intact in the midst of loss of control and independence brought about by circumstances like serious illness, the impact to self-respect and authenticity (Dworkin, 2011) produces the harm of indignity, prompting the desire to die with dignity in an effort to spare oneself from the anticipated remainder of the personal experience of indignity (FitzPatrick, 2024). Though there are variations of the practice, voluntary euthanasia, with euthanasia referring to *good death*, involves at least one other person, who intends for the relief of evidenced, acute suffering or comatoseness, through the least painful method possible (Beauchamp & Davidson, 1979, p. 299). The tension between the universality of the intrinsic value of life, and the preservation of dignity through death surfaces in the limited legality of euthanasia in ten nations throughout the world as of 2026, excluding the United States.

Unlike the generally uncontrollable loss of autonomy due to serious illness, punishment in the form of time in prison, including that prior to capital punishment, or state-sanctioned death, presents the intentional reduction of autonomy prior to death (Nagelsen & Huckelbury, 2016). Nagelsen and Huckelbury (2016) determine the incompatibility of the loss of the right to live, and autonomy to shape one's life, in the case of capital punishment, with the preservation of human dignity. Any capacity to exercise choice occurs within environmental limitations, resulting in distortions of a normal measure of valuable achievements (Sen, 1993) consistent with the unconstrained self, and the production of adaptive preferences (Nussbaum, 2001a). Regardless of the autonomous desirability, or the deservedness of death, premature death across circumstances reflects a lack of the most foundational of Nussbaum's (2000) capabilities, with the lack of specific capabilities contributing to the inability to function and flourish, inherent to experiences of pain and suffering.

In addition to varying degrees of loss of the capacity for choice, and exercise of autonomy, experiences of pain and suffering produce the loss of value of self and sense of meaning of one's life (Cowden et al., 2025; Frankl, 1946/2006). Despite the likely low quality of life in cases of terminal illness, Symons et al. (2024) discuss the possibility of a "qualified sense" (p. 401) of flourishing at the end of life, which though not ideal, and distinct from a typical sense of flourishing, allows for a unique, circumstantially relevant engagement with the goods of meaning and purpose, social relationships, and character development. In line with the variations in the object of judgment (Smetana, 2006; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994) that bring subjectivity into moral reasoning, an individual's interpretation of their life events functions as a kind of self-creation of their life narrative (Symons et al., 2024). Negative events, including experiences of suffering, prompt cognitive engagement in an effort to make sense of these experiences, and fit them into one's greater life narrative. The resulting self-reflection contributes to the development of wisdom (Brady, 2019), or post-traumatic growth (VanderWeele, 2019). According to the

International Association for the Study of Pain (2011), “Through their life experiences, individuals learn the concept of pain,” and though pain can have a negative impact on function, “pain usually serves an adaptive role.” Although its inherent unpleasantness distinguishes pain from other experiences, the International Association for the Study of Pain (2011) does not define pain as wholly negative, but rather as personal, learned, and even functional. Along with one’s participation in creative processes, as well as interactions with the world, Frankl (1946/2006) conceives of one’s response to suffering as another way of identifying the meaning of life. One’s approach to the individual task of responding to suffering counters, to some extent, its inherent lack of meaning (Frankl, 1946/2006), or the sense of the pointlessness of suffering produced by its intensity and duration (VanderWeele, 2019). The conception of suffering as a task with which to be dealt instils a sense of responsibility in suffering, and a need for coherence between one’s response to their suffering, and their overall life narrative (Frankl, 1946/2006), rather than solely emphasizing the loss of autonomy and identity. The freedom of choice, in the search for meaning in suffering, allows for the maintenance of elements of self-respect and authenticity (Dworkin, 2011), necessary for a dignified life.

Current Study

The gravity of human existence holds the mystery of the creation of life and history of investment, which grants each person a precious, irreplicable rarity, deserving of the right to not only continue their existence, but also to fully flourish. Considerations of a good quality of life have established the importance of the protection of functioning and flourishing through goods of both universal and relative, intrinsic value (Dworkin, 1993; Nussbaum, 2001b), in the midst of the ineliminable constancy of vulnerability (Fineman, 2008) to various experiences of pain and suffering. The moral matter of functioning and flourishing requires the capacity for choice and the right to autonomy fitting of rational beings. The distinct sentience of humanity exists in rationality. Despite the philosophical reality of the inherent value and dignity of human lives, the lived experience does not guarantee a fully flourishing, or even properly functioning life. A review of Nussbaum’s (2000) capabilities reveals the difficulty of accessing even minimal standards required for proper human functioning. Evidence for this difficulty emerges with the unfulfillment of the most fundamental capability, *Life*, or the ability to live to a normal length, without premature death. Similarly, the capabilities of *Practical Reason* and *Senses, Imagination, and Thought*, which include the ability to create one’s life according to one’s conception and pursuit of the good and of the pleasurable, avoiding needless pain (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78-79), ought to be guaranteed for rational human beings. This unfulfillment of capabilities required for a dignified life exemplifies the apparent dissonance between the presumed goodness of the preservation and continuation of life, and the variability of the quality of life. The current study examined this apparent tension, as it manifests in people’s reasoning about issues of living, dying, and pain and suffering. In the face of the various limitations to the goodness of the quality of life, it is necessary to consider a more complex and nuanced view of those things that grant the experience of living its worth, and how people think about the multi-faceted experiences of living and dying.

Value and Quality of Life

The current study sought to examine, as its first objective, how people reason about the value of life in the context of diminished quality of life due to experiences of pain and suffering. If the sacredness and inviolability of life honor the investments of an individual life (Dworkin,

1993), then it is fitting to interpret the process of constructing a subjectively meaningful and worthwhile life, as building upon the utmost intrinsic good, or the existence and flourishing of a human life. In line with the inherency of the value of life, considerations of the diminished quality of life, and the negotiation of its dynamic with the value of life must be made upon intrinsic grounds. Thus, consideration of the variability of quality of life, which may interfere with the intrinsic desire to preserve life, as well as determinations of the worth of an individual life, must occur upon the foundation of the objectively intrinsic value and dignity of life. Dworkin (1993) considers the seemingly intuitive measure of the waste, or frustration of life, as life lost, that could have been lived, to be a simple and inadequate interpretation of loss, which inaccurately attributes incremental value to life. Rather, the frustration of life stems not only from the loss of future potential, but also from the loss of all of the past investment contributing to one's current personhood, including goods and relationships of intrinsic importance to the individual. Dworkin's (1993) emphasis on the importance of the flourishing, rather than wasting of a life, exclusively refers to lives in existence: "But once a human life starts, a process has begun, and interrupting that process frustrates an adventure already under way" (p. 88). Despite the inherent value and dignity of life, and frustration of the end of life, the exercise of choice, in actual and hypothetical situations, does not invariably favor the preservation of life.

Eudaimonic Interests

The current study sought to examine, as its second objective, the interaction between pain and suffering, and eudaimonic interests. In its examination of the dynamic between the value and quality of life, the current study addressed a gap in the psychological literature. Pain and suffering involve the loss of some perceived good, and interfere with one's personhood (Cassell, 1982; Cowden et al., 2022; VanderWeele, 2019), granting these experiences great moral, psychological significance. Cassell (1982) summarizes the urgency of the problem of suffering, stating, "Suffering occurs when an impending destruction of the person is perceived" (p. 131). If suffering is the subjectively determined experience of the one who is suffering (VanderWeele, 2019), then exploration of people's reasoning on pain and suffering, and flourishing, contributes to the psychological literature on living well, that extends beyond measures of well-being. Reasoning on questions of pain and suffering has not been explored in depth through the social domains perspective of the cognitive-developmental approach. In addition to the categories of social knowledge, social domains research has examined variations in the interpretation of moral events, including through informational assumptions, which lead to variations in moral actions (Smetana, 2006; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994; Wainryb et al., 2005). Application of this research to the predominantly moral and personal issues of pain and suffering benefits analyses of complex participant reasoning about issues of living, dying, and pain and suffering. Despite the problems they pose for the concerns of the moral and personal domains, existing literature shows experiences of pain and suffering have purpose and value for one's flourishing and personal growth, capacity for reflection, and development of wisdom (Ryff, 1989; Symons et al., 2024; VanderWeele, 2019), as well as for the construction of social and moral knowledge (Turiel, 1983). It is worth exploring the interaction of experiences of pain and suffering with eudaimonic interests, and people's reasoning about flourishing in contexts of suffering.

The study employed clinical interviews designed to assess moral reasoning on the issues of living, dying, and pain and suffering. The current study drew from a larger, ongoing research study on moral reasoning on the value of life. Specific questions were selected from the existing

interview protocol for their potential to address the research questions of the current study. Two general questions on the *Right to Live*, and *Ending Life*, addressed abstract ideas related to living and dying, and examined the interaction between the intrinsic value of life, and the conditional quality of life. Following the general questions, the contextualized situations explored the abstract ideas of living and dying through hypothetical situations involving pain and suffering, which examined the interaction between these experiences and eudaimonic interests. The first contextualized situation, *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, presented the hypothetical ending of the actor's life in the context of pain and suffering due to poor quality of life caused by illness. The second contextualized situation, *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*, presented a different angle of the prospect of the end of life, as punishment for unprovoked murder, with resulting constraints to the offender's functioning and flourishing. Interviews were coded for participant evaluation and justification responses, respectively assessing judgments of, and reasons for or against the permissibility of the action in question.

Participants were expected to provide positive evaluations of the *Right to Live* in recognition of the universal, intrinsic value of life, along with positive evaluations of *Ending Life*, in specific situations involving the prevention of harm to self or others, including the harm of pain and suffering, and lack of functioning and flourishing. Participants were also expected to provide negative evaluations of *Ending Life*, through a different interpretation of the same purpose of the preservation of life (Dworkin, 1993). *Ending Life* was designed to capture the exceptionality of this consideration, or whether ending life is *ever* all right. Reasoning against *Ending Life* was expected to reflect a stricter adherence to the general, intrinsic value of all lives, through an assessment of the wrongness of even the exceptional ending of life. Overall, general evaluations of issues of living and dying were expected to draw varied justifications primarily of the moral domain. Evaluations and justifications of the contextualized situations, which directly addressed pain and suffering, were expected to reflect the complexity of the dynamic present in the general questions, within the greater complexity of moral reasoning.

The situation of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* more directly introduced considerations of the self within a specific context of pain and suffering. As with the abstract considerations of living and dying, participants were expected to provide positive and negative evaluations of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, according to different interpretations of the greatest preservation of the self-respect and authenticity comprising one's dignity (Dworkin, 2011). As the existing literature emphasizes the necessity of the capacity for choice in human functioning and flourishing appropriate for the value and dignity of life (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999), and the moral harm that results from the denial of the right to autonomy in the pursuit of flourishing (Nucci, 1996, 2014), participants were expected to reference the exercise of choice and right to autonomy in decisions about the continuation or end of life. These themes were also expected to feature saliently in support of positive and negative evaluations of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*, in addition to concerns of justice in response to the notion of punishment. As the existing literature on pain and suffering emphasizes the resulting loss, to varying degrees, of the sense of self, autonomy, and ability for functioning and flourishing (Cassell, 1982; Cowden et al., 2022; VanderWeele, 2019), the themes of the capacity for choice, autonomy, and flourishing were expected to emerge as points of interference with the desire to preserve life due to the subjectively diminished worth of an individual life, and to inform reasoning about the interactions between experiences of pain and suffering, and eudaimonic interests. Participants

were expected to present primarily moral and personal justifications depending on their interpretation of living well, in the specific contexts of pain and suffering.

Dworkin's (1993) conception of the sacredness or inviolability of human life allows for the inclusion of both religiously and non-religiously informed justifications regarding the importance of the right to live. Although participants were expected to promote the universal, intrinsic value of life, religious components of people's informational assumptions about the world (Turiel & Wainryb, 1994) were expected to inform reasoning about the source and creative process of human life, and motivate various justifications for or against the ending of life in different situations. Therefore, religiosity was not expected to significantly influence evaluations, but to appear in specific examples of reasoning. Similarly, age was not expected to significantly influence evaluations, but to possibly shape the reasoning of the older adults through exposure to a greater amount of life experience.

Chapter 3: Methods

Participants

The current study stemmed from a larger, ongoing research study of which I was a part of formulating, and for which I conducted a pilot study. The current study employed existing interview data from 87 adults of two age cohorts, including 48 college students ages 19 to 23 ($M = 20.17$, $SD = 1.09$), and 39 adults ages 30 to 49 ($M = 39.13$, $SD = 4.40$), with no additional data collection. According to self-reported demographic information, participants across age cohorts identified as female (51.1%, $n = 46$) and male (45.6%, $n = 41$). Within age cohorts, college students identified as female (50.0%, $n = 24$) and male (50.0%, $n = 24$), and older adults identified as female (56.4%, $n = 22$) and male (43.6%, $n = 17$). Participants across age cohorts identified as the following races and ethnicities in order of frequency: White (46.7%, $n = 42$), Asian (30.0%, $n = 27$), Hispanic/Latino (6.7%, $n = 6$), “two or more races” (5.6%, $n = 5$), Black/African American (3.3%, $n = 3$), Middle Eastern (2.2%, $n = 2$), and “other” (2.2%, $n = 2$). The distribution of participants along a range of ages, genders, and races and ethnicities allowed for a representation of a variety of judgments, though race/ethnicity was not examined as a variable. Participants self-reported religiosity, selecting from a list of religious orientations and affiliations, as well as non-religiosity. For the purpose of analysis, all self-reports of religious affiliation were considered “religious” (44.4%, $n = 40$), including the following religious affiliations in order of frequency: Christianity (65.0%, $n = 26$), “other” (17.5%, $n = 7$), Judaism (7.5%, $n = 3$), Islam (5.0%, $n = 2$), and Buddhism (2.5%, $n = 1$). Participants across age cohorts also identified as non-religious (54.4%, $n = 49$). One participant (2.5%, $n = 1$) declined to report religiosity. As the current study employed existing data, the following information concerns participant recruitment for the larger study, which took place in two forms. College students were recruited through the Department of Psychology’s Research Participation Program (RPP), available to students of different disciplines enrolled in psychology courses. Participants were able to access information about the study and voluntarily sign up for an interview, in exchange for research participation credit for a course of their choice. The older adult participants were recruited through the platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), on which a posting about the study linked to a Qualtrics survey containing the written form of the same interview questions administered to college students.

Design and Procedures

Data collection for the larger study consisted of individual, semi-structured clinical interviews conducted via Zoom with college students. The written form of the same interview questions was administered via Qualtrics to the older adults. Consistent with the research of the structural-developmental approach, clinical interviews were administered for the exploration of people’s lines of moral reasoning (Ginsburg & Oppen, 1988), with probing by the interviewer reserved for the clarification of participant responses. The lack of probing of the written responses did not hinder the clarity and adequacy of participant responses for the purpose of analysis. Participants were presented with the opportunity to review the consent form before verbal or electronic consent from college students and older adults was respectively obtained prior to the start of the study. Following the study, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). Two general, abstract questions, and three contextualized questions, or hypothetical situations, were selected from the existing interview protocol of the larger study, as they specifically addressed the research questions examined

through this current study (Appendix A). The first contextualized situation of the current study, *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, appeared in one of two corresponding sets of contextualized situations in the larger study, involving approximately half ($n = 42$) of the total participant interviews included in the current study. The current study approached the existing dataset with novel research questions unaddressed by the larger study.

Purpose of Question Selection

Specific questions were selected from the existing interview protocol for their potential to meaningfully address the research questions of the current study. The general questions addressed abstract concepts related to living and dying. The first of two general questions addressed the right to live, and the second addressed the permissibility of ending life. The pairing of the following general questions established a foundation for the first research question, which examined the interaction between the intrinsic value of life, and the conditional quality of life:

1. Do you think that everyone has the right to live? Why or why not?
2. Is it ever all right for someone to take the life of another person? Why or why not?

Preliminary analysis of these general questions in the larger study showed that in the midst of their support of the right to live, participants repeatedly referenced without prompting from the interviewer, two specific situations that would serve as possible contexts for the intentional or unintentional surrender of the right to live, or exception to the goodness of the continuation of life. These situations involved poor quality of life due to serious illness, and the act of taking another's life, potentially leading to the offender's death by capital punishment. The current study partly emerged from an identification of experiences of pain and suffering, common to these situations, as a potentially meaningful reason for varied judgments about the goodness and worth of the continuation of life. Following these general questions, the contextualized situations grounded the abstract concepts of living and dying in hypothetical situations. Two situations from the larger study were identified as suitable for the purpose of examining reasoning specifically from the novel angle of pain and suffering, including the interaction of experiences of pain and suffering with eudaimonic interests, as examined by the second research question. The two situations varied along considerations like the deservedness of the pain and suffering, and controllability of the circumstances of the end of life. The first contextualized situation presented the hypothetical ending of the actor's life in the context of pain and suffering due to illness. The situation touched on the points previously discussed regarding the presence of suffering, with the actor experiencing uncontrollable pain of a chronic nature, and of a lengthy duration, causing limited functionality (Cassell, 1982). In the context of an objective lack of full flourishing, the actor makes a subjective judgment about the diminished worth of living their life. The question intended to assess participant reasoning about the various considerations that make a life worth living or not, and contribute to, or interfere with, a sense of flourishing. The following question assessed the permissibility of ending one's life due to illness:

3. Alex has had a chronic illness for many years. He experiences a great deal of pain and has difficulty engaging in many activities. He does not think it is worth living with this suffering. Although he has tried different methods of pain relief, none of them have been effective. Alex considers ingesting a lethal dose of medication to end his life. Would it be all right or not all right for Alex to end his own life? Why or why not?

The issue of capital punishment served as the context for the ending of life in the following contextualized situation, presented in two variations. Though originally intended to address the

role of authority dictates, the current study approached this situation from a different angle. Unlike the lack of flourishing that prompted the actor of the first hypothetical situation to consider ending their own life, the potential for flourishing of the actor of the second situation was threatened by the prospect of death as punishment. Preliminary analysis of participant responses in the larger study showed that in the process of reasoning, participants often set death from capital punishment against the possibility of an otherwise extended life for the actor, with specific references to a life sentence in prison, though this alternative form of punishment was not mentioned in the situation. This dynamic also touched on points indicative of suffering, including the lack of autonomy and control, loss of opportunity to choose a reasonable life plan (Brock, 1993), and extended duration of pain and suffering (Cowden et al., 2022; VanderWeele, 2019). In different ways, the two contextualized situations set death against a potentially lifelong reduction or loss of autonomy, for the purpose of assessing participant reasoning on pain and suffering, in the context of the inviolable value of life. The following questions assessed the permissibility of death as punishment for ending another's life:

4. John works for a technology company. As he is arriving at the office one morning, his coworker, Tom, shoves past him through the entrance. This bothers John, so he considers killing Tom in order to get back at him. Now let's suppose that John did kill Tom. There are laws against homicide in the U.S., and John is tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Would it be all right for the authorities to kill John? Why or why not?
5. Mark has recently lost his job. He does not have a lot of money and has many bills to pay. He is walking around the block one day, worrying about what to do, when he sees a man leaving a bank with a thick envelope full of money. Mark considers killing the man to steal his money. Now let's suppose that Mark did kill the man. There are laws against homicide in the U.S., and Mark is tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Would it be all right for the authorities to kill Mark? Why or why not?

Coding and Data Analysis

Existing interviews were newly coded and analyzed for the current study. Consistent with the method of analysis of social judgments utilized by social domains research (Davidson et al., 1983), interviews were coded for participant evaluation and justification responses. The question, "Would it be all right or not all right..." following each of the contextualized situations, assessed participant evaluation of the permissibility of the action in question, and were coded, "All right," "Not all right," or "Maybe." Participant responses to the following question, "Why or why not?" assessing their reasons for the evaluation of permissibility were organized into justification categories, classified by domains of social knowledge (Davidson et al., 1983; Turiel, 1983). The domain-differentiated justification categories were further organized by descriptive subdomains providing thematic context for the justification codes. The complexity of moral reasoning necessitated at times, the assignment of two or three justification codes to a participant's response. Three coding systems were developed, containing justification categories organizing responses to the general questions (Table 1), the first contextualized situation (Table 2), and the second and third contextualized situations (Table 3). The second and third contextualized situations presented variations of the same question, "Would it be all right for the authorities to kill [the actor]? Why or why not?" originally designed to serve the same purpose in each of the two, alternate sets of contextualized situations for the larger study. Therefore, responses to these questions were merged, and treated as responses to one question, for the

purpose of data analysis. For the general questions and contextualized situations, evaluations and domain classifications of justifications were tested for statistical significance and across cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity using chi-squared tests, or Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate based on cell counts. Evaluation and justification responses to the general questions and contextualized situations are reported as counts and frequencies.

Reliability

Intercoder reliability for the coding of evaluation and justification responses was conducted by two graduate student coders, through a random selection of 20% of the interview responses to the two general questions, and three contextualized situations, with the second and third contextualized situations merged into one. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa for evaluation responses, and the Jaccard Similarity Index for justification responses. Cohen's kappa indicated perfect agreement on evaluation responses between coders for the general questions, as well as for the second contextualized situation ($\kappa = 1.0$), and moderate agreement for the first contextualized situation ($\kappa = 0.41$), partly due to the small sample of transcripts coded ($n = 9$). The Jaccard Similarity Index indicated that the proportion of overlapping justification codes between the two coders was 94% for the first general question, 85% for the second general question, 78% for the first contextualized situation, and 100% for the second contextualized situation.

Table 1***Justification Coding Scheme for General Questions***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Description
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing	Factors inherent to a human life that support the right to live, including: References to life as having intrinsic value, and being “precious,” “special,” or “unique”; the idea that life has meaning or purpose simply because it exists, or because one was born into the world. Wrongness of a life ending especially before its natural end; once born into the world, one should continue to exist. Everyone deserves to experience their one chance at life; life is a gift. References to “miracle,” “God,” “higher power,” or divine purpose, including the wrongness of interfering with divine plans regarding life and death. References to parts of being human, like having thoughts and emotions, and social connections. References to the opportunities to seek the interests and goals included in the flourishing of one’s life.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives	Death of the actor as a way to prevent or reduce physical and/or psychological harm, and pain and suffering, to self or others, including the loss of lives.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Doer of Continual Evil Deeds	Permissibility of death of one who is particularly evil in character and/or deed, and/or who has continued to do evil despite being given chances to stop, and will likely continue to do harm.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Categorically Wrong	General wrongness of ending another’s life.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm	Death as fitting punishment for murder, or significant harm to others. References to “life for a life,” eye for an eye, or forfeiting one’s own life by taking another’s.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering	Death as inadequate punishment, or an easy way out of living with one’s wrongdoing and the resulting regret and repentance. Prison as a more appropriate punishment, as it inflicts greater pain and suffering.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Excessive or Unjust Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering	Death as excessive punishment. Despite the seriousness of the crime, ending the actor’s life is undeserved, and too severe of a punishment. Prison as a more appropriate punishment, as it is less severe than death. Includes the wrongness of retributory killing from a moral standpoint, as it is doing the same thing the actor has done (i.e., taking another’s life), and perpetuates the cycle of murder (versus the pragmatic futility of death as punishment).

Moral	<i>Rights</i>	Autonomy Concerns	The right to the choice of one's own living or dying, with an emphasis on control over one's decisions. Illegitimacy of decisions around another's living and dying, including the ending of life by governmental authorities.
Moral	<i>Equality</i>	Equality of Lives	Equality of lives, and the opportunity to live, with no one having more or less of this right to live. Specific reference to "equal" or "equality," or fairness.
Moral	<i>Environmental</i>	Biological Basis or Social Contract	Taking others' lives goes against the shared biological goal of preservation, and/or the implicit social contract not to kill one another.
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Autonomy of Pain and Suffering	Subjectivity of the experience of pain and suffering, and the corresponding right to end one's own life to bring an end to the pain and suffering. The suffering individual is the only one who can judge their own quality of life; others cannot know their pain. Wrongness of being forced to suffer.
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Personal Decision to End One's Life	Ending one's own life as a personal decision, without explicit reference to pain and suffering as the cause.
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish	Lack of possibility or hope for current or future functioning and/or flourishing for the actor, or inability to move forward and continue life in a desirable or meaningful way.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Futile Punishment	A focus on the futility, or pointlessness of death as punishment, rather than on the aspects of harm, pain and suffering, or injustice involved in the punishment. References to the lack of efficiency, or productivity of, or reason for death as punishment. Ending the actor's life will not make a difference, teach a lesson, or bring back the person who has been killed.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Deterrent	Death discourages others from engaging in the same behavior.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Risk of Wrongful Conviction	Disapproval of death by capital punishment due to the risk of inadvertently convicting an innocent person.

Table 2***Justification Coding Scheme for Contextualized Situation: Ending One's Life Due to Illness***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Description
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Harm to Self	Wrongness of ending one's own life, or reference to "self-murder."
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Harm to Others	Ending one's own life will bring harm, and pain and suffering to others, especially to loved ones.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Opportunity for Functioning and Flourishing	Continuation of the actor's life allows for future possibilities for a life without pain and suffering, and for flourishing.
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Autonomy of Pain and Suffering	Subjectivity of the experience of pain and suffering, and the corresponding right to end one's own life to bring an end to the pain and suffering. The suffering individual is the only one who can judge their own quality of life; others cannot know their pain. Wrongness of being forced to suffer
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Personal Decision to End One's Life	Ending one's own life as a personal decision, without explicit reference to pain and suffering as the cause.
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Diminished Worth of an Individual Life	Subjective judgment of the diminished worth of an individual life due to pain and suffering (rather than a general comment on whether human life has worth). Specific reference to "worth."
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish	Lack of possibility or hope for current or future functioning and/or flourishing for the actor, or inability to move forward and continue life in a desirable or meaningful way.

Table 3***Justification Coding Scheme for Contextualized Situation: Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Description
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Mercy for Flawed Human Circumstances and/or Judgment	Possible factors that could contribute to the actor's decision to murder, or possibly lessen the culpability of the offense and deservedness of punishment, including mental health issues, desperate circumstances, or this crime being a first-time offense.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Opportunity for Development and Flourishing	Continuation of the actor's life allows for possibilities of rehabilitation and/or working to better oneself, with references to change, learning, or growth. Reference to opportunities for reflection and repentance, or coming to terms with one's wrongdoing.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives	Death of the actor as a way to prevent or reduce practical and/or emotional harm to others.
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Categorically Wrong	General wrongness of ending another's life.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm	Death as fitting punishment for murder, or significant harm to others. References to "life for a life," eye for an eye, or forfeiting one's own life by taking another's.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering	Death as inadequate punishment, or an easy way out of living with one's wrongdoing and the resulting regret and repentance. Prison as a more appropriate punishment, as it inflicts greater pain and suffering.
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Excessive or Unjust Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering	Death as excessive punishment. Despite the seriousness of the crime, ending the actor's life is undeserved, and too severe of a punishment. Prison as a more appropriate punishment, as it is less severe than death. Includes the wrongness of retributory killing from a moral standpoint, as it is doing the same thing the actor has done (i.e., taking another's life), and perpetuates the cycle of murder (versus the pragmatic futility of death as punishment).
Moral	<i>Rights</i>	Autonomy Concerns	Illegitimacy of decisions around another's living and dying, including the ending of life by governmental authorities.
Moral	<i>Equality</i>	Equality of Lives	Equality of lives, and the opportunity to live, with no one having more or less of this right to live. Specific reference to "equal" or "equality," or fairness.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Futile Punishment	A focus on the futility, or pointlessness of death as punishment, rather than on the harm, pain and suffering, or injustice involved in the punishment. References to the lack of efficiency, or productivity of, or reason for death as punishment. Ending the

			actor's life will not make a difference, teach a lesson, or bring back the person who has been killed.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Deterrent	Death discourages others from engaging in the same behavior.
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Risk of Wrongful Conviction	Disapproval of death by capital punishment due to the risk of inadvertently convicting an innocent person.
Social- Conventional	<i>Authority</i>	Law	Rightness of ending life as determined by the law of capital punishment.
Other	-	Unelaborated	Lack of, or unelaborated response.

Chapter 4: Results

The current study employed the previously described interview protocol to address the following questions:

1. How do people reason about the value of life in the context of diminished quality of life due to experiences of pain and suffering? When does diminished quality of life due to pain and suffering interfere with the intrinsic desire to preserve life? What are the resulting implications for the intrinsic nature of the value of life, and what are the salient considerations for whether a life is or is not worth living?
2. How do experiences of pain and suffering interact with eudaimonic interests? Specifically, how do people reason about, and conceptualize the meaning, purpose, and value of suffering?

Dworkin (1993) attributes people's disagreements on prominent moral issues to differences in individual interpretations of, rather than general convictions about, the intrinsic value of life and goodness of its continuation. Moral reasoning about questions of living, dying, and pain and suffering, like those posed to participants in this study, involves the coordination of moral and non-moral judgments (Smetana, 2006). In order to examine the hypotheses concerning the complex and varied interpretations of issues of living and dying, this section presents participant evaluation and justification responses to the two general questions on the *Right to Live*, and *Ending Life*, and the two contextualized situations on *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, and *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*. Evaluations addressed the two general questions, and the question, "Would it be all right or not all right..." following both of the contextualized situations. Evaluations were coded, "Yes," "No," or "Maybe," for the general questions, and similarly, "All right," "Not all right," or "Maybe," for the contextualized situations. Participant justifications for their evaluations addressed the follow-up question, "Why or why not?" and were classified by domains of social knowledge and coded as "moral," "personal," "pragmatic," and/or "social-conventional" (Davidson et al., 1983; Turiel, 1983). In line with the complexity of moral reasoning, participants provided justification responses classified into one or more moral and/or non-moral domains. Due to these multi-domain classifications, total percentages of domain classifications of justifications exceeded 100% at times (e.g., all participants (100%) provided at least one justification of the moral domain, with some participants (20%) co-referencing a justification of the personal domain).

For the general questions and contextualized situations, evaluations and domain classifications of justifications were tested for statistical significance and across cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity using chi-squared tests, or Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate based on cell counts. Chi-squared tests were conducted to determine statistically significant differences between categorical variables. No multiple comparisons corrections were made. Fisher's exact tests were conducted to determine statistically significant associations between categorical variables, accommodating low cell counts. Logistic regression tests were attempted, to determine interactions between variables, but low cell counts prevented reliable interaction testing. Following these analyses, this section presents responses organized by positive, negative, and equivocal evaluations and corresponding domain classifications of justifications, and reported in counts and frequencies. Primary and secondary justification categories are identified and illustrated by interview excerpts.

Right to Live: Evaluations and Justifications

Evaluations of the *Right to Live* addressed the first general question, “Do you think that everyone has the right to live?” and were coded, “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe.” Fisher’s exact tests indicated no statistically significant associations between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, with regard to evaluations of the *Right to Live* ($ps \geq .09$). Participants’ justifications for their evaluations were classified by domains of social knowledge and coded as “moral” or “personal.” All participants ($n = 87$) provided at least one justification of the moral domain. Due to the perfect association, and lack of expected difference between evaluations of the *Right to Live*, and justifications of the moral domain, statistical analyses regarding domain classifications of justifications, and comparisons between cohorts, were unwarranted.

Positive Evaluations of the Right to Live, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 98% (47/48) of college student participants, and 87% (34/39) of adult participants reported, “Yes,” positively evaluating the *Right to Live*. College student participants reporting positive evaluations referenced at least one justification of the moral domain (100%, $n = 48$), with 4% of students ($n = 2$) co-referencing a justification of the personal domain. Adult participants reporting positive evaluations exclusively referenced justifications of the moral domain (100%, $n = 39$) (Table 4). Accordingly, primary and secondary justifications provided in support of positive evaluations, as determined by frequency of reference were *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, and *Autonomy Concerns*, concerning issues of welfare and rights within the moral domain (Tables 1, 5). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for positive evaluations of the *Right to Live*.

Value of Life, and the Right to Autonomy

One college student participant (F, age 21) cited the creative opportunities and potential for impact, as well as the validity of human experiences, including pain, that contribute to the inherent value of life, referencing the justification of *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I think, like, inherently, life itself has value because we all experience so much, and like, have the potential to, like, create a lot, and to like, make a—I think, like, yeah—I think, like, the potential impact everyone has, and like, pain people feel—like, emotions people feel are very valid, and so that inherently gives people’s lives value.

Another college student participant (F, age 19) described the distinctly human capacity for choice and the right to create and direct one’s life, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, and *Autonomy Concerns*:

Okay, um, it’s a hard question. I don’t know. I don’t know because I’m not fully decided on my answer either really, but, um hmm, I think maybe it’s the fact that we all have—I guess humans more so than anyone or anything else have more of an ability to, like, make choices, and you know, like, affect the direction of their own lives. So, I would say that maybe that’s the reason that, um, like, everyone has the right to live. It’s because your life can be whatever you make of it, so everyone deserves the right to, um, I guess, like, no matter what they do, they have the right to create their own life, or like, yeah, or like, something like that.

This participant continued with a description of the inherency of the right to live, and the corresponding right to end one's life:

I, um, I don't think that right can really be given to you by anybody, like, it's um, it is quite simply something you are given whether you like it or not, and there are people who sometimes, who you know, sometimes they're like, 'Well I've had enough of living—maybe this is not what I wanted. My life is not what I wanted it to be,' and as unfortunate as that is, that is still their choice, and no one also can take that choice away from them too. Like so, just as, like, we all have a right to live, we have a right to end that life too, I think?

An adult participant (M, age 30) commented on the equality of the value inherent to all lives, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing and Equality of Lives*:

I believe everyone has the right to live. No one life is more important than any other life. This may be true to society as a whole, but on an individual life everyone means something to someone. Someone who may [be] fairly insignificant in their community or the world as a whole, but they could mean the world to a number of other people. All lives matter.

Negative Evaluations of the Right to Live, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 2% (1/48) of college student participants, and 13% (5/39) of adult participants reported, "No," indicating that not everyone has the right to live. All college students ($n = 48$) and adults ($n = 39$) reporting negative evaluations exclusively referenced justifications of the moral domain (100%) (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications provided against the *Right to Live*, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm*, and *Doer of Continual Evil Deeds*, concerning the issues of justice and welfare within the moral domain (Tables 1, 5). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for negative evaluations of the *Right to Live*.

Exceptions to the Right to Live

One college student participant (M, age 21) negatively evaluated the *Right to Live*. This participant referred to capital punishment as a way to address the loss experience of a murder victim's loved ones, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm* and *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives*:

Just some people—I feel like—How should I say this? I mean, part of it—I guess the easiest way to say the reason why I believe death penalty should exist consists why I think so...Not from the standpoint of, like, prevention, but more on the spectrum of the fact that the loved ones of the person who are likely murdered in many cases, you know, they shouldn't have to go with the fact that their loved one is dead, but the person still alive. So, that's—that's my main reasoning, I guess.

An adult participant (F, age 39) conceived of the intentional, illegitimate decision-making regarding another's living and dying as a forfeit of the murderer's own life, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm*, and *Autonomy Concerns*:

I do not think that everyone has the right to live. I feel that if you willingly and consciously take the life of another human being, then you have forfeit your right to live. We have not been put on this earth to decide who lives and who dies, but I do think if you make that decision for another, then you can no longer be afforded the right to live.

Another adult participant (F, age 44) mentioned those whose continued existence poses a threat to the lives of others, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Doer of Continual Evil Deeds*, and *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others*:

No, I don't believe everyone has the right to live. There are people in the world who are more of a detriment to society and the world. Such people are serial killers who can't control their urge to kill people. The world is safer without them.

Table 4***Percentages of Domain Classifications of Justifications by Evaluation Across Questions***

Domain	<i>Right to Live</i>	<i>Ending Life</i>	<i>Ending One's Life Due to Illness</i>	<i>Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life</i>
<i>Moral</i>				
% (Positive)	100	95.3	0	72.2
% (Negative)	100	90.5	100	82.5
% (Maybe)	0	0	0	66.7
<i>p</i>	-	0.95	-	0.46
<i>Personal</i>				
% (Positive)	2	17.2	100	0
% (Negative)	0	0	0	0
% (Maybe)	0	0	100	0
<i>p</i>	-	0.06	-	-
<i>Pragmatic</i>				
% (Positive)	0	1.6	0	16.7
% (Negative)	0	14.3	0	27
% (Maybe)	0	0	0	0
<i>p</i>	-	<0.05	-	0.25
<i>Social-Conventional</i>				
% (Positive)	0	4.7	0	22.2
% (Negative)	0	0	0	0
% (Maybe)	0	0	0	16.7
<i>p</i>	-	0.57	-	0

Table 5***Right to Live: Percentages of Justifications for Evaluations (N = 87)***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Evaluation: Yes	Evaluation: No	Evaluation: Maybe
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing	72.8	0	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives	1.2	33.3	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Doer of Continual Evil Deeds	0	50	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Categorically Wrong	0	0	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm	66.7	8.6	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering	0	0	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Excessive or Unjust Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering	0	0	0
Moral	<i>Rights</i>	Autonomy Concerns	45.7	16.7	0
Moral	<i>Equality</i>	Equality of Lives	19.8	0	0
Moral	<i>Environmental</i>	Biological Basis or Social Contract	7.4	0	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Autonomy of Pain and Suffering	2.5	0	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Personal Decision to End One's Life	0	0	0
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish	0	0	0

Ending Life: Evaluations and Justifications

Evaluations of *Ending Life* addressed the second general question, “Is it ever all right for someone to take the life of another person?” and were coded, “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe.” Chi-squared tests indicated no statistically significant differences between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, with regard to evaluations of *Ending Life* ($ps \geq .15$). Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, and justifications ($ps \geq .15$). Participants’ justifications for their evaluations were classified by domains of social knowledge, and coded as “moral,” “personal,” “pragmatic,” and “social-conventional.” Fisher’s exact tests indicated no statistically significant associations between the moral, personal, and social-conventional domains, and evaluations ($ps \geq .06$). There was a borderline significant, inverse association between justifications of the pragmatic domain ($p = .04$, odds ratio = 0.10), and evaluations, suggesting a relationship between negative evaluations of *Ending Life*, and the use of pragmatic justifications.

Positive Evaluations of Ending Life, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 74% (34/46) of college student participants, and 77% (30/39) of adult participants reported, “Yes,” positively evaluating *Ending Life*. Five of the six participants negatively evaluating the *Right to Live*, reported positive evaluations of *Ending Life*. College student participants reporting positive evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (93%, $n = 43$) more than those of the personal (20%, $n = 9$), pragmatic (2%, $n = 1$), and social-conventional (4%, $n = 2$) domains. Adult participants reporting positive evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (100%, $n = 39$) more than those of the personal (5%, $n = 2$) and social-conventional (3%, $n = 1$) domains (Table 4). Overall, primary and secondary justifications provided in support of permissibility, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives* and *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm*, concerning issues of welfare and justice within the moral domain (Tables 1, 6). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for positive evaluations of *Ending Life*.

Prevention of Pain, Suffering, and Murder, and Exceptions to the Right to Live

One adult participant (F, age 37) noted that a threat to life equates a surrender of the potential murderer’s own right to live, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives* and *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm*:

It is acceptable to take the life of someone else if it's in preservation of your own life or the life of someone else, assuming it's a genuine fear of your life being taken, and not just trying to protect property or an excuse. If someone is about to kill you, or you have a genuine fear for your life, then that other person has sacrificed their own right to life.

A college student participant (M, age 20) referred to the exceptional acceptability of ending life in cases with death as the sole way to cease perpetration of excessive harm to others, referencing the cooccurrence of the justifications of *Doer of Continual Evil Deeds*, *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives*, and *Autonomy Concerns*:

Yeah, I think an example might be, like, someone like John Wayne Gacy, who was a serial killer who killed a bunch of people who—he was having kind of an excess of killing people and therefore taking that basic human right away from them, and the only way to stop him at that point was by executing him. So, I think in that case, even though it isn't right in general to take someone's life and to kind of revoke that from him, it still was very justified. Like, I would agree to that.

Another college student (F, age 21) referred to cases of greatly diminished health, in which the long-term loss of consciousness or general functionality, autonomy, and hope of improvement, could prompt the preferability of ending life for both the suffering individual and loved ones. This participant referenced the cooccurrence of the justifications of *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives, Autonomy of Pain and Suffering, and Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*:

Yeah, so, I think that generally murder is wrong, right? But I do think there are exceptions where, like, again, like I said, if your health is impeding you so much, or if you can't live a life that you can, like—you don't have a consciousness, or you're in a coma, or on life support and—or like, there's no hope of living a better life in the near future or distant future. And like, it would be easier for them, and like, easier for their loved ones, to just, like, have them peacefully pass away. And like, I guess, like, that decision would be like killing someone, like taking someone's life, but I think that's one kind of exception that I think would probably be okay. But you're just senselessly murdering someone—I don't think that is obviously okay. But yeah, if it's taking someone out of their pain, if it's because they wouldn't want to live in a state that they can't control any part of their life, and they, like, lost all autonomy and independence, then.

Negative Evaluations of Ending Life, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 26% (12/46) of college student participants, and 23% (9/39) of adult participants reported, “No,” negatively evaluating *Ending Life*. College student participants reporting negative evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (92%, $n = 11$) more than those of the pragmatic domain (17%, $n = 2$). Similarly, adult participants reporting negative evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (89%, $n = 8$) more than those of the pragmatic domain (11%, $n = 1$) (Table 4). Accordingly, primary and secondary justifications provided against *Ending Life*, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Autonomy Concerns*, and *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, concerning issues of rights and welfare within the moral domain (Tables 1, 6). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for negative evaluations of *Ending Life*.

Right to Autonomy, and the Value of Life

One of the six participants negatively evaluating the *Right to Live* reported a negative evaluation of *Ending Life*. This participant (F, age 39), also quoted in the previous section, expressed the absolute wrongness of ending another's life, referencing the justification of *Autonomy Concerns*:

It is never all right to take the life of another person. A person can sacrifice their right to live, but we should never take it from them. Gone are the days when people would be

banished and their rights taken from them. I wish we could still do this. Now we lock them away and take care of them.

A college student participant (M, age 19) conceived of the ending of life as the elimination of one's values, purpose, and future goals, referencing the justification of *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I know I've been saying this a lot, but like, you know, these people have, like, values and like, purpose in life. And just, like, if you just take that away from them, you're taking away, like, you know, the future of their goals and like, you know, everything they want to do in their lives.

Another college student participant (F, age 21) deemed the inability to fully understand another's values and experiences as reason for the illegitimacy of determining the worth of their life, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Autonomy Concerns* and *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

No, because, um, it's not—I don't believe that anybody can have, like, full like, understanding of that person's values—what they've been through, their life experiences, unless they're them, and I don't think that it's their right—someone else's right to be able to dictate that their life is worth less or more than someone else's, so if that makes sense.

Table 6***Ending Life: Percentages of Justifications for Evaluations (N = 85)***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Evaluation: Yes	Evaluation: No	Evaluation: Maybe
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing	0	42.9	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives	78.1	0	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Doer of Continual Evil Deeds	17.2	0	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Categorically Wrong	0	14.3	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm	21.9	0	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering	0	0	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Excessive or Unjust Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering	1.6	4.8	0
Moral	<i>Rights</i>	Autonomy Concerns	6.2	57.1	0
Moral	<i>Equality</i>	Equality of Lives	1.6	0	0
Moral	<i>Environmental</i>	Biological Basis or Social Contract	3.1	4.8	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Autonomy of Pain and Suffering	15.6	0	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Personal Decision to End One's Life	1.6	0	0
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish	4.7	0	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Futile Punishment	0	14.3	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Deterrent	1.6	0	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Risk of Wrongful Conviction	0	0	0
Social- Conventional	<i>Authority</i>	Law	4.7	0	0

Ending One's Life Due to Illness: Evaluations and Justifications

Evaluations of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* addressed the first contextualized question, "Would it be all right or not all right for Alex to end his own life?" and were coded, "All Right," "Not All Right," or "Maybe." Fisher's exact tests indicated no statistically significant associations between the cohorts based on age and gender, and evaluations ($ps \geq .71$). There was a possibly significant association, in the context of the small sample size, between religiosity ($p = .04$, odds ratio = 0.16), and evaluations. There were no statistically significant associations between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, with regard to justifications of the moral ($ps \geq .10$) and personal ($ps \geq .10$) domains. Participants' justifications for their evaluations were classified by domains of social knowledge, and coded as "moral" and "personal." All participants reporting a positive evaluation ($n = 33$) provided at least one justification exclusively of the personal domain, and all participants reporting a negative evaluation ($n = 7$) provided at least one justification exclusively of the moral domain. Due to the perfect association, and lack of expected difference between positive evaluations and justifications of the personal domain, and negative evaluations and justifications of the moral domain, statistical analyses regarding domain classifications of justifications, and evaluations, were unwarranted.

Positive Evaluations of Ending One's Life Due to Illness, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 74% (17/23) of college student participants, and 84% (16/19) of adult participants reported, "All Right," positively evaluating *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*. All college students ($n = 17$) and adults ($n = 16$) reporting positive evaluations exclusively referenced justifications of the personal domain (100%) (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications provided in support of permissibility, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*, and *Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*, concerning issues of personal choice and personhood, within the personal domain (Tables 2, 7). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for positive evaluations of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*.

Subjectivity of Pain, Suffering, and Flourishing

One college student participant (M, age 20) reflected on the sole legitimacy of one's own conviction about the worth of one's life, especially in the context of pain and suffering, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering* and *Diminished Worth of an Individual Life*:

...I feel like it's his own choice on whether or not he wants to live, especially in this scenario where he's in, like, constant pain and, like, his life is not worth living to his own judgment. And I feel like there's no one who can judge better than yourself if your life is worth living, like, people might—might—like, obviously if you're, like, talking to a therapist, they might give you reason to say that your life is worth living. And—but I still think it's you having to convince yourself of that, like, no one telling you your life is worth living is going to convince you of it unless you believe it.

An adult participant (F, age 44) identified the actor's experience of pain and inability to function as "not living," and the coercive element of prolonged suffering, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*, and *Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*:

I think it would be all right. I believe that people should be able to end their own life if they are living in agony. Living with pain and not being able to do anything, is not living. Why should someone be forced to suffer?

Another college student participant (M, age 21) focused on the preservation of dignity in death, in the context of an exhaustion of options, and pain and suffering without expected end, referencing the same two cooccurring justifications of *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*, and *Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*:

Yeah, I think so. I think you're suffering—I mean it's controversial, but we put down dogs for the same reason, and so, like, you know, I put down a dog for that reason, and if someone and I think mostly beings—most living social beings have some—should have an ounce for respect and dignity in the way they die. Um, I think if he's, like, going through a lot of pain, then that should be his decision, and you know, if there's no other recourse, like, if he's tried everything, then yeah, he should, yeah.

Twenty-four percent of participants expressed support for *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, without specific reference to pain and suffering. A college student participant (M, age 21) determined the unsuccessful pursuit of a meaningful life, as a reason for the acceptability of ending one's life, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Personal Decision to End One's Life*, and *Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*:

I mean—I guess—I guess from whose perspective—I mean—I think that I would hope that he wouldn't kill himself, or wouldn't try to kill himself. But like, if he ended up doing that, then, like, that's—that's a decision, but I feel like there hopefully would be people around him that could try to help him or convince him not to, or there should be people monitoring him to hopefully ensure that he doesn't kill himself. But I mean, if he does kill himself, I don't know what's right or not right there. I feel like he can technically do whatever he wants if he exhausted every single effort to view life as meaningful or whatever, and he didn't find it, then, yeah. I think he probably does have the right to kill himself... I think there's some sort of freedom like what you are doing with yourself. I mean, I don't know if laws should be able to really dictate what you're doing with yourself. I mean, what are you going to do? I mean, that they're going to kill themselves. Are you going to punish them? I mean, they probably saw that they'll be more pain-free in wherever they think is after.

Negative Evaluations of Ending One's Life Due to Illness, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 22% (5/23) of college student participants, and 11% (2/19) of adult participants reported, "Not All Right," negatively evaluating *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*. All college students ($n = 5$) and adults ($n = 2$) reporting negative evaluations exclusively referenced justifications of the moral domain (100%) (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications provided against *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Harm to Self*, tied with *Harm to Others*, and *Opportunity for Functioning and Flourishing*, all of which concern the issue of welfare within the moral domain (Tables 2, 7). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for negative evaluations of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*.

Harm and Loss of Future Possibilities

One college student participant (F, age 21) emphasized the constancy of the value of life, and the wrongness of ending life regardless of the subject of the murder, referencing the

justification of *Harm to Self*: “I feel it still counts as murder even if it's to yourself...Because you're ending a life that is basically worthy, or just priceless as is a life.” Another college student participant (F, age 21) prioritized consideration of the impact of the actor's death on the welfare of loved ones, including potential dependents, referencing the justification of *Harm to Others*:

It's really hard, especially because you have loved ones. Alex has loved ones. And it's very dependent on the situation, like, people could rely on him. If he's taking care of people, like, how are they going to survive without him? And like, how is his death going to affect the other people in his life if he has any?

An adult participant (M, age 37) proposed any degree of the possibility for a cure as a reason for the wrongness of ending life in this situation, referencing the justification of *Opportunity for Functioning and Flourishing*: “To me, I feel it would not be right to end his life, as there may be a possibility, albeit infinitesimally small, that there may be a cure to their illness.”

Equivocal Evaluations of Ending One's Life Due to Illness, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 4% (1/23) of college student participants, and 5% (1/19) of adult participants reported an equivocal response, or “Maybe.” All college students ($n = 1$) and adults ($n = 1$) reporting equivocal evaluations referenced the justification of *Personal Decision to End One's Life*, of the personal domain (100%) (Tables 4, 7). A college student participant (M, age 20) expressed both general support for personal decisions regarding one's life, and hesitation toward the ending of life in this situation due to the actor's possible need for emotional support in the face of their illness:

I think—wow, okay—I think that I'll always go to the fact that, like, it's someone's own decision to, you know, do what they do with their own lives and with their own bodies. Um, you know, same as I believe that with myself. Like, it's my decision. It's my body. And if that were the case, then—I wouldn't—I don't want to say yes, because that sounds like I'm, like, supporting that action when truly, I obviously don't support it. I feel like there's always other answers. There's always help out there. There's always, you know, support. And I feel like in this case it's more emotional support that they sound like they needed than, like, the physical, because if there's no medication thus far, then there should have been consideration for his emotions. Um, so, uh, no, but then I'm also on the fence because I don't want to say, like, no, in terms of, like, they were wrong for doing it because it's their decision. But I personally just feel for them. That's—that's all I'm going to say.

Table 7***Ending One's Life Due to Illness: Percentages of Justifications for Evaluations (N = 42)***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Evaluation: All Right	Evaluation: Not All Right	Evaluation: Maybe
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Harm to Self	0	42.9	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Harm to Others	0	42.9	0
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Opportunity for Functioning and Flourishing	0	28.6	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Autonomy of Pain and Suffering	75.8	0	0
Personal	<i>Personal Choice</i>	Personal Decision to End One's Life	24.2	0	100
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Diminished Worth of an Individual Life	9.1	0	0
Personal	<i>Personhood</i>	Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish	36.4	0	0

Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life: Evaluations and Justifications

Evaluations of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life* in an act of unprovoked murder, addressed the second contextualized question, "Would it be all right or not all right for the authorities to kill [the actor]?" and were coded, "All Right," "Not All Right," or "Maybe." There were no statistically significant differences between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, with regard to evaluations of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life* ($p \geq .12$). Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences between the cohorts based on age, gender, and religiosity, with regard to justifications of the moral ($p \geq .20$), pragmatic ($p \geq .29$), and social-conventional ($p \geq .17$) domains. Participants' justifications for their evaluations were classified by domains of social knowledge, and coded as "moral," "pragmatic," and "social-conventional." There were no statistically significant differences between the moral, pragmatic, and social-conventional domains, with regard to evaluations ($p \geq 0$).

Positive Evaluations of Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 15% (7/48) of college student participants, and 28% (11/39) of adult participants reported, "All Right," positively evaluating *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*. College student participants reporting positive evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (57%, $n = 4$) more than those of the pragmatic (29%, $n = 2$) and social-conventional (14%, $n = 1$) domains. Adult participants reporting positive evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (82%, $n = 9$) more than those of the pragmatic (9%, $n = 1$) and social-conventional (27%, $n = 3$) domains (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications provided in support of permissibility, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Fitting Punishment* and *Law*, respectively concerning the issue of justice of the moral domain, and the issue of authority of the social-conventional domain (Tables 3, 8). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for positive evaluations of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*.

Justice and Social Order

One adult participant (F, age 35) noted the appropriateness of capital punishment as a reciprocal and just punishment, which also provides closure for the victim's family, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Fitting Punishment* and *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives*: "Yes, that is due punishment for a crime that was committed. It give justice and closure to the family as well as serves as a punishment for the crime."

A college student participant (M, age 23) prioritized adherence to the unjust law of capital punishment in avoidance of the societal problems prompted by violation of the law, referencing the justification of *Law*:

That's tricky. I mean, on the one hand, I want to say—Yeah, like, of course the, um—the law—I think the law is unjust. I don't think necessarily putting someone to death is, uh, justice. Although I'm not totally sure how I feel about capital punishment. Let's just go with that. But even if the law is unjust, is it worth violating the law in this particular circumstance for the sake of maintaining, like, morality or justice? Uh, it's tough. I mean, you could pull it out, and I think—I think you probably should still go through with it. I think it would probably cause more chaos and problems with society to violate in this particular instance. And rather than forming some kind of—and—and like, rather than

forming something later down the line—killing Mark in this instance—but later down the line, you, like, elect politicians that push that kind of law out of, uh, out of the system. Another college student participant (F, age 21) commented on the preventative effect of the universal fear of death, referencing the justification of *Deterrent*: “I think death is the worst thing that you can put onto an individual, and using that as a punishment could possibly prevent more deaths because people are scared to die themselves.”

Negative Evaluations of Death as Punishment for Ending Another’s Life, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 81% (39/48) of college student participants, and 62% (24/39) of adult participants reported, “Not All Right,” negatively evaluating *Death as Punishment for Ending Another’s Life*. College student participants reporting negative evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (92%, $n = 44$) more than those of the pragmatic (20%, $n = 9$) domain. Adult participants reporting negative evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (82%, $n = 32$) more than those of the pragmatic (21%, $n = 8$) domain (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications provided against *Death as Punishment for Ending Another’s Life*, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Excessive Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, concerning issues of justice and welfare within the moral domain (Tables 3, 8). The following interview excerpts represent participant references to justifications for negative evaluations of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another’s Life*.

Injustice and Denial of Merciful Opportunity

One adult participant (F, age 38) expressed the harshness of death as punishment in this situation, and a preference for the actor’s rehabilitation and opportunity for reflection upon their actions, referencing the justifications of *Excessive Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering* and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I don't feel it would be right for Mark to be killed. I think it is too harsh for Mark to be sentenced to death. I feel it would be better for Mark to be rehabilitated and to realize what his actions have done.

A college student participant (M, age 21) described the possibility of psychological vulnerability, as well as the injustice of death as punishment, as reasons not to seek vengeance, but rather to provide assistance and opportunities for rehabilitation, referencing the cooccurring justifications of *Excessive Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering*, *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, and *Mercy for Flawed Circumstances and/or Judgment*:

No, because I think that he still got a lot more potential. Like he—he could've done this one evil thing, but I mean, is that going to define him? There's some sort of either eye for an eye, and that type of thing, but I try not to believe in the concept of revenge there. It's horrible that he had done such a thing, but I don't know if he deserves death. Hopefully, if he would make that decision, maybe something mentally was a little bit off where he didn't conform to the standard of being able to, like, follow the law and not kill someone. But if you're able to, like, help that person and rehabilitate them, and hopefully make it so that they can contribute to society rather than do something like that in the future. I don't think they have the right to kill.

Similarly considering circumstantial vulnerability, another college student participant (F, age 21) preferred opportunities for rehabilitation and personal betterment, referencing the cooccurring

justifications of *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing* and *Mercy for Flawed Circumstances and/or Judgment*:

I personally don't agree with that. I mean, I get—I get why people do. I get why people would say like, oh, if you take a life then we're going to take yours. For murder, it's hard for me to say. I'd rather just put them away, possibly do some kind of rehabilitation stuff. I think a lot of people that are in prisons would benefit from, like, volunteer or community service stuff, rehabilitation...I mean, in this case specifically, I don't endorse it because it is one killing. I think it was an act of desperation. And just this guy really just not doing well in life. And as far as I know, like in the story, he hasn't committed a bunch of different murders; this was just seeing one criminal escape a bank thing spur of the moment. I do believe in, like, rehabilitation. So that's more of where I'm coming from, trying to make people better versus just putting them down.

A third college student (M, age 20) focused on the lack of purpose or benefit of the process of capital punishment, preferring rehabilitation, reflection, and restoration, especially in the context of possible circumstantial vulnerability. The participant referenced the cooccurring justifications of *Futile Punishment*, *Mercy for Flawed Circumstances and/or Judgment*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I say no, because although Mark tried to take that action—him killing this random stranger—killing Mark doesn't do anything. After this person is already dead, it doesn't bring this person back to life. There's no—there's no benefit to anyone in society for actually killing Mark. And then you're just, like, taking another life senselessly. So, like, after the fact, I don't think there's any reason why the death penalty, even for murder or something extremely heinous, should be in effect.... While it is morally wrong for Mark to commit this action, I think there are other ways that you could go about punishing Mark for this or rehabilitating Mark. Like, a correctional facility, for instance, rather than just, like, killing him because it's possible he was just motivated by his—like, he was feeling really desperate, or something like that. And it's possible that rehabilitation and correctional, like, education could help him to realize that what he did was extremely wrong and maybe, make him a productive member of society again after he's been rehabilitated.

A fourth college student (F, age 19) rejected death as punishment due to the illegitimacy of governmental decision-making about the value of lives, and the elimination of opportunities for redemption, restoration, and contribution to society. This participant referenced the cooccurring justifications of *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing* and *Autonomy Concerns*:

...they're not allowing him to like, reflect on, um, what he's done, or kind of serve, um, back. Like, I guess, like, one point of, like, the prison system is to, like, reform people to hopefully let them be, like, productive members of society again. Um, so they're kind of saying like, we're just gonna cut that short and we're not going to allow him to, you know, like, redeem himself, or like, contribute to society in, like, any way because we're not giving him that ability anymore, and we're just kind of taking that away from him and we're taking his life away from him. So, I think just to be more, um, like morally ground, its best to just, like, apply that law to everyone that we, um, shouldn't take the lives, um, lives of others, and I think that another thing is, it also gives authorities, um, too much power because it gives authorities [power] to kind of play a role of, um,

determining the value of lives, and I don't think that authorities should be able to determine values of people's lives.

One participant (M, age 40) described death as a non-punitive end, unlike a life sentence in prison, referencing the justification of *Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering*:

The death penalty is not a punishment in my opinion. It should be life in prison, as that is real punishment. Death is just an end, and they would not get the punishment of being incarcerated for life if they are just put to death.

A college student (F, age 21) reasoned about the inappropriate application of the principle of an eye for eye to human life, preferring the opportunity for reflection and the development of remorse, and noting the value of this experience of suffering. This participant referenced the cooccurring justifications of *Excessive Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering*, *Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I think these are the kind of—the harder questions. I think from my general perspective on the death penalty, I would say no, because I don't think—the only reason I see, like, the death penalty being an accurate form of punishment, is, like, with overcrowding of prisons. But I think that in general, like, I think it's not—I mean, there's, like, an eye for an eye statement. I don't think that really applies to something as large as the human life. And also, I think that, like, they should be given the opportunity to, like—'cause I think that's more painful to sit with the crime, to just be taken, at least from my perspective, than to be taken out of your misery. Their deaths—I think at least giving the opportunity for them to reflect upon their experience and maybe make a wiser decision in the future, is a good opportunity... I think you have to have some sort of understanding and some sort of moral sense initially, but I think you have to have some sort of understanding of the situation as a whole, and you have to at least—and with that, then have the potential to have remorse at some point in time. I don't think it's necessarily capable—or not everyone's going to suffer as much from just sitting with their crime. But I think that, like, have—at least having that accounts for the—yeah, I don't know. But I think that at least there is value to it, though.

Equivocal Evaluations of Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life, and Corresponding Justifications

Overall, 4% (2/48) of college student participants, and 10% (4/39) of adult participants reported an equivocal response, or “Maybe.” College students reporting equivocal evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (100%, $n = 2$). Adults reporting equivocal evaluations referenced justifications of the moral domain (50%, $n = 2$) more than those of the social-conventional domain (25%, $n = 1$), with one adult providing an “unelaborated” response (25%, $n = 1$), unable to be coded (Table 4). Primary and secondary justifications, as determined by frequency of reference, were *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, tied with *Mercy for Flawed Circumstances and/or Judgment*, concerning the issue of welfare of the moral domain (Tables 3, 8). A college student (F, age 19) expressed hesitation toward an immediate death sentence, without denying the permissibility of the punishment, noting a preference for understanding the actor's circumstances and motives prior to consideration of punishment. This participant referenced the cooccurring justifications of *Mercy for Flawed Circumstances and/or Judgment* and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*:

I wouldn't say, like, immediately so. I think I'm a little troubled by such, like, a quick sentence, like, straight to death. It like—I would say for—I think maybe there's, like, some mental health issues involved. Maybe there's—there's, like, some other factors involved. So, I think before, like, sentencing him to death, they should maybe be trying to take some, like, remediating actions, like therapy, and like, yeah. And like, providing him, like, programs and resources and other people to help them improve, and try to better understand, like, what was going on, and why he did that before making such a decision to end his life.

Table 8***Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life: Percentages of Justifications for Evaluations (N = 87)***

Domain	Subdomain	Justification Category	Evaluation: All Right	Evaluation: Not All Right	Evaluation: Maybe
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Mercy for Flawed Human Circumstances and/or Judgment	0	25.4	33.3
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Opportunity for Development and Flourishing	0	27	33.3
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives	16.7	0	16.7
Moral	<i>Welfare</i>	Categorically Wrong	0	1.6	16.7
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm	61.1	0	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Inadequate Punishment/Prison Inflicts Greater Suffering	0	19	0
Moral	<i>Justice</i>	Excessive or Unjust Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering	0	36.5	16.7
Moral	<i>Rights</i>	Autonomy Concerns	0	22.2	0
Moral	<i>Equality</i>	Equality of Lives	0	1.6	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Futile Punishment	0	25.4	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Deterrent	16.7	0	0
Pragmatic	<i>Effectiveness</i>	Risk of Wrongful Conviction	0	4.8	0
Social-Conventional	<i>Authority</i>	Law	22.2	0	16.7
Other	-	Unelaborated	0	3.2	33.3

Chapter 5: Discussion

The current study examined how people reason about the value of life, including about the presumed goodness of its preservation, in the context of the diminished quality of life due to experiences of pain and suffering, as well as salient considerations for whether an individual life is or is not worth living. The study also sought to examine reasoning on the interaction between experiences of pain and suffering and eudaimonic interests, and conceptualizations of the meaning, purpose, and value of suffering. This section begins by addressing these areas of examination, based on findings from participant reasoning about the general questions on the *Right to Live*, and *Ending Life*, and the contextualized situations on *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, and *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*.

Support for the Value and Preservation of Life

With the complexity of the coordination of judgments within, and across domains of social knowledge (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983), and the subjectivity of individual judgments involving moral components (Turiel & Wainryb, 1994), paralleled by the objective moral grounding of the issues addressed, this study approached questions of living and dying with a necessary openness of expectation regarding variations in evaluations and justifications, apart from the issue of the right to live. *Right to Live* established a foundation for the support of the universal right to life, upon which this study sought to explore reasoning in the context of experiences of pain and suffering. Participant reasoning about the general, abstract ideas of living and dying, as well as about contextualized situations involving pain and suffering, reflected expected support for the universal, intrinsic right to live, and confirmed the presumption of the goodness of life's continuation. The large majority of participants across age cohorts supported *Right to Live*, and provided primary and secondary justifications of the moral domain, *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life*, and *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, involving elements inherent to a distinctly human life, and *Autonomy Concerns*, involving the right to the choice of one's own living or dying, with an emphasis on control over one's decisions. Consistent with existing literature on the value and dignity of life, participants cited factors including the preciousness and irreplaceability of individual lives, experiential and creative opportunities, and the capacity for choice and the right to autonomy to conduct life according to one's beliefs, in support of the *Right to Live* (Dworkin, 1993; Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1993).

Exceptions to, and Varied Interpretations of the Goodness of the Preservation of Life

A small minority of participants, consisting of one college student, and five adults, negatively evaluated the *Right to Live*, also referencing the issue of welfare within the moral domain. These responses were not indicative of a straightforward rejection of the right to live, but rather, a consideration of exceptional cases possibly warranting the death of one who has violated another's right to live. The small minority of negative evaluations, and appropriate, corresponding justifications, were within the expected breadth of reasoning. The primary justification of *Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm* drew on the issue of justice, and included references to "life for a life," eye for an eye, or the forfeiting of one's own life by the taking of another's. The secondary justification, *Doer of Continual Evil Deeds*, supported the death of one particularly evil in character and/or deed, and/or who has continued to do evil despite chances to stop, and will likely continue to do harm.

Possible exceptions to the right to live were addressed by the second general question, *Ending Life*, regarding the permissibility of *ever* ending a life. The cooccurrence of majority support for *Ending Life*, with majority support for the *Right to Live*, represented not an inconsistency of reasoning, or deviation from the conviction about the intrinsic value of life, but rather a narrowing of the urge for preservation into a specific prioritization of one's own life, or the lives of loved ones, over the life of an offender posing a risk to one's own, or others' lives. The primary justification provided in support of *Ending Life* was *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives*, with the death of the actor as a way to prevent or reduce physical and/or psychological harm, and pain and suffering, to others, including the loss of lives. The secondary justification for *Ending Life* was *Exception to Universal Right to Live: Death as Fitting Punishment for Murder or Significant Harm*, which was, appropriately, the primary justification against the *Right to Live*. Also, the minority of participants rejecting *Ending Life* provided the same cooccurring primary and secondary justifications, in reversed order of frequency, *Autonomy Concerns* and *Value and Sacredness/Inviolability of Life, and Opportunity for Development and Flourishing*, as those in support of the *Right to Live*. Thus, participant responses to the two general questions showed a general alignment in the arrangement of justifications across positive and negative evaluations, and a consistency in support for the right to live, and exceptional ending of life. Living and dying were deemed moral issues.

The contextualized situations introduced two different contexts of pain and suffering to the examination of the interaction between pain and suffering, and eudaimonic interests. Participants negatively evaluating *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, interpreted this act as a violation of welfare, and the elimination of future possibilities for flourishing. The primary justification, *Harm to Self*, referenced self-murder, and *Harm to Other*, referenced the harm, and pain and suffering brought to others, through the ending of one's life. Across contexts, negative evaluations of ending life consistently aligned with justifications concerning the issue of welfare within the moral domain, demonstrating a more straightforward interpretation of, or stricter adherence to the general, intrinsic value of all lives, and the general wrongness of ending life. This perspective prioritized preservation of the intrinsic value inherent to existence (Dworkin, 1993). The small minority of participants in support of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*, referenced *Fitting Punishment*, in recognition of the seriousness of ending another's life, and an exceptional support of death as just punishment for the sake of righting a wrong, rather than a straightforward rejection of the universal right to live. In line with the existing context of capital punishment, the secondary justification in support of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life* was *Law*, concerning the rightness of ending life as determined by the law of capital punishment. Although these participants referenced the moral domain most frequently, a small number of participants prioritized the issue of accordance with the law, within the social-conventional domain. Upon this confirmation of support for the value and preservation of life, and the reality of exceptions to the right to live, the following subsections expand on two response categories of interest to the objectives of the study, concerning support for *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, and rejection of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*.

As earlier stated, the primary, and heavily referenced justification in support of *Ending Life* was *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including*

Loss of Lives. The moral concerns of the prevention of harm and preservation of life generally aim toward the prevention of the loss of lives. As with majority support for *Ending Life*, majority support across age cohorts for *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* cooccurred with majority support for the *Right to Live*, revealing a different interpretation, or expansion of the understanding of the preservation of life. In the way that reasoning about exceptionality emphasized another angle of the right to live, directed toward the recognition and righting of violations against another's life, justifications in support of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* reflected beliefs about the importance of the preservation of life, or the experience of living. *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* introduced the element of self as actor, as well as the context of pain and suffering of illness. Intended to set the value of life against the quality of life, *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* prompted a weighing of the moral issues of welfare and prevention of further harm, in a context of preexisting harm. The primary justification in support of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* was *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*, which emphasized the subjectivity of the experience of pain and suffering, and the corresponding right to end one's own life to bring an end to the pain and suffering, according to the actor's desire. The suffering individual was deemed the only one able to judge their own quality of life, as others cannot know their pain. While the self-determining right to autonomy, as conceptualized through the justification of *Autonomy Concerns*, was oriented toward protection of the continuation of life, this right surfaced in a fundamentally similar, but altered orientation toward the alleviation of one's own pain and suffering in the justification of *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*. The greater frequency of references to *Autonomy of Pain and Suffering*, over *Personal Decision to End One's Life*, without explicit reference to pain and suffering as the cause, showed the salience of the context of pain and suffering for positive evaluations. The secondary justification in support of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* was *Individual Inability to Function and/or Flourish*, indicating a lack of possibility or hope for current or future functioning and/or flourishing for the actor, or an inability to move forward and continue life in a desirable or meaningful way, revealing the importance attributed to the capacity for functioning and flourishing. Participants across age cohorts in support of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness* exclusively referenced the personal domain.

Violation of Self, Subjectivity of Eudaimonic Pursuit, and the Negotiation of Dignity

Reasoning about the interaction between the value and quality of life reveals expected variation in the interpretation and expression of the preservation of the intrinsic goodness of life, through the prioritization of subjective, context-specific eudaimonic goals. The intertwining of existential, intrinsic value, and personally embodied value creates a desire to prevent and resolve violations of the lives of self and others, as well as prolonged exposure to the helplessness of suffering. If suffering comprises a subjectively undesirable state or experience involving the lack, or loss of intrinsic goods (Cowden et al., 2022; Nussbaum, 2001b; VanderWeele, 2019), then suffering presents a eudaimonic conflict that centers on the loss of self, or the object of utmost value to an individual for whom life has not only existential, intrinsic, but also personal value. This loss of personhood becomes the subject of suffering (Cassell, 1982), rendering this experience an inherently tragic event, violent in its direct violation of self, and the autonomy to select and maintain goods of intrinsic value. If human function lies in the rational principle, or the capacity to exercise thought (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009), then suffering possesses a victimizing quality of rendering one passive or helpless in the face of the unexpected, prolonged,

and intense experience of suffering (Cassell, 1982). Painful events “crush and maim one’s blessedness” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2009, *NE* 1100b28-30), and the experience of the loss of intrinsic goods is akin to “tearing the self apart,” intensified by the strength of the cognitive-affective valuing of the specific goods (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 33). In this way, suffering embodies and produces moral wrong in its infliction of harm to intrinsic and personal value, through its threat to the “moral status” (FitzPatrick, 2013, p. 1) of human beings of inherent dignity. If morality necessitates mutual concern for welfare, and the prevention of harm within social interactions (Turiel, 1983), then a self-respecting life requires the exercise of moral responsibility toward oneself, to ensure the honoring of one’s dignity, and the alignment of one’s convictions and life narrative (Dworkin, 2011). Consistent with universal support for the *Right to Live*, and as evidenced by the primary justification of *Prevention or Reduction of Harm, and Pain and Suffering, to Self or Others, Including Loss of Lives*, provided in support of *Ending Life*, the threat of harm, and pain and suffering, prompts a defensive, preservative response toward life.

Interpretation of intention in reasoning requires an understanding of the process of social construal (Smetana, 2006), or the making sense and meaning of interactions with the world, in the context of the subjectivity of morality (Dworkin, 2011), and the relativity of intrinsic good (Nussbaum, 2001b). As context alters perception of harm (Helwig et al., 1995), determination of the object of judgment, or the focus of the moral evaluation (Smetana, 2006; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994) directs people’s moral reasoning. Ending life produces moral wrong in its act of extinguishing the immeasurable, irreplicable, and sacred or inviolable value of life, causing the frustration of the investment history of a life (Dworkin, 1993). One participant (M, age 23) acknowledged the moral wrong that death commits in its extinction of good through *Ending One’s Life Due to Illness*, and yet questioned the possibility for the production of good with the continuation of the actor’s life:

...what makes death bad is that it's, um, sort of cutting off life that could have continued to produce good and, like, be morally good and that life has, uh, a diachronic meaning in its totality. And if it seems like Alex's life is not continuing to produce—is only producing moral bad—it’s only producing suffering for himself, um, then he should have that ability to cut it off. Um, it's tough because is Alex really in a good state of mind to figure that out? Like, that's what I usually think of when we're talking about euthanasia cases and things like that, but—or suicide cases. But it seems like from the way the question was phrased, it was, like, objectively speaking, that he's tried a lot of things, and like, there's no hope for him.

Though the intrinsic value of life differs from the instrumental, or productive value, to which this participant alludes, one’s lived experience holds intrinsic, instrumental, and subjective value, as a sum of the creative process of one’s life, history of investments, and web of social attachments (Dworkin, 1993).

Along with premature death, existence without proper functioning and flourishing suffers the moral wrong of the violation of one’s intrinsic and personal value of life. While death, as the object of judgment, is inherently harmful in its extinction of intrinsic value, the reinterpretation of death, or the shifting of the object of judgment to the elimination of overwhelming pain and suffering, turns death into a contextually eudaimonic goal, as conceived by some in support of *Ending One’s Life Due to Illness*. Participants interpret this situation not primarily as the end of

living, but rather as the desired end of suffering, which has crowded out the experience of living a dignified, fulfilling life. Interpretation of death as a release, or rescue from a lifelong loss of autonomy and dignity, reconceptualizes the ending of life as a final act of reacquisition of autonomy, even in its ultimate relinquishing of the limited autonomy that remains. As one participant (F, age 39) stated in support of *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, "it is saving him from a life of unbearable pain." Participant reasoning revealed that autonomous decision-making includes exercising the right to die. If suffering produces a desire for resolution, or the compensation of losses (VanderWeele, 2019), then some may choose to fulfill this desire through the autonomous selection of death, as a form of resolution of the loss of dignity. The personal value an individual attributes to their own life cannot be untwined from the objective, intrinsic value of life. Without denying its violation of the intrinsically valuable self, participant reasoning suggests the possibility of death as eudaimonic pursuit.

In an alternative manifestation of the preferable fulfillment of various functionings (Sen, 1993), the pursuit of flourishing, which persists even in non-ideal circumstances, prioritizes the exercise of autonomy to make a final decision about one's living or dying, rather than avoidance of the consequence of death. While participants support the actor's exercise of autonomy in respect for the subjectivity of suffering, their reasoning does not suggest that the pursuit of death is a simple, inherently good, or desirable choice; death is an unintended, and simultaneously intended tragic consequence of the search for perceived greater good within circumstantial limitations (Foot, 1967). One participant (F, age 19) stated about the overarching preferability of living over dying, "It depends on the person, but, like, a lot of people would choose to be alive, maybe not under ideal circumstances, over dead, so." Participants identified the losses of the capacity for choice, rights to autonomy and dignity, and sense of personhood, as points of interference of the diminished quality of life with the intrinsic value of life. The reclaiming of these goods functions as an ideal resolution of the moral wrong of one's pain and suffering.

Though issues of living and dying predominately involve moral concerns, the interpretative nature of morality, and the coexistence of elements of the personal domain especially in situations of greatly diminished quality of life, complicate the determination of moral right and wrong. The competing moral and personal goals inherent to events of pain and suffering foster an environment of heightened moral ambiguity, and increased reliance on subjective interpretations of good, particularly in situations concerning the self. The determination of the subjective eudaimonic measure of the continuation, or the end of life, is contingent on the perceived level of dignity the option affords. Upon the foundation of universal support for the right to live, and rejection of the moral wrong of pain and suffering, participant support for the permissibility of ending life in specific cases emphasizes the weightiness attributed to moral responsibility toward the upholding of the welfare of self and others. Human susceptibility to pain and suffering requires a constant reengagement with the process of meaning-making, and the search for dignifying options, in efforts to sustain one's pursuit of value, and not waste life (Dworkin, 2011), even in the presence of circumstantial limitations or coercion. This negotiation of dignity involves the intentional and unintentional pursuit of choices honoring of one's status as a being of intrinsic moral value and worth, deserving of respect. Within the context of consensus on the goodness of the preservation of life, the consideration of death emphasizes the destructive and undesirable nature of experiences of suffering. The losses

of suffering demand the negotiation of one's remaining goods in a way consistent with the authenticity of one's lived experience (Dworkin, 2011).

Mercy for Human Vulnerability, and Pain and Suffering as Opportunities for Development

This study sought to examine reasoning on the interaction between experiences of pain and suffering and eudaimonic interests, and conceptualizations of the meaning, purpose, and value of suffering. Drawing on Aristotle's view of compassion as a painful emotion in response to another's suffering, Nussbaum (2001b) writes that compassion requires an appraisal about the seriousness, un-deservedness, and "similar possibilities" of the suffering (p. 315). The seriousness of the suffering (e.g., death or illness) refers to its interference with flourishing, while the appraisal about similar possibilities refers to an understanding of shared vulnerability to pain (Nussbaum, 2001b). Regardless of the perceived deservedness of the pain and suffering across situations, participant reasoning revealed a consistency with the literature, showing a compassionate desire to participate in the hypothetical restoration of the actor's dignity, and thus their humanization, even through the unpreferable allowance of the end of life. Justifications regarding flourishing featured prominently in reasoning against *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*, which introduced the concepts of pain and suffering as punishment. Unlike majority support granted for *Ending Life*, as well as *Ending One's Life Due to Illness*, the majority of participants across age cohorts rejected *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*, referencing the issues of justice and welfare within the moral domain. As with *Ending Life*, moral justifications were most salient, in both support for, and rejection of *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life*. Participants rejecting this form of punishment provided the primary justification of *Excessive Punishment/Prison Inflicts Less Suffering*, referring to the undeserved severity of death as punishment. Participants often cited prison as a more appropriate punishment, in support of the possibility for flourishing, even in limited ways.

Accordingly, the secondary justification of *Opportunity for Development and Flourishing* supported the continuation of the actor's life, to allow for possibilities of rehabilitation, and opportunities for self-betterment, reflection and repentance, and the process of coming to terms with one's wrongdoing. Suffering leads to new opportunities (VanderWeele, 2019), though these possibilities may be bound by situations of expected death. Another salient justification, *Mercy for Flawed Human Circumstances and/or Judgment*, considered possible factors that could contribute to the actor's decision to murder, or possibly lessen the culpability of the offense and deservedness of punishment, including mental health issues, desperate circumstances, or this crime being a first-time offense. In line with the shared pain inherent to a compassionate response (Nussbaum, 2001b), participants' rejection of excessive punishment for offense, and their quickness in identifying reasons to show mercy across situations, aligned with their rejection of the undesired subjection of actors to the cruelty of their experienced pain and suffering. The consideration of serious pain and suffering, and lack of functioning and flourishing, complicated determinations of moral right and wrong. Overall, participant reasoning about *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life* revealed the complex coexistence of the desire to spare the offending actor from excessive pain and suffering, recognition of the altered nature of any potential flourishing, and acknowledgement of the deservedness of punishment for ending another's life. The continuation of life rather than the administration of the punishment of death allows for a redemptive, and even eudaimonic angle of pain and suffering. Consistent with the literature on the opportunities for growth associated with pain and suffering, participant

reasoning against *Death as Punishment for Ending Another's Life* referenced possibilities for self-reflection, repentance, and increased understanding of one's actions, which contribute to post-traumatic growth. This growth includes the development of wisdom through self-reflection and meaning-making, and a renewed, increased capacity for the valuing of the intrinsic goods of life and new opportunities (Brady, 2019; VanderWeele, 2019). Though not ideal, the altered, limited sense of flourishing in cases of expected death prompts ongoing creation of one's narrative, as attempts to make meaning of one's life continue regardless of circumstances, and perhaps more significantly in suffering (Symons et al., 2024). One's participation in the universal, inevitable experience of suffering contributes to the search for the meaning of life (Frankl, 1946/2006).

Complexity of Moral Reasoning

The contextualized situations engaged participants in moral reasoning about contexts with intentional constraints to the actor's available options for functioning and flourishing, and thus, to the quality of life. Even with the opportunities for redemptive growth uniquely available through suffering, the consideration of possibilities for flourishing in the context of altered functioning must acknowledge that any possibilities are not ideal. A sum of decisions made under coercive circumstances does not equate an autonomous life (Raz, 1988). Experiences of pain and suffering, and premature death, must not be beautified through the instillment of inherent good into harm and death, as even a good death leads to the tragic extinction of intrinsic value, and the fullest pursuit of eudaimonic interests. If existence possesses intrinsic value, then death is not inherently good. Nevertheless, Dworkin (1993) refers to the importance of the conduct of death for the purpose of finishing well, and its function as a final chapter to one's life. Though universally undesirable, participant reasoning shows that death fulfills different functions in relation to dignity. The hypothetical situations of this study involve the tragic lack of critical interests (Dworkin, 1993), and things of relative, intrinsic value (Nussbaum, 2001b), related to the inability to access capabilities, exercise choice and autonomy, and flourish through the fulfillment of individual goals. Flourishing, terminologically related to the concept of blossoming, cannot occur independently of a supportive context (VanderWeele et al., 2023), and especially in an environment with constraints producing suffering (Raz, 1988). At the same time, full flourishing, or the attainment of good across various domains of life, is an ideal (VanderWeele, 2024b), within the context of the universality of human vulnerability (Fineman, 2008), and the fragility of goodness due to uncontrollable circumstances (Nussbaum, 1986).

It is this experienced tension that participants expressed as they reasoned about the value of life, and the upholding of dignity for the hypothetical actors, through limited options. The thoughtful and complex nature of participant responses, and the conceptual wrestling involved in arriving at those responses during the interviews, are not immediately evident through the presentation of findings. Complexity of moral reasoning manifested in expressions of the difficulty of the questions, moments of hesitation, and frequent perseveration of speech. Participants notably emphasized the exceptional nature of the permissibility of ending life across situations, their reasoning often interspersed with reaffirmations of their support for the right to live. This pattern was reflected in the following statement of one of the previously quoted college students (F, age 21):

Yeah, so, I think that generally murder is wrong, right? But I do think there are exceptions...And like, I guess, like, that decision would be, like, killing someone, like

taking someone's life, but I think that's one kind of exception that I think would probably be okay. But you're just senselessly murdering someone—I don't think that is obviously okay.

Wainryb et al., (2005) draw on philosophical thought to conceive of morality as “fully compatible with a realistic picture of human deliberation, including experiences of ambivalence and regret in the face of situations of moral conflict in which there is no act available that is without pain, loss, or harm” (Wainryb et al., 2005, p. 79). The spoken tension in participant reasoning about difficult, multi-faceted moral issues demonstrates the processes taking place in thinking, feeling human minds that reflect from within their particular contexts, the passionate, shared values of the preservation of life, dignity, and autonomy.

Conclusion

In addition to the complexity of its interaction with the value of life, the quality of life is recognized as a concept difficult to define, necessarily leaning on philosophical foundations for its meaning. Through the depth of reasoning accessible through clinical interviews, and with the clarity brought about by the classification of thought through the social domains approach, this study addresses the need for more psychologically rich examination of people's thinking about the quality of life, including considerations of the things that make a life worth living or not, and contribute to the ability, or inability to flourish. In this way, the present study moves questions of quality of life, and pain and suffering, addressed primarily in philosophical and scientific spaces, into the psychological realm, hoping to encourage future research that engages with and incorporates novel themes in the creation of conceptual frameworks as well as measures assessing quality of life, and pain and suffering. The variety of considerations that arise in response to questions of life and death show that research must adequately reflect human rationality, and the desire for autonomy of decision-making about life, that cannot be captured in simple ways. Rather than the isolation of the quality of life as representative of conditional factors that distract from the universal, inviolable nature of the value of life, quality and value must exist in tension, and mutually inform one another. People's reasoning reflects the expected difficulties of weighing conflicting considerations that at different times prioritize or sacrifice the continuation of life for a greater good like the elimination of pain and suffering for self or others, or allow for the rehabilitation and restoration of one who has violated the sanctity of life.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the limitations to the current study concerned characteristics of the participant population, and the comparison between the two age cohorts. Recruitment of college students for the larger study took place at a single institution, and that of adults took place throughout the U.S. using an online platform, allowing for greater generalizability of adult responses than student responses. The relatively small sample size ($N = 87$) affected the statistical power of the analyses. Thus, recruitment of a greater number of participants would allow for more robust statistical analyses. The current age cohorts consisted of adults, limiting the possibility for developmental analyses of reasoning. A conceptual limitation of the study design was the variety of elements in the contextualized situations, including illness, the lives of self and other, and punishment. While the focus of the examination centered on pain and suffering, the various contextual factors in the situations could be distinguished in the questions to avoid potential conflation of different themes. Based on the methodological limitations, future research would be strengthened through recruitment of a greater and more geographically diverse sample size to

allow for greater generalizability of the findings. Inclusion of a younger age cohort would allow for assessment of qualitative changes in understandings of experiences of pain and suffering. The contextualized situations involved hypothetical moral situations, which the existing literature has shown to be an effective method of arriving at clear moral evaluations (Smetana, 2006). Nevertheless, an expansion of the research would be enriched by an analysis of actual experiences of pain and suffering. Following this current assessment of reasoning with a general population, future study would benefit from interviews with populations experiencing specific forms of pain and suffering, to determine whether those who have experienced, or are currently experiencing suffering differ in their responses to questions about living and dying. This would allow for further analyses of the interaction between the value and quality of life, as well as self-measures of any experienced growth. While some existing research addresses the adverse implications of suffering for personhood (Cassell, 1982; VanderWeele, 2019), the present study both deepens psychological understandings of the losses brought about by pain and suffering, as well as emphasizes the essential role of experiences of pain and suffering in the development of the moral person, hoping to encourage further study of the role of pain and suffering in moral development.

Beyond individual interests in the lives of self and close others, Dworkin (1993) describes the call to preservation of the human race as “an inarticulate, unchallenged, almost unnoticed, but nevertheless absolute” societal reality (p. 76). The fierceness of debates arguing different interpretations of the agreed upon value of life, shows the powerful draw toward the preservation of human life. Recognition of the intrinsic value of one’s own, and others’ lives, and the corresponding respect for persons (Piaget 1997/1932) produce a sense of moral responsibility for the promotion of one’s own, and others’ welfare and flourishing. Human possession of the intrinsic value of life imbues dignity upon people, and touches upon the most intimate, and yet universal cause of human existence. Denial of the ability to flourish violates the intrinsic and personal values distinct to rational humanity. It is the shared pursuit of the preservation of life, and of dignity, spiritual in the sense of its dedication to honoring and upholding the sacred value of life, that unifies the human cause (Dworkin, 1993). The universality of experiences of pain and suffering participates in this sacredness. Pain and suffering remain problematic, but the universality and psychological reality of these experiences (Nussbaum, 2001b) prove their necessary part in the development and flourishing, and even valuing, of life.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol (for Larger Study)

Section 1: General Questions

- 1. Do you think that everyone has the right to live? Why or why not?** ¹
2. Do you think there should be laws stating that it is wrong to kill humans? Why or why not?
3. Suppose the law in the United States was such that it was only against the law to take the life of someone who contributes a lot to society. Would that be all right or not all right? Why or why not?
4. Suppose the law in another country was such that it was only against the law to take the life of someone who contributes a lot to society. Would that be all right or not all right? Why or why not?
- 5. Is it ever all right for someone to take the life of another person? Why or why not?**

Section 2: Contextualized Situations

Set A

1. John works for a technology company. As he is arriving at the office one morning, his coworker, Tom, shoves past him through the entrance. This bothers John, so he considers killing Tom in order to get back at him.

- a. Would it be all right or not all right for John to kill Tom? Why or why not?
- b. Should the law prohibit killing someone in this situation? Why or why not?
- c. Suppose there is another country in which the law does not prohibit killing someone in this situation. Would that be all right or not all right? Why or why not? ²
- d. Now let's suppose that John did kill Tom. There are laws against homicide in the U.S., and John is tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Would it be all right for the authorities to kill John? Why or why not?** ³

¹ Questions selected for the current study are in bold.

² Questions (a), (b), and (c) follow each of the contextualized situations in the larger study.

³ Question (d) follows only Question 1 of Sets A and B.

2. Michael is walking back to his car one night when an armed stranger approaches him. The man points his weapon at Michael and threatens to kill him. Michael is carrying a gun and considers shooting the man to avoid being killed. Would it be all right or not all right for Michael to kill the man? Why or why not?
3. Robert is a soldier engaged in combat. He sees an enemy soldier across the battlefield and is trying to decide if he should kill him. Would it be all right or not all right for Robert to kill the enemy soldier? Why or why not?

Set B

1. Mark has recently lost his job. He does not have a lot of money and has many bills to pay. He is walking around the block one day, worrying about what to do, when he sees a man leaving a bank with a thick envelope full of money. Mark considers killing the man to steal his money.

d. Now let's suppose that Mark did kill the man. There are laws against homicide in the U.S., and Mark is tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Would it be all right for the authorities to kill Mark? Why or why not?

2. Daniel decides to run some errands across town one afternoon. He is standing at a crosswalk when he sees a man coming out of a parking lot with a gun pointed at another man walking out of a bank. He hears the man with the gun say he is going to kill the other person. Daniel is carrying a gun and considers shooting the one with the gun to stop him from killing the other person. Would it be all right or not all right for Daniel to kill the man with the gun? Why or why not?
3. **Alex has had a chronic illness for many years. He experiences a great deal of pain and has difficulty engaging in many activities. He does not think it is worth living with this suffering. Although he has tried different methods of pain relief, none of them have been effective. Alex considers ingesting a lethal dose of medication to end his life. Would it be all right or not all right for Alex to end his own life? Why or why not?**

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to answer
3. What is your year in school?
4. Are you an international student? (*For college students only*)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
5. How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? (Select all that apply)
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic or Latino
 - e. Middle Eastern
 - f. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - g. White
 - h. Two or more races
 - i. Other
 - j. Prefer not to answer
6. How would you describe your religious background?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Christianity
 - c. Hinduism
 - d. Islam
 - e. Jainism
 - f. Judaism
 - g. Sikhism
 - h. Other religion
 - i. Not religious
 - j. Prefer not to answer