

Volgograd State Medical University  
Department of Philosophy, Bioethics and Law

Lectures on Bioethics

**EUTHANASIA**

- “From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving,  
Whatever gods may be,  
That no life lives forever,  
That dead men rise up never,  
That even the weariest river,  
Winds somewhere safe to sea” (Swinburne)

# Definition

- The term was proposed by English philosopher F. Bacon. It means literally “easy (good) death”. From gr. Eu- good and thanatos- death.
- Euthanasia broadly is the beneficent timing or negotiation of the death of a sick person. More narrowly it is the killing of a human being on the grounds that he is better off dead (stop of sufferings)
- In an extended sense it is used to refer to the painless killing of animals in our interests at least as much as in theirs.

# Active and passive euthanasia

- Active euthanasia is the taking of steps to end a patient's life (method of full syringe).
- Passive euthanasia is the omission or termination of means of prolonging life, on the grounds that the person is better off without them (method of postponed syringe).

# Voluntary and non-voluntary

- Voluntary euthanasia is the action with the patient's consent or at his request.
- In-voluntary euthanasia is action over the patient's objections.
- Non-voluntary euthanasia is the killing of a person deemed incompetent with the consent of someone.

# Arguments for euthanasia

- The most important arguments for euthanasia are the pain and indignity suffered by those with incurable diseases, the burden imposed by persons unable to take part in normal human activities and the supposed right of persons to dispose of their lives however they please.

# Arguments against euthanasia

- Religious, traditional morality forbids directly intended euthanasia.
- Non-religious arguments against euthanasia include the danger of expanding the principle of euthanasia to an ever-widening range of persons and the opacity of death and its consequent incommensurability with life, so that we cannot safely judge that a person is better off dead.

- According to the main principle of bioethics the principal value of life is life itself. Therefore, it should be preserved at any conditions. But doctors know better than anyone else what “the life of an organism” and “the life of a person is” and what “life as the good” and “life as the suffering is”.



- There is a minimum-program for a doctor: to save one's life and there is a maximum-program – to restore one's health. Moreover, there exists a psychological law: if a man breaks the norm even only once, he will surely do it again. That's why the famous theoretician of bioethics Heyar is strongly against euthanasia.

- Heyar says: “If doctors start killing their patients in order to relieve their sufferings they will proceed killing them in order to set out for the weekend much earlier”.

- But in spite of all these objections of the religious and nonreligious character, legislations in some countries already has permitted euthanasia (Belgium, Holland, Swiss, some states of the USA).
- In Swiss there is even organization (Dignitas) which is rendering service of euthanasia for foreigners (average price near 4000 euro).

- One must agree that problem of euthanasia sets very important dilemma: on one side life as the principal value, but on other side patient's life, which is full of unbearable suffering in terminal stage.

- However the way out of the problem is the development of palliative help and medicine. Palliation means “temporary relief”. That is palliative help implies use of the most strong pain-killers without restriction.
- The system of palliative help can be provided in hospice. Hospice service gives possibility to patient to go away with dignity.

- The symbol of hospice is the extinguishing candle in hands: careful, trembling attitude to dying, compassion.
- Philosophy of hospice is such: it is impossible prevent death, one should not bring it nearer.
- The main trends of care in hospice: anaesthetization, home-nursing care and spiritual work.

- The word “hospice” is originated from Latin hospitium which means friendly relationships between host and guest.
- According to the world standards one hospice is counted for the service of 300-400 thousands of population.
- Usually there are three subdivisions in hospice: hospital, day hospital and exit service.