

Institut für Ethik und Geschichte der Medizin

Is there a right to determine one's own death? The ethical perspective(s)

Urban Wiesing

WMA European Region Meeting on End of Life Questions

Vatikan, 17.11.2017

UNIVERSITAT TÜBINGEN

Plurality

- Suicide, assisted suicide and killing on demand are notoriously controversial since antiquity until today.
- There is no consensual answer what the autonomy of a patient means for end-of-life decisions.



Plurality

- There is not the one and only ethical theory!
- Deontological ethics, utilitarian ethics, Aristotelian ethics, care ethics, feminist ethics, dignity approach, Christian ethics...
- Even within one ethical theory a broad range of answers!

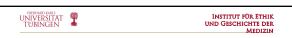


INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

Plurality

- From total ban of any restriction of therapy to liberal positions in favor of killing on demand and assisted suicide
- All theories come to different conclusion.
- Two examples: Dignity approach, Christian ethics



Human-Dignity-Approach?

- No consensus on physician assisted suicide or killing on demand:
- Does dignity mean that each person has the right to decide according one's own autonomy?
- Or: You must never decide against the biological condition of possibility for autonomy (that's your life!)?





Human-Dignity-Approach?

- · Good arguments for both interpretations
- No consensus!

UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN

INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

- · Majority of Christians in industrialized countries is favor physician assisted suicide/killing on demand, despite official statements
- · Highly controversial opinions among Christian theologians, priests, bishops, politicians

UNIVERSITAT TÜBINGEN



INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

- Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey: Assisted dying is 'profoundly Christian and moral'
- · Dismisses 'pain is noble' claim



UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN



Institut für Ethik und Geschichte der Medizin

End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

- Desmond Tutu: "I want the right to end my life through assisted dying"
- Terminally ill people "should have right to choose a dignified assisted death"



UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN



INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

- · Herman Van Rompuy:
- "Former EU president criticises Pope Francis over euthanasia ban" (Catholic Herald 15.8.2017)
- · "The time of 'Roma locuta causa finita' is long past"



UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN



INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

· Hans Kueng argues as a catholic theologian in favor of killing on demand and assisted suicide



UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN



End-of-life decisions and Christian Ethics

- Even within Christianity: Non consensus on end-of-life decisions.
- · Within Christianity: Plurality!
- . In a pluralistic, liberal society: One of the numerous convictions must not be made the basis of legislation!



Plurality

- It is unrealistic that this plurality will disappear
- The opposite is realistic!
- A political answer is needed!

UNIVERSITAT TUBINGEN INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

The answer to ethical plurality is a political one

- "Certain decisions are momentous in their impact on the character of a person's life—decisions about religious faith, political and moral allegiance, marriage, procreation, and death, [...] In a free society, individuals must be allowed to make those decisions for themselves, out of their own faith, conscience, and convictions."
- Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, Judith Jarvis Thompson, 1997, Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief



The political answer to ethical plurality

- Important decisions of your life (and dying) are individualized.
- The task of the state is to enable and to protect them.



But...

- Despite the ethical plurality on autonomy and end-of-life decisions:
- There is strong consensus on what should be prohibited!
- We know that there are end-of-life-decisions not driven by autonomy.



Consensus: This should be prevented

- Premature, affectively influenced decisions
- No one should ask for PAS because of poor medical treatment or lack of palliative care
- Consensus: (physician) assisted suicide is complicated



Empirical ethics on PAS

- No slippery slope
- No decrease of palliative care
- · No social discrimination
- No loss of trust in physicians
- <u>Physician</u> assisted suicide: high rate of patients no longer pursuing assisted suicide (up to 80%)



INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

Empirical ethics

- Supreme Court of British Columbia 2012
- "[...] the research does not clearly show either a negative or a positive impact in permissive jurisdictions on the availability of palliative care or on the physician-patient relationship. [...] The evidence shows that risks exist, but that they can be very largely avoided through carefully-designed, wellmonitored safeguards."





INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

Summary

- There is a plurality of ethical theories and answers within the theories to end-of-lifedecisions...
- ... and no consensus!
- The political answer to plurality: Make those decisions for yourself, out of your own faith, conscience, and convictions.
- These decisions are no longer in the scope of responsibility of a state.



Institut für Ethik und Geschichte der Medizin

Summary

- But: There is consensus what should be prohibited.
- In a pluralistic, liberal society:
- There is no political right to forbid, but a political need to protect autonomous decisions and to regulate end of life decisions!





INSTITUT FÜR ETHIK UND GESCHICHTE DER MEDIZIN

Is there a right to determine one's own death? The ethical perspective(s)

Urban Wiesing

WMA European Region Meeting on End of Life Questions

Vatikan, 17.11.2017