

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH – EUTHANASIA AND PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE IN THE LIGHT OF THE "FOUR-PRINCIPLES" APPROACH TO HEALTH CARE ETHICS

Lars Johan Materstvedt, PhD<sup>a,b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The Norwegian Cancer Society, Oslo, Norway; <sup>b</sup>Unit for Applied Clinical Research, Faculty of Medicine, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway; <sup>c</sup>Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway

### a) Object of study:

An ethical analysis of the issue "euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide (E and PAS)".

### b) Method:

Employment of the so-called "four-principles" approach to health care ethics: 1. Beneficence (the obligation to provide benefits and balance benefits against risks); 2. Non-maleficence (the obligation to avoid the causation of harm); 3. Respect for autonomy (the obligation to respect the decision-making capacities of autonomous persons); and 4. Justice (obligations of fairness in the distribution of benefits and risks).

### c) Results:

It is shown first in what way E and PAS may be consistent with, and indeed flow from, all four principles. Thereafter, it is demonstrated how it is possible to construe the issue so that E and PAS conflict with, or run against, the very same principles.

### d) Discussion:

Philosophical-ethical research into the issue E and PAS can take many forms. Common is the employment of either Kantian ethics (deontological, duty focused), utilitarian ethics (cost-benefit considerations), or Aristotelian (virtue) ethics. The "four-principles" approach yields a very different picture of the issue.

### e) Conclusions:

First, that the issue E and PAS is extraordinarily complex; second, that ethical theory does not necessarily resolve the question, "Is E and PAS right or wrong?"; and, third, that the philosopher's "tool box" is helpful in shedding new light on the issue.