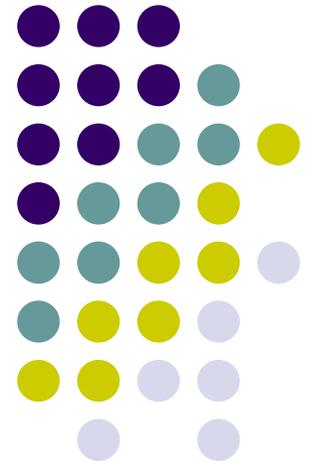
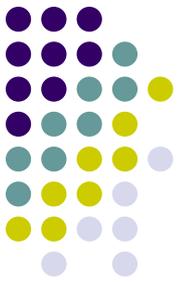


# The 3 Ps of Euthanasia

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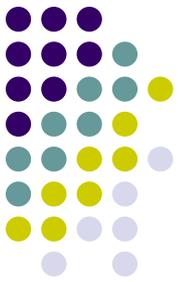
Revd Kevin McGovern,  
Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics:  
Calvary Health Care Bethlehem,  
11 November 2014





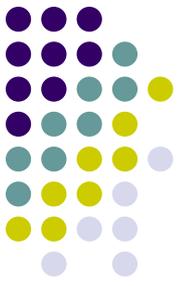
# Overview

- Introductory Comments
  1. **P**olitical
  2. **P**hilosophical
  3. **P**ersonal



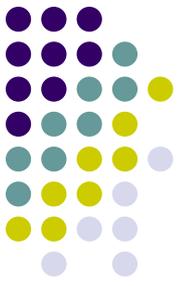
- **Introductory Comments**

# Terminology

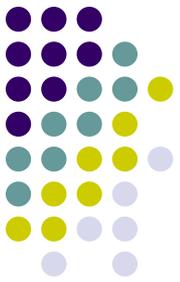


- I am using “euthanasia” to refer to both euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.
- The crucial moral feature of these actions is that we help someone to kill themselves.
- Euthanasia is different from treatment for pain which may shorten life.
- I want to avoid euphemisms:
  - It’s not just “aid in dying.”
  - It’s helping someone to kill themselves.

# Reasoned Moral Arguments

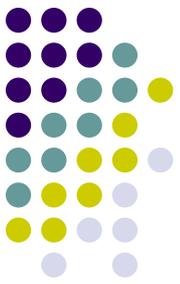


- An intuitive support for euthanasia or an intuitive opposition to euthanasia aren't enough. We need reasoned moral arguments.
- I will present reasoned arguments against euthanasia.
- We will have time for discussion. You may agree or disagree – with reasoned arguments. You may also add other reasoned arguments.
- Whether we agree or disagree, let us treat one another with respect.



# 1. Political

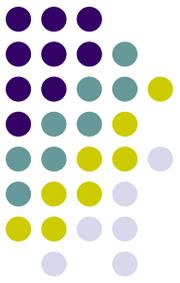
- Can we devise laws to restrict euthanasia to those who
  - have a terminal condition
  - unbearable pain
  - months to live
  - consistently request it
  - are not depressed
  - are not coerced or pressured ???



# Are the “safeguards” illusions?

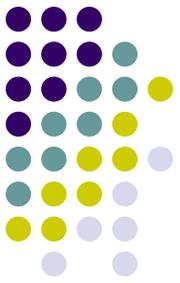
- **“Safeguard”**
- Unbearable pain
- Less than 6 months to live
- Another doctor is consulted.
- **Problem**
- Subjective
- Should poor pain management lead to death?
- Existential suffering?
- Very often it is impossible to tell how long a person has.
- Consultation only with other doctors of similar views.

# Are the “safeguards” illusions? (cont’d)



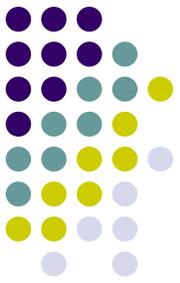
- **“Safeguard”**
- Repeated requests for euthanasia
- Not depressed
- Not pressured or coerced
- **Problem**
- WTHD often disappears when an underlying problem is identified and remedied.
- Response shift
- Psychiatrists often cannot diagnose depression in a few appointments.
- Coercion can be subtle.

# Belgium



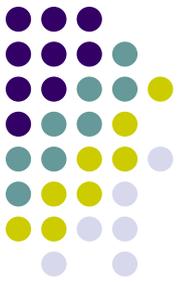
- Belgian Act on Euthanasia (28 May 2002)
  - competent adult or mature minor
  - request is voluntary, repeated, and not coerced
  - constant, unbearable physical or mental suffering
  - serious, incurable disorder
  - no reasonable alternative
  - consult another doctor
  - consult specialists if the patient is not expected to die in the near future
  - report all cases of euthanasia to commission

# Belgium (cont'd)



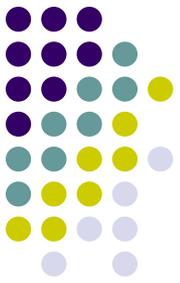
- Amendment to Euthanasia Act (February 2014)
  - extends euthanasia – with parental agreement - to children with “capacity of discernment”
- Increase in euthanasia deaths
  - from a total of **2,086** in 2010 & 2011 to a total of **3,329** in 2012 & 2013 (**55%** increase)

# Belgium (cont'd)

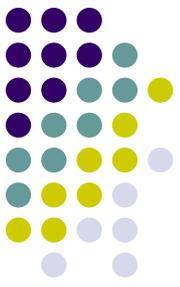


- December 2012: Deaf twins Marc and Eddy Verbessem who were going blind, 45
- October 2013: Female-to-male transsexual Nathan Verhelst, 44
- September 2014: Prisoner Frank van den Bleeken, 50
- 3 February 2015: Married couple Francis, 89, and Anne, 86, plan euthanasia together on their 64<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary

## 2. Philosophical



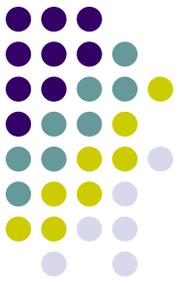
- “It’s my choice”
- Traditional morality



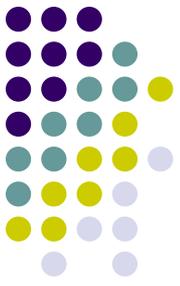
# “It’s my choice”

- If choice is the ultimate rationale for euthanasia, euthanasia cannot be restricted to those with a terminal illness who are near to death.
- If choice is the ultimate rationale, euthanasia on demand should be available for all competent adults and mature minors.
  - “Once we’ve accepted that some.. people can be killed, why not some others? Why should it be restricted to the very sick? What about young people who want it or those who aren’t terminally ill? People who are just tired of life? .... it’s just a matter of following the logic of the argument.”
    - Bishop Anthony Fisher, 15 October 2014

# Realpolitik



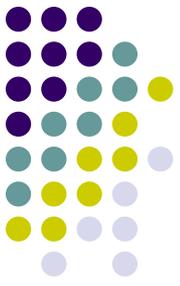
- Some unscrupulous families may pressure a relative to choose euthanasia either to spare themselves from being part of a lengthy process of dying - or to get the inheritance sooner.
- Palliative care costs many thousands of dollars. The drugs for euthanasia cost about \$300. With rising medical costs, might we come to criticise those who choose the more expensive option? Might the so-called 'right' to die become a duty to die?
- These concerns about harm to individuals or society are one reason why freedom of choice is not the final word.



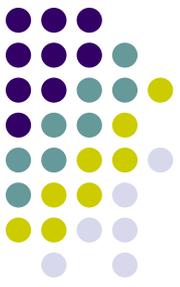
# Traditional Morality

- Human beings have a natural instinct and inhibition against killing each other. Except in very unusual situations, we know that it is wrong to kill other human beings.
- Because of this insight, the moral codes of almost every religion and the laws of almost every nation throughout history forbid us to kill.

# Catholic Church

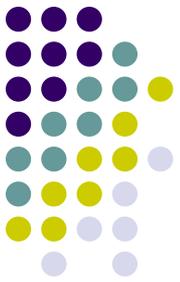


- John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae*, #65:
  - “I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human being.”
  - “This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written law of God, is transmitted by the Church’s Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.”



# Other Religions

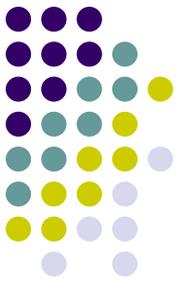
- Judaism: God should decide when we die. Euthanasia usurps God. All forms of suicide and any aid in another's suicide are forbidden.
- Islam: God should decide when we die. Euthanasia usurps God. All forms of suicide and any aid in another's suicide are forbidden.
- Hinduism: To end life disturbs the cycle of death and re-birth. It is very bad karma. We will pay for this in another life. Don't do it!
- Buddhism: To end life disturbs the cycle of death and re-birth. It is very bad karma. Don't do it!



# International Law

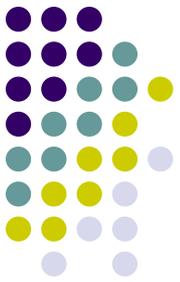
- Euthanasia is forbidden in every country and state of the world, except for:
  - the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg (the Benelux countries)
  - Switzerland
  - the US states of Oregon, Washington, and Montana

# Traditional Morality (cont'd)

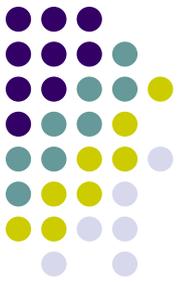


- Euthanasia is the **killing** of a human being.
- There are very few exceptions to the rule against this (e.g. self-defence, war, ectopic pregnancy, perhaps capital punishment).
- In each case, the exception is justified by the saving of another human life.
- Euthanasia does not belong in this series of exceptions to the law against killing.

# 3. Personal

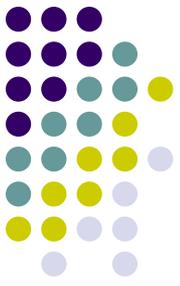


- The time before the end can often be extremely significant both for the dying person and their loved ones.

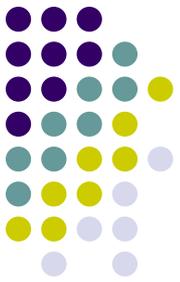


# Narratives

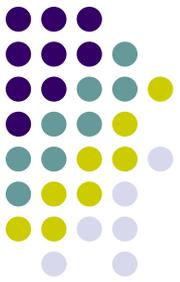
- **Dr Bruce Rumbold** (Director, Palliative Care Unit – School of Public Health, La Trobe University) →
  - **Three Narratives** of Encounters with Life-Threatening Illnesses:
    - Restitution
    - Chaos
    - Quest



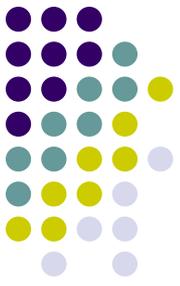
- Philip Gould's *When I Die*
  - “Intensity comes from knowing you will die and knowing you are dying.... Suddenly you can go for a walk in the park and have a moment of ecstasy.... I am having the closest relationships with all of my family.... I have had more moments of happiness in the last five months than in the last five years.” (p. 127-129)
  - “I have no doubt that this pre-death period is the most important and potentially the most fulfilling and most inspirational time of my life.” (p. 143)



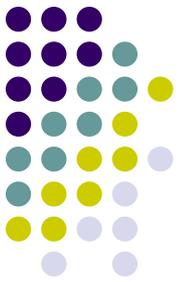
- Henri Nouwen's *Our Greatest Gift*
  - “I took his hand in mine and laid my other hand on his forehead; I looked into his tearful eyes and said: ‘Rick don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid.... Please trust that the time ahead of you will be the most important time of your life, not just for you, but for all of us whom you love and who love you.’ As I said these words, I felt his body relax, and a smile came through his tears. He said, ‘Thank you, thank you.’” (p. 60)



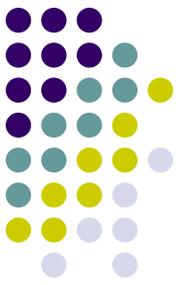
- Henri Nouwen's *Our Greatest Gift* (cont'd)
  - Our greatest legacy is still before us:
  - “In her growing dependence, [Connie] is giving more to her grandchildren than during the times when she could bring them in her car to school, to shops, and to the sports field.... She speaks to them about her gratitude for life, her trust in God, and her hope in a life beyond death.... She... gives what she couldn't give in her strength: a glimpse that love is stronger than death.” (p. 89-90)



- Bill Bartholome's *Living in the Light of Death*
  - “To live in the bright light of death is to live a life in which colors and sounds and smells are all more intense, in which smiles and laughs are irresistably infectious, in which touches and hugs are warm and tender almost beyond belief.”
  - “I live with a kind of freedom now that I had never allowed myself before. I am free to be myself, to be ... ‘radically honest’ with myself and with others.... I like the person I am now more than I have ever liked myself before.”

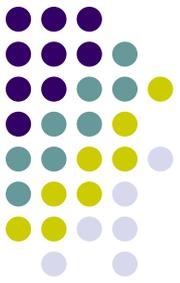


- Bill Bartholome's *Living in the Light of Death* (cont'd)
  - “I wish that the ‘final’ chapter in all your stories will be one in which you will have the gift of some time to live with whatever illness proves to be your fatal illness.”



- Michael Barbato's *Reflections of a Dying Sun: Healing experiences around death*
  - Michael's book records many significant things which happened as people became sick and as they were dying.
  - From this experience, Michael hopes that he will die not suddenly but after a period of illness and decline.
  - "So yes a slow journey towards death is my preference...."
  - "I would feel cheated if I died suddenly."

# A Concluding Thought from a Famous Ethicist



- Albus Dumbledore
  - in the 2005 movie *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*:
  - “We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy.”