

Revision of the dominant classifications of medical aid-in-dying practices

Description for the General Public:

The main goal of our project is to develop a comprehensive, conceptual framework for classification of various medical procedures that can be performed to bring about, or in some cases, only slightly hasten, the death of the patient. Those procedures shall be hereby referred to as *aid-in-dying*. In the most broad sense, they include: active voluntary euthanasia, assisted suicide, as well as – what can be deemed more controversial – palliative sedation, lethal analgesia, and withholding or withdrawing life-saving treatment. This preliminary classification already hints at the philosophical hypothesis of the project: it will be argued that there is no significant moral difference between all of those procedures if they are an expression of the will of the patient. The primary task of the PhD student shall be to test this hypothesis, and to further develop it if necessary. The project aims to present a thorough critical analysis of the philosophical background of various legislation concerning aid-in-dying. It will be the first project so far to systematically review underlying philosophical presuppositions of present regulations of assisted dying.

There is an urgent need for making the medical, social and ethical aspects of aid-in-dying (in a broad sense defined above) more conceptually coherent and comprehensible for the general public. Topics surrounding death and the process of dying are of grave importance on many levels: existential, axiological, political. But they are often misunderstood and plagued with controversy. The terminology that the scientific community adopts in communication with the general public shapes the dominant narratives in public discourse, which has a significant impact on the policymaking process. For example, if the people considered experts in the field, that is both medical professionals and ethicists, treat the notion of euthanasia as something to be avoided, the common belief that there is something inherently nefarious with those and similar practices can only be enforced. That is why we find the need to establish a clear, misconception-free conceptual framework to be so crucial both from the scientific perspective as well as from the perspective of public life.