

Medical triage principles in wartime and pandemic scarcity

A Catholic perspective

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- Situations of scarcity
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Medical scarcity

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Wartime

Pandemic

- Soldier victims (front, mainly men)
- Civilian casualties (e.g. after bombings)
- Surgical facilities

- Civilian casualties (ill humans)
- Health care workers
- Hospital / ICU facilities



Approach without severe scarcity

- Treat everybody
- No priority for people with very poor prognosis
- Urgent cases first
 - Treatment of cases with intermediate or low urgency later
- Transport to hospitals further away from the front
- Transport to other hospitals
- Maintaining army operation / hospital or other operations

Scarcity: secular approach

Western societies

Justice - distributive justice

Also:

- Formal equity (Aristoteles)
- Solidarity



Principles of equity and solidarity

- Egalitarism
 - All people equal
 - All people same opportunities for surviving
 - General principle in healthcare without scarcity
- Utilitarism
 - Maximize utility
 - Save as much lives / life years as possible

Secular triage principles

Egalitarism (treating people equally)

- Random selection first in, first served lottery
- · Giving priority to the worst off
 - Priority to sickest / younger people (shorter lived lives; fair innings)
- Disease criterion (triage for all diseases)

Utilitarism (maximizing the benefits produced by scarce resources)

- Most individual lives
- Most saved life-years (priority to younger individuals)
 - Medical selection / comorbidity
- Promoting and rewarding instrumental value
 - Priority to those who can save others
 - Priority to those who have saved others in the past

Raad voor de Volksgezondheid en Zorg, 2012; Emanuel, 2020; Centrum voor Ethiek and Gezondheid, 2023



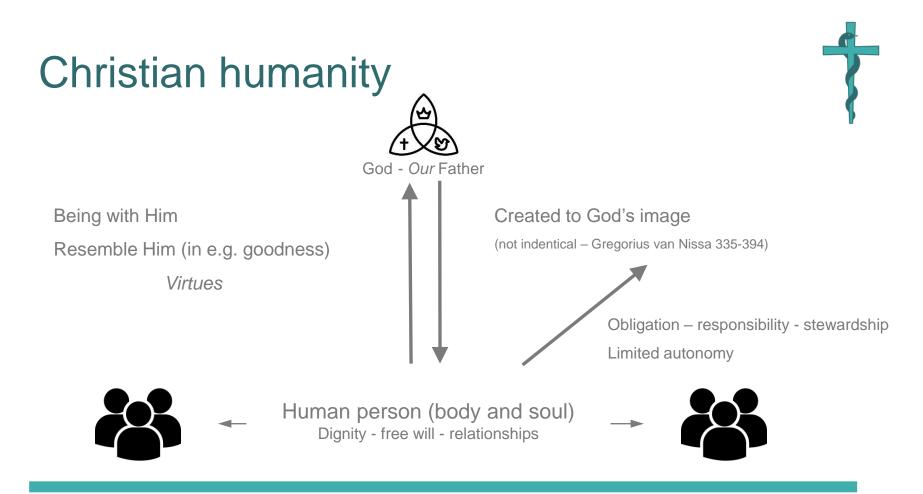




Christian Humanity

elaborated in

Social Doctrine of the Church



Gaudium et Spes, 12, 14, Gregorius van Nissa, W.J. Eijk



Social doctrine Catholic Church (1)

• Life

- Gift of God, resulting in human dignity
- Not an absolute value: (being with God is destination of life; CCC 2289)
- Stewardship of creation (including other human persons)
- Goal
 - being with God

Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004; Catechism of the Catholic Church; Daly, 2020; Kenny, 2021

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Social Doctrine Catholic Church (2)

- Human dignity
 - Inherent dignity God-given, transcendent, immeasurable value of each person
 - Subsidiarity leading to participation
 - Common good -, equity, unity of all individuals
 - Solidarity
 - Preferential option for the poor and disabled
 - Respecting human dignity *≠* saving lives in all circumstances
- Stewardship
 - Omit not evidence based treatments
 - Universal destination of goods

Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004; Catechism of the Catholic Church; Daly, 2020; Kenny, 2021

Catholic Guidelines COVID-19 (1)



- 1. All patients should receive treatment / merciful care
 - Second best treatment
 - (Palliative) care
- 2. Special attention foor poor and vulnerable persons
- 3. Prioritize patients who most likely benefit from treatment
 - <u>Not based on</u>: age, disability, quality of life, nationality, race ethinicity, criminal history, insurance
- 4. Common good directs prioritizing treatment for healthcare professionals

Catholic Guidelines COVID-19 (2)



- 5. In case of equal benefit: consider expected duration of benefit (survival weeks versus years)
- 6. Treatment can withdrawn for the sake of another patient
- 7. Rationing by case-by-case basis (last option)
 - Lowest level (subsidiarity)
- 8. Prudence
- 9. Transparency

Conclusions



- Secular scarcity protocols tend to utilitarism with a danger of discrimination (elderly / disabled)
- Catholic perspective:
 - Each human life has equal human dignity
 - Humans are in relationship with others and have to pursue the common good
 - Saving life is not the ultimate goal of creation
 - Triage in scarcity is possible, but with respecting human dignity
 - All sick must receive treatment / care, even if it is second / third chooce
- Secular protocols sometimes make other choices than Social Doctrine of the Church



Secular selection criteria



- Medical
 - Recovery prognosis
 - Comorbidity (cave discrimination)
- Fair innings
- Social utility health care utility
- Disease criterion
 - Triage for all patients, not only war victims / pandemic victims
- Care-relationship criterion
- Procedural transparency