

# Can the compassionate physician kill?

Brendan Leier PhD

Clinical Ethicist

University and Stollery Hospitals, MAHI

Assistant Clinical Professor, Dossetor Health Ethics Centre

Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry

Adjunct Professor of Philosophy

University of Alberta

# Why this talk? Why this title?



# Why this talk? Why this title?



Compassion?

# Why this talk? Why this title?

Compassion?

- AHS core value

# Why this talk? Why this title?

- Integrity: we do the right thing even when it's hard.
- Compassion: we remember that caring is as important as care; the highest calling is to provide comfort and empathy to those who are in need.
- Respect: we treat others with fairness, dignity, and kindness; we value and honour diversity and demonstrate compassion with all.
- Accountability: we act in an open and transparent manner: we do what we say we will do and 'own' our results.
- Collaboration: we work together with our patients, families and communities, and each other, through teamwork and partnerships.
- Safety/Quality: we create an environment that is committed to quality and safety through keeping people as the central focus of our decisions and embracing continuous improvement.

# Why this talk? Why this title?

Compassion?

- AHS core value
- Professional Value

# Why this talk? Why this title?

## Compassion?

- AHS core value
- Professional Value
- Ubiquitous as a value in PAD debate



**Toulou Drimonis** [Become a fan](#)

Former TC Media News Director. Freelance writer, editor, opinion columnist. CJAD800 radio contributor.



# Assisted Death Isn't Murder, It's Compassion

Posted: 05/23/2014 12:41 pm EDT | Updated: 07/23/2014 5:59 am EDT

115

33

0

0

0

Submit

27



Like

Share

Tweet

Share

Pin it

Submit

Comment

Print



Few people probably noticed -- what with spring in the air, and the Habs preparing to play a crucial game against the New York Rangers -- but Bill 52, an Act Respecting End-of-Life Care, was quietly re-introduced yesterday in the new session of the Quebec National Assembly.

In a rare show of unanimity, the motion was adopted by all four major political

# Why this talk? Why this title?

Why the term 'killing'?

# Why this talk? Why this title?

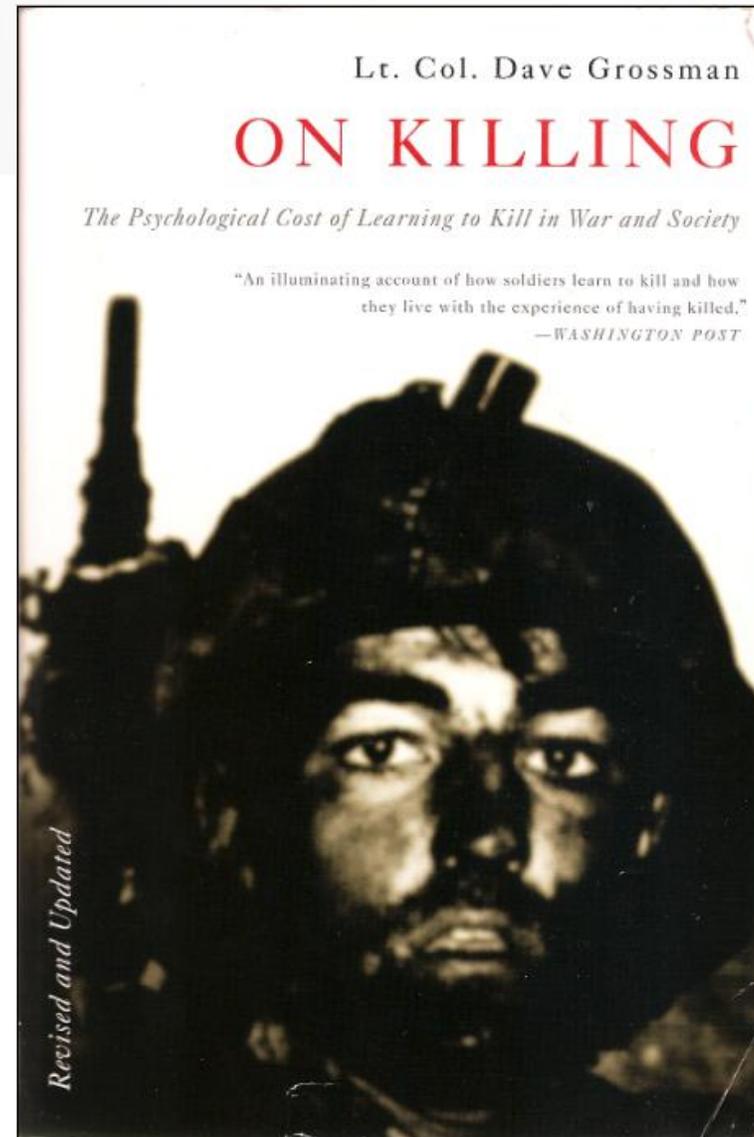
Why the term 'killing'?

- Academic literature

# James Rachels, Active and Passive Euthanasia

Is there a moral difference between killing and letting die?

THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE, Vol. 292, January 9, 1975, pp.  
78-80



# Why this talk? Why this title?

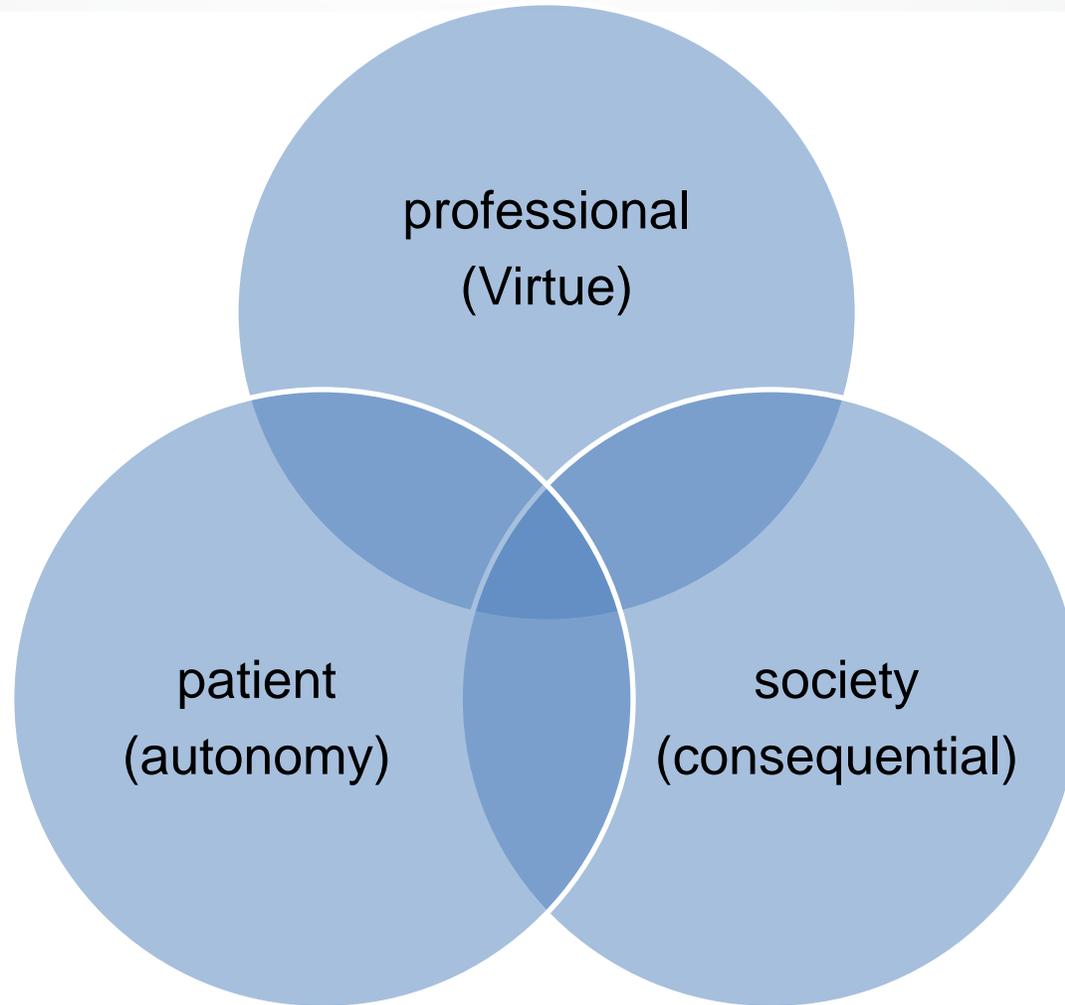
Why the term 'killing'?

- Academic literature
- ostensive and value neutral

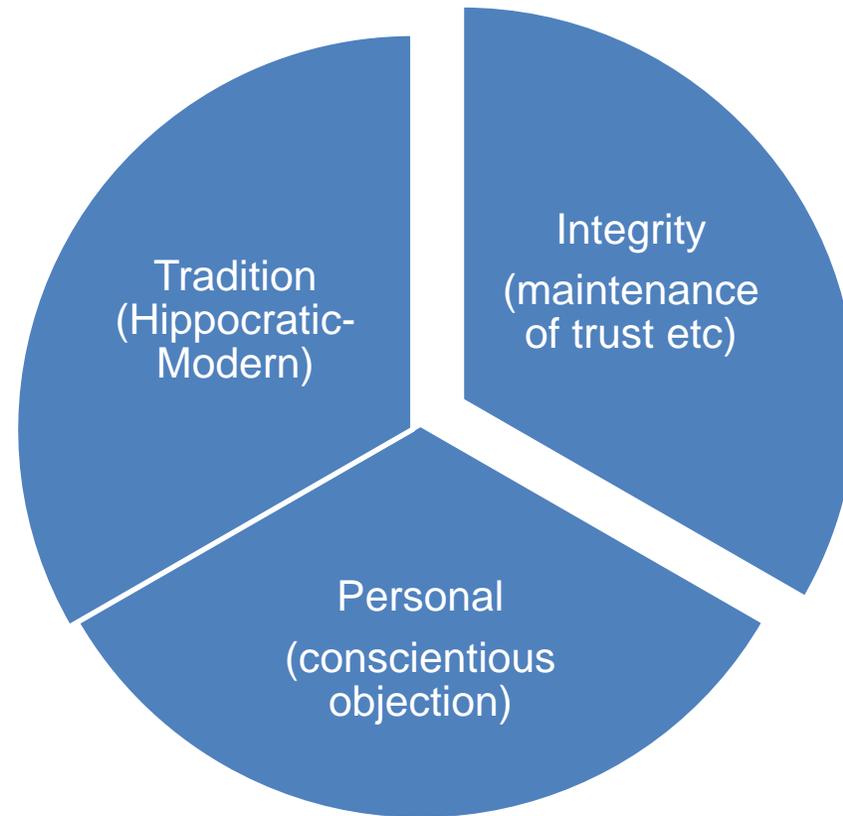
A limited scope...



# Relationship of this talk to PAD



# Inside Professional Values



# Conflicts of interest/value declaration

# What is compassion?

# What is compassion?

- Compassion is one of two universal values, meaning simply, wherever, whenever, and however we look, historically, anthropologically and philosophically, compassion appears as a central virtue in society, culture and religion. Hospitality is the second.
- Compassion is one of several pro-social emotions demonstrated in some fashion by all social animals.
- Compassion is an integral, precognitive experience.

*It is a feeling common to all mankind that they cannot bear to see others suffer...  
This feeling of distress is the first sign of humanity.*

*Mencius*

## Thich Nhat Hanh

*It is true that the other person suffers, and that alone is worth your compassion. When you begin to understand the suffering of the other person, compassion will arise in you, and the language you use will have the power of healing. Compassion is the only energy that can help us connect with another person. The person who has no compassion in him can never be happy*

## Matthew Fox

*Compassion leads to works. Feeding, clothing, sheltering, setting free, giving drink, visiting, burying, educating, counseling, admonishing, bearing wrongs, forgiving, comforting, praying: all these acts of mercy are acts indeed. Though they come from the heart and go to the heart, they are not restricted to heartfelt emotions, however powerful. They all involve other people which is to say they are political activities.*

# Compassion

The experience of compassion is a two fold phenomenon:

feeling the suffering of another combined with the incentive and motivation to alleviate that suffering.

# Jon Sobrino



- Compassion cannot be confused with the sentimental fellow-feeling or even so-called works of mercy for these actions can serve to “conceal the structural cause of human suffering, can distract attention from the necessary structural solutions, and can even justify those responsible for oppression”.
- Compassion is the reaction to overcome human suffering *simply because it exists*. Compassion has no reason or final cause or justification other than that. This compassion can manifest itself in different forms, in mercy, or justice.
- Compassion is the exercise of defending victims, and in doing so, identifying and denouncing their tormentors. As a result, the compassionate are often made to suffer and often die. This is not the case in ‘works of mercy’.

## What compassion is not:

- sentimentality
- empathy
- sympathy
- weakness
- costly/fatiguing

Wendy Austin · E. Sharon Brintnell · Erika Goble · Leon Kagan  
Linda Kreitzer · Denise J. Larsen · Brendan Leier

# Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow

**Canadian Health Professionals' Experience of Compassion Fatigue**

## 'fatigue'

we discovered the phenomenon of fatigue was related not to the experience of compassion itself, but failure to satiate the first of the two phenomena. Experiencing the suffering of another while being incapable of, or prevented from, alleviating the suffering was the source of self-identified 'compassion fatigue'.

# The Compassionate Physician...

# Two Cardinal Virtues

*Prajna* (wisdom)

*Karuna* (compassion)



# Can the compassionate physician kill?

## Supreme Court Criteria

‘Grievous’ is a legal term that applies to serious, non-trivial conditions that have a significant impact on the patient’s well-being. ‘Irremediable’ is a broad term capturing both terminal and non-terminal conditions. As stated by the SCC, ‘irremediable’ does not require the patient to undertake treatments that are not acceptable to the individual.

# Can the compassionate physician kill?

- can killing alleviate suffering?

# Can the compassionate physician kill?

- can killing alleviate suffering?
- Is there a medical model to treat suffering?

# Can the compassionate physician kill?

- can killing alleviate suffering?
- Is there a medical model to treat suffering?
- What is a request to die? How does the compassionate physician interpret such a request?

# Clinical Wisdom

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering
- awareness of and sensitivity to iatrogenic burden of illness

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering
- awareness of and sensitivity to iatrogenic burden of illness
- understanding the depth and breadth of both curative and palliative philosophy

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering
- awareness of and sensitivity to iatrogenic burden of illness
- understanding the depth and breadth of both curative and palliative philosophy
- identification of and advocacy towards appropriate systemic pathways in response to nature and burden of disease

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering
- awareness of and sensitivity to iatrogenic burden of illness
- understanding the depth and breadth of both curative and palliative philosophy
- identification of and advocacy towards appropriate systemic pathways in response to nature and burden of disease
- anticipation of and strategy in responding to occult requests.

# Clinical Wisdom

- identification of suffering
- awareness of and sensitivity to iatrogenic burden of illness
- understanding the depth and breadth of both curative and palliative philosophy
- identification of and advocacy towards appropriate systemic pathways in response to nature and burden of disease
- anticipation of and strategy in responding to occult requests.
- Resolve the moral/professional difference between PAS and Euthanasia.

## bibliography

- Grossman, Dave. On Killing: The Psychological Costs of Learning to Kill in War and Society. New York: Back Bay Books, 1995
- Sobrino, Jon. S.J. “Compassion: The Shaping Principle of the Human and of the Christian”. Campion College, 1992
- Fox, Matthew. A Spirituality Named Compassion. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1979
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. The Heart of Buddha’s Teachings. New York: Broadway Books, 1998
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. Old Path White Clouds. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991