

## EAN HEADQUARTERS

EAN asbl  
c/o Résidence Grande Duchesse  
Joséphine Charlotte  
11, avenue Marie-Thérèse  
L-2132 Luxembourg



## EAN OFFICE

Na Pankráci 1618/30  
CZ-140 00 Praha 4  
Czech Republic  
+420 777 357 832  
info@ean.care  
Skype: edeskype2016

## POSTAL ADDRESS

c/o EASPD office  
Rue de Commerce 72  
B-1040 Brussels  
Belgium

## THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

The ongoing global pandemic of the coronavirus SARS -CoV-2 has been, and still is, not only a test of today's society but has also shown many of its "sore spots". One of them is making decisions about the value of human life.

For many decades, healthcare in Europe has been accessible for everyone as a matter of course and is something that does not have to be fought over, that no one is questioning, and that has become part of today's Europe. Until March 2020 that is, when the situation was so critical that the provision of health care was conditioned by age. Some Italian and American hospitals refused to hospitalize people who were over 60, 65 or 80 years old. Among other things, it was this shocking and unknown experience for us up to now that care is only for the "younger ones" which frightened the politicians of many European countries, awakened them and forced them to immediate reactions. What was the logic of patient selection? And what is the value of seniors' lives?

### The value of life

By value we mean the amount of money we get for goods and services. But life is not exchangeable, that is, convertible to money. When we determine the value of life, we have to also deal with ethical concepts and ethical dilemmas if at all possible rather than with economic principles and approaches. In practice, we encounter a simple approach that de facto determines the value of life according to how much time we have left. The same logic to this selection was followed by some European hospitals during the coronavirus age. Although we rely on an economic approach when discussing or determining the value of life, human life is priceless for its vicinity and for its loved ones. If someone close to us dies, we would give or more precisely sacrifice a lot so that we can return or prolong his life for a while. The pain and suffering experienced by close ones, loved ones and survivors is priceless.

When thinking about the value of life, two great ethical concepts often clash - the utility theory and the theory of moral categories. According to the utility theory (e.g. Jeremy Bentham, 18th century, England), a moral solution is the one that maximizes the utility of an act. Each utility can be quantified, then it is justified to calculate the value of the expected economic activity of a human or similar parameters. In theories of moral categories, life is of the highest value. For example, in John Locke's Moral Philosophy, the right to life is inalienable and one cannot give it up even by consent unlike the other two fundamental rights which are freedom and property. In practical life, it will be good to ask what purposes we consider the value of life for. If this is for example for insurance purposes, then an economic justification is appropriate. If the right to health care is decided in a multi-individual situation, then other values should be involved such as the question: "For how many people will the death of this person be an irreplaceable loss?" Decision-making should never be mechanical based on one simple principle such as the patient's age.

### How the cost of life is calculated

The main need to quantify the value of life in money is litigation because of the purposes of compensation, reparations or redress. These compensations for wasted human life have a long history in the field of law, especially in the United States. Even in the Czech Republic, we encounter the quantification of the value of life in judicial practice. The Civil Code of 1964, valid until the end of 2013, quantified it numerically at CZK 240,000.

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AGEING  
NETWORK  
former EDE | EAHSA  
E.D.E. EAHSA

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For these purposes, it is based on a person's economic activity and how much money he can earn in his whole life. The problem with such a simple or rather simplified calculation of the value of life is that it involves only the economic activity of a human in the course of his work and profession. However, a human naturally creates worth outside his profession. It is neither possible nor realistic to create a pattern or algorithm that would evaluate all these components and details.

### **Vertical and horizontal assessment of human life**

There are two possible views on the value of human life. For easier illustration, let's name them as vertical and horizontal conceptions of the value of life.

The horizontal concept takes us through time. The more time we have left, the more valuable our lives are. After all, this is in line with the approach of the courts, but also of hospitals in times of crisis. The more economic activity, but also social contacts we can expect from an individual until the end of his life, the greater his value is.

It is a bit of a Spartan approach to life (when the measure of the value of life was the fighting ability of the individual). And in this logic, if we have a limited possibility of saving human lives, we decide preferentially for those who have a higher "profitability".

The vertical view is completely the opposite. It reflects the overall lifelong contribution of a person to his loved ones, family, other people and society. It is a converse view, a turned concept. It is the individual who, through his efforts, his activities, i.e. his life, has created the most worth or work that has a "greater" value. Here then, we do not look at a human in the way of his future returns, that is, what he will do for us or for society. We look at him from the other side - what he brought to our society, how he contributed to it for most of his life, what was his work.

### **Senior burden**

The first and foremost - the economic point of view *pro futuro* is the reason why the world's professional societies (Global Ageing Network, European Ageing Network, CommonAge Australia) have united in 12 theses, of which the third and sixth theses state:

"During the coronavirus crisis, hospitals were prioritised over nursing homes. The aim was to make provision for sufficient intensive care beds should ventilation become necessary. The over-80s were told to stay where they were and to write their living will in such a way so as not to deprive anyone of an intensive care bed."

"In many countries, old-age policy is fiscal policy. As soon as people become very old and vulnerable, any investment by the state is no longer seen as worthwhile. With each passing year towards death, very old people then become a cost burden for society. A fundamental social attitude like this robs the elderly of their dignity."

Yes, these two theses are a classic conflict between that horizontal and vertical perception of the value of human life.

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### **What's right then?**

There are extraordinary situations where a person or community is forced to choose between human lives. In some situations, such as a sinking ship, people make their decisions according to established patterns based on certain generally accepted values tested by history. For example, children are saved first, then women as bearers of the future of the human race. However, there are other patterns that say that the weakest and most vulnerable should be saved first because, unlike the strong, they have less chance of saving themselves. In both models, the moral category of respect for human life is applied and in both, on this basis, a rational reflection on the consequence of the decision is manifested. It can be seen that in real life the two theories do not have to oppose each other.

If the readers of this article expect a final resolution, a clear statement of what is actually right, they will be disappointed. This question does not have a clear and therefore correct answer. It is more of a question of values. Everyone perceives it differently. Readers under the age of 40 are very likely to identify more with the horizontal concept. Likewise, perhaps pragmatists or people oriented to "survival" would also. Older people, the age group of 45+, perhaps more likely 50+, will be more aware of the vertical concept and fully and absolutely rightly expect to take into account and reflect on everything they have done for society, they are doing, and will still be doing.

In 1983, the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan wrote: "The real question is not when human life begins, but what the value of human life is."

We determine this value ourselves regardless of the formula that someone uses to approach our lives, including ourselves.

Let us not perceive and judge the value of human life solely on the basis of what one can or cannot do. Let us be not only generous in our judgments, but also wise, and let us judge the human life from a retrospective point of view, that is, with respect for everything that a person has done for others in his life.

*Dr. Jiří Horecký, MBA  
president of European Ageing Network*