

RESUMO - BIOÉTICA

EUTHANASIA AND ORTHOTHANASIA: ETHICAL DISTINCTIONS AND THE ROLE OF PALLIATIVE CARE IN CATHOLIC HEALTHCARE

Clara Teixeira Nogueira Cardoso (teixeiranogueiracardosoclara@gmail.com)

Stephanie Mendonça Archanjo (stearchanjo@gmail.com)

Introduction: Terminal illness represents a profound turning point in human life, often accompanied by suffering, uncertainty, and reflection on the meaning of existence. In this context, ethical decision-making at the end of life becomes particularly complex, especially with the growing capacity of modern medicine to prolong biological life. Euthanasia and orthothanasia emerge as distinct approaches, frequently misunderstood in clinical practice and public discourse. While euthanasia involves the intentional act of ending life to alleviate suffering, orthothanasia consists of allowing the natural progression of disease by withholding or withdrawing disproportionate treatments, prioritizing comfort, dignity, and integral care. Within the Catholic perspective, human life possesses intrinsic and inviolable dignity, independent of functional status or perceived quality of life. Objective: To analyze the ethical, conceptual, and clinical distinctions between euthanasia and orthothanasia, emphasizing the role of palliative care within Catholic bioethics. Methods: This integrative literature review was conducted using PubMed and the Virtual Health Library, based on

Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) such as “Euthanasia,” “Palliative Care,” “End-of-Life Care,” and “Bioethics.” Original and review articles published in the last five years (2021–2026), available in full text and in English, were included. Irrelevant or methodologically weak studies were excluded. Results: Euthanasia is characterized by the deliberate intention to cause death and remains ethically controversial and legally restricted in many contexts. In contrast, orthothanasia is supported within medical ethics, aligning with the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, and respect for human dignity, while avoiding therapeutic obstinacy. The literature highlights the distinction between withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining treatments, as well as the ethical role of the doctrine of double effect. Palliative care is a fundamental approach, focused on relieving physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering without hastening death. Catholic bioethics emphasizes the inadmissibility of intentionally causing death and the legitimacy of refusing disproportionate means, alongside compassionate accompaniment. Conclusion: Ethical discernment between euthanasia and orthothanasia is essential in contemporary healthcare. Grounded in Catholic bioethics, orthothanasia—supported by palliative care—respects human dignity, rejects the intentional elimination of life, and promotes ethically coherent and humanized care.

Palavras-chave: euthanasia; orthothanasia; palliative care; bioethics; human dignity.