Bioethics Glossary

Abortion: Intentionally causing the death of a fetus in utero, by either active or passive means.
Active Abortion: Intentionally-caused death of a fetus in utero, by direct assault on the body of the fetus itself, rather than the condition of pregnancy which supports it.
Active Euthanasia: Mercy-killing; direct act of physically killing a sick or dying person.
Animal Rights Advocacy: That moral position which holds that animals other than human can have rights.
Animal Welfare Advocacy: That moral position which holds that all animals deserve humane treatment.
Assisted Suicide: Helping to provide someone with the means to self-kill. Any moral agent can be complicit in this act.
Autonomy: Self-rule, capacity for mature, uncoerced and therefore mentally competent decision-making; not the same as a liberty or right to choose this or that specific action, since this mental capacity is the prior condition of possibility of any competent decision.
Beneficence: doing well by someone; well-meaning intent and behavior.
Categorical Imperative: That moral maxim or principle, attributed to Kant, which holds that persons should be treated as ends in themselves, and never as means only.
Circularity: The logical error of question-begging; to assume as true or given that which is also to be argued for; to have the conclusion simply re-state the premise.
Competence: Capability of a mature person to reason and to choose autonomously.
Complicit Moral Agency: agreement in action or intent between two or more moral agents.
Conflict of Interest: A mind-state of having competing goals or intentions.
Euthanasia: A moral agent’s intentional causing of a patient’s earlier than natural death, either actively or passively. Genetic Mother: The woman who contributes her ovum for gestation.
Gestational Mother: The woman who is pregnant.
Harm Principle: Moral maxim which holds that one is not free to cause harm to others, attributed to J.S. Mill. Involuntary: That which is imposed upon a person despite that person’s objection.
Justice: Fairness or treating all equally.
Justification: Supporting reason for an action or decision which renders it morally acceptable.
Moral Agency: Capability of discerning right and wrong.
Natural Law: a source of law that arises out of human nature itself, innate, inborn, and which determines species characteristics, like moral agency or capacity to understand and think.
Non-Voluntary: That which is chosen on behalf of an incompetent person.
Nurturing Mother: The woman who raises a child who may or may not be her own biological offspring.
Palliative Care: Comfort care for those in pain, pain management, hospice care, etc.
Passive Abortion: Chemical or drug-induced abortion, with no direct assault on the fetal body itself.
Passive Euthanasia: Letting die, or allowing to die of a sick or dying person by any moral agent (including the patient himself) who is specifically intending to help bring about an earlier than natural death for that person.
Passive Infanticide: Intentionally letting an infant die from neglect of its needs.
Paternalism: Suppressing an individual’s autonomy for that person’s own sake.
Personhood: That moral status which is worthy of highest respect, and possessive of rights.
Physical Sentience: The capacity to feel physical touch, or experience discomfort/pain.
Rationality: Capability to reason or organize thoughts.
Self-consciousness: Awareness of one’s identity, knowledge that one’s self endures over time.
Speciesism: A moral theory which only applies to humans.
Supererogatory: Heroic or lofty behavior which goes beyond duty or obligation.
Surrogate Motherhood: Pregnancy undertaken for the purpose of gestating a child for another.
Termination of Pregnancy: Intentional or spontaneous ending of a pregnancy after which the fetus may live or die.
Total Extra-Corporeal Gestation: the growing of a human being entirely outside of the female human body.
Utilitarianism: That moral theory which holds that actions are good or bad depending on their consequences.
Viability: The physical state of being able to remain alive unattached to another human being.
Virtue: A habit of doing good.
Voluntary: That which is chosen freely.