

## **summary prior to my four principles presentation to Apothecaries DPAEOM course on Sat 7/1/23**

### **Synopsis**

The "four principles approach" to medical ethics (now regrettably commonly called 'principlism') provides a simple, accessible, and culturally neutral approach to thinking about ethical issues in health care. The approach, developed in the United States, is based on four common and basic prima facie moral *commitments*- respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice- plus (as I emphasise) concern for their scope of application (to whom or to what are these moral commitments owed and to what extent?). It offers, as well as this set of common and basic prima facie moral commitments, a common and basic moral analytical framework and a common and basic moral language. Although the approach does not provide a method for prioritising or judging between these principles when they or their specifications conflict the principles can help doctors and other health care workers to reflect more systematically about the moral issues that arise in their work. Below are references to the latest canonical account of the approach by Beauchamp and Childress (which I strongly recommend that those interested in the approach- and also its critics- actually read!) and to my own rather briefer accounts, defences and uses of the approach which I have offered about every ten years since 1985.

### References:

**Beauchamp T , Childress J. Principles of biomedical ethics (8th edition). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019**

**Beauchamp T, Childress J Principles of Biomedical Ethics: Marking Its Fortieth Anniversary.** American Journal of Bioethics, 2019: 19:11, pp 9-12, DOI: [10.1080/15265161.2019.1665402](https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2019.1665402)

Gillon R. Philosophical medical ethics. Chichester: Wiley, 1985.

Gillon R . Medical ethics: four principles plus attention to scope. BMJ 1994; 309 (6948):184-8.

Gillon R . Ethics needs principles- four can encompass the rest- and respect for autonomy should be "first among equals". J Med Ethics 2003;29:307-12.

Gillon R. Defending the four principles approach as a good basis for good medical practice and therefore for good medical ethics. J Med Ethics 2015;41:111-116. doi 10.1136/medethics-2014-102282.

For an extended use of the four principles approach to analyse a particular case see Gillon R . Families and genetic testing: the case of Jane and Phyllis from a four principles perspective. In: Ashcroft R, Lucassen A, Parker M, Verkerk M, Widdershoven G (eds) Case analysis in clinical ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 (pp 165-185).

