

# QALYs and Ethics

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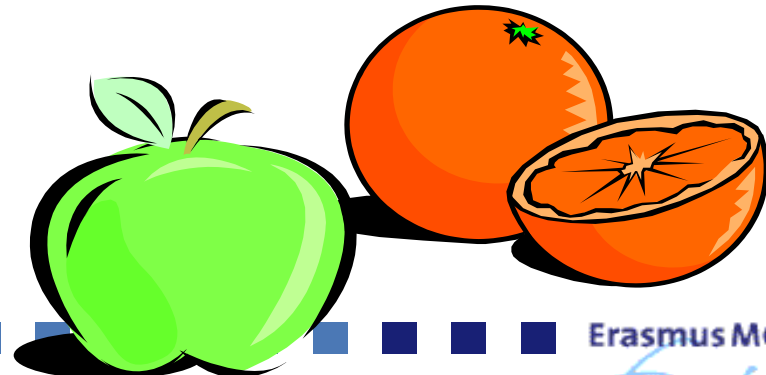
# Health Economics

## ❑ Comparing different allocations

- Should we spend our money on
  - Wheel chairs
  - Screening for cancer
- Comparing costs
- Comparing outcome

## ❑ Outcomes must be comparable

- Make a generic outcome measure



# Outcomes in health economics

## ❑ Specific outcomes are incompatible

- Allow only for comparisons within the specific field
  - Clinical successes: successful operation, total cure
  - Clinical failures: “events”  
“Hart failure” versus “second psychosis”

## ❑ Generic outcome are compatible

- Allow for comparisons between fields
  - Life years
  - Quality of life

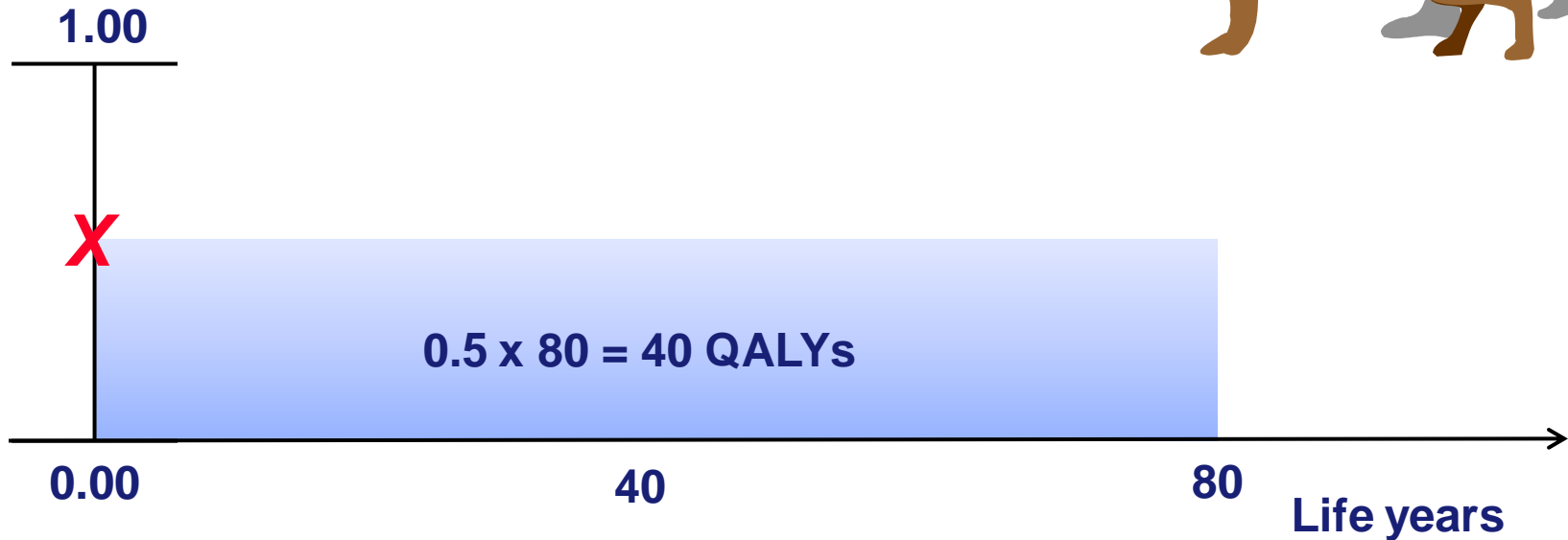
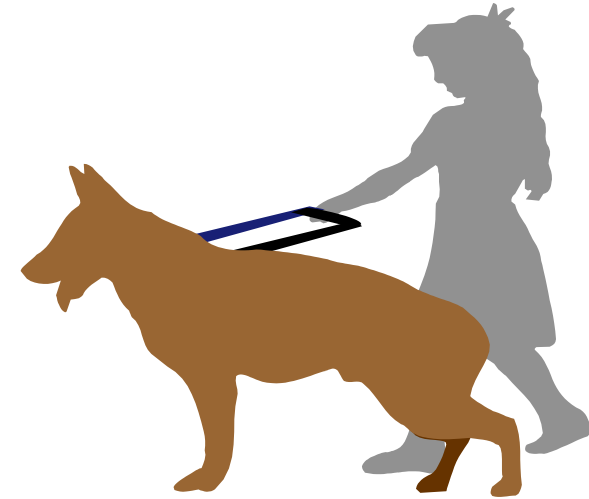
## ❑ Most generic outcome

- Quality adjusted life year (QALY)

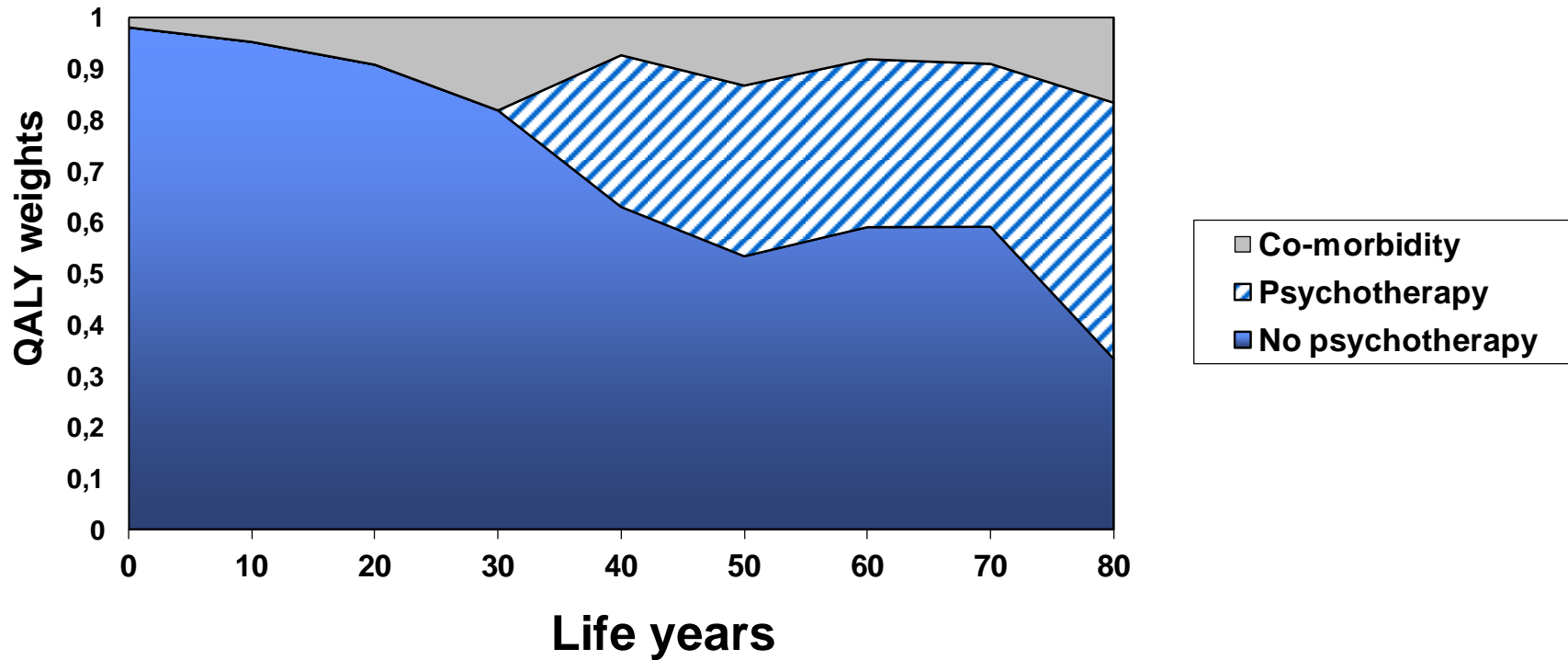
# Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALY)

## □ Example

- Blindness
- Time trade-off value is 0.5
- Life span = 80 years
- $0.5 \times 80 = 40$  QALYs



# Area under the curve



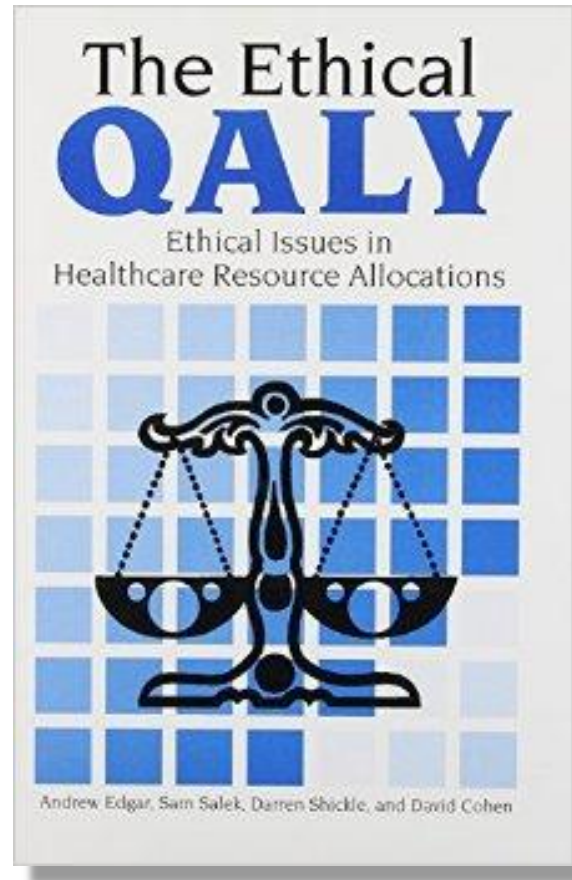
# Cost per QALY

- 20 QALY gained
- €100.000
- Cost per QALY
  - $\text{€}100.000 / 20 \text{ QALYs} = \text{€}5.000 / \text{QALY}$

# QALY league table

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>\$ / QALY</b>
GM-CSF in elderly with leukemia	235,958
EPO in dialysis patients	139,623
Lung transplantation	100,957
End stage renal disease management	53,513
Heart transplantation	46,775
Didronel in osteoporosis	32,047
PTA with Stent	17,889
Breast cancer screening	5,147
Viagra	5,097
Treatment of congenital anorectal malformations	2,778

# Ethical critics on QALY





# In the past, much criticism

Cohen CB.  
Quality of life and the analogy with the  
Nazis.  
Journal of Medicine and Philosophy 8:  
113-35, 1983.

CYNTHIA B. COHEN

## 'QUALITY OF LIFE' AND THE ANALOGY WITH THE NAZIS

**ABSTRACT.** The introduction of 'quality of life' judgments into treatment decisions is viewed as pernicious by some who claim that these presuppose the Nazi position that those who are 'devoid of value' must be exterminated. 'Quality of life' judgments are said to deny the equal value of human beings and to assume that some lives are not 'worthy to be lived'. It is argued that the analogy misconstrues the senses of 'value' and 'quality' employed by Nazism and a 'quality of life' position. This leads the analogizers incorrectly to claim that both views assimilate the value of human beings to the value of their condition. A 'quality of life' position is grounded in recognition of the logical priority of the value of human beings as self-reflective evaluators and agents, which is a matter of kind, not degree. The 'quality of life' is explicated in terms of the standards of well-being of individuals, which are derived from their basic human needs and their individual priorities and goals. The use of 'quality of life' judgments is morally required to ensure that considerations of justice and individual autonomy govern treatment decisions. The purported analogy misconstrues the views of both the Nazi position and a 'quality of life' position and so is seriously misdirected.

Human beings who are critically ill are being allowed to die or caused to remain alive with increasing frequency on the basis of poorly understood 'quality of life' judgments. These are viewed as pernicious by some who take them to deny the equal value of all human beings as such and to presuppose that some human lives are not 'worthy to be lived'. Proponents of 'quality of life' assessments claim that they are based on recognition of the value of human beings, and maintain that this very value entails that individuals ought not be subjected to a life that is below that of minimal human well-being. This disagreement about 'quality of life' considerations raises basic

# Criticism remains

Orszag's 'QALY': Hitler's 'Lives Unworthy of Life'

May 31, 2009 • 7:39PM

The LaRouche Youth Movement's Ian Overton exposes the strictly fascist essence of those QALYs (so-called Quality-Adjusted Life Years) so valued and promoted by Peter Orszag, Ezekiel Emanuel, et al. as the measures for 'necessary' healthcare to be allowed to the population by a national health board in President Obama's healthcare "reform." The Nazi nature of this "measuring stick" leaps out from the description of QALYs by one of the leading designers and promoters, the British company Health Utilities Inc. spun off from Sheffield and Leeds Universities to advise the UK government's National Health Service.

The company writes of itself, "HUInc. specializes in preference-based (utility) measures of health-related quality of life for use in: describing treatment processes and outcomes; economic evaluations of health care programs".

Overton has found that "The method by which the quality and duration of their lives standardized, calculated, and measured (QALY). This is how it works: patients fill out a vision, hearing, mobility, speech, dexterity, and several choices of disability severity, each with a weight. Other reports on the person's previous health status sheet, generates "Utility Levels"—relative to the Attribute Utilities."

...the strictly fascist essence of those QALYs (so-called Quality-Adjusted Life Years)...

formula—that is, it is compared to a person in supposed perfect biological health. Remember the "Aryan ideal physique"? The resulting number is the person's assigned Health Related Quality of Life (HRQL). From this, the number and cost of each additional QALY (defined as one year of

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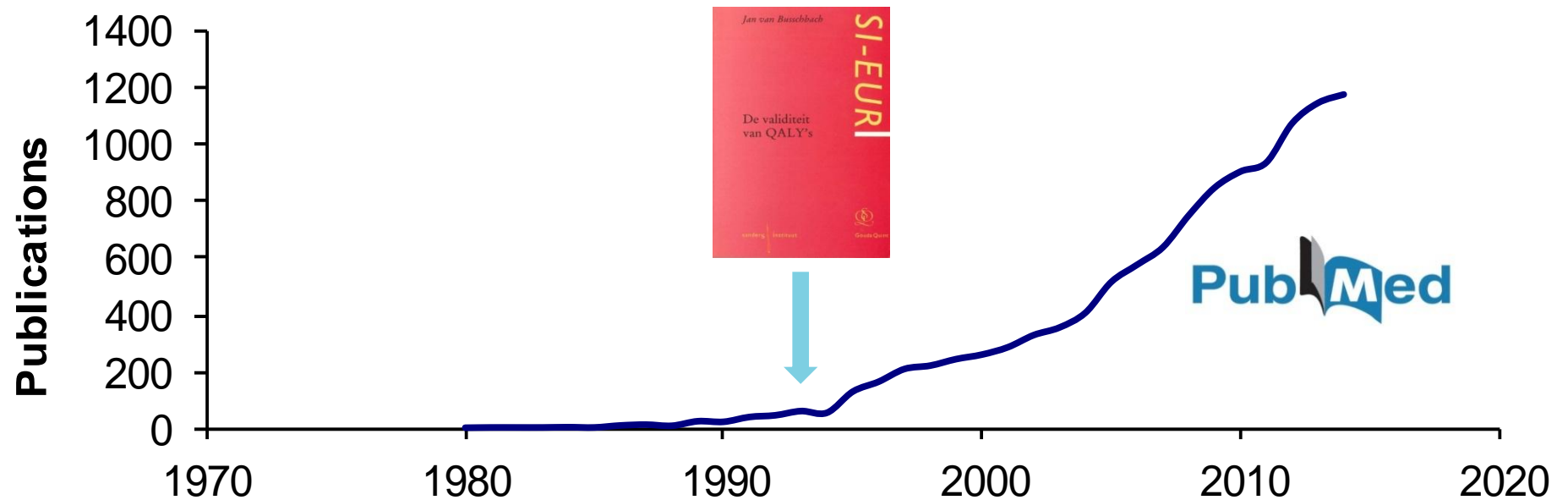
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# 10.915 QALY publications

1980[mdat] AND (QALY or QALYs)



PubMed

# Three problems with the ethical criticism .....

1. Arguments represent aversion toward a limited budget
2. Proposed alternatives turn out to be the same
3. Even equity concerns are in need of QALY

# 1. Arguments often represent aversion limited budget

*“...Wij hebben duidelijk aangegeven dat een discussie over "wat maatschappelijk nog aanvaardbaar is" [kosten per QALY] alleen gevoerd mag worden als geldverslindende "frivoliteiten" door de maatschappij [...] zijn uitgebannen. Bijvoorbeeld "joint strike fighters"...*

**Kees van Bezooijen** in his roll as Patient representative, 2007



## 2. Proposed alternative turns out to be the same...

### **TWiST**

- Time Without Symptoms of disease and subjective Toxic effects of treatment

### **HYE**

- Health Years Equivalent

### **SAVE**

- Saved Young Life Equivalent

### **Capabilities**

- Amartya Sen

### **DALY**

- Disability Adjusted Life Years

# Burden of Disease Project

- ❑ WHO Global Burden of Disease (GBD)
- ❑ Impact of diseases world wide
- ❑ Estimates of epidemiology per disease
  - Mortality
  - Quality of life losses
- ❑ In need of one measure of health
- ❑ But WHO disliked QALY...



# Chris Murray

## □ Harvard

- School of Public Health

## □ Worked outside

- Health economics
- Med Decision Making

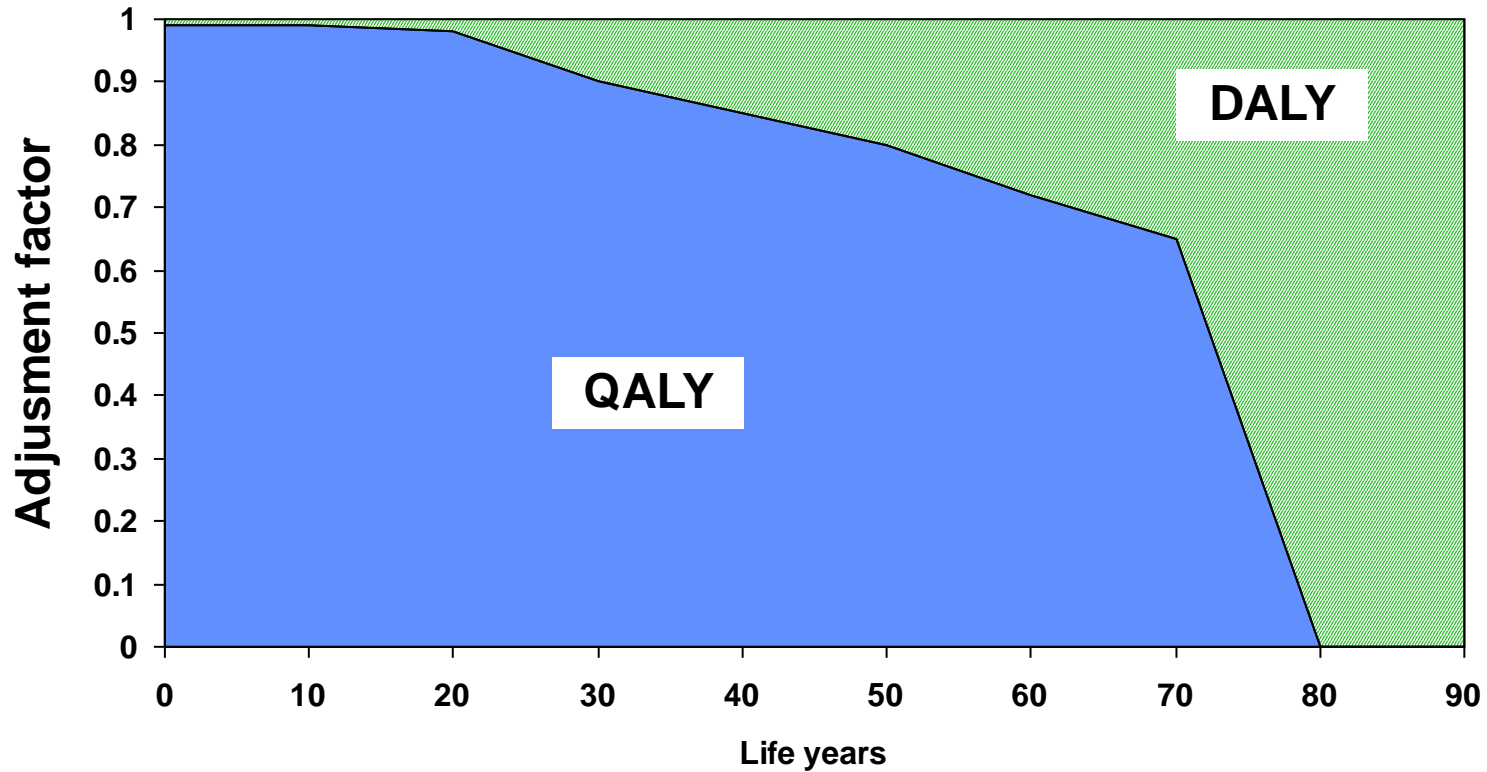
## □ DALY

- Disability Adjusted Life Years
- Lost life years
- Lost Quality of life

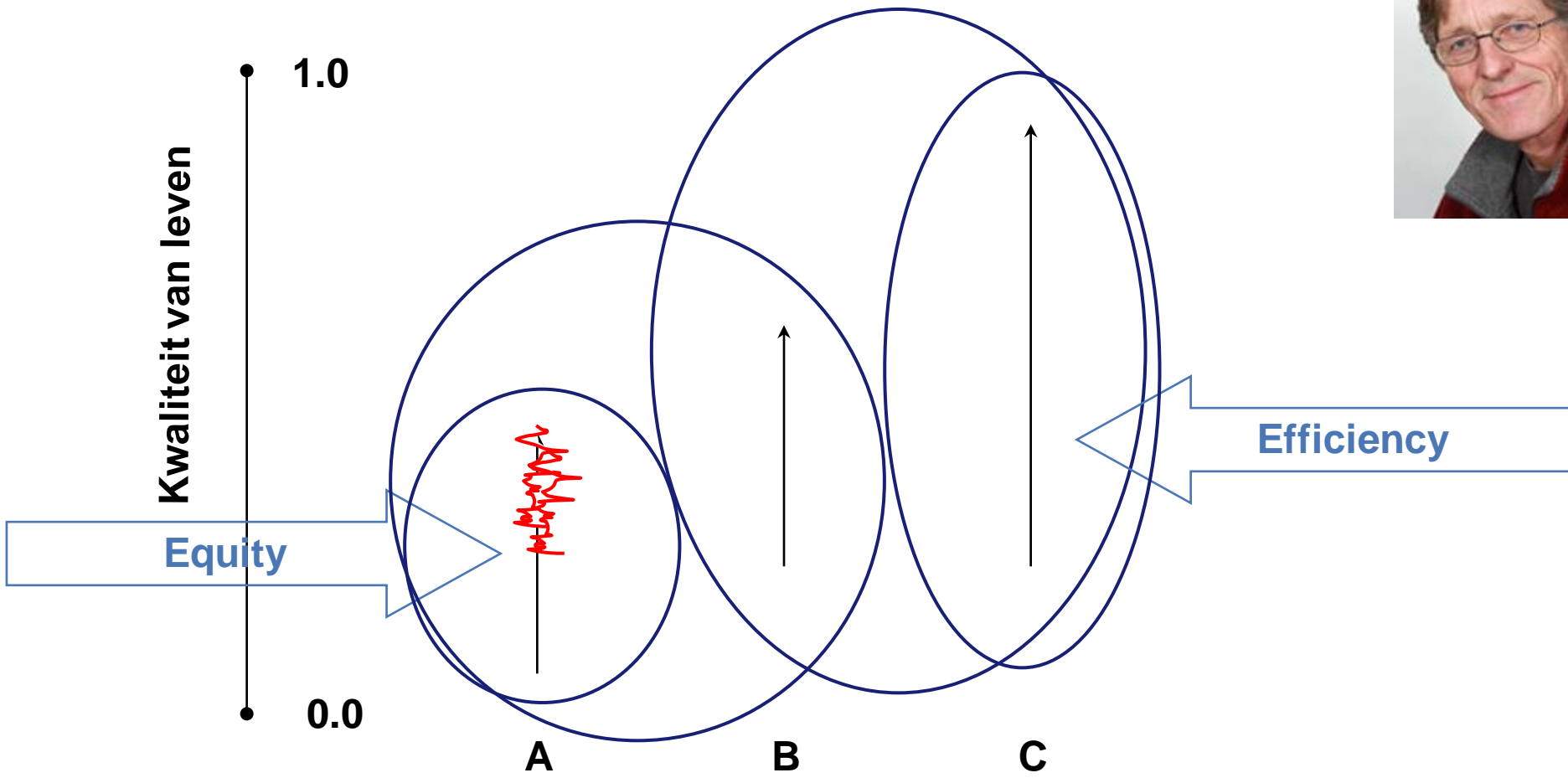




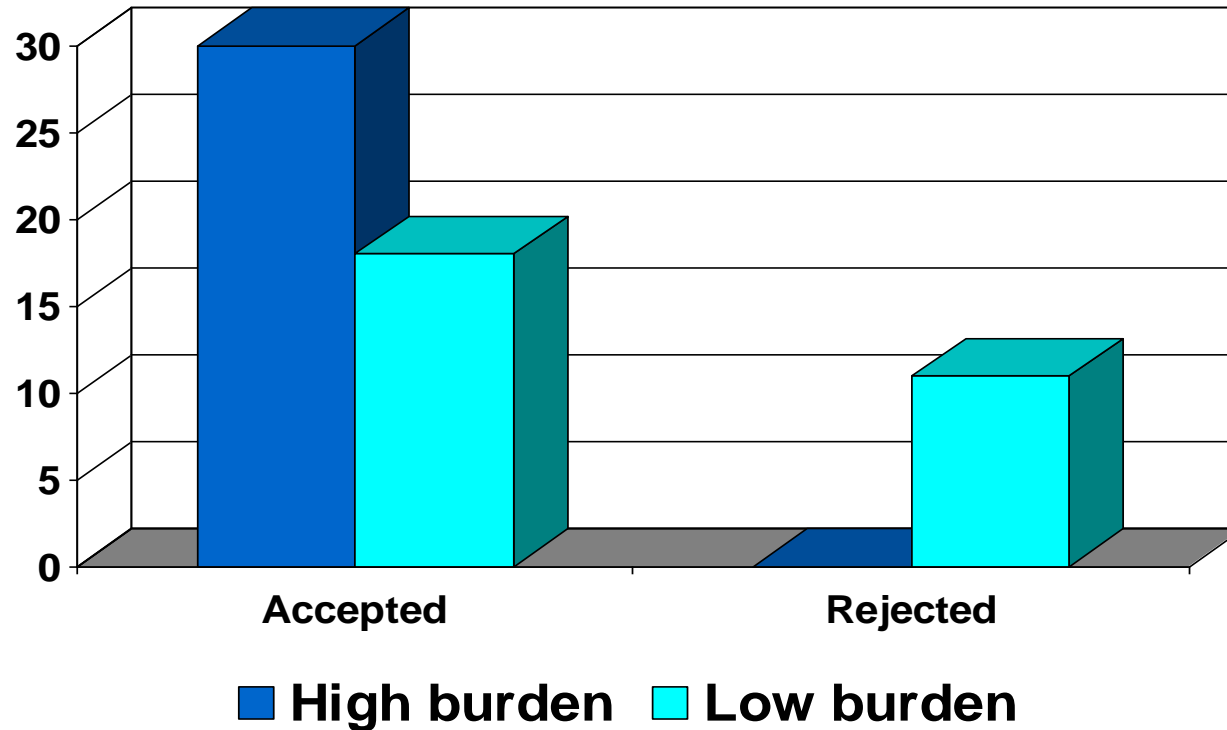
# DALY / QALY



# 3. Equity

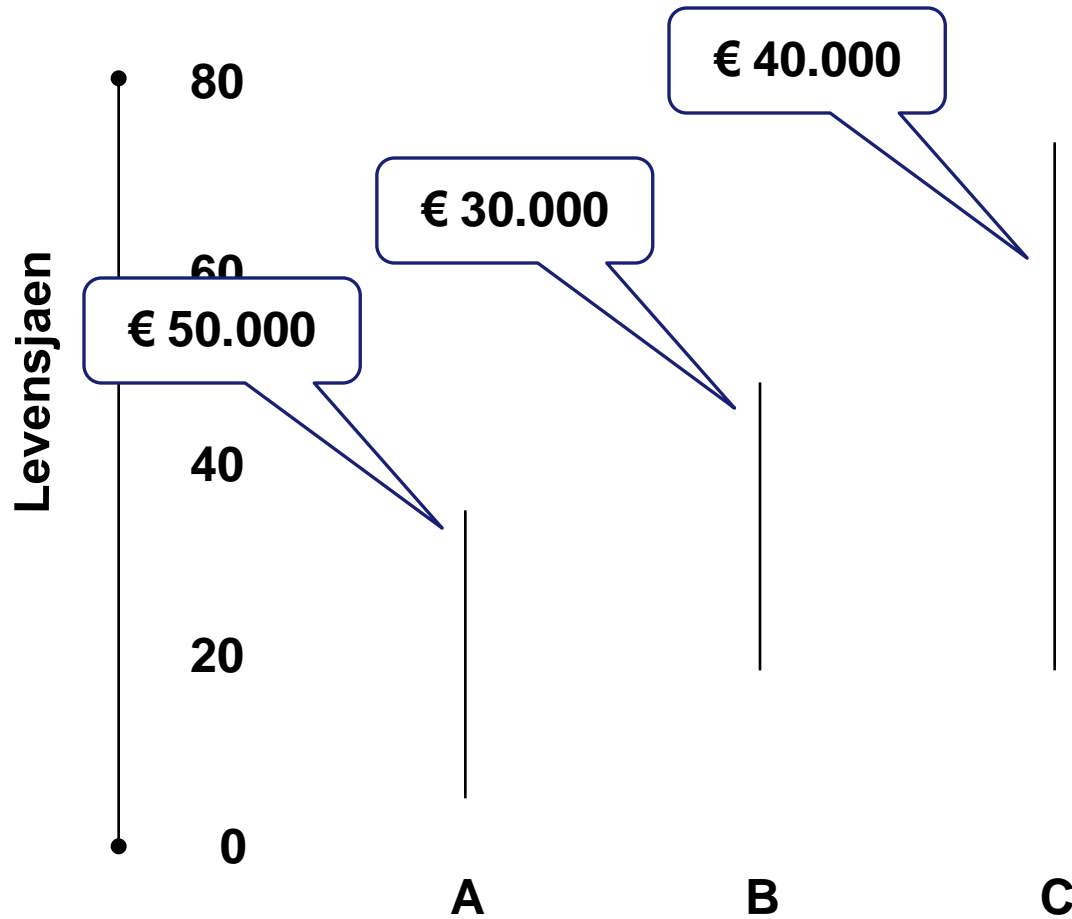


# Is (should) burden (be) a criterion?

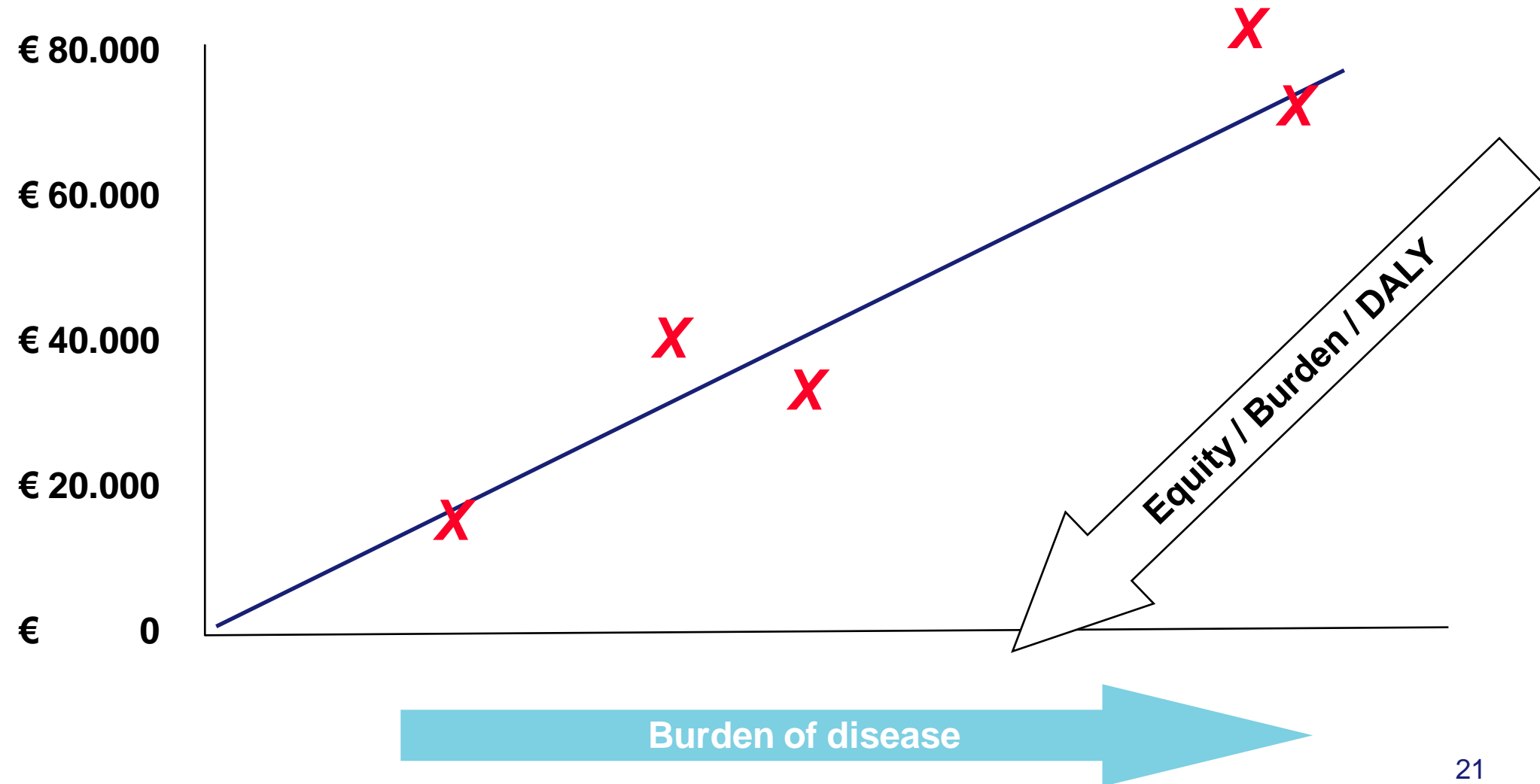


Pronk & Bonsel, Eur J Health Econom 2004, 5: 274-277

# Costs/QALY as indicator of solidarity

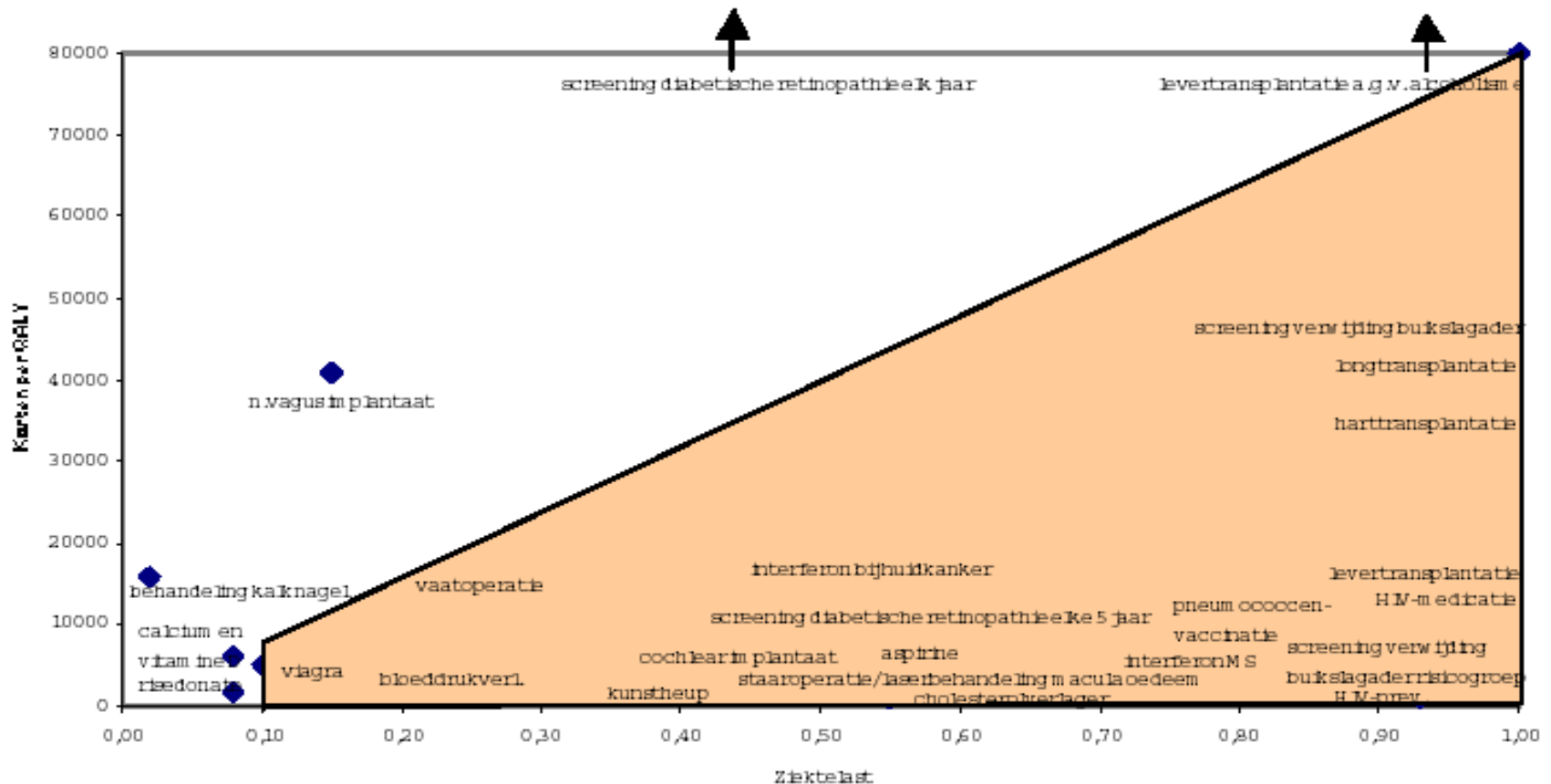


# Costs/QALY versus Burden of disease



# Dutch Council for Public Health and Health Care (De Raad voor de Volksgezondheid en Zorg, 2006)

Figuur 3.1 Kosten per QALY naar ernst van de aandoening



# Three problems with the ethical criticism .....

1. Arguments represent aversion toward a limited budget
2. Proposed alternatives turn out to be the same
3. Even equity concerns are in need of QALY