

# Candidate 6 evidence

## To what extent is assisted dying a morally acceptable practice?

There are many different views on the morality of assisted dying which are debated by philosophers, ethicists, and organisations with varying opinions.

### Dissertation Aims

- How successful are arguments for assisted dying based on bodily autonomy?
- How successful are arguments against assisted dying based on disability?
- How successful are arguments against assisted dying based on the sanctity of life?

Euthanasia comes from the Greek word Euthanatos which translates to easy/good death. Assisted dying is the practice whereby a person with a terminal illness or incurable condition is helped to take their own life. This is typically done using lethal drugs administered by a medical professional or the patient themselves. Assisted dying comes in many different forms such as active and passive. Active is when something is done to end the patient's life for example the administration of drugs. Passive is where life-saving medication is withdrawn from the patient to end their life. Both active and passive have subsections of voluntary and involuntary, Voluntary for both means the patient's choice. Involuntary passive would be a family member or medical professional making the decisions for example pulling the plug from someone in a coma. Debates about the morality of Euthanasia date back to ancient Greece and Rome where emperor Augustus supported Euthanasia saying, "dying quickly and without suffering in the arms of his wife"

Currently in the United Kingdom assisted dying is illegal however there has been some internal pressure to try to change the laws. However, as it stands assisted dying is prohibited in the whole of the UK as well as going to another country to have the procedure done and any family members who go to another country may be charged on return to the UK. However, there are many countries where assisted dying is legal such as Canada where the laws are extremely lenient compared to the other countries where it is legalised. In Canada, you can apply for assisted dying and be fast-tracked and euthanised within a day whereas in the majority of other countries such as Switzerland, it's a much longer process to prove assisted dying is beneficial for you at that point. Due to the large variety of the applications of assisted dying, it is hard to pinpoint an exact point where it is morally acceptable and not and many different pro-assisted dying philosophers are unable to agree where the line should be drawn however the majority of philosophers believe it should be based more on personal choice rather than the states. Which leads to the opening point of bodily autonomy.

### Bodily Autonomy

One of the primary arguments for the legalisation of assisted dying is Bodily Autonomy. Bodily autonomy also known as free choice or free will is the ability to make decisions about your own body and own life. If you want to die then that is your choice. A moral philosopher who supports this view is Peter Singer, He states "If beings are capable of making informed choices... we should allow them to decide whether or not their lives are worth living" <sup>1</sup>. Peter Singer believes that if someone

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<sup>1</sup> [http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20115/Singer\\_on\\_Euthanasia.htm](http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20115/Singer_on_Euthanasia.htm)

has full mental capacity they should be able to make choices about their own body. Although Singer puts forward a valuable point of people having free will and the ability to make choices about their bodies it can open a variety of issues such as where to draw the line with assisted dying. If it is up to the choice of the person then why can't anyone, no matter healthy or unhealthy choose if they want to live or die? However there are some consequences to Peter Singer's view of the argument. One of the main consequences of Singer's argument is that he believes that anyone with full mental capacity should have the ability to choose to be euthanised. By this logic anyone should be able to make the decisions on their life this then leaves an opening on where the limit in legislation is for assisted dying. Is it fair to take away someone's right to assisted death if they have full mental capacity but no terminal illness?

One group that disagrees with Peter Singer's point of view is the Society of the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC). They believe that all life is important and worth living. "Euthanasia violates the right to life. The right to life is inalienable, it cannot be taken away from a person- and inalienable- a person cannot take it away"<sup>2</sup>. SPUC implies that every person has the right to life and it should not be ended until its intended time no matter the circumstances. SPUC believes that all lives matter the same no matter that be an unborn child or an elderly man with a terminal illness, In their opinion every life is as important as the next and nothing should be able to take it away apart from the natural path of life.

However many other views support bodily autonomy such as the former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey who has a more liberal view on assisted dying and feels that assisted dying is a more compassionate way to the end of their life rather than

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<sup>2</sup> Spuc.org.uk

medical or social care "While medicine can do remarkable things for most dying people, there is an unfortunate minority who are forced to suffer unimaginable pain and misery." The former archbishop believes that it's important to have a decent and painless end to life rather than going through immense pain in social care or going through constant painful surgeries that do not help the patient's condition. George Carey was involved in the church of England for many years however the church of England has a far more lenient approach to the majority of things compared to other churches which are far more conservative with these views one example of this is the Roman Catholic Church who believe that assisted suicide is completely wrong "The Roman Catholic Church has always taught that assisted suicide is morally wrong. It goes against God's commandment(" You shall not kill-Exodus 20:13")" Overall the RRC believes that life is a thing of value in itself, its value does not depend on the extent to which it brings pleasure and well-being. The church also believes that each person should enter the dying process with all its mysteries with trust in God and solidarity with their fellow human beings; they should die with the dignity of letting themselves be loved unconditionally. The RRC have a very strong viewpoint on assisted dying and are radically against it. They believe death is up to God's own will and when it's your time to face God there is nothing to stop it. Another catholic belief towards assisted dying is the more pain and suffering the better your life will be after death. Many Catholics who have terminal illnesses believe the pain bestowed on them by God is a reflection of the riches they'll receive in the afterlife; this is another reason the RCC is against assisted dying.

Overall bodily autonomy is one of the most important factors in the legalisation of assisted dying. In my opinion, bodily autonomy should be a reason for the

legalisation of assisted dying for a variety of different reasons. I agree with the leading moral philosophers in the fact that if one has full mental function then they should be able to make choices based on their own body and no one should have an opinion on someone else's body and what they choose to do with it is their own choice, no one should have the power to make choices on someone else's body.

### Disability Rights

One of the key arguments in the ongoing debate surrounding assisted dying is the potential impact on disability rights. Critics of legalising assisted dying contend that it could set a dangerous "slippery slope," wherein the criteria for eligibility would progressively expand, eventually extending beyond those with terminal illnesses.

A particularly prominent case often cited in this context is that of the Netherlands, where a teenager named Aurelia Browners was granted the right to end her life prematurely due to mental health issues. This case raised alarm for many, with concerns that if the laws were loosened further, disabled individuals who are not terminally ill might be able to seek euthanasia, thereby ending their lives prematurely. Those who oppose the expansion of assisted dying laws argue that this could lead to vulnerable groups, including individuals with disabilities, feeling pressured to end their lives prematurely due to factors such as societal stigma, financial strain, or perceived burdens on family and carers. They warn that the legalisation of assisted dying for non-terminal conditions could reinforce the idea that some lives, especially those living with disabilities, are less valuable or worthy of protection. However, a study conducted among over 140 disability rights organisations provides a somewhat more nuanced picture. The research revealed that only 4% of these groups outright opposed the introduction of disability-based

assisted dying, while over 80% either remained neutral or chose not to express a definitive opinion on the matter. This suggests that the disability community is not as overwhelmingly opposed to assisted dying as some critics might assume. It also highlights that, for many organisations, the issue is complex and nuanced, warranting careful consideration of the specific circumstances under which assisted dying might be considered appropriate.

Although many disabled people remain deeply divided on the issue, one of the most vocal advocates against disability-based assisted dying is actor and disability rights campaigner Liz Carr. Carr, who produced the BBC documentary *Better Off Dead*, which explored both disability-based euthanasia and disability-based abortions, provided a first-person perspective on why legalising assisted dying for disabled individuals could have devastating consequences. In the documentary, Carr highlights the profound impact such legislation could have on disabled people's lives, particularly the fear it would instil in many who already feel marginalised by society. Carr herself has stated, "The assisted dying debate is terrifying for disabled people,"<sup>3</sup> a sentiment that underscores the anxiety many disabled individuals experience when faced with ongoing discussions about the potential for legalised euthanasia in the context of disability. This quote highlights how the very existence of the debate itself can make disabled people feel unwanted, undervalued, or even expendable. For many, it reinforces the idea that their lives are less worthy of protection simply because they may have a disability. In my view, it is deeply unfair to make disabled individuals feel unwelcome or less deserving of a fulfilling life simply because of an uncontrollable aspect of their identity. Every person, regardless of their disability,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68951037>

should be afforded the same opportunities to succeed and live a meaningful life. Legalising disability-based assisted dying, especially without stringent safeguards, risks reinforcing harmful stereotypes and undermining the dignity and worth of disabled individuals. Society should instead focus on creating a world where all people, regardless of their abilities, are valued and supported.

In Canada, the debate surrounding assisted dying has taken on its unique context, particularly about disability rights. Since the legalisation of medical assistance in dying (MAiD) in 2016, Canada has fought with the complexities of ensuring that the law is not misused to pressure vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, into making life-ending decisions. Initially, MAiD was available only to those suffering from grievous and irremediable medical conditions. However, the law has evolved, and recent changes have sparked even more intense debates about its application to disabled individuals, particularly those whose conditions are not terminal. Although the introduction of Bill C-7 in 2021 expanded access to MAiD to individuals whose conditions are not terminal but who still experience unbearable suffering. While this change was aimed at providing relief to people with severe disabilities, it has raised concerns within the disability rights community. Critics argue that the law, as it currently stands, risks sending a harmful message to people with disabilities—that their lives, because they are living with disabilities, are less valuable. By making it easier for disabled individuals to access assisted dying, these critics argue, society might inadvertently suggest that it is preferable to die rather than live with a disability, a perspective that could reinforce societal stigma and discrimination. For people with disabilities, this is a major concern. Many fear that individuals who feel like a burden to their families, society, or the healthcare system may be subtly pressured into

seeking MAiD. A disabled person may feel they are not contributing enough, or that their life is less meaningful, especially in a world where access to proper care, support, and social inclusion can be lacking. The fear is that, in an environment where assisted dying is readily accessible, vulnerable individuals might not be given the chance to explore all available options for improving their quality of life, such as better healthcare, support services, or mental health care.

Orlando Da Silva a Canadian Lawyer who suffered from depression through the majority of his life believes "We need to help. We need to give hope. Don't need an easy death, I want us to be a better society than that. If they say we're judged by how we treat our most vulnerable. How do we treat people with mental illness who want to die?"<sup>4</sup> Mr Da Silva's quote can be interpreted to mean rather than allowing those who are struggling an easy yet deadly solution we should instead focus on offering support and rehabilitating them. Rather than allowing everyone who is struggling to end their life prematurely, we should offer avenues of support. I agree with Orlando Da Silva and believe that he is an inspiration and a brilliant case against disability based assisted dying not only for mental but also physical. I believe that just because someone has a setback in life it doesn't mean life should have to end. Overall I believe Disability rights question the legalisation of assisted dying in any form and makes people question whether the good for some is worth the pain, suffering and pressure for others although assisted dying would end suffering for many people is it worth the millions who will face hatred and discrimination as they are viewed as worthless or a burden on society.

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<https://news.sky.com/story/canadas-assisted-dying-programme-has-gone-too-far-says-lawyer-who-ried-to-take-his-own-life-13260546>

### Sanctity of Life

The Sanctity of Life is one of the central arguments within Christianity against assisted dying. The majority of Christians hold the belief that life is a gift from God, and it should not be taken for granted or prematurely ended. This view is deeply rooted in biblical teachings, where life is seen as sacred and protected by divine will. The belief in the sanctity of life suggests that only God has the authority to take life away, and humans should not interfere with this divine plan. This perspective is particularly relevant in the debate over assisted dying, where questions arise regarding whether it is morally acceptable to end a life intentionally, even if the individual desires it. One of the main biblical quotes that shows the Christian belief in the sanctity of life comes from the Book of Genesis. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This verse emphasises the belief that every human being is created by God, in His image, and is therefore given eternal love and support from God. From this perspective, life is not merely a biological process but a gift with a higher spiritual meaning.

The idea that humans are made in God's image means that each individual has a purpose and is part of a divine plan. For many Christians, this makes life sacred and not to be ended prematurely, as doing so would contradict God's will. Further reinforcing the idea of life's sanctity is the belief that life is a precious gift from God, and it is through God's love and kindness that we are sustained. In Job 10:12 it states "You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched

over my spirit" This verse speaks to the belief that life itself, as well as the experiences, challenges, and joys within it, are blessings from God. The idea that God watches over our lives and guides us through difficulties is central to the Christian faith. Christians are encouraged to trust in God's plan, even when faced with suffering, rather than taking matters into their own hands. Ending one's life prematurely is seen as rejecting the support and providence God has offered. Most Christians believe in some sort of afterlife and that life on earth is only a small piece of a much larger puzzle and ending life prematurely would result in not achieving the afterlife glorified by Christians. In my opinion, it is unfair for Christians to force those who are suffering to carry on in pain for any longer if the opportunity is available for their suffering to end, however I understand why many Christians do not want people to break God's will if they do truly believe God is the almighty creator. There are many other options available for those with terminal illnesses such as hospices. Many Christians believe a hospice is the best place for someone with a terminal illness to be where they can receive great treatment and be happy in their final few days and spend time with loved ones before moving onto the afterlife.

Although that is a conception of many hospices can be very bad for those with terminal illnesses where instead of spending their final days in happiness with family it is instead spent in excruciating pain hoping for the final time to come. "The quality of life is more important than the length of life"<sup>5</sup>- Martin Luther King JR. Although the quote was not in the case of assisted dying it is used by supporters of the cause often. Is it fair to prolong a life which is full of pain and suffering or is it best to allow a fruitful and fulfilling life which is ended on the person's terms. I believe that a life

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<sup>5</sup> <https://burningforsuccess.com/hospice-quotes/>

which is enjoyed and ended on one's own terms is better than a dragged-out life which is unenjoyable in the final moments of life even if it does go against God's plans for the future. However, there are many arguments which many claim to debunk the theory of the sanctity of life and its relation to God's abilities. God is believed to have three main abilities. Omnipotence (All Powerful), Omniscience (All Knowing) and Omnibenevolence (All Good). If God truly had all of these attributes he would have foreseen the person ending their life short and that would have been part of his total plan and therefore invalidates the entire sanctity of life argument against assisted dying if that was to be the case. I agree that if god had to have those characteristics it would completely invalidate the sanctity of life argument and in my opinion, the Sanctity of life argument rather than being a fighting cause against the argument promotes more questions to be raised about the existence of God in the first place if God is all powerful why would he not stop the person from committing this "Heinous act" in the first place.

Overall I believe the sanctity of life is not a valid enough argument to oppose the introduction of assisted dying although there are some key takeaways from the argument such as going against God's will and breaking away from the plan he has created for you since he knitted you in the womb. I firstly don't believe in the existence of a divine creator who has created every being in his image since conception. I also don't believe it's fair to force people into beliefs of someone there is little to no proof of, and I think for people to go through such immense pain for a being that may not even be real is extremely upsetting. That is why I believe the sanctity of life is not a fully valid response to the introduction of assisted dying as I

believe people should make their own choices for their own life rather than an unconfirmed almighty being.

In conclusion, the debate surrounding assisted dying involves complex ethical, religious, and social considerations. Both sides of the argument present compelling reasons for and against the legalisation of assisted dying. On one hand, bodily autonomy and personal choice provide a strong case for individuals to have the right to determine the course of their own lives, especially when faced with terminal illness or unbearable suffering. Philosophers like Peter Singer argue that if a person has full mental capacity and is suffering, they should be allowed to choose to end their life.

This view resonates with those who believe that personal freedom and self-determination should take precedence, particularly in cases where medical professionals can provide a compassionate end. On the other hand, the sanctity of life, deeply rooted in Christian doctrine and other religious traditions, presents a strong moral opposition to assisted dying. For many, life is seen as a divine gift, and only God has the authority to take it away. The belief that life is sacred and should not be prematurely ended aligns with the conviction that humans should not interfere with God's divine plan. Furthermore, for those who hold religious views, the afterlife and the hope of spiritual fulfilment can make enduring suffering meaningful, even when faced with immense pain and terminal illness. The argument against assisted dying from this perspective emphasizes that suffering is part of God's will and should be embraced as a way to demonstrate faith and trust in His plan. While both arguments have valid points, the issue becomes more complicated when considering the potential social implications of legalising assisted dying. One significant concern is the potential impact on vulnerable groups, particularly individuals with disabilities.

The fear of societal pressures leading to the premature death of those who may feel like a burden on their families or society is a real concern. It is crucial to ensure that the legalisation of assisted dying does not inadvertently send the message that some lives are less valuable than others. In countries like Canada, where assisted dying has been legalised, this concern has prompted scrutiny of the laws to ensure proper safeguards are in place. The focus must remain on providing support, hope, and alternatives to those who are suffering, rather than offering a quick and irreversible solution. Despite the complexity of the issue, my stance is that bodily autonomy should be a primary factor in the decision to legalise assisted dying. No one should have the right to dictate what another person does with their body, especially in situations where suffering is severe and unrelievable. However, safeguards must be carefully implemented to prevent misuse and ensure that vulnerable individuals are protected from external pressures. As a society, we should aim to create a world where people feel supported and valued, no matter their health or ability, and where their choices are respected. Overall the debate over legalising assisted dying will always be a controversial one with so many people having varying opinions with no one person having a right or wrong opinion. However, I believe that if the UK Government go forward with current plans these new laws could be very successful and benefit those at the end of life who are in extreme pain and I would love for these plans to be introduced if it means even one person doesn't have to go through extreme suffering at the end of their life.

Word Count: 3947

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