

MORAL ARGUMENTS FOR/AGAINST PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED-DYING

By Clarke Miller

The main moral argument for PAD is that God is a Compassionate Loving Parent who wishes kindness and compassion for all human beings. If a dying person is in unrelievable physical pain and/or mental anguish, a loving human being does not want their loved one to suffer unnecessarily. In such a desperate situation, the compassionate action is to wish the dying person be relieved of such torture when dying, even if it hastens death. In this case death is a friend, not an enemy. All the world's religions stress compassion.

The other main moral argument for PAD is that God has delegated human beings to be responsible for their lives and deaths. God bestows brains to us to use fully to help one another. To our credit, we have extended the life expectancy from 25 in Jesus' time to 50 in 1900 and to 78 now in the U.S. If God is pleased with our extending viable quality life by 53 years, wouldn't God also be pleased if we shortened terrible dying situations by weeks or months?

Lastly, shouldn't we be able to die according to our own conscience in a democracy which protects freedom of religion? Isn't this the ultimate civil right? "Making someone die in a way others approve, but he believes a horrifying contradiction of his life, is a devastating, odious form of tyranny." (Legal scholar and philosopher Ronald Dworkin)

Moral arguments against PAD

"It's murder which is against God's commandment." No, it shortens dying, not living, is voluntary and is for the patient's good. PAD is akin to amputation of a gangrenous limb, rather than to assaulting and violently cutting off someone's limb.

"The Bible condemns suicide." There is no clear denunciation of Judas by Jesus nor of King Saul in the Old Testament. All agree that suicide, i.e. the premature ending of life because of a temporary emotional problem, is tragic and to be discouraged. PAD is shortening dying.

"People doing that must be depressed." Two physicians certify in Oregon that the person isn't depressed. If they are, they should be treated with antidepressants. But, if a bird is caught by a cat, you wouldn't give the bird antidepressants. You either try to free it or hope the cat quickly puts it out of its misery.

"You're playing God. Life and death are God's domain." Welcome to modern medicine, where 60% of deaths involve a medical decision to discontinue treatments, life supports, not to do emergency surgery, etc. Modern medicine hastens difficult births with induced labor and Caesarean section. Why can't it be used to hasten difficult deaths? (Estimated

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to be 2-5%, which at 2% is 47,000 people in U.S. annually.) We're literally playing a game of dying roulette, since we don't know who's going to get caught in this predicament until it happens. PAD is "death insurance."

"Suffering brings us closer to God and develops character." Yes, unavoidable pain may teach us important lessons. But we don't forego pain shots when having painful dental work, nor do we "prove our love of God" by foregoing anesthesia when having surgery. God is compassionate and doesn't wish us unnecessary pain.

"This will lead to abuses." There have been no reported abuses during the over 12 years PAD has been legal in Oregon. This state has strict laws regulating it, each case is reported to the state health department, and any physician abusing it will be punished. This is the way we manage with all our freedoms in our democracy. Do some people abuse our freedoms to drive, drink alcohol, speak, etc.? Yes. Should we therefore deprive everyone of these rights? No, in a democracy we cherish our freedoms and punish those who abuse them.