

A Kipper in York: Why I as a Libertarian, am Opposed to Assisted Suicide

By [Thomas Turton](#)

Saturday 20 February 2016



Image: University of York UKIP Association

So, as with many of my columns I have picked an absolute can of worms to open. I felt it pertinent to do an article on this while an excellent talk from Peter D Williams by the Life Matters Society is fresh in my mind. I have always been opposed to assisted suicide, but often have been dismissed as opposing it merely for my Christian faith. For me there is no better reason than that, but I have many secular reasons for my opposition as well, and indeed some of the most vocal opponents of assisted suicide in the UK are atheists and agnostics.

The first reason is the importance of palliative care. For those who do not know what this is, it's basically end of life care, designed to lessen the pain of patients who are nearing the end of their lives. In the UK we have one of the best palliative care systems in the world, currently ranked in the top ten in the most recent studies. In my view, assisted suicide undermines palliative care and indeed there is evidence for this. In Belgium and the Netherlands, two countries that have brought in assisted suicide laws, in the same study of palliative care, they came very low indeed (the Netherlands was 42nd, Belgium was worse). Palliative care in these countries is in complete crisis, to the point at which it has become a more viable option to kill oneself than to suffer through a end of life care system that is woefully inadequate. It makes sense really, as there is less motivation for research into palliative care if suicide is considered a more viable option. Now, I'm not saying the British system is by any means perfect, but there is an excellent House of Lords bill currently being processed that will hopefully deal with the problems that lead to recent scandals.

This brings me to another critical medical service which is undermined by assisted suicide legislation: Suicide prevention. Belgium has a system that has led to people with depression (a very treatable condition) opting for assisted suicide instead of the vital mental health treatment they need. The Belgian law has also resulted in people with anorexia, borderline personality disorder, chronic fatigue syndrome

and other illnesses being euthanised. In one particularly harrowing case, a transgender individual opted for euthanasia after their reassignment surgery failed. Again, the implications of assisted suicide legislation make what has happened totally logical, if chilling. If we can say that it is legitimate for someone to allow the state to take their lives, then there is no logical reason for the state to try and prevent people from doing so. To quote one key representative of the assisted suicide lobby in the UK, Baroness Warnock, we would be legislating to "put people down". It's not just Belgium. In Oregon (generally the model used by the assisted suicide lobby), the majority (83%) of the patients who died under assisted suicide legislation were suffering from cancer, 46% of those that used assisted suicide legislation felt that part of the reason was that they felt like a burden on their families or society. Oregon (not including suicides by their legislation) has seen a 49.3% rise in suicide rates among those aged 35-64 (this compares to the national average rise of 28%). As harsh as this sounds, the statistics show that the culture assisted suicide promotes winds up in a society that does not value life as much to the point at which suicide prevention has clearly been undermined.

The conclusion of this is that being a libertarian is not necessarily the wish to allow anyone to do whatever they want. Ultimately the law is there to protect the vulnerable as well as defend the freedoms of others. The inherent problems with assisted suicide (including the lack of true patient-doctor relationships, which are crucial in ordinary safeguards) mean that there will never be sufficient safeguards to protect those who could be pressured into taking that option, due to the inherent issues with the confirmation of agency on the patient's part. In the Netherlands, one of the strongest advocates for assisted suicide before the legislation (Professor Theo Boer) now calls for the euthanasia law to be repealed due to the problems with safeguards. As a Libertarian, I am forced to dismiss assisted suicide due to the effects that it has on the rights of others, the slow creep that such legislation has that makes it impossible for patient safety to be ensured.



17 comments

Keyboard warrior

21 Feb '16 at 2:29 am

Awful article

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Thomas

21 Feb '16 at 5:23 pm

Would you like to give a reason or is it just because you disagree with me?

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Daddyyyyyyyyy

22 Feb '16 at 8:49 am

'Some of the most vocal opponents in the uk are atheist and agnostic.'- quotes, dates facts please don't use lies of others spewing shit to validate your own filth.

Your main issue about people wanting to end their lives is the idea that it'd undermine the palliative care system? I think Jeremy hunt is a bigger issue to that end than a few of the chronic and terminally ill who can't take the pain anymore offing themselves. For you to want them to stay for you is selfish, you have no thought for the personal suffering they go through every day, if you were truly libertarian you'd let them do as they wished not regulate them you big government lefty douche.

You have a very stupid view of the world if you think that given the citizens can legally kill themselves the government won't care to help them. Does this one piece of legislation turn men to monsters?

'Impossible for patient safety to be ensured.' Validate that with some stats or even logic perhaps or you're off chatting shit again.

Kipper in York is more a permanent flounder, get in the fucking sea.

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Thomas

22 Feb '16 at 11:01 am

Do you really want me to list some people that oppose assisted suicide who are atheists?

Here's a couple to get you started:

Lord Carlile (Agnostic) <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/assisted-dying-bill-top-lawyer-lord-carlile-warns-suicide-risk-vulnerable-people-1519249>

Baroness Tani Grey-Thompson (Atheist)

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/08/assisted-dying-bill-reject>

And I show you the statistics. You are the one denying that suicide prevention is being undermined. Look at the Oregon suicide statistics, higher than the USA national average, I'm not saying it turns people into monsters, but when one concedes that some life is not worth living (through euthanasia), it becomes harder to justify, logically speaking, to prevent people from taking their own lives (see Belgium and the Netherlands who have killed people with depression) . I don't want suicide prevention to be undermined , so I don't support assisted suicide. The statistics condemn the Oregon law, but you know let's ignore facts and prioritise insults.

I give you case studies such as the awful Belgian law and huge reams of people that have killed themselves who had treatable conditions- despite safeguards-but that isn't evidence enough for you.

What about the fact that they have started euthanising Children?

Suicide is already legal , the Suicide Act (1961) made it legal-I support that law. I don't really have much else to say on that front.

Oh and Jeremy Hunt is a bad health minister for sure, but that's not really relevant. I could very easily talk about him , but really there isn't much to be said on him.

Supporting a law currently in place that prevents exploitation does not make one a "lefty" , it does make one a non-anarchist, but I'm not an anarchist.

In terms of getting in the sea...I don't know, suddenly valuing patients lives is a primitive and backwards? Fair enough, but I'm not the one resorting to insults to make my argument.

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H. Vanderheyden

22 Feb '16 at 9:37 am

Mr. T . Turton,

Have you checked the terms of the Belgian law about "assisted suicide"? Do you doubt the competence of Belgian Doctors? It seems so Mr. Turton.

The way you think, there would probably be a lot more suicides. This leaves the family and friends with a lot of questions, even feelings of guilt. Is that the way you want it?

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Thomas

22 Feb '16 at 11:07 am

Nope, suicide prevention is something that is crucial, I don't want it logically undermined by assisted suicide legislation. I don't doubt the competency of Belgian doctors, however Doctors don't necessarily know patients very well and actually considering Belgium has started euthanising Children and people with depression you can make your own mind up. I am aware they have the two doctors safeguard. It doesn't work. We have a similar safeguard with abortion, and we know the system has been abused e.g. a shocking case in Wales where people were having abortions based on gender but

the doctors were giving different reasons.

 Report

H. Vanderheyden

23 Feb '16 at 1:14 pm

In Belgium it's absolutely not so "easy" to obtain euthanasia, as you pretend.
You think that someone with a depression can obtain euthanasia? No, of course not!
That patients with the chronic fatigue syndrome can receive euthanasia? No of course not!
You describe it as if everyone with one of those and other illnesses can ask and receive euthanasia?
That's totally wrong, there are a lot of conditions to be fulfilled.
For me the discussion has ended, because you pretend knowing the law and the conditions about euthanasia in Belgium better than the Belgian government.
<http://www.belgium.be/nl/gezondheid/gezondheidszorg/levenseinde/euthanasie>

 Report

Thomas

23 Feb '16 at 2:25 pm

Umm I can point you to people who have been euthanised with these conditions. Of course it's not "easy" to obtain euthanasia, but the law is riddled with flaws.
I did not say that everyone with these conditions can be euthanised, I merely said that people with depression and other conditions had been.
You're building a nice strawman to burn, but the truth is palliative care has suffered in Belgium and the safeguards have failed several people.

 Report

Magpie

23 Feb '16 at 10:57 pm

So really the point of your article doesn't even justify an opposition to assisted suicide but more so a stronger examination and enforcement of the safeguards that ensure that assisted suicide is very much a final option for seriously ill and vulnerable people.

How on earth can you claim that because Belgium does it horrifically wrong that warrants a complete and utter block on any potential development for assisted suicide practices? Yes it definitely needs work and I would not stand for it if a corrupt system was put in place, I'm very passionate about that, but I very much struggle to see how you can jump from one point to the other where you would rather people suffer a terrible existence just to appease your 'moral and ethical worries'.

"The inherent problems with assisted suicide (including the lack of true patient-doctor relationships, which are crucial in ordinary safeguards) mean that there will never be sufficient safeguards to protect those who could be pressured into taking that option, due to the inherent issues with the confirmation of agency on the patient's part. "

How on earth is assisted suicide void of any potential successful safeguards? Where is your reasoning for this exactly? You're using flimsy claims and essentially wanting to take away autonomy from people under the guise of 'They don't know any better'.

Of course they are vulnerable people under extreme duress but I couldn't imagine a far worse fate than to be trapped and in pain and to have no way out because some nonce on the internet decided I cannot make decisions for myself, you're underestimating people's experiences. Instead of fighting for an uncorrupt and well-built system you're instead fighting the corner for people to have that option never provided to them, and for family members being put at risk of imprisonment for trying to help.

Ridiculous.

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Magpie

23 Feb '16 at 11:00 pm

*distress not duress

a bit of a big mistake there haha

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Thomas

24 Feb '16 at 12:23 am

Every country and system has the problem, not just one. If we day the family has the final say for someone whose consent isn't easily proven e.g. locked in syndrome, them what about those without family? Is the state their next of kin?

Or do we go down the medical practitioner route , which we have with abortion and it has been abused horrifically, and the Belgian system uses, as detailed above it doesn't work.

Ultimately the nature of killing a patient (which is what we're talking about with euthanasia and assisted suicide) is impossible not to corrupt.

I'm not taking people's autonomy away, I'm saying they have no right to indirectly impinge the rights of others, and unfortunately state sanctioned assisted suicide does just that. People who want to have assisted suicide are often extremely vulnerable, and many have conditions which make them unable to consent (either mental or physical) - you cannot do something based on previous consent before they were unable to consent (as obviously people's minds can change).

There's a reason why many top medics and lawyers are opposed to assisted suicide, because it is inherently bad law. Every model we have in the world is abused and the safeguards are never enough.

Practical worries are what I concern myself with, and while their may be people who want to die and are not being pressured, unfortunately I have to think of the rights of those who are being pressured. In my mind we cannot risk the rights of the vulnerable (and who cannot consent/it's a grey area for their consent) being impinged. (which are worryingly high in many states which have assisted suicide laws)

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JustAReader

24 Feb '16 at 4:23 pm

Oldest point of debate amongst Libertarians in the book. Well done on your inventive article. Libertarians don't always agree with each other. E.g freedom of movement etc. Please do not think you have just written an original article, because you really haven't. Hardly a contentious article too..

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Thomas

24 Feb '16 at 9:18 pm

I don't think it's particularly original I just gave my opinion. I don't see myself as a huge innovative person. These are just my views.

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Thomas

24 Feb '16 at 9:19 pm

Also I think considering the comments it's a little contentious.

[Report](#)

Lily

25 Feb '16 at 1:00 am

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your article as someone who has first hand experience of assisted suicide, not abroad but in the UK.

My grandfather, a 75year old quadraplegic man who required a lot of care, was put on the 'liverpool care pathway' - a palliative care system now in place in hospitals, in 2012 when doctors told me and my family he had an incurable perforated stomach. This meant the hospital withdrew life saving care due to the fact they believed there was no way of saving his life. It was then found at post mortem that he in fact died of a blod clot in his lung, which the doctors never mentioned and can be easily treated, and there was no sign of a perforation on the stomach what so ever. This was due to the doctors failing to carry out any tests other than an inaccurate xray to confirm his condition, and he consequently died unnecessarily. This occured after three years of unfortunately terrible experiences with hospital care for both my grandad and other elderly patients. From this experience, it became clear that this group of people in society were not considered valuable or worthy and were made to feel like a burden, the most tragic consequence of which is not recieveing adequate care and leading to an early death., This burden is something my grandad felt in shame at some of his lowest moments of his illness. However, unfortunately unlike other patients, we never saw caring for him as a burden and never let him hear otherwise. However, many people would disagree with me and argue the doctors did their best, he had a good innings and he would have died of something soon anyway.

I don't see it that way.

I don't think people quite understand the pressure that is placed on vulnerable people to end their lives in an environment where they are not valued, and in todays austerity, where cost-cutting is becoming inherently involved in care. You don't understand the psychology of it until you've been on a hospital ward, every night for 8 months, where you're arguing with the nurses because they haven't given him a drink of water all day, or you see an elderly gentleman's catheter full of urine burst all over his trousers because he hasn't been taken to the toilet.

From my experience, a very personal and challenging one, which can be argued is biased and clouded by emotion, I argue that the reasons I am against assisted suicide are rational and sensible. My grandad died needlessly. He died needlessly through a euthanasia system which was supposed to be a last resort, and in fact, due to the failure of infalliable safeguards, was not the last resort as the necessary checks weren't carried out. and from what i saw and what occurs all over the country, this was because he was an old, disabled man whose life wasn't viewed as valuable or important enough for a CT scan, which would have saved his life.

The desire to die is not rational, with no other conditional variables which influence your decision. In fact, it is all to do with that, the people around you and the environment you live in, which says whether or not your life is worth living, despite how old you are or what condition you may have. Allowing assisted suicide will not only lead to more unnecessary and preventable deaths like my grandads, where the so called unbreakable safeguards against abuse of the system are ineffective, but also it will develop an environment where those who require more care and are more vulnerable will be made to feel they are a burden and those around them will feel the same - a trend I saw with my own eyes and saw its devastating consequences.

To conclude, I would first like to point out that those groups who assisted suicide would affect the most - the elderly and the disabled - these groups have been found to be overwhelmingly against the legalising of assisted dying. This in itself speaks volumes as to why we shouldn't allow it and we should listen to those concerns.

Secondly, I would like to point out that my family was awarded damages for my grandads death after the court recognised the negligence of the hospital care and our claims that his life could have been saved. This cannot be allowed to carry on and have other families affected by the same fate of a destructive and dangerous system such as assisted suicide or euthanasia.

[Report](#)

Thomas

25 Feb '16 at 9:44 am

Hello Lily,

Thank you for sharing your story. The recent scandal with the Liverpool Care Pathway is something that we all need to be aware of. Thankfully there is a bill going through the House of Lords (Access to Palliative Care Act) that is specifically designed to help prevent what happened to patients like your grandfather happening again. This will be done by making it an obligation for medical boards to ensure all medical staff are properly trained in palliative care amongst other positive reforms.

The Liverpool Care Pathway scandal happened due to too much pressure being put on hospitals to free up beds and as a result it led to negligence. I, like you, believe the Liverpool Care Pathway gives a snapshot of what legalised assisted dying in the UK would be like, and I find it chilling.

My perspective: Several members of my family and friends are doctors or training to be doctors, and the fact that they are opposed to assisted suicide tells me all I need to know.

[Report](#)

Matt

25 Feb '16 at 11:12 pm

You say that “I am forced to dismiss assisted suicide due to the effects that it has on the rights of others, the slow creep that such legislation has that makes it impossible for patient safety to be ensured.”

However, this can be turned on its head: “I am forced to dismiss existing legislation against assisted suicide due to the effects it has on the rights of others, making it impossible patients to end their suffering in a dignified manner, under conditions that they choose.”

Whether you have legislation banning or supporting assisted suicide, people will be harmed as a result. I’m not sure this is an argument that can be resolved under a libertarian framework. Rather, I think you have to look at the numbers of people involved and the scale of suffering.

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