

Does Canadian Legislation Promote Autonomy Regarding Euthanasia

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I would say that the current Canadian Legislation on euthanasia does promote autonomy. The majority of people interested in euthanasia do not have conditions that significantly impact their ability to make decisions, and meaningful steps exist in Canadian law to ensure that decision is sound. "Typically, less than 33% of patients experience inadequate pain control. The dominant motives are loss of autonomy and dignity and being less able to enjoy life's activities."¹ The average patient's condition who is considering euthanasia is preventing them from achieving their definition of living life, rather than just extreme pain or other factors that lead them to a rash decision. Also, patients have to meet extensive criteria and thorough safeguards to proceed with euthanasia. In Canada, one must have an incurable or unbearable medical condition, give consent without outside influence, and be a mentally competent adult.² With these precautions in place, euthanasia will very likely be carried out only on people willing and capable of making an independent decision.

One might object that the burden of any illness does not contest the value of life, and therefore euthanasia is freeing oneself of a burden that does not exist in comparison to life. One might further object that euthanasia being available in Canada does not promote autonomy, as life is not something we should have power over. Mainly, an individual who supports euthanasia would be suggesting that bodily life is separate from personal life or conscience. Bodily life could then be seen as useless. This would contradict logic as it suggests that life has worth and it also does not have worth.³ Therefore, one's life is not something to have an autonomous decision over, and consciously choosing euthanasia is losing dignity.

I reply by stating that extending one's life as long as possible does not inherently lead to dignity. Certain individuals may see value in the life they have lived already, see no value in the life left to live, or both. Concluding that consciously choosing death over life lacks dignity would suggest that anyone who has ever died earlier than they should have, has lost their dignity. For example, if I eat food that makes me happy but may have health consequences that shorten my life, have I lost my dignity? Conversely, if I extend my life in a depressive and painful state that has little to no chance of improving, would I gain dignity? I would argue that decisions regarding our lives are made every day, all involving some risk or consequence that may be small or large.

¹Emanuel et al., "Attitudes and Practices of Euthanasia," 79-90.

² "Medical assistance in dying."

³ Narbekovas and Meilius, "Why is the ethics of euthanasia wrong?"

Being autonomous is having control over the state of our life and decisions affecting it no matter the significance, even to the extent of euthanasia.

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