

# Euthanasia A Dilemma In Biomedical Ethics A Critical Appraisal Of Peter Singers And Luke Gormallys Arguments

## Euthanasia: A Dilemma in Biomedical Ethics - A Critical Appraisal of Peter Singer and Luke Gormally's Arguments

Euthanasia, the act of intentionally ending a life to relieve suffering, presents a profound ethical dilemma in biomedical ethics. The debate surrounding its moral permissibility is complex and often fiercely contested, with arguments ranging from individual autonomy to the sanctity of life. This article critically examines the contrasting viewpoints of two prominent philosophers, Peter Singer and Luke Gormally, to shed light on the multifaceted nature of this issue. We will explore their key arguments surrounding **physician-assisted suicide**, **voluntary euthanasia**, and the broader implications for **end-of-life care**. The differing philosophical underpinnings of their positions highlight the central tension between the value placed on individual liberty and the inherent moral worth of human life.

### Introduction: The Sanctity of Life vs. the Right to Die

The debate surrounding euthanasia centers on a fundamental conflict: the sanctity of life versus the right to die with dignity. Those who uphold the sanctity of life view human life as inherently valuable and inviolable, regardless of quality of life or suffering. Any deliberate act to end a life, they argue, is morally wrong. Conversely, proponents of euthanasia emphasize the importance of individual autonomy and self-determination. They argue that individuals should have the right to make choices concerning their own lives, including the decision to end their suffering through a peaceful death, particularly in cases of unbearable pain and terminal illness.

### Peter Singer's Argument for a Qualified Right to Die

Peter Singer, a prominent bioethicist, advocates for a qualified right to euthanasia, focusing primarily on the concept of **voluntary euthanasia**. He argues that competent adults, facing unbearable suffering with no prospect of improvement, should have the right to choose a peaceful death. Singer's argument rests on several pillars:

- **Autonomy:** Individuals possess the right to control their own lives and bodies, including the timing and manner of their death. Denying this right, he suggests, is a

violation of fundamental human dignity.

- **Compassion:** Allowing individuals to choose euthanasia is an act of compassion, relieving immense suffering and allowing for a dignified end-of-life experience.
- **Rationality:** Singer emphasizes that the decision to seek euthanasia should be a rational one, made with full understanding of the implications. This requires robust safeguards and oversight to ensure the individual's autonomy is not compromised.

However, Singer's position is not unconditional. He emphasizes the importance of strict safeguards to prevent abuse and ensure informed consent. These safeguards might include independent medical evaluations, counseling, and a waiting period to allow for reflection. He acknowledges the potential risks associated with euthanasia and stresses the need for careful regulation to minimize these risks. This nuanced approach distinguishes his position from those who advocate for unrestricted access to euthanasia.

## Luke Gormally's Defense of the Sanctity of Life

Luke Gormally, a prominent defender of the sanctity of life tradition, offers a counterargument to Singer's position. He argues that the inherent value of human life prohibits any intentional taking of life, even with the consent of the individual. Gormally's perspective rests on:

- **The Inherent Value of Human Life:** Gormally believes human life possesses intrinsic worth, regardless of its quality or the level of suffering experienced. This value, he contends, is not contingent upon individual preferences or capabilities.
- **The Slippery Slope Argument:** Gormally expresses concern that legalizing euthanasia, even in limited circumstances, would lead to a "slippery slope," where the practice expands beyond its intended boundaries, potentially encompassing involuntary euthanasia or the killing of vulnerable individuals.
- **The Importance of Palliative Care:** Gormally emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive palliative care to alleviate suffering and improve the quality of life for those nearing the end of their lives. He argues that focusing on improving palliative care offers a more compassionate and ethically sound alternative to euthanasia.

Gormally acknowledges the suffering experienced by individuals with terminal illnesses, but he maintains that society has a moral obligation to provide comfort and support, not to assist in ending their lives. He firmly believes that legalizing euthanasia would undermine the fundamental moral principle of the sanctity of life. This principle, he argues, forms the bedrock of a just and compassionate society.

## Comparing and Contrasting the Arguments: A Critical Appraisal

The contrasting positions of Singer and Gormally highlight the core tension within the euthanasia debate: balancing individual autonomy with the inherent value of human life. Singer's emphasis on autonomy and compassion leads him to advocate for a regulated system of euthanasia, while Gormally's focus on the sanctity of life leads him to

oppose it entirely. A critical appraisal reveals the strengths and weaknesses of both positions.

Singer's emphasis on safeguards acknowledges the potential for abuse and attempts to address concerns about coercion and exploitation. However, critics argue that even with safeguards, the possibility of unintended consequences remains. Gormally's emphasis on palliative care offers a valuable alternative, but critics point out that palliative care alone cannot alleviate all suffering and that it may not be sufficient for all individuals.

Ultimately, the debate over euthanasia remains deeply complex and emotionally charged. There is no easy resolution, and different individuals and societies may arrive at different conclusions based on their values and priorities.

## **Conclusion: The Ongoing Debate and Future Implications**

The debate surrounding euthanasia, as exemplified by the contrasting perspectives of Peter Singer and Luke Gormally, remains a central challenge in biomedical ethics. It forces us to confront profound questions about the value of human life, the nature of autonomy, and the role of compassion in medical decision-making. While there is no easy answer, careful consideration of both sides of the argument, along with ongoing research into palliative care and the impact of euthanasia laws, is crucial for informed and ethically responsible policymaking. The future of this debate will likely involve further refining of safeguards, continued improvements in palliative care, and a continuing dialogue between those who champion individual autonomy and those who uphold the sanctity of life.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **Q1: What is the difference between euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide?**

A1: Euthanasia involves a physician directly administering a lethal substance to end a patient's life. Physician-assisted suicide, on the other hand, involves a physician providing a patient with the means to end their own life, but the patient administers the lethal substance. Both are controversial and subject to differing legal and ethical considerations.

### **Q2: Are there any countries where euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide is legal?**

A2: Yes, several countries have legalized either euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide under specific circumstances, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and parts of Australia. The specific regulations and criteria vary significantly between jurisdictions.

### **Q3: What are the potential safeguards to prevent abuse of euthanasia laws?**

A3: Potential safeguards include mandatory consultations with multiple physicians, psychological evaluations to assess mental competency, thorough documentation of the patient's wishes, and a waiting period to allow for reflection.

**Q4: What is the role of palliative care in the euthanasia debate?**

A4: Proponents of the sanctity of life often emphasize the importance of high-quality palliative care to alleviate suffering and provide a dignified death. They argue that improved palliative care reduces the need for euthanasia. However, even the best palliative care cannot alleviate all suffering, and some patients may still choose euthanasia as a preferred option.

**Q5: What are some of the ethical objections to euthanasia?**

A5: Ethical objections include concerns about the sanctity of life, the potential for coercion or abuse, the slippery slope argument, and the impact on the medical profession's role.

**Q6: What are some arguments in favor of euthanasia?**

A6: Arguments in favor emphasize individual autonomy, compassion for those suffering unbearably, and the right to die with dignity.

**Q7: How does the concept of "informed consent" relate to euthanasia?**

A7: Informed consent is central to the debate. Proponents of euthanasia insist that the decision must be fully voluntary and informed, with the patient having a complete understanding of the implications. Opponents argue that even with informed consent, the act remains morally wrong.

**Q8: What are the future implications of the ongoing euthanasia debate?**

A8: The future will likely see continued legal and ethical debates surrounding euthanasia, as well as further research into the effectiveness of palliative care and the potential for abuse within any legalized system. The focus will likely shift towards creating more robust safeguards and finding innovative ways to improve end-of-life care for all.

Euthanasia: A Dilemma in Biomedical Ethics – A Critical Appraisal of Peter Singer's and Luke Gormally's Arguments

The complex issue of euthanasia consistently tests the base of biomedical ethics. This examination revolves around the justifiable permissibility of deliberately ending a life to alleviate suffering. Two prominent figures in this heated philosophical conflict are Peter Singer and Luke Gormally, who offer starkly opposing perspectives. This

assessment will investigate their individual arguments, emphasizing their key premises and identifying their merits and weaknesses .

Peter Singer, a eminent bioethicist, advocates for a more permissive approach to euthanasia, rooted in a utilitarian framework. His argument hinges around the precept of maximizing well-being and minimizing distress. Singer argues that if a person is enduring unbearable suffering with no prospect of improvement, and willingly chooses to end their life, then helping them in this decision is morally permissible, even mandatory in certain circumstances. He employs the analogy of removing life support, implying that the separation between actively causing death and letting someone to die is unclear. This standpoint recognizes the value of life but emphasizes the significance of value of life over mere physiological existence.

Luke Gormally, a prominent philosopher and bioethicist, offers a counter-argument to Singer's position. Gormally firmly opposes euthanasia on religious grounds, highlighting the inherent value and sanctity of human life. He contends that intentionally ending a human life, regardless of the conditions , is always immoral . Gormally questions Singer's utilitarian framework, highlighting to the risk for exploitation and the dangerous precedent that could lead to the devaluation of human life. He also raises concerns about the capacity of individuals to make truly sound decisions when facing extreme suffering, contending that coercion from family members or society could undermine their autonomy. His argument relies heavily on the idea of the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of their state .

The core point of disagreement between Singer and Gormally rests in their opposing interpretations of the value of human life and the constraints of autonomy. Singer centers on the lessening of suffering and the increase of well-being, while Gormally stresses the inherent value and sanctity of life itself. Both thinkers offer convincing arguments, but neither fully addresses the complexities of this sensitive issue.

For instance, Singer's utilitarian approach fails to adequately account for the potential negative consequences of widespread euthanasia, such as the weakening of trust in the medical field. Similarly, Gormally's focus on the intrinsic value of life overlooks the intense suffering experienced by some individuals, causing to a potential infringement of their right to autonomy .

In summary , the debate surrounding euthanasia continues a profound ethical dilemma . Both Peter Singer and Luke Gormally provide valuable perspectives , but their arguments illuminate the fundamental challenges in navigating this crucial area of bioethics. A comprehensive understanding of these contrasting perspectives is essential for informed discourse and regulation making concerning end-of-life management.

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

- 1. What is the difference between euthanasia and assisted suicide?** Euthanasia involves a doctor directly administering a lethal substance to end a patient's life, while assisted suicide involves a doctor providing the means for a patient to end their own life.
- 2. What are some of the potential benefits of legalizing euthanasia?** Proponents argue that it allows individuals with unbearable suffering to choose a peaceful death,

promotes patient autonomy, and reduces the burden on healthcare systems.

3. **What are some of the potential risks of legalizing euthanasia?** Critics worry about the potential for abuse, coercion, and the devaluation of human life, especially for vulnerable populations.
4. **What role does patient autonomy play in the euthanasia debate?** Patient autonomy, the right to self-determination, is central. The debate revolves around whether this right extends to choosing the timing and manner of one's death.
5. **Is euthanasia legal anywhere in the world?** The legality of euthanasia and assisted suicide varies significantly worldwide, with some countries having legalized it under specific circumstances, while others maintain strict prohibitions.

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