

## [Assisted dying: does it benefit society?](#)

May 2013

[Kevin Yuill](#) , [Ray Tallis](#) , [Jane Barraclough](#) and [Bob Pounder](#) introduced their considered thoughts on assisted dying / suicide



As a new **Assisted Dying Bill** is tabled by **Lord Falconer** and as religious bodies such as the Unitarian Church show increasing tolerance towards assisted suicide, we ask the question, is taking one's life ever permissible, whatever your faith? The taboo against suicide held for millennia, enforced by sanctions against it in all the world's major religions. Whereas most humanist and atheist organizations favour a liberalisation of the laws, major churches and most official religious bodies incline against it (the Catholic Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Lutheran faiths, Islam) or are simply vague about it.



There are some useful case studies from a formalisation of assisted dying being permitted in certain circumstances when particular formalities have been met, so are these examples enough of a reassurance to those who are holding onto the line that assisted dying should not be formalised in law and regulated through procedure? Or do the examples from other countries merely highlight the unnecessary unravelling of a societal norm that could lead to unwelcome consequences of a move toward more generalised acceptance of suicide and euthanasia.



Perhaps because of the difficulty of discussing the issue through personalised testimony, or perhaps because it's simply not an easy matter to resolve, the issue of assisting someone ending their life is not one that society has a clear view or majority view on. The question of autonomy and having control over one's own decisions is definitely blurred by a legalised bureaucratic approval process by state appointed functionaries, but how else could the autonomy of purposeful beings be best managed when faced with end of life decisions, or is the existing fudge the best we can hope for?



Like abortion, many individuals feel that they must make up their own minds about the rightness or wrongness of such a decision. Should these questions be left to individuals or does society have some stake in trying to dissuade and prevent individuals from killing themselves. Shall we regard suicide in certain very specific circumstances as not suicide at all but **assisted dying**? Can the act of taking one's life ever be an entirely individual one?

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## Some background readings

[Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide](#) , Maranatha Briefing, September 2003

[Legal physician-assisted dying in Oregon and the Netherlands: evidence concerning the impact on patients in vulnerable groups](#) ”, Battin MP, van der Heide A, Ganzini L, van der Wal G, Onwuteaka-Philipsen BD, J Med Ethics 2007, 33: 591-597

[Assisted Suicide - An Overview of the Debate](#) , RCN Policy Unit, April 2009

[Suicide is a marvellous possibility for humans](#) , Kevin Yuill, spiked 8 April 2009

[A law out of step](#) , Dignity in Dying Report June 2009

[Giving the green light to suicide](#) , Kevin Yuill, spiked 23 June 2009

[Should we all have the right to die?](#) , Brendan O'Neill and Debbie Purdy, Big Issue debate 13-19 August 2009

[Turning death into a consumer product](#) , Kevin Yuill, spiked 25 August 2009

[Assisted suicide: the real slippery slope](#) , Kevin Yuill, spiked 8 September 2009

[Should physician-assisted dying be legalised](#) ? video of Battle of Ideas discussion October 2009

[Charlotte Raven: Should I take my own life?](#) by Charlotte Raven, The Guardian, 16 January 2010

[Assisted Dying, draft discussion document](#) , by Unitarian Movement ahead of national assembly vote on policy 2012

[Suicide is NOT Painless](#) , by Denis Joe, Manchester Salon opinion piece March 2013

[Assisted Suicide: The Liberal, Humanist Case Against Legalization](#) , by Kevin Yuill, available from Amazon 8 March 2013

[Memo to all radical campaigners: please stop exploiting suicidal people for political ends](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, The Telegraph 25 March 2013

[Paul Lamb's Request for the Right to Die](#) , by Sam Woolfe, Backbencher 1 May 2013

[Assisted suicide; leave the law alone and let juries do their duty](#) , by Richard Carey, Liberty League 9 May 2013

[Assisted Suicide: The Liberal Humanist Case Against Legalization](#) , review by Denis Joe for Manchester Salon May 2013

Watch video of the speakers' initial comments and discussion below (before the camera battery failed). Thanks to Dan Clayton the [documentary filmmaker](#) from Leeds for this.

