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Definitions, Context, Religious Ethics, and the Legalization of Assisted Dying: An International View

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Definition: Assisted dying

- Assisted dying allows patients with a terminal illness/unbearable suffering who are competent to voluntarily request it to accelerate their death with the help of clinicians through drugs that are either self-administered or given by healthcare staff.
- Different jurisdictions use various terms to refer to assisted dying issues, such as medically/physician-assisted suicide, voluntary assisted active euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, physician-assisted dying, voluntary assisted dying, physician aid in dying, and medical aid in dying.

Context

- Switzerland, Canada, New Zealand, many regions of the United States, Europe, and Australia have legalized some form of assisted dying.
- The UK has recently passed the Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Commons, and it awaits approval in the House of Lords (**Committee Stage**).

Context: Death with Dignity



- Countries that legalize assisted dying often refer to these deaths as “*good deaths*” or “*death with dignity*”.
- Many see ‘assisted dying’ as a “*dignified*” end, allowing choice, autonomy, and relief from unbearable suffering, aligning with compassion



Oregon's Death with Dignity Act

- Death With Dignity
- Annual Reports
- Reporting Forms and Instructions
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Oregon Revised Statute
- Administrative Rules
- Public Health's Role
- Publications
- Release of Information Regarding the Death with Dignity Act

About the Death with Dignity Act

On October 27, 1997, Oregon enacted the Death with Dignity Act which allows terminally ill individuals to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, expressly prescribed by a physician for that purpose.

The Oregon Death with Dignity Act requires the Oregon Health Authority to collect information about the patients and physicians who participate in the Act, and publish an annual statistical report.

- [Current Report - 2024 \(pdf\)](#)
- [View All Annual Reports](#)
- [Get Reporting Forms and Instructions](#)
- [Read the Law](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Contact Us

Center for Health Statistics staff can answer questions about Oregon's Death with Dignity Act

General info:
DWDA.INFO@oha.oregon.gov

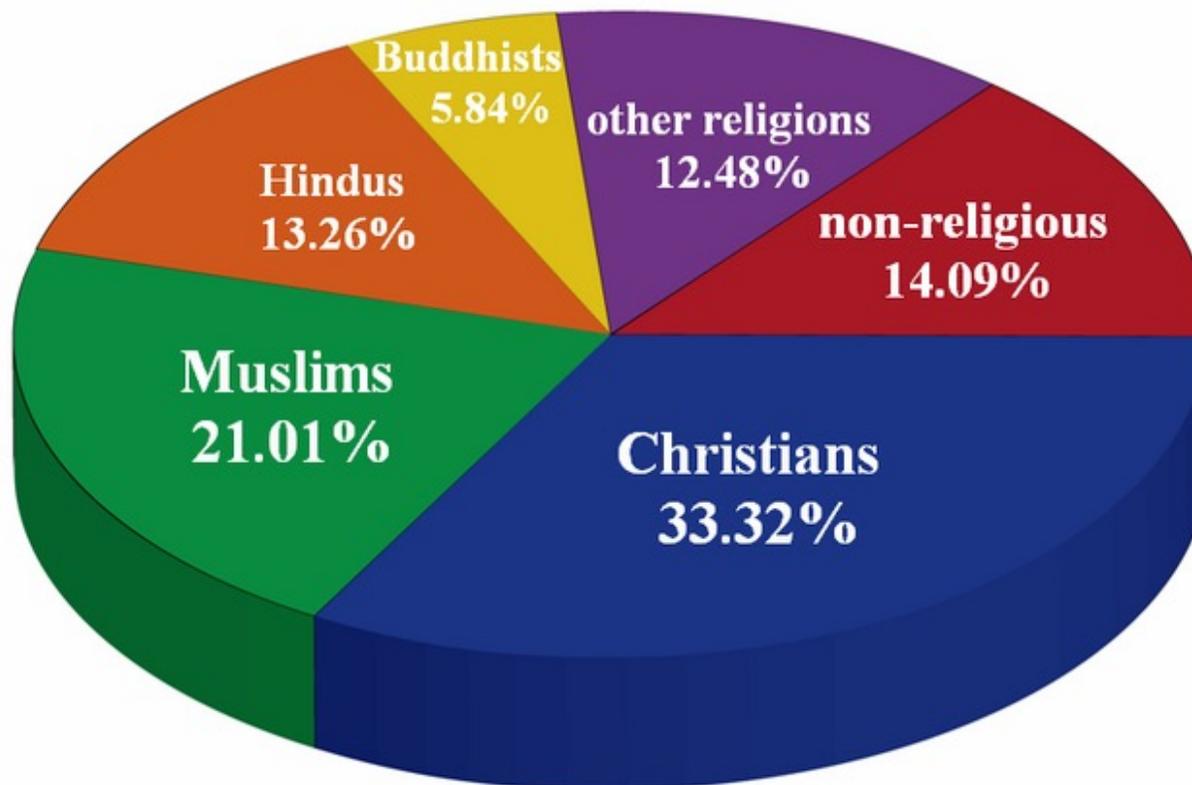
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World Religions by percentage



Religious Considerations

EAST ASIA



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What should be the Muslim Approach?



- While it may be ethically justifiable for Secular countries to promote assisted dying in alignment with their core values of autonomy and individual choice,
- It is essential to consider what is morally appropriate in religious societies where religious ethical principles shape societal value systems.
- This presentation focuses primarily on Islamic societies.

Theoretical Considerations



A screenshot of a Springer article page. The browser address bar shows "link.springer.com". The page has a dark blue header with navigation links: "Find a journal", "Publish with us", "Track your research", "Search", and "Cart". The article title is "The varieties of human dignity: a logical and conceptual analysis" by Daniel P. Sulmasy, published in "Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy" on March 27, 2012. A "Download PDF" button is visible. The journal cover image shows the title "Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy" and "A European Journal".

Three categories of dignity:

- 1) Intrinsic,
- 2) Attributed, and
- 3) Inflorescent

Daniel P. Sulmasy

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Abstract

The word 'dignity' is used in a variety of ways in bioethics, and this ambiguity has led some to argue that the term must be expunged from the bioethical lexicon. Such a judgment is far too hasty, however. In this article, the various uses of the word are

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Sections

References

[Abstract](#)

[The varieties of human dignity](#)

[The logical and linguistic argument](#)

Daniel Sulmasy's Definition of Dignity

- 1) **Intrinsic dignity**... “the value that human beings have simply by virtue of the fact that they are human”. p. 938; It is Kant’s notion of dignity.
- 2) **Attributed dignity** ...“that worth or value that human beings confer upon others by acts of attribution.” p. 938; It is the Hobbesian notion of dignity.
- 3) **Inflorescent dignity** ... “the value of a state of affairs by which an individual expresses human excellence”.. p. 938; This is the Stoic sense of dignity.

Implications of Islam (Quran and Sunnah)



Intrinsic dignity

- Islamic law values sustaining life as an absolute demand of human dignity.
- It emphasizes that taking assisted dying diminishes the ethical principle of the sanctity of human life and to God usurping his authority.
- Acting with the intention to end the life of a terminally ill patient is thus contrary to human dignity. It invokes the intrinsic meaning of the word 'dignity'.

- Kant also supported the intrinsic value of human life. He put forward the principle of treating no one as a mere means but always as an end in himself or herself.
- Thus, human beings have the obligation to save their own life even when experiencing an obviously low quality of life.
- Killing oneself means not treating oneself as a subject with absolute value but as a means to an end.

- The sanctity of human life, upholding the intrinsic value of the physical body, and requiring that it be treated with care and respect.
- The body is understood as a **trust** from God. He is both the originator and ultimate “owner” of the body-soul dyad that is human life.
- **The Qur’an states:**

“Do not take a life—made sacred by Allah.”(17:33) and “whoever takes a life... it will be as if they killed all of humanity” (5:32).

Attributed dignity



- It is bestowed or conferred from an external source. For Sulmasy, attributed dignity is granted, depending on what one owns and offers, by other human beings or society.
- In Islam, the source includes not only other human beings and society, but also God Himself.
- Attributed dignity that comes from a divine source is tied to one's adherence to God's rules and commandments. One can achieve a higher level of standing or dignity compared to one's peers, the more one engages in virtue, obedience, discipline, and God consciousness.
- Dignity can also decline when one chooses to disobey divine commandments and live an ignoble life.

The Qur'an:

“Whosoever God disgraces, there is no one to dignify” (22:18)

- In this context, exercising one's autonomy or agency does not affirm his/autonomy.
- God is the ultimate owner of life; thus, one's choice (to withdraw/withhold life support) in accordance with the Islamic ethico-legal injunctions will increase one's attributed dignity.

Inflorescent dignity



- Dignity is not lost due to negative conditions like being ill, weak, physically impaired, or dependent does not necessarily diminish a person's dignity. These conditions are not inherently degrading or shameful.
- Dignity is also attributed based on social and personal qualities: Beyond personal autonomy, a person's dignity can be recognized and valued based on their physical state or dependence, which may be socially or culturally significant.

- Life hardships as opportunities such as suffering and hardship, are viewed as tests and opportunities to elevate one's moral or spiritual status. Facing end-of-life with patience and resilience can enhance one's dignity.
- Dignity can be undermined by degrading attitudes, for example, if a person faces their hardships with faith, acceptance, and emulation of noble virtues (like that of the Prophet), they demonstrate excellence or do good. Conversely, if their dignity is undermined by degrading beliefs or attitudes (**reliance on aid**), it diminishes their sense of worth.

Concluding remark



- Without a careful understanding of how these terms are defined, there is a risk that the ethical implications may be lost, and
- It might be forcefully adopted in regions where religious ethics hold sway over law and culture without a thorough examination.
- It underscores in caring for the vulnerable to alleviate suffering.
- Death as a natural part of one's life cycle ("good death"), and accepting it aligns with maintaining moral integrity (death with dignity).