“Can’t you at least die with a little dignity?” The Right to Die Debates and Normative Dignity

In recent decades, the right to die has emerged as one of the most divisive social and political questions in North America and Europe, one that involves the mobilization of numerous social actors and activists as well as several legal challenges. In Quebec, the provincial legislature formed the “Select Committee on Dying with Dignity”, a group of legislators tasked with examining the issue. In their 2012 report, they recommend the legalization of “medical aid in dying” as an appropriate part of the continuum of care at the end of life. From a meta-analysis of the written and oral submissions collected by the Committee in different locations throughout the province, this article presents several competing meanings of the dignity in the debate about whether individuals have the right to die in a dignified manner.

In such a view, dignity depends on the physical or mental condition of the individual. Here “dying with dignity” means dying without undue suffering or loss of autonomy. Whether “dying with dignity” is defined as having a peaceful or meaningful death or alternatively as an end-of-life without undue suffering or loss of autonomy, these normative calls all take for granted that human beings want to die with dignity. This article analyzes the multiple meanings of dignity in the right to die debate while challenging the assumption that a “good death” is necessary synonymous with “dying with dignity.”
Those who cannot pay for prolonged accommodation in expensive health care facilities and intensive care units. Death with dignity. In support of physician assisted suicide or voluntary active euthanasia, the argument is often made that, as people have the right to live with dignity, they also have the right to die with dignity. Some medical conditions are simply so painful and unnecessarily prolonged that the capability of the medical profession to alleviate suffering by means of palliative care is surpassed. But we do have the right to decide how long we remain in existence. The fact that we have the right to suicide, does not mean that it is always (morally) right to execute that right. This patient repeatedly, say at least twice a week, requests that his/her life be terminated. The right to die is a concept based on the opinion that a human being is entitled to end their own life or to undergo voluntary euthanasia. Possession of this right is often understood to mean that a person with a terminal illness, or without the will to continue living, should be allowed to end their own life or to use assisted suicide or to decline life-prolonging treatment. The question of whom, if anyone, should be empowered to make this decision is often central to debate.