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Castrillon, Gloria Ledger

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IS SUICIDE EVER MORALLY PERMISSIBLE?

Gloria Ledger Castrillón

ABSTRACT

The moral permissibility of suicide continues to be as controversial as ever. Recent, rapid advances in medicine and science, and in particular in those technologies that extend human life, have resulted in a resurgence of interest in the question. In this paper, I examine two views on suicide so as to arrive at an answer to the question of whether suicide is ever morally permissible. I look in some detail at a sanctity-of-life approach, in which it is argued that suicide is against 'natural' law and that it perverts our rational desire for the good that is life. By way of contrast, I examine a broadly utilitarian approach to the question. I conclude that it is through the application of the utilitarian approach that we are able to come to the answer that sometimes, depending on the circumstances, suicide may in fact be morally permissible, not only for reasons of suffering or ill health such as we expect to find in the context of euthanasia.