Morality of MAiD: Through Three Perspectives

By Erin Smith

Murder is wrong. A truth as old as Cain and Abel. Why then is the topic of MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) so controversial and debated? Why is it seen as acceptable in society today? Why is it given so freely and so frequently? Everyone has their own opinion. I myself, as a Catholic, have been taught and have come to believe that MAiD is morally unacceptable. I also believe that everyone, regardless of religion, should understand the issues with MAiD. In order to inform Catholics, but also the non-religious, as to why MAiD is so wrong, it is important to look at the concept through a theological lens, a medical lens, as well as a psychological lens. Together, these three perspectives can greatly educate and persuade anyone to believe that MAiD is in fact wrong.

Catholics as well as many Christian churches view MAiD as sinful and must not be used as an escape route from suffering. Our lives are seen as a gift from God and a sanctuary for the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes 8:8 states that "no one has power over the breath of life to retain it, and none has mastery of the day of death." Therefore, it is not our choice to determine our ending. As some may already know, while others may not; humans are created in the image and likeness of God. Since the beginning of the Old Testament, during the creation of Adam and Eve, God intended for life to be cherished and not simply ended when situations become difficult or suffering occurs. To expand upon the concept of suffering, having a fuller understanding regarding the purpose of suffering can help us come to see that MAiD may be prohibiting a great deal of good. On many occasions, including in the Bible and in life today, suffering has led to growth and a more fruitful life. For example, Joseph was initially sold into slavery by his brothers, but after years of hardship, he became a wise leader of Egypt who was able to save the lives of many during a great famine. Furthermore, Corrie Ten Boom, the author of the famous memoir *The Hiding Place*, suffered in Nazi Concentration camps for approximately ten months with her sister. Rather than causing Corrie to lose her faith and drive her away from God, the horrid experience only brought her stronger trust, reliance, and gratitude towards God. The stories of Joseph as well as Corrie Ten Boom teach us to surrender our suffering to God, as he is able to bring greatness out of the darkness. Using MAiD as an escape route from suffering could be getting in the way of God's great plan for us. Overall, through a theological lens, MAiD is seen as inherently wrong. It is not our decision to determine our time of death or prohibit the work of God. Instead, our lives should be cherished and protected.

On a second note, MAiD can be looked at through a medical lens. MAiD violates the traditional role of doctors to provide support and care, treat diseases, and help patients understand what is happening to them. In 1979, Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, two bioethicists from the United States, published a renowned and significant textbook that has led ethics in the medical world for the past four decades. It is called the *Principles of Biomedical*

Ethics. This famous textbook teaches the *Four Pillars of Medical Ethics*: beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice. Beneficence instructs doctors to "do good," and non-maleficence means to "do no harm." MAiD easily breaks both of these principles, as one is not being saved from harm, but is rather being offered an irreversible, life-destroying outcome. Moreover, the pillar of autonomy states that a patient must be given the option to choose freely. Although, in theory, MAiD is never forced upon a person, one might be influenced to choose it because it is offered so frequently and willingly by medical professionals. In a similar way, this potential influence to choose MAiD violates the pillar of justice, as the patient might not have the free mind to decide for themselves what they truly want (this shall be discussed further through a psychological lens). Ultimately, MAiD has turned the purpose of medicine into something causing death instead of helping to sustain life, the original purpose of healthcare.

To expand on another, yet just as important perspective, MAiD and the ethics behind it can be looked at through a psychological lens. As talked about previously through a medical lens, one might feel pressured to partake in MAiD, that otherwise might not have been considered if it was not offered so freely from health care professionals. A person might feel like they are a burden to family, friends, or even the healthcare system with their medical needs. They might feel as if they are "doing people a favour" by accepting MAiD. Additionally, patients coping with an illness can be under great stress and may have clouded judgment that causes them to make choices they might not have made with a clear and healthy mind. Patients are vulnerable, and no one should feel any pressure to make such fatal decisions. It is a violation of human rights. Furthermore, MAiD not only clearly destroys the person it is administered to, but can also cause substantial harm to family members and friends who love the patient dearly and did not get a say in the patient's choice of treatment. It creates grief, trauma, and can arouse many questions for those close to the patient. "Was there more that could have been done for them? Did they choose this because of me? What if they had gotten better?" MAiD leaves lasting impacts on many. It alters trust between the healthcare system and patients. MAiD is wrong and should not be the solution to suffering, as it greatly harms the psychological well-being of our entire society.

MAiD has created detrimental effects in our world today. Since MAiD was legalized in Canada in 2016, approximately 75,000 to 100,000 human lives have been taken due to this life-ending treatment. Unfortunately, due to unreliable data collection, the true number of annual deaths is difficult to determine, but it is increasing and becoming more acceptable. Therefore, it is important to persuade people to come to believe and view MAiD as wrong. The ethics regarding MAiD can be looked at through a theological, medical, and psychological lens. With enough publicity and education surrounding the topic as to why MAiD is wrong, hopefully our country will once again see a future that legally protects each persons' dignity and life up to a natural death.