

FACTSHEET 12: The Slippery Slope Objection

OBJECTION 7 - If voluntary euthanasia were legal it would diminish respect for human life and lead to acceptance of lives being ended without request.

Answer:

- Every significant social reform has its detractors who predict dire consequences; yet in retrospect the reform is seen as basic human justice. The abolition of slavery, the prohibition of child labour and equal rights for women are obvious examples. We believe the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia will eventually be viewed in the same way.
- The "slippery slope" or "thin end of the wedge" objection is a powerful one because it plays on our instinctive fear of change, of moving into uncharted territory, of engaging in a venture which, although desirable in itself is portrayed as too hard to control. The objection is developed, not by addressing genuine problems of effective management, but by speculating on hypothetical scenarios without adequately establishing their credibility. The mere fact that such scenarios can be invented is held to be proof that they must occur. When the objection is developed in this way it often masks an objection on quite different grounds.
- There is no logical sequence that requires that a practice that is good in itself must lead to something that is bad. It is necessary to examine the merits of a given proposal, noting where the boundary lies and how it will be maintained. The merits of the proposed reform are that it is based on sound moral principles (see [Fact Sheet 9](#)), it meets an urgent human need and it does no more than provide an option of last resort under strict guidelines and safeguards. Its boundary is unambiguous. The voluntary requirement (applying to both doctor and patient) clearly sets the limit. Far from reducing respect for human life, respect is enhanced when the personal autonomy of the frail and vulnerable is recognised and protected.
- It is not possible to base a case for non-voluntary euthanasia on the practice of voluntary euthanasia. Our free press, legal system and democratic process provide powerful safeguards against any attempt to blur the boundary set by the voluntary requirement.