Come Lovely And Soothing Death: The Right To Die Movement In The United States

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But Goodall’s case and the right-to-die movement have their critics, in both the religious and the secular sphere. And end-of-life debates more generally—that they’re instances of suicide like Goodall’s or controversial cases like that of terminally ill UK infant Alfie Evans, whose parents lost the fight to keep him on life support—raise vital questions for which we, as a society, do not have fully articulated answers. Who has the right to end a life and why? And what does it mean to make assumptions that a life is, or is not, worth living? At what point do the sometimes competing ideals of autonomy and compassion play out?

Advocates for the right to die find the constitutional basis of their argument in the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause, which reads: No State shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law. The wording of the due process clause suggests that people are responsible for their own lives, and could, therefore, have a legal right to end them if they choose to do so. But this issue was likely not on the minds of constitutional framers, as physician-assisted suicide was not a public policy issue at the time, and conventional suicide leaves no...