



## Does Avatar really deserve 9 Oscar nods?

It cleaned up at the box office and director James Cameron's 3D epic leads the Academy Awards nominations. But should it?



**STEVEN HAMILTON**  
21, Ayrshire, student

It was better than expected. It's certainly nothing new plot wise. It still has spectacle but it's not very intellectual.



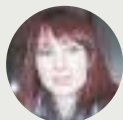
**SEAN KEOUGH**  
21, Glasgow  
British Red Cross worker

I don't think it deserved nine nominations. It was an awesome movie but did it change the face of cinema? I don't think so. It was just a really good CGI movie. *District 9* deserved them more.



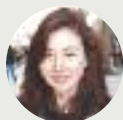
**NINO ALLENZA**  
54, Edinburgh  
transport worker

I was very impressed with the film, it was stylish and it something completely new. The plot is a bit simplistic to the point of being crap. James Cameron has done something groundbreaking, but if it won all nine Oscars that would be a bit overboard.



**REBECCA RILEY**  
22, Glasgow, student

It doesn't tell a story we haven't heard before but visually it's pretty epic. It doesn't deserve Oscars for the storyline. It's done in quite an unintelligent way. It's fundamentally a love story and I think that's been done. This year there hasn't been any really epic films so I can understand why everyone has held onto that one in particular.



**CHLOE THORNTON**  
21, Cirencester,  
fundraiser

It's a great film and the animations are beautiful, I think it probably deserves to be as successful as it has been so far. I hope it wins quite a few Oscars. I loved the storyline – I identified with it a lot because I love animals and I like how it wasn't cynical. It was really imaginative, but it probably was a bit too long for my liking. I thought the dude in it was really good looking though.

## BRENDAN O'NEILL

After Sir Terry Pratchett's speech last week, the debate on assisted suicide continues to divide people. It's time for 'a Third Way', argues O'Neill

**D**o you ever watch a public debate unfold, in which two implacably opposed camps lock horns, and think to yourself: "I take neither side"?

That is how I feel about the assisted suicide debate. I can't bring myself to sign up to the anti-assisted suicide lobby, which uses the politics of fear to argue that legalising assisted suicide will create a slippery slope towards "death panels" and the extermination of people we consider "useless".

But neither can I get behind the pro-assisted suicide camp, which seems to think that death – voluntary death, yes, but still death – is a solution to ill-health and even old age.

I hate to use a Blairite phrase, but it might be time to come up with a Third Way on assisted suicide. We need a new outlook that rejects the fearmongering of the antis but which also puts the pros on the spot as to why they think assisted suicide is something worth fighting for.

Assisted suicide has been a hot political issue for years, but the debate has intensified in recent weeks. Margo Macdonald, an independent MSP for the Lothians region, continues to push her Assisted Dying Bill.

Ms Macdonald suffers from Parkinson's disease and is campaigning for the right of terminally ill people to choose an assisted death here in the UK rather than having to travel, often at great expense, to the euthanasia clinic Dignitas in Switzerland.

And last week Terry Pratchett, author of the Discworld fantasy novels, called for the establishment of assisted suicide tribunals.

Pratchett, who suffers from early-onset Alzheimer's disease, says terminally ill people need a space in which they can make the case for their own assisted deaths.

The response to Pratchett's proposal in particular has exposed the limitations to the current debate about assisted suicide.

The sometimes-shrill critics of assisted suicide claim that Pratchett's idea for assisted-suicide tribunals will give rise to "death panels", where ghoulish men and women – perhaps wielding scythes – will decide who can live and who can die.

The critics also claim that families who want to "get rid of granny" in order to break into her piggy bank, and doctors who feel overworked on overcrowded geriatric wards, will cajole vulnerable people into choosing death over life.

Such arguments are based on a rather poisonous politics of fear, in which families and the medical profession are painted as sinister institutions with dark motives. Our real-world experiences tell us that the vast majority of families and doctors are actually not evil at all.

Yet on the flipside, there is an unthinking acceptance among liberal commentators and left-leaning politicians that legalising assisted suicide is a good idea. Often they justify assisted suicide on the basis that it will save



**MORAL AUTHORITY?**  
DOES SIR TERRY PRATCHETT HAVE THE STRONGER ARGUMENT BECAUSE OF HIS ILLNESS?

the health service money. A writer for *The Times* estimates that as the number of older people increases, there will be the "social catastrophe" of increased rates of dementia.

And each patient with dementia costs the economy "eight times as much as someone with heart disease".

So we should allow, and possibly even encourage, people to choose death as a way of saving the state some cash? That seems a spectacularly inhumane proposal.

The pro-assisted suicide lobby also uses a kind of moral blackmail to try to quash dissent. One journalist has celebrated the "unassailable moral authority" of Pratchett on the basis that he is "suffering a wretched condition".

But what about the old saying that hard cases make bad law?

What about the many sufferers from early-onset Alzheimer's who lack Pratchett's access to the front pages of the papers and who think suicide is *not* the solution to their problems? Should Pratchett's moral authority override their outlook on life?

My main worry with the fashionable demand to legalise assisted suicide is that it springs from society's inability to value the ageing population.

Increasingly described as a "social catastrophe" in the making or as a "ticking timebomb" of dementia, older people, especially diseased ones, tend to be looked upon as a burden.

Because we seem unable to include them in the social make-up, to value them as human beings, we are almost unconsciously spending more time devising "exist strategies" than coming up with a social vision for improving older people's lives and valuing their wisdom and their desires.

No, there is no sinister attempt to create granny-destroying "death panels" – but there is a slow drift towards focusing on how to help people to die rather than helping them to live better lives. We need a rational debate about why that is a problem. ●

**Brendan O'Neill is the editor of Spiked, an independent online magazine dedicated to a culture war of words.**  
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