

# LETTER

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## Assisted Suicide

THE countries where assisted suicide and euthanasia have been legalised reveal rapidly expanding criteria for their availability. Whether this is evidence of advancing civilisation, or the slippery slope to its reverse, probably reflects one's contempt or gratitude for Palliative Care professionals.

In the thirties, when I was born, Nazi doctors were writing up their experiments in using gas for ending the lives of patients with fulminating syphilis. There was more interest than opposition to this from the German public and medical profession. Thanks to this, and to Hitler's views on eugenics, these techniques were extended. Ever widening groups of people whose lives were deemed, by themselves or others, to be worthless qualified for elimination.

Human nature being what it is none of this surprises me. What does amaze me, in no small measure, is that within my own lifetime the notion of doctors legally killing patients is again, so soon, lauded as welcome and progressive. Such thinking sets my profession back two and a half thousand years. Hippocrates was revolutionary in stripping the awesome Medicine Man and Witch Doctor of his powers of life and death over his clients. Henceforth doctors were to use their powers and skills only in the service of life.

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