
Letters to the Editor



Assisted suicide

Sir, Further to your leading article "*Into that Good Night*" (Mar 31), not all homicide is intentional. Some killing, even of oneself, can be accidental. But when it is intentional, it is suicide. That remains the case, whether it is performed by someone terminally ill, chronically ill, or in perfect physical health.

Assisted dying is what happens in hospices, where dying patients are given social support and pain-relief as they die. Assisted suicide is what happens when a physician helps patients to kill themselves.

This distinction is important to maintain, lest, under the appearance of "assisted dying" we in fact enshrine in law a kind of assisted suicide. For once we have granted one kind, the question of why we withhold other kinds will quickly arise. Is it obvious that the terminally ill suffer more grievously than the chronically ill, or the handicapped, or the bereaved, or the philosophically miserable? Not to the Dutch, who have mooted extending the privilege of assistance in suicide and killing upon request to those who are "tired of life" or merely consider their lives "complete".

Even if, all things considered, we were to reckon it wise to legalise assisted suicide, let us be clear about what we are doing — and its ramifications.

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