

Book Review

Title: *The Case Against Assisted Suicide: For the Right to End-of-Life Care*

Author: Edited by Kathleen Foley, M.D., & Herbert Hendin, M.D

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Reviewer: Christina Carty Bergholz

The Case Against Assisted Suicide is an edited volume addressing a highly controversial issue that is, and promises to remain, controversial for a long time. The book attempts to provide a comprehensive perspective on the case against physician assisted suicide and for the right to palliative care. Contributing authors represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders and include ethicists, lawyers, clinicians, and healthcare policy experts. The editors conclude that lack of education about palliative care, and limitations in a variety of health care resources, are at the heart of support for assisted suicide and euthanasia. This book is much needed and should be of interest to the public at large, due to the increasing numbers of people diagnosed with fatal diseases like cancers and AIDS, and the growing number of elderly people, as the baby boomers age.

The book is divided into four main sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The sections are entitled *Autonomy, Compassion and Rational Suicide; Practice versus Theory; Reason to be Concerned;* and *A Better Way*. The first section consists of four chapters. From different perspectives, but from the common ground of medical ethics, the authors systematically address what may be considered the strongest arguments for legalizing assisted suicide - compassion for suffering patients, respect for patient's autonomy, and suicide as a constitutional right and a rational act on the part of the patient. The second section contains five chapters, each chapter using case examples of places where euthanasia and assisted suicide are legal, to empirically demonstrate and highlight the dangers of this practice. The next section consists of three chapters and includes a chapter by Diane Coleman, an attorney who is disabled, and a leading advocate against assisted suicide. This section focuses on the vulnerability of the disabled, elderly, depressed, and disenfranchised groups, in the face of the possibility of legalized assisted suicide and euthanasia, and addresses common arguments used to justify legalization. The final section consists of two chapters. This section, along with the conclusion, advocates better hospice care and improved palliative and psychiatric care as alternatives to legally sanctioned euthanasia and assisted suicide.

This book is timely and important in the life and death debate that is of personal relevance to all of us. It is thoughtful and comprehensive in its critical examination of the arguments supporting assisted suicide, is intimately knowledgeable of the case supporting the legalization of assisted suicide, and does not dismiss these arguments lightly, which is one of the strong aspects of the book. Perhaps the strongest aspect of the book is that it does more than critique legally sanctioned assisted suicide, it also offers practical alternatives.

Indeed, when patients nearing the end of life express fears of losing control, or being deprived of dignity, compassionate and supportive counseling is called for — not assistance in committing suicide.” Ronald W. Pies, MD Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, SUNY Upstate Medical University —“How Does Assisting Suicide Affect Physicians?”, theconversation.com Jan. 7, 2018. 6. Legal Right. —“The right of a competent, terminally ill person to avoid excruciating pain and embrace a timely and dignified death bears the sanction of history and is implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.” The Declaration of Independence says that we should have the right to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nothing in it says we have the right to pursue death, nothing.” In the case of Foley and Hendin, that agenda is improvement in the palliative care of terminally ill patients. As the comedian says, not that there’s anything wrong with that.” None of the essays argues against assisted suicide and euthanasia simply because killing is wrong. Rather, each one points out how legalization of such practices would achieve a goal that is the opposite of the one its supporters claim it would.” Attorney Diane Coleman, president of the disabilities rights group Not Dead Yet, demonstrates how the same society that cannot be bothered to provide the necessary assistance to enhance the lives of disabled people seems to jump to support any disabled person’s request for assisted suicide.