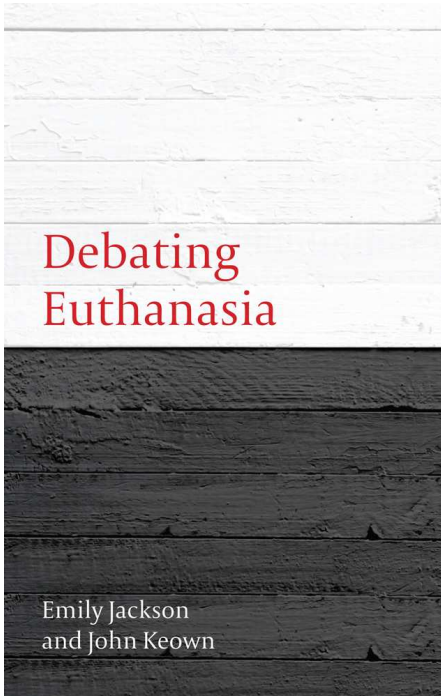


BOOK REVIEWS

DEBATING EUTHANASIA BY EMILY JACKSON AND JOHN KEOWN

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REVIEWED BY PRAVIN THEVATHASAN

In this highly readable work, Professor Emily Jackson first presents the case for legalizing assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia. The arguments are well presented and they demand a cogent response. For a small number of people, she argues, a good death is only made possible by means of assisted suicide and in a pluralistic society people should not be forced to endure a death they find intolerable. She cites the case of a doctor who meets a patient for the first time and performs an act of illegal euthanasia even though that patient might have been depressed. This should not have occurred, she says, if there is legal voluntary euthanasia with adequate safeguards.

Professor Keown then presents the case against legalizing assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia. He argues that the safeguards in place where euthanasia is already legal have been "illusory." In the Netherlands, for

example, being depressed or being tired of life is reason enough for becoming a candidate for euthanasia. Besides, the Dutch flout their own guidelines.

Keown also reminds us that clinicians are autonomous beings who make specific clinical decisions. Why should they withhold euthanasia from a patient who in their opinion requires it simply because the patient has not requested it? The slippery slope is both a practical and logical one. He further reminds us that Professor Jackson has already stated prior to this debate that only certain human beings qualify as "persons." Clinicians with this belief are unlikely to suffer disquiet after disposing of "non-persons" who are unable to consent to their own demise. One is reminded of the case of Tony Bland who was effectively de-personalized by the Courts prior to being put to death.

Little wonder then that disability rights groups are among the strongest to oppose legalizing assisted suicide and euthanasia. There is a real alternative and this is excellence in clinical care.

Given that neither author read what the other wrote, the overall work is coherent and flows well. This work is informative and a welcome summary of the arguments for and against legalizing euthanasia.