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'Physician-assisted suicide'; Conclusions; PART II The ethical debate: human life, autonomy, legal hypocrisy, and the slippery slope; 4 The value of human life; 'Vitalism' v. 'sanctity/inviolability of life' v. 'Quality of life'; Vitalism; Sanctity/inviolability of life; The prohibition of intentional killing; Intention and foresight; Acts and omissions; The worthwhileness of treatment: its benefits and burdens; Quality of life Distinguishing 'Quality of life' from 'quality of life' Illustrating the distinctions; Mary's case; Dr V(italism); Dr Q(uality of life); Dr I (nviolability of life); Angela; Dr V; Dr Q; Dr I; Conclusion; 5 The value of autonomy; The 'right to choose'; Choosing what is right; The purpose and value of autonomy; The right to refuse futile or excessively burdensome treatments; How autonomous?; Conclusion; 6 Legal hypocrisy?; The current law; VAE as murder; Autonomy and the law; Five criticisms of the current law; Ineffective?; Palliative care and euthanasia; A right to commit suicide? A right to commit suicide by refusing treatment? Active and passive euthanasia; Conclusion; 7 The slippery slope arguments; VAE in principle and in practice; The nature of the slippery slope argument; Empirical and logical slopes; The empirical argument; The logical argument; Voluntariness; 'Unbearable suffering'; Conclusion; PART III The Dutch experience: controlling VAE? condoning NVAE?; 8 The guidelines; The Dutch law; 'Strict safeguards'?; The guidelines; 'Precisely defined' and 'strict'?; The government bill; Conclusion; 9 The first Survey: the incidence of 'euthanasia' The Rummelink Report and the Van der Maas Survey The findings of the Survey; Methodology; The retrospective study; The death certificate study; The prospective study; How much 'euthanasia'?; VAE; Other cases of 'euthanasia'; 2,700 or 9,050?; 'Dances with data'?; Conclusion; 10 Breach of the guidelines; An explicit request; An 'entirely free and voluntary' request which was 'well considered, durable and persistent'?; 'Life-terminating acts without the patient's explicit request'; Other cases lacking an explicit request; Unbearable suffering and last resort; Unbearable suffering?; Last resort? Consultation and reporting

Sommario/riassunto

Whether the law should permit voluntary euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide is one of the most vital questions facing all modern societies. Internationally, the main obstacle to legalisation has proved to be the objection that, even if they were morally acceptable in certain 'hard cases', voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide could not be effectively controlled; society would slide down a 'slippery slope' to the killing of patients who did not make a free and informed request, or for whom palliative care would have offered an alternative. How cogent is this objection? This book provides the general reader (who need have no expertise in philosophy, law or medicine) with a lucid introduction to this central question in the debate, not least by reviewing the Dutch euthanasia experience. It will interest all in any country whether currently for or against legalisation, who wish to ensure that their opinions are better informed.
