

Legalising assisted suicide would set us on slippery slope towards euthanasia

The long-term implications for countries which have already gone down this road should give us pause for thought, writes **Dr Antony Latham**



The Scottish Parliament will shortly debate a bill seeking to legalise Assisted Suicide. Physician-assisted suicide involves doctors helping patients to end their own lives.

Euthanasia, the active killing of a patient, is closely related and in most countries usually follows legalisation of assisted suicide. It is very important to look at the experience of other European countries, who have gone down this route, to see what the long-term implications will be. This is not scare-mongering but merely examining the facts. We are on the threshold of a slippery slope.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide were legalised in the Netherlands in 2001 and in Belgium in 2002.

In the Netherlands we have seen euthanasia and assisted suicide moved from those who are terminally ill, to those who are chronically ill. Moreover, euthanasia and assisted suicide are no longer for only physical illness but can be for psychological distress on its own. It is now allowed for over-70s who are "tired of living". Increasingly, euthanasia requests in the Netherlands are from people with dementia. Their protocols have moved from conscious patients who give consent, to unconscious patients unable to give consent. Euthanasia for infants (which is a form of infanticide) was also legalised in the Netherlands in 2005. Thus, many infants, who are disabled but do not have terminal illnesses are legally killed each year.

A similar picture emerges in Belgium where, alarmingly, unreported euthanasia is relatively common. In 2021 official figures stated that 2.4 per cent of deaths in Belgium were from euthanasia. However, an anonymous survey of doctors showed the true picture to be 4.6 per cent. Other surveys show that unreported "terminal sedation" is used increasingly and unofficially for the terminally ill in

Belgium, where deliberate shortening of life is performed without any consent. This is a form of passive euthanasia whereby sedation to unconsciousness is undertaken at which point subsistence requirements such as nutrition and hydration are withheld or withdrawn with the intention of bringing about death.

Advanced euthanasia directives prepared by those who want euthanasia if they become severely demented in the future, are increasing in these countries. This can be seriously abused, as occurred in 2019, when a woman in the Netherlands signed such a directive. But when she became severely demented, she could not understand, was not obviously depressed, and had to be held down forcibly when the lethal injection was given.

In countries where euthanasia and assisted suicide are legal, the fear of being a burden on loved ones is a significant factor in agreeing to such a death. Yet allowing oneself to be a "burden" is surely an important aspect of normal loving relationships, where we depend on family and others to care for us.

Where non-assisted suicide rates are falling in most European countries, the rate is increasing in the Netherlands, very likely reflecting an overall acceptance of the unacceptable belief that lives can become unworthy of life and that suicides are normal. Indeed, where euthanasia or assisted suicide are used for psychiatric reasons, such deaths are very similar to "traditional suicide". Our society rightly sees suicide as a tragedy, but once legalised, this tragedy may become more "acceptable". Let us not, therefore, blindly follow a slippery downhill path leading to the dangerous consequences seen so clearly in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Dr Antony Latham (Retired GP in Harris, Western Isles, and Chair of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics)

Our future is lying



A new think tank will help Scotland to participate in the global dialogue and spread of ideas, writes **Roddy Gow**

Scotland has a new world-class think tank, the Scottish Council on Global Affairs. This new institution was launched in Edinburgh Castle on 27 April and will bring together the brightest minds to develop public policy and disseminate new ideas to the nation and participate in the global dialogue. This focused approach to engaging with global issues is a great initiative and long overdue.

Led by the three universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrew's, with the endorsement of the Holyrood and Westminster Governments, as stated, "the new Scottish Council on Global Affairs, Scotland's first global affairs institute, will be marked by its academic freedom." "It will develop critical thinking on international issues and Scotland's place in the world, using the excellent expertise, researchers, and universities that Scotland already has."

While the term "think tank" is modern, the concept can be traced to the humanist academies and scholarly network including the Scottish Enlightenment in the 18th century.

In response to the launch of The Council, External Affairs Secretary Angus Robertson added his endorsement: "As Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine continues, prompting Europe's biggest refugee crisis since the last world war, it has never been clearer that the challenges that nations face today are global in nature. Although the Scottish Government warmly welcomes and supports the establishment of the Scottish Council on Global Affairs – as committed to in

our latest Programme for Government – this initiative is independent, supported as it is by parties across the political spectrum, making it truly non-partisan".

Ten years ago I founded the Asia Scotland Institute with the mission to inform, educate, and inspire tomorrow's leaders in Scotland with a better understanding and grasp of pan Asia in this Century of Asia. As a convener and catalyst, the Institute set out to invite global business leaders, economists, politicians, policy thought leaders, and academics to bring their ideas to Scotland to discuss and debate the pressing issues of our time.

When the Asia Scotland Institute was launched in the Playfair Library of Edinburgh University in March 2012, I was asked by someone in the front row, "Mr Gow, what makes you think anyone of any importance will ever come up to Scotland as a speaker?" While startled by this question, I knew from my experience living and working abroad that there is a great interest and affinity for Scotland – and that the future for Scots lies beyond our shores as it always has. Some ten years later, ASI has demonstrated with scores of events that the interest and commitment of global business and political leaders has been palpable, and the enthusiastic response from our audiences, both young and old, has been significant. Even with the onset of the pandemic and the need to move to "virtual" events, we have invited many more international speakers and increased our reach to a global audience.

Historically, Scotland and the



Scots have had an outsized influence around the world and especially in Asia. There is hardly a country where they have not settled and played a part in developments. Indeed, Burma, or Myanmar, was known as the Scottish Colony and its river shipping company, run from Glasgow, was the largest in the world.

Those of us who have been engaged in developing links

beyond our shores

between Scotland and the world have networks that can contribute to the growth and success of the new Scottish Council on Global Affairs. There is a great network of Scots who are eager to see their home country succeed, which we can do by helping the new Council to reach a global audience and have a positive influence on the world.

Roddy Gow, Chairman, Asia Scotland Institute

↑ A refugee reception center at the Ukrainian-Polish border crossing. The refugee crisis is just one of the issues the new think tank will consider



The next generation of performers will need to be digitally savvy

Our new course covers the skills students will need in the near future, says **Bianca Mastrominico**

The world's largest arts festival will return to Edinburgh this summer to the delight of audiences desperate for the live performance experience denied for most of them since 2019. What will have changed? In the same way that businesses around the world were spurred by the pandemic to undergo digital transformation, lockdown also accelerated a shift in the way performing artists use online performance techniques in their practice.

There are signs digital performance may be here to stay. Not only has the collaborative nature of the medium unleashed creativity for performers and performance making it has triggered creative entrepreneurship as artists reach audiences around the world. Research has shown that the notion of "liveness" which is often contested

in digital performance work, is now replaced with that of participation.

In an industry marked by high levels of self-employment, performers aiming to make a living from their art must stay abreast of potential platforms, festivals and networks which allow them to set up and monetise digital projects that will help to sustain careers. The rise of NFTs, or non-fungible tokens which use blockchain technology allow art buyers to own the original copy of a digital file, is also creating very real opportunities for performance artists, music makers and games creators.

Digital performance has a long history which pre-dates the internet. Today, digital creativity has transitioned from being a pivot responding to a moment of crisis, to contemporary innovation. Online gathering spaces for practice,

research and knowledge exchange are becoming the new normal. In this very rapidly changing scenario, performance practice has a crucial role to play in investigating the creative potential of digital technologies. Education providers have had to act swiftly to stay abreast of these new developments, ensuring the next generation of practitioners is equipped with the latest techniques.

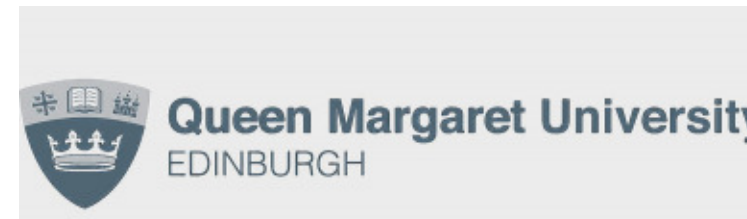
The new MA Digital Performance programme at Queen Margaret University is leading the way in providing practical skills training in making live performance for online audiences, as well as covering theoretical and practical knowledge of current digital arts shifts. We are conducting extensive practice research in digital performance making, understanding the many benefits that working digi-

tally can also have for in-person creative processes. The focus is very much on interaction within the medium and how to engage online spectators through new technologies.

Alongside more classic broadcasting of live performance, there are applications that have been purpose built by performance artists specifically for digital performance, such as the UpStage platform. As the digital environment grows, there are no restrictions to what the imagination can con-

ceive beyond the physical stage. In the near future, where digital and hybrid approaches will be a part and parcel of contemporary performance practice, students of digital performance will be well equipped to fully and successfully embrace a career they couldn't have imagined five years ago.

Bianca Mastrominico, Programme Leader MA Digital Performance, Queen Margaret University



Edinburgh Leisure's CEO deserves leadership prize

Shortlisting for a ukactive award is fitting recognition for June Peebles' passion and dedication – and now you can lend her your support, says **Scott Haldane**



It's a privilege to help direct and support, along with the rest of our non-executive Board of Directors, who give their time and expertise on a voluntary basis, Edinburgh Leisure's Chief Executive, June Peebles, and her team, in leading this organisation.

Covid-19 has changed all our lives and the leisure industry, like many suffered because of the various lockdowns and venue closures. However, Edinburgh Leisure, with support from the City of Edinburgh Council, weathered the storm. And while the impact of the pandemic is diminishing, other national and world events are impacting on us. Yet, Edinburgh Leisure continues to adapt and works to overcome the challenges, all the while committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of the citizens of Edinburgh. Indeed, never has the importance of being and staying active been more important to people's health and wellbeing.

Edinburgh Leisure is a charity on a mission to help keep people active and well. They do this by running over 50 sport, leisure and school venues and are committed to creating opportunities for everyone to be and stay active.

Edinburgh Leisure's Active Communities programme harnesses the power of physical activity and sport to tackle inequalities and combat the effects of inactivity. Each year the Active Communities Team support around 10,000 people affected by health conditions, disabilities, inequalities, and poverty to be active – empowering people to improve and protect their health, wellbeing, and quality of life. This work is undoubtedly more important than ever and only possible thanks to support from funding partners, supporters, and fundraising.

June Peebles, Edinburgh Leisure's CEO, has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Outstanding Leadership Award category as part of ukactive awards. For those that know June, this is a fitting recognition for the leadership, passion, and dedication she has shown over many years.

June led the organisation through the unprecedented period of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading with unflinching transparency. She led a small leadership team, while 90 per cent of staff were furloughed. Combatting the uncertainty, unknowns, and volatility of the pandemic and despite the various lockdowns, Edinburgh Leisure remained focused on its purpose and values, thanks to exemplary leadership.

The winner of this category will be decided through a public vote on the ukactive website. Voting is open until Friday, 27 May and the winner will be announced during the ukactive Awards Ceremony on Thursday, 30th June at the ICC in Birmingham.

If you value the work of Edinburgh Leisure, please lend your support and vote for June to get her the recognition she deserves. Please note, however, that IP addresses are tracked and monitored, and only one submission can come from any one network so if you vote, please use your own mobile phone (on 4/5G and not a shared Wi-Fi) or home computer.

To vote, and read more about the submission and who June's competition is, visit www.ukactive.com/ukactive-awards-2022-stage-2-public-vote/ **Scott Haldane is Chair of the Edinburgh Leisure Board and has served on the board since March 2012. He is currently Director of Finance at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.**



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