

## Euthanasia

Euthanasia is the practice of intentionally ending a life to relieve [pain](#) and [suffering](#). Different countries have different [euthanasia laws](#). The British [House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics](#) defines euthanasia as "a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, to relieve intractable suffering".

In the [Netherlands](#) and [Belgium](#), euthanasia is understood as "termination of life by a doctor at the request of a patient".

The Dutch law however, does not use the term 'euthanasia' but includes the concept under the broader definition of "assisted suicide and termination of life on request".

Euthanasia is categorized in different ways, which include voluntary, non-voluntary, or involuntary:

- [Voluntary euthanasia](#) is legal in some countries.
- [Non-voluntary euthanasia](#) (patient's consent unavailable) is illegal in all countries.
- [Involuntary euthanasia](#) (without asking consent or against the patient's will) is also illegal in all countries and is usually considered murder.

As of 2006 euthanasia had become the most active area of research in [bioethics](#). Passive euthanasia (known as "pulling the plug") is legal under some circumstances in many countries. Active euthanasia, however, is legal or *de facto* legal in only a handful of countries (for example: Belgium, Canada and Switzerland), which limit it to specific circumstances and require the approval of [counselors](#) and doctors or other specialists. In some countries - such as Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan support for active euthanasia is almost non-existent.

"The word "euthanasia" was first used in a medical context by [Francis Bacon](#) in the 17th century, to refer to an easy, painless, happy death, during which it was a "physician's responsibility to alleviate the 'physical sufferings' of the body." Bacon referred to an "outward euthanasia"—the term "outward" he used to distinguish from a spiritual concept—the euthanasia "which regards the preparation of the soul.

In current usage, euthanasia has been defined as the "painless inducement of a quick death".

Another approach incorporates the notion of [suffering](#) into the definition. The definition offered by the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) incorporates suffering as a necessary condition, with "the painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful disease or in an irreversible coma". This approach is included in Marvin Khol and Paul Kurtz's definition of it as "a mode or act of inducing or permitting death painlessly as a relief from suffering".

According to definitions such as that offered by the [House of Lords Select committee on Medical Ethics](#) euthanasia is defined as "a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, to relieve intractable suffering".

An act of euthanasia is one in which one person ... (A) kills another person (B) for the benefit of the second person, who actually does benefit from being killed".

---

Any definition of euthanasia must incorporate four elements: an agent and a subject; an intention; a causal proximity, such that the actions of the agent lead to the outcome; and an outcome.

In a discussion of euthanasia presented in 2003 by the European Association of Palliative Care (EPAC) Ethics Task Force, the authors offered: "Medicalized killing of a person without the person's consent, whether nonvoluntary (where the person is unable to consent) or involuntary (against the person's will) is not euthanasia: it is murder. Hence, euthanasia can be voluntary only."

## **Classification of euthanasia**

Euthanasia may be classified into three types, according to whether a person gives informed consent: voluntary, non-voluntary and involuntary.

### **Voluntary euthanasia**

Voluntary euthanasia is conducted with the consent of the patient. Active voluntary euthanasia is legal in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Passive voluntary euthanasia is legal throughout the US per *Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Department of Health*. When the patient brings about his or her own death with the assistance of a physician, the term assisted suicide is often used instead. Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and the U.S. states of California, Oregon, Washington, Montana and Vermont.

### **Non-voluntary euthanasia**

Non-voluntary euthanasia is conducted when the consent of the patient is unavailable. Examples include child euthanasia, which is illegal worldwide but decriminalised under certain specific circumstances in the Netherlands under the Groningen Protocol.

### **Involuntary euthanasia**

Involuntary euthanasia is conducted against the will of the patient.

### **Passive and active euthanasia**

Voluntary, non-voluntary and involuntary types can be further divided into passive or active variants. Passive euthanasia entails the withholding treatment necessary for the continuance of life. Active euthanasia entails the use of lethal substances or forces (such as administering a lethal injection), and is the more controversial. While some authors consider these terms to be misleading and unhelpful, they are nonetheless commonly used. In some cases, such as the administration of increasingly necessary, but toxic doses of painkillers, there is a debate whether or not to regard the practice as active or passive.

## **History**

Euthanasia was practiced in Ancient Greece and Rome: for example, hemlock was employed as a means of hastening death on the island of Kea, a technique also employed in Marseilles. Euthanasia, in the sense of the deliberate hastening of a person's death, was supported by Socrates, Plato and Seneca the Elder in the ancient

world, although [Hippocrates](#) appears to have [spoken against the practice](#), writing "I will not prescribe a deadly drug to please someone, nor give advice that may cause his death" (noting there is some debate in the literature about whether or not this was intended to encompass euthanasia).

### **Early modern period**

The term *euthanasia* in the earlier sense of supporting someone as they died, was used for the first time by [Francis Bacon](#). In his work, *Euthanasia medica*, he chose this ancient Greek word and, in doing so, distinguished between *euthanasia interior*, the preparation of the soul for death, and *euthanasia exterior*, which was intended to make the end of life easier and painless, in exceptional circumstances by shortening life. That the ancient meaning of an easy death came to the fore again in the [early modern period](#) can be seen from its definition in the 18th century [Zedlers Universallexikon](#):

Euthanasia: a very gentle and quiet death, which happens without painful convulsions.

Suicide and euthanasia became more accepted during the [Age of Enlightenment](#). [Thomas More](#) wrote of euthanasia in *Utopia*, although it is not clear if More was intending to endorse the practice. Other cultures have taken different approaches: for example, in Japan suicide has not traditionally been viewed as a sin, as it is used in cases of honor, and accordingly, the perceptions of euthanasia are different from those in other parts of the world.

### **Beginnings of the contemporary euthanasia debate**

In the mid-1800s, the use of [morphine](#) to treat "the pains of death" emerged, with [John Warren](#) recommending its use in 1848. A similar use of [chloroform](#) was revealed by Joseph Bullar in 1866. However, in neither case was it recommended that the use should be to hasten death.

In all cases of hopeless and painful illness, it should be the recognized duty of the medical attendant, whenever so desired by the patient, to administer chloroform or such other anaesthetic as may by-and-by supersede chloroform – so as to destroy consciousness at once, and put the sufferer to a quick and painless death; all needful precautions being adopted to prevent any possible abuse of such duty; and means being taken to establish, beyond the possibility of doubt or question, that the remedy was applied at the express wish of the patient.

### **Early euthanasia movement in the United States**

[Felix Adler](#), circa 1913, was the first prominent American to argue for permitting suicide in cases of chronic illness. The rise of the euthanasia movement in the United States coincided with the so-called [Gilded Age](#), a time of social and technological change that encompassed an "individualistic conservatism that praised laissez-faire economics, [scientific method](#), and [rationalism](#)", along with major [depressions](#), industrialisation and conflict between corporations and labour unions. It was also the period in which the modern hospital system was developed.

The first attempt to legalise euthanasia took place in the United States, into the [General Assembly](#) of [Ohio](#) in 1906. After 1906 the euthanasia debate reduced in intensity, resurfacing periodically, but not returning to the same level of debate until the 1930s in the United Kingdom.

---

Euthanasia opponent [Ian Dowbiggin](#) argues that the early membership of the [Euthanasia Society of America](#) (ESA) reflected how many perceived euthanasia at the time, often seeing it as a eugenics matter rather than an issue concerning individual rights. Dowbiggin argues that not every eugenicist joined the ESA "solely for eugenic reasons", but he postulates that there were clear ideological connections between the eugenics and euthanasia movements.

### **1930s in Britain**

The [Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society](#) was founded in 1935 by [Charles Killick Millard](#) (now called Dignity in Dying). The movement campaigned for the legalisation of euthanasia in Great Britain. In January 1936, [King George V](#) was given a fatal dose of morphine and [cocaine](#) to hasten his death. At the time he was suffering from cardio-respiratory failure, and the decision to end his life was made by his physician, [Lord Dawson](#).<sup>[46]</sup> Although this event was kept a secret for over 50 years, the death of George V coincided with proposed legislation in the [House of Lords](#) to legalise euthanasia.

### **Nazi Euthanasia Program**

[Hartheim Euthanasia Centre](#), where over 18,000 people were killed. A 24 July 1939 killing of a severely disabled infant in [Nazi Germany](#) was described in a [BBC](#) "Genocide Under the Nazis Timeline" as the first "state-sponsored euthanasia". Parties that consented to the killing included Hitler's office, the parents, and the Reich Committee for the Scientific Registration of Serious and Congenitally Based Illnesses. The "euthanasia campaign" of mass murder gathered momentum on 14 January 1940 when the "handicapped" were killed with gas vans and killing centres, eventually leading to the deaths of 70,000 adult Germans.

In modern terms, the use of "euthanasia" is seen to disguise a program of [genocide](#), in which people were killed on the grounds of "disabilities, religious beliefs, and discordant individual values".

### **1949 New York State Petition for Euthanasia and Catholic opposition**

"The ultimate object of the Euthanasia Society of America is based on the principle that the state is supreme and that the individual does not have the right to live if his continuance in life is a burden or hindrance to the state. The Nazis followed this principle and compulsory Euthanasia was practiced as a part of their program during the recent war"

### **Legal status**

---

West's *Encyclopedia of American Law* states that "a 'mercy killing' or euthanasia is generally considered to be a criminal homicide" and is normally used as a synonym of homicide committed at a request made by the patient.

The judicial sense of the term "[homicide](#)" includes any intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, even to relieve intractable suffering. Not all homicide is unlawful. Two designations of homicide that carry no criminal punishment are justifiable and excusable homicide. In most countries this is not the status of euthanasia. The term "euthanasia" is usually confined to the active variety; the University of Washington website states that "euthanasia generally means that the physician would act directly, for instance by giving a lethal injection, to end the patient's life".

Some governments around the world have legalized voluntary euthanasia but most commonly it is still considered to be criminal homicide. In the Netherlands and Belgium, where euthanasia has been legalized, it still remains homicide although it is not prosecuted and not punishable if the perpetrator (the doctor) meets certain legal conditions. In a historic judgment, the Supreme court of India legalized passive euthanasia. The apex court remarked in the judgment that the Constitution of India values liberty, dignity, autonomy, and privacy.

## **Religious views**

---

### **1- Christianity**

#### **1.1. Broadly against**

The Roman Catholic Church condemns euthanasia and assisted suicide as morally wrong. It states that, "intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator".

The [Orthodox Church in America](#), along with other Eastern Orthodox Churches, also opposes euthanasia stating that, "Euthanasia is the deliberate cessation to end human life."

Among Protestant denominations, the Episcopal Church opposing euthanasia and assisted suicide states that it is "morally wrong and unacceptable to take a human life to relieve the suffering caused by incurable illnesses."

#### **1.2. Partially in favor of**

The [Church of England](#) accepts passive euthanasia under some circumstances, but is strongly against active euthanasia. The [United Church of Canada](#) accepts passive euthanasia under some circumstances, but is in general against active euthanasia, with growing acceptance now that active euthanasia has been partly legalised in Canada.

### **2- Islam**

Euthanasia is a complex issue in Islamic theology; however, in general it is considered contrary to [Islamic law](#) and [holy texts](#). Among interpretations of the [Quran](#) and [Hadith](#), the early termination of life is a crime, be it by suicide or helping one commit suicide. Suicide and euthanasia are both crimes in almost all [Muslim majority countries](#).

### **3- Judaism**

There is much debate on the topic of euthanasia in Judaic theology, ethics, and general opinion (especially in Israel and the United States). Passive euthanasia was declared legal by [Israel's highest court](#) under certain conditions and has reached some level of acceptance. Active euthanasia remains illegal.