

The act of intentionally ending a person's life to relieve suffering is known as euthanasia, also known as 'mercy killings'.

For instance, it may be termed euthanasia if a doctor gave a terminally ill patient a drug they didn't need, such as an overdose of sedatives or a muscle relaxant, with the sole intent of ending their life.

The act of enabling another person to kill oneself is known as assisted suicide. If a relative of a terminally ill person obtains heavy sedatives with the knowledge that the person intends to use them to commit suicide, the relative may be seen to be facilitating suicide. The purposeful death of a person, even if it is done out of kindness, is considered murder or manslaughter in the eyes of the law. It is not against the law to commit suicide under the 1961 Suicide Act. However, it is a criminal offence under section 21 to "assist, abet, counsel, or procure the suicide of another or an attempt to commit suicide by another."

As a result, in the United Kingdom, euthanasia and helping someone in committing suicide are both unlawful and punishable offences. In some cases, if convicted of murder or manslaughter as a result of a mercy killing, the person could face a mandatory life sentence in jail.

Individuals who are convicted of helping a suicide under Section 21 face a sentence of up to 14 years in prison.

Because assisted suicide cases generally feature bereaved family who thought they were acting in their loved ones' best interests, juries are often hesitant to convict. Despite the fact that many doctors claim to be involved, no UK doctor has been found guilty of aided suicide.

What is the difference between active and passive euthanasia?

Active euthanasia refers to when a person or a group of medical experts (or carers) purposefully causes someone's death. This could include things like a fatal injection or suffocating the patient with a pillow. Active euthanasia is clearly a kind of murder or manslaughter under the law.

When nothing is done, passive euthanasia occurs, culminating in the patient's death. Medical personnel may, for example, remove feeding tubes, turn off life support machines, or withdraw medications that keep the patient alive.

Because of the Tony Bland case in 1993, passive euthanasia that entails omissions (failures to act) is not unlawful under the Suicide Act. A case of this nature would not ordinarily result in criminal charges.

Human rights act

Many activists have maintained since the Human Rights Act of 1998 that denying a right to be free of significant and frequently intolerable pain amounts to inhuman and humiliating treatment in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the right to privacy and family life (Article 8).

There have also been claims that the UK legislation is discriminatory in light of the legality of suicide and that it violates an individual's inherent dignity and right to die.

The Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights may recognise an individual's right to life, but the UK's present laws do not recognise their concurrent right to die.

There are several compelling reasons both in favour of and against euthanasia.

Many of these arguments may be agreed upon by people of various ideologies. An atheist, for example, may recognise the difficulties of legalising euthanasia (the slippery slope argument), yet argue that an individual's freedom to decide their own life trumps other compelling justifications.

Many religious believers are inclined to sympathise with arguments that a person should not have to live in pain, but the belief that life is precious may trump other reasons, no matter how compelling they are.

Euthanasia Caitlin Regola



In a nine-year period, Tony Nicklinson has requested the court to modify the legislation on euthanasia and assisted suicide after a legal battle. Following his death, his widow pursued the matter all the way to the European Court of Justice, but it was determined that Parliament needed to modify the legislation.

The Assisted Dying Bill was considered in Parliament in 2015, however it was defeated by a large majority of MPs.

Arguments for euthanasia;

- Humans should have the freedom to choose when and how they will die (self-determination).
- Euthanasia allows someone to die with dignity and control over their circumstances.
- Death is a personal affair, and the government should not intervene in a person's right to die.
- When there is no cure for a condition, it is costly to keep people alive. Euthanasia would free up resources that might be used to help individuals who are still alive.
- Family and friends would be spared the agony of watching a loved one die slowly and painfully.
- When animals are suffering, society allows them to be put down as a compassionate gesture; the same treatment should be offered to humans.

Arguments against euthanasia;

- Euthanasia would erode society's regard for the worth and importance of human life. While effective palliative care exists to decrease or eliminate the need for individuals to remain in agony, it would result in poorer care for the terminally ill.
- It would give doctors too much power and damage patient-doctor trust; some people may feel pressured to request euthanasia by family, friends, or doctors when it isn't what they really want; it would undermine doctors' and nurses' commitment to saving lives; it would discourage the search for new cures and treatments for the terminally ill; and it would discourage the search for new cures and treatments for the terminally ill.
- Some people may recover unexpectedly, while others may change their minds about euthanasia and be unable to notify anybody.

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