

In Britain



A 'living will' is a legal document that outlines a person's wishes with regards to their medical care. It can instruct doctors not to resuscitate (revive once the heart has stopped) or intubate (insert a breathing tube) or use artificial methods to keep the person alive.

A DNR or Do Not Resuscitate order is a type of living will.

In Britain today, euthanasia is illegal. Depending on the situation it is considered manslaughter or murder and is punishable by law, with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

Assisted suicide, is illegal under the terms of the Suicide Act (1961) and is punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment. Attempting to kill yourself is not in itself a criminal act. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) decides whether to take someone to court for assisting in suicide. The DPP said in 2010 that it would be unlikely that someone would be prosecuted if:

- The victim has reached a voluntary, clear, settled and informed decision to commit suicide
- The suspect was wholly motivated by compassion



Why Choose Euthanasia?

People may want to die a dignified death and die before their illness takes away their ability to kill themselves. Some are afraid of the end stages of their illness, e.g. the pain.

Living with constant and unmanageable pain (linked to an injury, disability or a side-effect from previous illnesses) is reason enough.

The final stages can take away human dignity, amongst other things. Some people would rather not experience this.



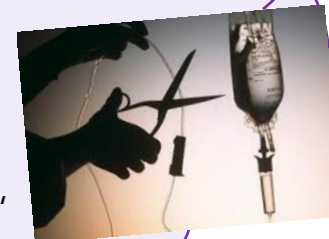
Types of Euthanasia

Voluntary: (or assisted suicide) is where a person explicitly asks for help to die. Often this is due to a life-limiting or terminal illness.

Active: when a person takes a specific course of action to end their own life, e.g. overdose

Passive: where life-sustaining treatment is removed, e.g. a feeding tube or respirator where there is no hope of recovery.

Involuntary: where death is forced on a person, for example during ethnic cleansing (WWII) or the death sentence

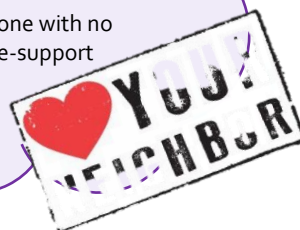


Arguments For



Stephen Hawking said, "We don't allow animals to suffer, so why humans?!"

- People with a terminal illness might want to control the way they die. This is believed to be a matter of free will and maintaining human dignity
- It is ethically wrong to keep someone with no hope of recovery on expensive, life-support treatment



Christianity

Liberal Christians: Euthanasia may be acceptable because:

- The person might be brain dead. In such circumstances, turning off the life support would be OK
- It might be the most loving and compassionate thing to do. For example, withholding treatment that prolongs a painful illness.
- Jesus taught compassion for others

Conservative Christians: Euthanasia is not acceptable because:

- All life is sacred (sanctity of life)
- Those who assist are involved in murder ("Do not kill")
- Life is a gift from God and is, therefore, precious
- Suffering can have a purpose and should be endured as God will not give us more suffering than we are able to cope with
- Hospices also offer an alternative where care and support can be given. Patients can die with dignity and their pain is managed



Euthanasia

Arguments Against

- Legalising euthanasia may put pressure on the vulnerable and the elderly to commit suicide if they feel they are becoming a burden. They could feel obliged to end their life
- Harold Shipman gave lethal injections of morphine to his patients. Legalising doctor-assisted euthanasia would make it easier for people like Shipman to commit this sort of crime
- If euthanasia is legalised, the drive to research cures for terminal illness lessens. Shouldn't we want to solve the problem?
- It is a slippery slope: once you allow doctor-assisted suicide, other practices will become legal, e.g. involuntary euthanasia



Hospices



A hospice is a place where people with terminal illnesses can go to die with dignity. There are over 260 hospices in Britain. Patients do not only go to hospices to die – some patients are admitted for short periods of time to help manage pain and relieve other symptoms of their illness.

A hospice focuses on relieving the symptoms and pain of the terminal illness, it does not try to cure the illness.

Hospices also provide a type of pastoral care. Hospices may be religious in ethos because of the clear connection with religious ideas and practices, e.g. to act with kindness and compassion. Hospices fulfil the Christian desire to support the suffering of both patients and family in the final moments of life.

Patients and believers can preserve their sanctity of life and can still benefit from a quality of life. For some Christians, palliative care and hospices provide the best of both sides of the argument.

Humanists



- Humanists uphold the right to life but don't believe that life should be prolonged in the face of pointless suffering. Being able to die, with dignity, in a manner of our choosing must be understood to be a fundamental human right.
- Humanists have supported attempts to legalise assisted dying, assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia across the UK. They believe that assistance should not be limited to terminally ill people alone and want to see reform (change) in the law. This 'reform' would consider the needs of other people who are 'permanently and incurably suffering', for example people who are paralysed.
- Tony Nicklinson campaigned for his right to die after he suffered from a paralyzing stroke in 2005. He was denied euthanasia by the courts, which resulted in him protesting in the only way he could – he refused food and water until he died of dehydration. Some would argue that euthanasia would have been the more humane option in this case.

