

# EUTHANASIA

INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

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“VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA” IS OFTEN NON-CONSENSUAL



Propaganda for Nazi Germany's Action T4 euthanasia program: "This person suffering from hereditary defects costs the community 60,000 Reichsmark during his lifetime. Fellow German, that is your money, too" - from the Office of Racial Policy's Neues Volk.

'Euthanasia' is defined as the mercy killing of humans suffering from an incurable and painful illness, but is forever associated with the involuntary killings of adults and minors deemed "life unworthy of life" by Nazi eugenicists. These were not mercy killings as few of the victims had a terminal disease or even a painful condition and most died in great pain (gassed or starved) or a state of terror (lethal injection).

'Action T4' was the name of the Nazi program for the involuntary euthanasia of people with a physical or mental disability. From 1939

to 1945 an estimated 275,000 adults and minors were killed in gas chambers, with lethal injections, or starved to death.

The first attempt to legalize [voluntary] euthanasia in modern times occurred in 1906 in the American state of Ohio, but efforts to legalize such killings in the US and other nations failed for decades until the rise of Nazi Germany. The first state-sponsored euthanasia in modern times occurred in Germany on July 24, 1939, in which a severely disabled infant named Gerhard Kretschmar, born blind, with missing limbs and subject to

convulsions, was given a lethal injection. While Kretschmar's killing received parental consent, most of the infants killed afterwards (at least 5,200) were forcibly taken from their parents and killed without their consent in order to "purify society".

Voluntary euthanasia for adults with a terminal and painful illness is now legal in a small number of nations. In the Netherlands minors as young as 12 can legally be killed in rare circumstances with the "child's consent"; while mentally competent, able bodied adults who supposedly suffer from an incurable illness can be killed if they so choose even though their illness is not terminal.

On February 13, 2014, Belgium legalized "voluntary euthanasia" for all minors with a painful terminal illness who say they want to die. The killings must be approved by parents and a medical team.

No child can rightly consent to being killed. The "voluntary euthanasia" of stressed children who say they want to die is akin to the "voluntary euthanasia" of mentally incompetent and stressed adults who say they want to die. Such killings are inherently non-consensual and an abuse of power, thus unethical and inhumane.

Legalizing any form of euthanasia promotes values that naturally lead to the non-consensual killing of people who are considered a burden on the state and taxpayers or "life unworthy of life", thus tacitly validates eugenicist policies and genocide.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

State-sponsored euthanasia is primarily driven by economic considerations; namely the desire to rid society of unproductive people who are a burden on the state and taxpayers.

## RECOMMENDATION

Political action to stigmatize and criminalize all forms of euthanasia worldwide.

## FURTHER READING

*A Concise History of Euthanasia: Life, Death, God, and Medicine*, Ian Dowbiggin, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

*A merciful end: the euthanasia movement in modern America*, Ian Dowbiggin, Oxford University Press, 2003.

"Euthanasia": *A confusing term, abused under the Nazi regime and misused in present end-of-life debate*, A. Michalsen and K. Reinhart, *Intensive Care Med* 32 (9): 1304–10 (September 2006).

*Human dignity in the Nazi era: implications for contemporary bioethics*, Dónal P. O'Mathúna, *BMC Med Ethics* 2006.

