



# Pro-Life Bulletin Board

A project of American Life League, Inc.

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## Euthanasia: Another threat from the Culture of Death

When we hear about euthanasia, we usually hear about it in health care contexts. For our purposes, “euthanasia” means acting (or failing to act) in order to intentionally bring about a patient’s death.

It is not euthanasia to administer medication needed to control pain; that’s called good medical care. It is not euthanasia to stop treatment that is gravely burdensome to a patient; that’s called letting the patient exercise the moral option to refuse extraordinary medical means. It is not euthanasia to stop tube-feeding a patient whose diseased or injured body can no longer assimilate food and water; that’s called simply accepting death.

In these circumstances, pain control, refusing extraordinary means, and stopping feeding may all allow death. But—and this is crucial to our understanding—unlike euthanasia, their purpose and intent is not to bring about death.

### Concerns about ‘living wills’

The goal of the euthanasia movement is, in effect, legal and social acceptance of death on demand. Primary tools in this effort have been the “living will,” other so-called advance directives” and the laws implementing them.

Typically, a living will instructs medical personnel to stop medical treatment when the patient is in a terminal condition. But many state laws and court decisions now consider “medical treatment” to include the provision of basic care, such as food and water, and “terminal” to include many people who are far from imminent death and, indeed, not even dying.

It is doubtful that every person who signs an advance directive fully understands what he or she is instructing a doctor to do under penalty of law. Yet, to authorize a doctor to stop basic care, such as the provision of food and water, when a person is not near death, amounts to authorizing euthanasia by starvation and dehydration.

### Larger tragedies may follow

The euthanasia movement always viewed the living will as the foot in the door to legal and social acceptance of euthanasia. For our society to condone its members’ bringing about their own deaths is, of course, a terrible tragedy. It speaks volumes about our failure to adequately comfort and care for the troubled, the sick and the dying.

Economic and demographic factors, such as the increasing cost of health care, an aging population and a shrinking base of wage earners, also contribute to the concern that the “beneficiaries” of euthanasia could easily expand to the elderly, to the poor—indeed, to any “burdensome” member of society.

In sum, it is vitally important to understand that everyone’s most basic right—the right to life—is in jeopardy when our law and collective morality no longer view all persons as equally worthy of life, solely on the basis of our common humanity. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is also in our own best interests to protect and cherish weak and vulnerable members of our human family. In order to do that, we must educate ourselves and others about the growing threat of euthanasia, vigorously oppose its legalization and pray for the wisdom and compassion to properly comfort, care for and dissuade those considering suicide.

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## Pregnant and in need of help?

Heartbeat International: 800-395-4357