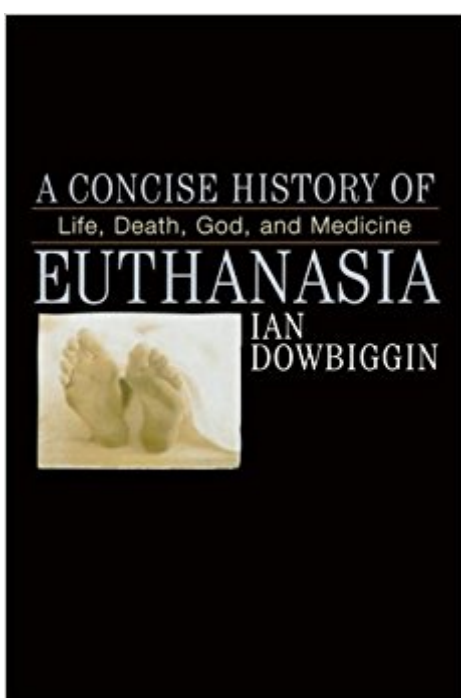


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# A Concise History Of Euthanasia: Life, Death, God, And Medicine (Critical Issues In World And International History)



## Synopsis

In this first book to explore the history of euthanasia worldwide since classical antiquity, distinguished historian Ian Dowbiggin exposes the many disturbing themes that link present and past in the concept of the right to die. His deeply informed history traces the controversial record of "mercy killing," a source of heated debate among doctors and laypeople alike. Dowbiggin examines evolving opinions about what constitutes a good death, taking into account the societal and religious values placed on sin, suffering, resignation, judgment, penance, and redemption. He also examines the bitter struggle between those who advocate for the right to compassionate and effective end-of-life care and those who justify euthanasia by defining human life in terms of biological criteria, utilitarian standards, a faith in science, humane medical treatment, the principle of personal autonomy, or individual human rights. The author considers both the influence of technological and behavioral changes in the practice of medicine and the public's surprising lack of awareness of death's many clinical and biological dimensions. Dowbiggin reminds us that the stakes in the struggle are enormously high, with the lives of countless vulnerable people hanging in the balance. His provocative historical perspective will be indispensable as patients, families, governments, and the medical community debate when it is time to let go of life. Bound to spark controversy, this book takes issue with the right-to-die movement over the question of legalizing either assisted suicide or actual lethal injection (mercy-killing) and raises profound personal and collective questions on the future of euthanasia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dowbiggin has produced a well-written text of considerable breadth . . . . Those generally interested in the topic will find all they need to know about the whys and hows of euthanasia belief and advocacy in this short and easy-to-digest book. Dowbiggin has fulfilled the promise of his title and produced the best available concise history of euthanasia. (First Things)A useful, clearly written primer on an issue of increasing importance. (American Historical Review)It is certainly accessible and can be commended as a very general orientation to the history of euthanasia; one becomes familiar with the broad contours of its history. (Ethics and Medicine)Anyone desiring a more deeply informed sense of the historical background to our current debates over end-of-life issues will appreciate this thoughtful and dispassionate introduction by Ian Dowbiggin, one of our most accomplished scholars of the subject. They will learn that the burning controversies of the moment, while unprecedented in many respects, are not entirely new, precisely because they emerge out of the most fundamental problems of human existence. (Wilfred M. McClay, University of Oklahoma)Essential reading that recounts with verve and clarity the story of euthanasia from the ancient Greeks to postmodern Americans. Understanding the historical record may lead contemporary advocates for euthanasia and assisted suicide to pause and reconsider their prescriptions today. Certainly those who combat these practices cannot help but be bolstered by Dowbiggin's fine piece of work. (Paul McHugh, Johns Hopkins University)

Ian Dowbiggin is professor of history at the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada.

Dowbiggin, a history professor at the Univ. of Prince Edward Island, has written an excellent introduction to the subject here. It is written in a way that the average educated person would understand, but it contains powerful ideas. He shows the way that ideas from outside medicine have helped shape the euthanasia debate. It is brief, but enlightening. Readers who want more depth will find it in his earlier book, *Merciful End* about the American euthanasia movement.

I can't believe that what is masquerading as a history of euthanasia is so ridiculously biased in its views. I don't doubt that the book is well-researched, and it usefully traces ideas of euthanasia through the centuries, but throughout history Dowbiggen manages to link any historical advocates of mercy-killing to those with an unchristian world view, supporters of eugenics, and (gasp) advocates of birth control. He finds Darwin shocking and reduces many Unitarians' backing of euthanasia to their "willingness to overthrow traditional religious value systems" (p. 59). I don't see how a book

about such a sensitive and complex issue can present everything in stark black and white.

This book makes people think about their life and death. It also contains concrete and easy writings on the history on this topic. Through this book, I came to know well about euthanasia, which has been very controversial issue and will be the same in our society. I strongly recommend this title to all readers!

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