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| mercy killing  *n.*  Euthanasia. |

eu•tha•na•sia (ˌyu θəˈneɪ ʒə, -ʒi ə, -zi ə)   
*n.*

Also called [**mercy killing.**](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/mercy%20killing) the act of putting to death painlessly or allowing to die, as by withholding medical measures from a person or animal suffering from an incurable, esp. a painful, disease or condition.

[1640–50; < New Latin < Greek *euthanasía* easy death]

**The law and mercy killing**

Mercy killing (sometimes referred to as euthanasia) is when someone directly ends another person’s life, because they believe it is in their best interest in order to relieve pain and suffering from an incurable or terminal condition. The term ‘mercy killing’ is used to describe both situations where a person asked for their life to be ended, and where they did not. Under the current law, anybody who ends the life of another can be charged with murder and would face mandatory life imprisonment if found guilty – even if the act is a compassionate response to a dying person’s request for help to die.

Dignity in Dying believes that mercy killing should remain illegal. However, we call for more distinction to be made in law between mercy killing and murder. At present cases of mercy killing are tried using the framework of murder law, but this law is inflexible: it can only consider a person’s intention, and not their motivation. The current legal framework cannot distinguish between crimes of compassion and crimes of malice.

In contrast, the [DPP’s prosecuting policy on assisted suicide,](http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/assisted-dying/dpps-policy-on-assisted-suicide/) where someone indirectly helps end another person’s life, takes motivation into consideration. Dignity in Dying would like to see the same flexibility in the law governing mercy killing, by creating either a specific offence or specific defence of mercy killing. A change along these lines would be more just – at present some mercy killers do not face time in jail because judges and juries are unwilling to sentence them to life in prison. A clear legal framework that takes motivation into account would allow judges and juries the flexibility to recognise compassionate acts, and better protect vulnerable people by ensuring that mercy killing cases are fully examined by the courts.

The Law Commission raised this as an issue of concern when it reviewed the law in 2006, and came to the conclusion that the law of murder in relation to cases of mercy killing requires a separate review, looking at whether there should be a partial defence to murder of mercy killing, or a separate crime of mercy killing. However, the Government did not take up this recommendation.

The Ministry of Justice conducted a separate [consultation into Murder, manslaughter and infanticide](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http:/justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/murder-manslaughter-infanticide-consultation.pdf) in 2008, which [Dignity in Dying responded to](http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Digntiy-in-Dying-response-to-the-ministry-of-Justice-consultation-paper.pdf), calling for a full review of the law in relation to mercy killing. The Ministry of Justice published the government [response to the consultation](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.justice.gov.uk/docs/murder-review-response.pdf) in January 2009, which stated that mercy killing is a matter of conscience for Parliament to decide.

(<http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/assisted-dying/the-law-and-mercy-killing/>)

# California man charged in 'mercy' killings of wife, sister

Published December 14, 2013

[Associated Press](http://www.ap.org/" \t "_blank)

LOS ANGELES –  A California man was charged with murder Friday after authorities said he shot and killed his dementia-stricken wife at their home and his sister in a convalescent home.

Lance Anderson, 60, faces two counts of murder, with special circumstance allegations of multiple murders and intentional discharge of a firearm with great bodily injury. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

Anderson was being held without bail and his scheduled arraignment later in the day was put off until Jan. 13, said Shiara Davila-Morales, a spokeswoman with the Los Angeles County district attorney's office. It wasn't immediately known if he had retained a lawyer and no public defender had yet been assigned.

Coroner's Lt. Larry Dietz identified Anderson's wife as Bertha Maxine Anderson, 68. She died of a gunshot wound to the head after the shooting earlier this week in the couple's suburban Santa Clarita home.

Authorities said Lance Anderson took a taxi Wednesday from the home to the Country Villa Sheraton nursing facility in the North Hills area, where his 58-year-old sister, Lisa Nave, was shot in the head while she was in bed.

Anderson then put the small-caliber revolver on a nightstand and stepped into a courtyard, where he surrendered after police arrived, Los Angeles police Lt. Paul Vernon said.

Police initially said Nave was in a vegetative state or coma at the nursing home for the past five years, but Vernon said she was actually responsive and had been improving since a heart attack five years earlier left her in a yearlong coma.

After learning of Nave's death, family members called Los Angeles County deputies and asked them to check on the welfare of Anderson's wife.

Deputies found Bertha Anderson's body at the couple's three-bedroom town house on a curved, tree-lined street in Canyon Country. Sheriff's Lt. Holly Francisco said no weapon was found.

Family members told authorities that Bertha Anderson was suffering from dementia, said Vernon, who characterized the shootings as apparent mercy killings.

"He unilaterally decided to kill two people for whatever seemed like a rational reason to him," Vernon said. "But it isn't right for those who want those people to live. He can't make that decision."

Neighbors described Lance Anderson as a chatty, friendly man who doted on his frail wife. He had indicated that he had moved from Arizona five or six months earlier because of his wife's health.

"He treated her like she was a jewel ... because she was so fragile," neighbor Gale Madrigal said.

Sometimes Lance Anderson was seen on their porch caressing his wife's hand, Madrigal said.

Two weeks ago, Anderson offered Madrigal his artificial Christmas tree, telling her the couple wouldn't be doing anything for Christmas this year.

# Belgium grants murderer's request for mercy killing

AFP

10:01PM BST 15 Sep 2014

Belgium has granted a serial rapist and murderer’s request that he be allowed to die, his lawyer said on Monday.

Frank Van Den Bleeken, who has spent the past 30 years in prison for repeated rape convictions and a rape-murder, has for years requested that the state help him end his life due to “unbearable psychic suffering,” said Jos Vander Velpen.

Van Den Bleeken is to be transferred from his prison in Bruges to a hospital within the next few days where he will be euthanised.

Belgium legalised euthanasia in 2002, the second country in the world to do so after the Netherlands, and logged a record 1,807 cases of euthanasia in 2013.

Its strict conditions for a mercy killing include that patients must be capable, conscious and have presented a “voluntary, considered and repeated” request to die.

Vander Velpen said his client met all legal conditions, and for the past four years had felt he “couldn’t stand to live like this any longer and could no longer accept the pain”.

“I am a human being, and regardless of what I’ve done, I remain a human being. So, yes, give me euthanasia,” Van Den Bleeken said.

Van Den Bleeken, considering himself a menace to society, had refused to be considered for early parole, but found the conditions of his detention inhumane.

He had requested a transfer to a specialised psychiatric centre in the Netherlands for treatment or, failing that, a mercy killing. Belgian authorities denied the transfer request earlier this year.

A source close to the case said Van Den Bleeken had been informed that a new centre providing appropriate psychiatric care would open later this year in Belgium. But the convict, who in 30 years left prison only once – to attend his mother’s funeral – opted to pursue euthanasia, for which he had already received medical approval.

A justice ministry spokesman on Monday confirmed the decision.

In February, Belgium became the second country to authorise mercy killing of terminally ill children, a controversial move that sparked heated public debate and protest.

The Netherlands allows euthanasia for children aged 12 and over, while Belgium has lifted all restrictions.