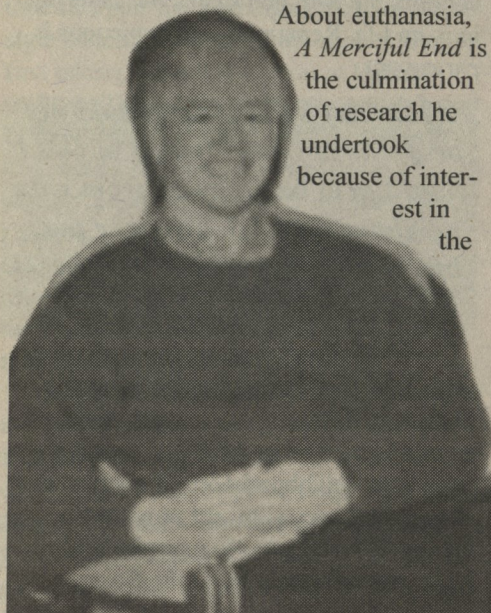


UPEI Professor Publishes Book on Euthanasia

By Julie VEINOT

Another UPEI professor has their name on a book.

On Friday Ian Dowbiggin, chair of the history department, launched his latest nonfiction book, *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America*, published by Oxford University Press.



Professor, Chair of the History department, and author

About euthanasia, *A Merciful End* is the culmination of research he undertook because of interest in the

subject, both academic and personal. While studying the eugenics movement (the idea of improving humans through breeding for certain characteristics) and the sterilization of mentally challenged people, he noticed the same proponents of these causes also supported mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide.

Dowbiggin also had a personal experience of his own to draw upon when he was writing *A Merciful End*. A good friend of his was fighting terminal cancer; as he watched him war with the disease, he was certain it wasn't necessary to have someone help him die.

Dr. Dowbiggin is concerned people like his friend will be pressured into mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide by their families - or in Canada, by a system that wants to cut healthcare costs. A law that legalizes mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide could lead to more extreme measures.

All of these concerns he addresses in *A Merciful End*, which has a double meaning: the obvi-

ous, and the merciful end of the euthanasia movement.

The movement has been around a long time, but Dr. Dowbiggin says, "The movement has sort of ground to a standstill."

Think mercy-killing or physician-assisted suicide is not in Canada? Think again, says Dowbiggin. There is a underground network of sympathetic physicians and pharmacists would can set up patients with the right materials - "bootleg euthanasia," he calls it.

In the short term, he expects interest in euthanasia to wane for awhile, since it is tough to pass legislation legalizing euthanasia.

While mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide is illegal in Canada and most U.S. states, Oregon has passed a law allowing terminally ill patients to end their life; Dr. Dowbiggin is watching the law with interest.

(In Oregon, if you're diagnosed with a terminal illness, have no more than six months to live, have signatures from physicians as well as a psychiatrist, doctors can prescribe a lethal dose of barbiturates. Of course, the law says you have to be a resident of the state to be allowed to end your own life.)

Since it is early, Dr. Dowbiggin says it is difficult to say how the Oregon law is going to work in the long run.

Oregon is not the only place that has enacted euthanasia laws; Holland is the only country in the world with it; patients can request a doctor administer a lethal dose to end their life. Dr. Dowbiggin says the law almost passed with a clause saying children as young as 12 could choose to end their life. It is decisions like this that concern him, along with the pressure ill patients might be facing if the mercy killing or physician-assisted suicide law is ever passed in Canada or the United States. Also, the law could become a slippery slope, ending like what happened in Nazi Germany, he says.

One of the other good things about having a law banning euthanasia, he says, is that in some cases it reduces the number of people who request it.

"It reassures people," he says, adding it makes them stoical.

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ground network of sympathetic physicians and pharmacists would can set up patients with the right materials - "bootleg euthanasia", he calls it.

Also, before they become ill, Canadians can refuse unwanted medical treatment and make their wishes clear through living wills, where someone is appointed to make a decision to say, turn off a respirator, if the patient cannot speak for themselves in particular medical situation.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, when medical technology changed death and dying through things like respirators and artificial food, it became necessary for the movement to talk about euthanasia, just like he does in the book.

Dr. Dowbiggin, who has written four books including Canadian bestseller *Suspicious Minds: The Triumph of Paranoia in Everyday Life*, found *A Merciful End* the easiest to write. Research began in 1999; it took a year to write the book once the research was completed. He is also excited because this is the first book of his that was bought by a company for the purpose of the general public, instead of academics and scholars.

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The advantages to having the book published as a trade book means the publisher will promote the book more. Dr. Dowbiggin has already appeared in newspapers and CBC Radio. In the future, he hopes to publicize his book locally, as well as in the U.S. (he is going to New York City in March). He is also hoping for a German translation, as there is a large interest in euthanasia in Europe because of the Holland experiment and because several other countries are thinking of passing it into law.

"In Europe, things are happening very, very fast," he says.

For any of Dr. Dowbiggin's students, they will probably get a taste of his new book in classes, especially European History. He wants to incorporate part of his research into his class.

For anyone who is not in his classes, they can go to the bookstores for the hardcover book, which has been in stores since early January.

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