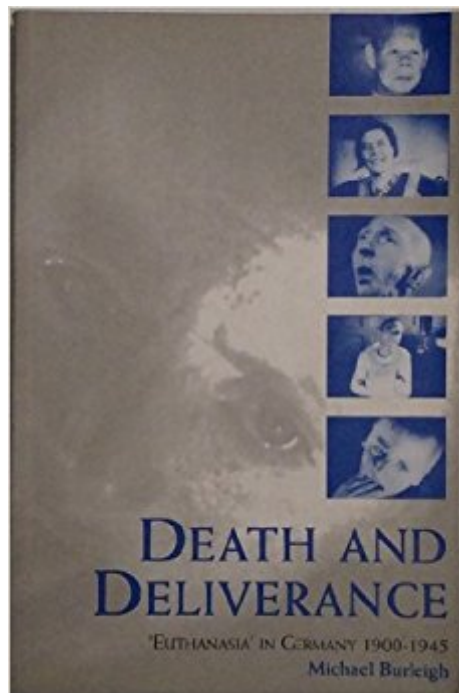


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# Death And Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' In Germany, C.1900 To 1945



## Synopsis

Between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis systematically murdered as many as 200,000 mentally ill or physically disabled people whom they stigmatised as 'life unworthy of life'. This complex and covert series of operations was known as the 'euthanasia' programme. It provided many of the personnel and the technical expertise later deployed in the 'Final Solution'. This is the first full-scale study in English of the 'euthanasia' programme. It considers the role of all those involved in these policies: bureaucrats, doctors, nurses, health officials, lawyers, clerics, and also parents, relatives, and the patients themselves. Using a wealth of original archival material, it highlights many of the moral issues involved in a way that is profoundly disquieting. The book concludes by showing the ease with which many of the perpetrators filtered back into German society after 1945.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A chilling documentation of what happened in Germany when the Nazis seized power and put their ideas on eugenics and euthanasia into action. Burleigh (International History/London School of Economics; coauthor, *The Racial State*, not reviewed) points out that the Nazi program began with a humanitarian rationalization: Mentally and physically disabled children were subject to "mercy killing" as a form of deliverance. Soon, however, "mercy killing" evolved into the elimination of "life unworthy of life" as the Nazi killing machine expanded to include more and more victims, and as political, legal, moral, and religious opposition was quashed by the fear of reprisals and totalitarian power. Burleigh demonstrates how Nazi eugenics perverted German medicine and science: Scientists approved the sterilization of some 400,000 people between 1934 and 1945 to eradicate

“degenerative heredity” in order to “improve the race.” Doctors, particularly psychiatrists, were encouraged to falsify medical records, give lethal injections, starve patients, and use other creative means of murder while ignoring the age-old dictum of the physician, “Do no harm.” Burleigh also details how asylum populations were decimated as managers, bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, nurses, and other professionals, corrupted by monetary awards and promotions, played their parts in the Nazi murder industry. Daily killings became routine as Nazi propagandists extolled social Darwinism. Burleigh describes how victims were targeted, including Jews, foreigners, enemies of the Reich, gypsies, and those who lacked “labor values.” Occasional accounts of humanity brighten the grim story, as medical Schindlers saved patients from death by listing them as valuable workers who were badly needed. After the war, some of the Nazi eugenicists, tried at Nuremberg and in German courts, were executed, while others received light sentences. Most melted into the general population under new identities. A notable contribution to the history of Nazi Germany--and a sobering reminder of what can happen when the claims of science, bureaucracy, and expertise go unchallenged. -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

‘Indictment is brilliantly combined with memorial ... he restores personality to individuals deemed unworthy of life. History writing is rarely this moving, or so admirably, effectively moralistic.’ David Cesarani, *The Guardian* ‘Everyone ought to read it ... It is difficult to believe that this account could be improved upon ...’. Anthony Storr, *The Times* ‘Death and Deliverance is humane, tough-minded, thoroughly researched, and breaks new ground in some neglected areas ... the book is refreshingly free of intellectual jargon and cant without over-simplifying the issues involved.’ Jeremy Noakes, University of Exeter ‘Starkly written and impressively researched, it focuses on the lives of the victims, the administrators and medical personnel, and on public responses. This is a distinguished historical contribution.’ Paul Weindling, University of Oxford ‘This is the most illuminating discussion of the Nazi ‘euthanasia’ programme yet published. The thorough documentation and chilling quotations bring out the extent of the complicity of the medical profession, and the extent to which the programme was ideologically driven. It is also a powerful study of the way propaganda can make the unthinkable seem normal. The ‘euthanasia’ programme is too little known, and the lessons to be learnt from this book are important.’ Jonathan Glover, University of Oxford

Difficult to read, but important as so many books covering this period tend to focus on the ‘Final Solution’ and ignore the 70,000+ who were killed because of their mental disorders, birth defects, congenital malformations and diseases and injuries that resulted in loss of productivity. This text is

important because it lays out the historical factors that lead first to the eugenics movements and Germany's eventual sterilization policies which were bolstered by the forced sterilization policies in the U.S. and moved toward the 'life unfit for life' philosophy that was being intellectually discussed by both the right and left leaning philosophers, to the eventual killing through starvation, injection and gassing of people held in asylums and hospitals. These policies did not happen merely because of the madness of the National Socialist Policies, but in an intellectual debate on what it is to be human which was being held across national boundaries, whose arguments supported the ideas of the Nazi Party on genetic superiority, and the purification of the Volk that would make up the Germany of the future. The methods and the secrecy of these systematic killings did not come from demands on high, as some histories would have one believe, with participants acting in fear of their lives and under duress. It started with the change in the civil service system, placing Party members in charge of asylums, the cutting of all funds to maintain those who had the least protections and political voice, it involved the collusion of thousands in the selection process, the killing and the disposal of remains and the vast bureaucracy that collected data on who was unworthy of life and to create the death certificates that were sent to families listing one of the 92 causes of death they could list that might not create too much questioning from families. The men and women who were the main actors in this euthanasia developed the methods and indeed were some of the people transferred to run the death camps, because they had become so skilled in the murders of the 'unfit'. Strangely, post war very few of these people were ever brought to trial by German authorities, who either acquitted them or gave them light sentences such as several months to four years for the direct murder of thousands, as the courts declared that these perpetrators did not know that the killing of thousands of Germans was illegal. Also many of these perpetrators were honored members of the community and friends of people in high places in post-war Germany. It also has a chapter that focuses on the film propaganda, and the tourist trade the government provided giving thousands of Germans tours of asylums so they could see for themselves how unworthy of life these charges were. The films presented the economic arguments, telling audiences how much it cost to maintain these creatures, when these funds could go to them, the viewer in better housing, or more food access, if only the state wasn't being burdened. Atrocities will always be with us, but they are not only the work of a few, these few always need the complicity of the general population, the willingness of a large number of people who can be bought with additional pay, food & alcohol allowances, and the right to some of the spoils of those they dispose of. This text is quite balanced giving no quarter to any specific point of view, but by providing documents and diaries of perpetrators lets the reader come to their own conclusions. A very

important read on the direction medical and personnel can easily be subverted.

The best English language book available on Nazi euthanasia...Burleigh's ironic style and meticulous research make a difficult subject a pageturner...

A long and painful book very academic book.

An extraordinary and deeply moving book. Burleigh documents in meticulous and scholarly detail the mass murder of psychiatric patients, and exposes the obscene justification of this as "mercy killing" (incidentally providing a fascinating and horrifying survey of the way in which the Nazi "euthanasia" program helped create the bureaucratic machinery later used to run the concentration camps). Instead of allowing the sheer weight of numbers to render the victims anonymous, he uses haunting photographs and details of some of the murdered adults and children to "bring them to life" and make vivid the humanity which the Nazis were unable to see. Anyone interested in the rights of the mentally handicapped and mentally ill should read this book

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