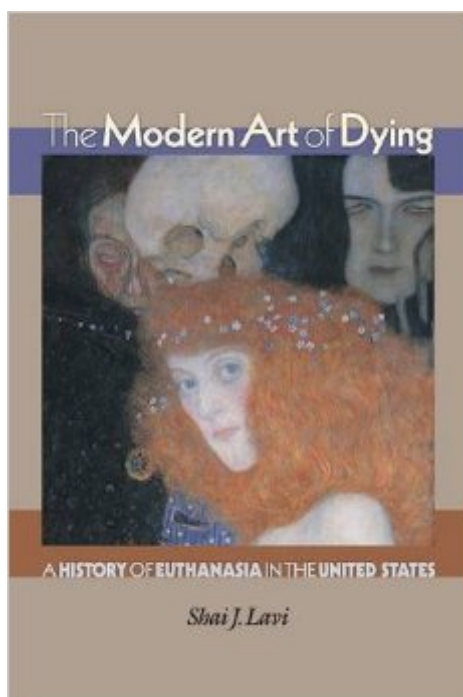


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The Modern Art Of Dying: A History Of Euthanasia In The United States



Synopsis

How we die reveals much about how we live. In this provocative book, Shai Lavi traces the history of euthanasia in the United States to show how changing attitudes toward death reflect new and troubling ways of experiencing pain, hope, and freedom. Lavi begins with the historical meaning of euthanasia as signifying an "easeful death." Over time, he shows, the term came to mean a death blessed by the grace of God, and later, medical hastening of death. Lavi illustrates these changes with compelling accounts of changes at the deathbed. He takes us from early nineteenth-century deathbeds governed by religion through the medicalization of death with the physician presiding over the deathbed, to the legalization of physician-assisted suicide. Unlike previous books, which have focused on law and technique as explanations for the rise of euthanasia, this book asks why law and technique have come to play such a central role in the way we die. What is at stake in the modern way of dying is not human progress, but rather a fundamental change in the way we experience life in the face of death, Lavi argues. In attempting to gain control over death, he maintains, we may unintentionally have ceded control to policy makers and bio-scientific enterprises.

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press (November 18, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691133905

ISBN-13: 978-0691133904

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (3 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,683,101 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in Â Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Euthanasia #1393 in Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Death #9492 in Â Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Sociology

Customer Reviews

Shai J. Lavi *The Modern Art of Dying: A History of Euthanasia in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) 226 pages (ISBN: 0-691-10263-5; hardcover) (Library of Congress call number: R726.L3797 2005) The process of dying in the United States freshly examined: In the early years of the USA, dying was more an art, often with deep religious dimensions. But in more

recent times, regular medical techniques have shaped the process of dying. This history of aid in dying goes up to the 1960s, although an epilogue mentions more recent developments. One chapter examines palliative care as a new pathway towards death: Chapter 5: "Lethal Dosing: Technique beyond the Law". This reviewer discusses these methods of choosing death as increasing pain-medication and terminal sedation. Pain-killers have become standard in most managed deaths. And instead of on-and-off pain-relief, the standard practice has become to provide a continuous stream of drugs to prevent suffering. The use of sedatives at the end of life has not been included in the discussion of "euthanasia" because the primary, direct purpose for using the drug has not been to cause the patient to die. Rather, such palliative care eases the process of dying without explicitly shortening the time between the beginning of this medical treatment and the date of the patient's death. Hundreds of books debate 'euthanasia' pro and con, but only a few books acknowledge that many more patients are meeting death with the help of palliative drugs.

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