



Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics

By Peter Singer

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The new commandments according to *Rethinking Life and Death*.

--If you must take human life, take responsibility for the consequences of your decisions.

--All human life is not of equal worth; treat beings in accordance to the ethical situation at hand.

--Respect a person's desire to live or die.

A profound and provocative work, *Rethinking Life and Death*, in the tradition of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, examines the ethical dilemmas that confront us as we near the twenty-first century.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In these brilliant essays, Singer (*Animal Liberation*), a founder of the Australian Animal Rights Movement, argues persuasively for a change in attitudes toward abortion, euthanasia, fetal transplants and animal rights. He considers that 20th-century advances in medicine, technology and anthropology have made traditional Judeo-Christian ethics irrelevant and hypocritical. He offers five new commandments: "Recognise that the worth of human life varies" because all life is not of equal value; "Take responsibility for the consequences of your decisions" because the old commandment "never intentionally to take innocent human life" is too absolutist to deal with all the circumstances that can arise; "Respect a person's desire to live or die" because "incurably ill people who ask doctors to help them die are not harming others"; "Bring children into the world only if they are wanted" because being fruitful and multiplying now causes serious overpopulation; "Do not discriminate on the basis of species" because what is "human" can no longer be demonstrated to apply to *Homo sapiens* alone. Singer analyzes the history of traditional arguments about life and death, with man as the center of the universe, and makes a forceful case for his new ethic.

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From Library Journal

Singer (*Animal Liberation*, LJ 3/15/90. 2d ed.) calls for a revolution in ethical thinking about life and death. Human beings, in his view, form merely one species among others, and obligations to humans do not always outweigh those to animals. Within the human species, not all life has equal worth. Singer's position has radical applications in practice, which he is at pains to spell out. In his view, people whose brains no longer function may have their vital organs removed, even if they are not legally dead. Abortion is almost always morally permissible and active euthanasia often justifiable. Even infanticide receives a sympathetic hearing. Singer writes well and offers a detailed discussion of important issues in medical ethics. But he fails to address seriously objections to his brand of utilitarianism and inclines too readily to dismiss ordinary morality as "speciesism." For academic collections. David Gordon, Bowling Green State Univ., Ohio
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From [Booklist](#)

Modern medicine often puts doctors and families in painful quandaries. When a baby is born with severe defects of the sort that always used to kill babies, are doctors and parents now morally obligated to use the latest technologies, regardless of cost? When a pregnant woman loses all brain function, should doctors use new procedures to keep her body living until the baby can be born? Can a doctor ethically help terminally ill patients to kill themselves? Drawing on current medical, ethical, and legal scholarship, Singer argues that we can no longer rely on traditional ethics for answers to such questions. He proposes a radically new ethics meant to protect the quality, not the sanctity, of human life. As sharp boundaries disappear between life and death, between humans and animals, this new ethics casts doubt on the morality of animal research even as it offers a surprisingly sympathetic assessment of infanticide. This is a book sure to provoke heated controversy. *Bryce Christensen*

Users Review

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