



In the Arms of Others: A Cultural History of the Right-To-Die in America

Peter G. Filene

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When, if ever, is life no longer worth living? When, if ever, is it right to withdraw life-support or hasten death? These questions—which confront physicians, bioethicists, social workers, the children of aging parents, and sooner or later almost everyone—now receive increasingly urgent attention in American society. Peter Filene's *In the Arms of Others* is the first book to set this dilemma into broad historical and cultural context. It is, in other words, a history of the “right to die” as viewed in the United States. With the narrative skills he has displayed in his fiction, Mr. Filene takes the reader into the lives and feelings of people who have struggled with the predicament of modern dying. Beginning with the nineteenth-century background and the rise of medical technology, he moves quickly to the landmark case of Karen Ann Quinlan, who became in the 1970s the macabre protagonist of a melodrama that crystallized the nation's consciousness and produced a legal benchmark. Mr. Filene explores the maze of bioethical arguments surrounding this and succeeding cases, and guides readers through complex questions with remarkable lucidity. Ultimately, he argues, we must acknowledge that traditional American self-determination is not sufficient to resolve terrible questions of life and death; what we need is an ethic of relatedness.

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