Approaching the End
David Albert Jones

This book considers two basic questions: how can we live well in the face of death?; and when, if ever, is it legitimate deliberately to bring human life to an end? It does so by considering the distinct theological approaches to death shown by four outstanding Christian thinkers: Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Rahner. These philosophers’ thoughts constitute a single extended argument on the theology of death which can be set out in relation to the practical realities of grief, fear, and hope in the face of death. There is a rightful place for grief, a good grief, even for a Christian. Augustine teaches us that death is something with which we have to contend, and indeed that the difficult and painful process of contending with death is a means through which we are brought to our final joyful end. A key point for Thomas Aquinas is that, in itself, it is always wrong to kill a human being on account of the dignity of human nature. Rahner adds that it also stands in contradiction to the supernatural destiny of human beings. Rahner is at his most profound in describing how the need to surrender oneself to God in death is anticipated throughout life. The aim of this book is not primarily to make a contribution to the knowledge of the history of theology, but rather, through engagement with the thought of theologians of the past, to reflect on some of the practical and existential issues that the approach of death presents for us.

Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions
Jon Elster

in Making Sense of Suicide Missions
This chapter examines why people kill themselves for other reasons than that they do not want to live, focusing on the special case of why they engage in suicide bombings or (as on 11 September 2001) other modes of suicide missions (SMs). It makes a distinction between two levels of actors. At the first level are those who sacrifice their lives (the suicide attackers). At the second level are those who incite and enable them to do so (the organizers). It draws heavily on the cases of suicide attacks mentioned in the other chapters in this volume as well as on some other sources.

The Right to Life and Conflicting Interests
Elizabeth Wicks

Published in print: 2010 Published Online: September 2010
Item type: book

The right to life is a core human right which has not yet received the detailed legal analysis that it requires. This book provides detailed, critical analysis of the controversial human right to life and, in particular, assesses the weight of conflicting interests which could and/or should serve to override the right. This contemporary study of the right to life focuses on the legal, as well as ethical, issues raised by the value of life in modern day society. It seeks to analyse the development, meaning and value of the fundamental human right to life in the context of its conflicts with other competing interests. The book begins with an overview of the right to life in which the concept of life itself is first analysed, before both the right and its legal protection and enforcement are subjected to historical, philosophical and comparative analysis. The remainder of the book identifies, and assesses the merits of, various competing interests. These comprise armed conflict; prevention of crime; rights of others; autonomy; quality of life; and finite resources. The right to life is unusual in having potential application to so many of today’s ethically controversial questions. This new work investigates specific topics of current political, legal and ethical concern such as the right to life during international conflicts, the role of lethal force in law enforcement, the death penalty, the right to life of a foetus in the context of legalized abortion, and the significance of quality of life and autonomy issues in respect of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Assisted Death in Europe and America
Guenter Lewy

Published in print: 2010 Published Online: January 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press
This book provides a detailed account of four regimes of assisted death for which there is a substantial body of data as well as observational research: The Netherlands and Belgium have legalized both voluntary euthanasia as well as physician-assisted suicide; the state of Oregon allows physician-assisted suicide; and in Switzerland assisted suicide can be provided by non-physicians. For each regime the book describes the unique cultural, political, and legal context in which the legalization of assisted death has taken place. It analyzes problem areas that have developed, such as the issue of assisted death for patients with mental suffering or the termination of life in pediatric cases, and the effectiveness of each system of regulation is assessed. While accurate factual information cannot settle the moral debate over assisted death, it nevertheless is a precondition of any well-founded argument. The conclusion discusses the lessons that can be learned from the experience of these four regimes, and analyzes a model statute for physician-assisted suicide that has been proposed for the United States.

Confrontations with the Reaper
Fred Feldman

Presenting a discussion of classic philosophical questions surrounding death, this book investigates the great metaphysical and moral problems of death. The first part argues that a definition of life is necessary before death can be defined. It maintains that death is a conceptual mystery—it cannot be defined as the cessation of life, or in any other similar way. After an exploration of several of the most plausible accounts of the nature of life and death and a demonstration of their failure, a conceptual scheme involving life, death, existence, personality, and related concepts emerges from the book's analysis. The second part returns to ethical and value-theoretical questions about death. Addressing the ancient Epicurean ethical problems about the evil of death, it argues that death can be a great evil for those who die, even if they do not exist after death, because it may deprive them of the goods they would have enjoyed had they continued to live. After formulating principles that purport to evaluate the badness (or goodness) of death, the book concludes with a novel consequentialist theory about the morality of killing, applying it to such thorny practical issues as abortion, suicide, and euthanasia.
Suicide in Asia
Paul S. F. Yip (ed.)

Over one million people worldwide commit suicide every year, and more than 60% of suicide deaths occur in Asia. However, very little reliable information is available to permit a good understanding of the multifaceted and complex issues involved in suicide prevention in the region. This book provides analysis of suicide in eight Asian societies. While each society has its own unique characteristics, Asia as a whole is under rapid transition and transformation, and the associated stress and depression are both closely linked to suicide. Hopefully, a better evidence-based understanding of suicide will enable governments and non-government organizations to establish effective and culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies for the region.

Handbook of Bioethics and Religion
David E. Guinn (ed.)

This book discusses the role of religion in a religiously pluralistic liberal society, namely the United States. Nowhere else in the public realm do the fundamental religious questions about the meaning and nature of life arise in a context where resort to a political answer is the norm. Many people continue to insist that the US Constitution precludes religious participation in the political process, while others insist that by denying a role to religion we fundamentally discriminate against people of faith. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, the issues are complex and multifaceted. The book address such specific and highly contested issues as assisted suicide, stem cell research, cloning, reproductive health, and alternative medicine as well as general questions concerning as who legitimately speaks for religion in public bioethics, what religion can add to our understanding of justice, and the value of faith-based contributions to healthcare. The book begins with overview chapters about the role of religion in bioethics since the inception of the field. It then explores that role in the formation of public policy in terms of sociology, critical studies, philosophy, and religious studies. The book questions the distinction between public policy bioethics and clinical care, recognizing the close interconnection between the two. It offers
insight on how religion shapes questions of justice in patient care and the ethical tools provided by Islam, Buddhism, and Evangelical Christianity that can be used both in advocating for public policy and in making individual care decisions. Over the last five to ten years, researchers have begun to explore the efficacy of religion as a mode of treatment.

The Weeping Willow
Lynne Dale Halamish and Doron Hermoni

This book is a practical and direct handbook for grieving. It presents 30 stories from real life that examine how we grieve and how we can help those who grieve—whether the griever is oneself, someone we care about, or a client or patient. The authors present vignettes from practice that show how death—lingering, unexpected, violent, or self-inflicted—and the loss of a relationship—to oneself or with a child, sibling, parent, mate, grandparent, or friend—give life to grief, together with the process by which each person fully encounters his or her grief. Each story is no more than two or three pages, and the authors follow each one with a short summary of its teachings and a selection of annotated recent references for those who wish to read more about a topic.

Assisted Dying and Legal Change
Penney Lewis

The question whether assisted dying (euthanasia and assisted suicide) should be legalized is often treated, by judges and commentators alike, as a question which transcends national boundaries and diverse legal systems. One obvious example is the use made of the ‘Dutch experience’ in other jurisdictions. By treating the issue as a transcendent, global ethical question, the important context in which individual jurisdictions make decisions about assisted dying and the significance of the legal methods chosen to carry out those decisions is often lost. This book concentrates not on the issue of whether assisted dying should be legalized, but rather on the impact of the choice of a particular legal route towards legalization. Legal change on assisted dying may be achieved in a variety of ways: challenges to criminal prohibitions using constitutionally entrenched rights; the use of defences available to
defendants who are prosecuted for assisting a death; legislative change; or referenda or ballot measures proposed by individual citizens or interest groups. The examination in this book of the impact of these different alternatives suggests that greater caution is needed before relying on the experience of one jurisdiction when discussing proposals for regulation of assisted dying in others, and the possible consequences of such regulation. The book seeks to demonstrate the need to explore the legal environment in which assisted dying is performed or proposed in order to evaluate the relevance of a particular legal experience to other jurisdictions.

Latinas Attempting Suicide
Luis H. Zayas

Among teenage Latinas in the United States, suicide attempts occur at alarming rates, sometimes twice as high as other youth. For decades clinicians in mostly urban centers with large Hispanic populations witnessed the puzzling phenomenon of young Latinas who had attempted suicide. It was not until the 1990s when national surveys confirmed what clinicians were seeing in their practices. But the mystery of why some Latinas attempted when other Latinas with similar social and psychological profiles did not remained. Through the retelling of the history of research into this life-threatening act and the many factors that contribute it, this book begins to unravel the mystery of suicide attempts by young Latinas. Beginning with a description of the U.S. Hispanic population and the characteristics of the Hispanic family—its values, beliefs, norms, child-rearing—the book goes on to look at the development of young Latinas, girls straddling two cultures and struggling to reconcile them. Drawing on developmental, cultural and family psychology, acculturation and immigration theory and research, and the traditional and modern socialization of U.S. Hispanic girls, the book sets the stage for an in-depth look at the suicide attempts by Latinas. The book presents case studies and data collected from over 120 girls who attempted suicide and more than 110 who had not. It illustrates with the girls’ own words, and those of their parents, how social, psychological, family and cultural factors come together to a flashpoint. This book presents the anatomy of the experiences before, during and after the suicide attempt, suggests new ways of understanding suicide attempts, and offers ideas for prevention and treatment to save young Latinas.
The argument of Augustine in De civitate Dei is strikingly similar to that of Ambrose in De bono mortis. However, while Ambrose treats death as something good in itself, Augustine sees it as bad in itself. Their contrasting attitudes have practical effects on how they regard virginity, marriage, and mortification; on how each reads the letters of Paul; and on their discussions of suicide and martyrdom. Furthermore, it leads to a noticeable shift in the Christian treatment of fear of death, grief, and the care of the dead (that is, prayers said for those who have died).

In the Summa Theologiae, Thomas Aquinas develops Augustine's anthropology with the help of the rediscovered metaphysics of Aristotle. Thomas comes to stress that the power of understanding of the 'separated soul' is very weak. Death is natural as regards matter (the destructible body) but not as regards form (the indestructible soul). Death in itself is always a bad thing and it is only incidentally (per accidens) that death is, for some, the beginning of heavenly bliss. Thus, homicide and suicide can be seen to be wrong because, in themselves, they are acts of destruction.
Both Something Suffered and a Human Act: Death in the Thought of Karl Rahner

David Albert Jones

in Approaching the End: A Theological Exploration of Death and Dying

Karl Rahner develops his own distinctive theological approach to death in Zur Theologie des Todes – On the Theology of Death published in 1958. For Rahner, death is an event that affects the human being as a whole, not just the body, while leaving the immortal soul essentially unchanged. Understood as the conclusion of a personal life, death must itself be construed as an act. Rahner seems, like Ambrose, to interpret fulfilment as belonging to death as such. Nevertheless, as with Augustine, Rahner’s thought continues to develop and his discussion of ‘the liberty of the sick’, while flawed, represents an important contribution to moral reflection on end of life issues.

Final Reflections

David Albert Jones

An examination of the thought of Ambrose, Augustine, Thomas, and Rahner shows them to constitute a single extended argument on the theology of death. This can be set out in relation to the realities of grief, fear, and hope in the face of death; in relation to the practices of suicide and euthanasia; and in relation to the more complex issue of withdrawal of treatment. Christian hope affirms both the need and the difficulty of acknowledging one’s own approaching death. Rahner is at his most profound in describing how the need to surrender oneself to God in death, the need to die like a martyr, is anticipated throughout life. If, by the grace of God, death can be freely endured — and this is no easy task — then the final surrender in death will be the end of death and the preamble to our true end: eternal happiness in which death will be no more.
Euthanasia
Bernard Gert, Charles M. Culver, and K. Danner Clouser
in Bioethics: A systematic approach

Published in print: 2006 Published Online: September 2006
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/0195159063.003.0012
Item type: chapter

This chapter discusses why euthanasia presents a moral dilemma for physicians. It shows that trying to distinguish between active and passive euthanasia in any of the following four ways: (1) acts versus omissions, (2) withholding versus withdrawing, (3) ordinary care versus extraordinary care, or (4) whether death is due to natural causes, does not work. It then shows that using the distinction between patient requests and patient refusals does provide an adequate way to make this distinction. It provides an analysis of killing and discusses the Supreme Court decision concerning assisted suicide.

I Want Attention
Lynne Dale Halamish and Doron Hermoni
in The Weeping Willow: Encounters with Grief

Published in print: 2007 Published Online: November 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195325379.003.0015
Item type: chapter

This chapter describes the author's experience in counselling teenagers who had experienced losing someone close to them through suicide, suggesting that one of the dangers of suicide, which is not relevant to other causes, is that it is infectious. Because of this, it is important for survivors in the family and friends to be checked for suicidal ideas. The chapter argues that making a time and place for relatives or friends to voice their feelings and concerns without being judged is an important part of the debriefing process.

I Can't Tell You
Lynne Dale Halamish and Doron Hermoni
in The Weeping Willow: Encounters with Grief

Published in print: 2007 Published Online: November 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195325379.003.0017
Item type: chapter
This chapter discusses ways of dealing with a grieving person who is thinking of committing suicide, describing the case of Paula, who became very distressed over the death of the young girl she had been caring for. In her conservation with the author, she described an easily accomplished and well-thought-out plan to kill herself and her only son. The chapter explains that many people who commit suicide see physicians within three months prior to the act and that it is important for physicians to refer these people to professionals who can accurately evaluate their suicidal intentions.

**Government as Partner Against the Past**
George P. Fletcher

in Our Secret Constitution: How Lincoln Redefined American Democracy
Published in print: 2003 Published Online: November 2003
Item type: chapter

This chapter juxtaposes the role of government with the “paradox” of freedom. The U.S. government's varying role in regulating issues of employment (in Lochner), sexual relations (rape law, polygamy, sexual harassment), and questions of income tax, assisted suicide, and abortion are discussed.

**Suicide in Nazi Germany**
Christian Goeschel

Published in print: 2009 Published Online: October 2011
Item type: book

The Third Reich met its end in the spring of 1945 in an unparalleled wave of suicides. Hitler, Goebbels, Bormann, Himmler and later Göring all killed themselves. These deaths represent only the tip of an iceberg of a massive wave of suicides that also touched upon ordinary lives. As this suicide epidemic has no historical precedent or parallel, it can tell us much about the Third Reich's peculiar self-destructiveness and the depths of Nazi fanaticism. The book looks at the suicides of both Nazis and ordinary people in Germany between 1918 and 1945, from the end of World War I until the end of World War II, including the mass suicides of German Jews during the Holocaust. It shows how suicides among different population groups, including supporters, opponents, and victims of the regime, responded to the social, cultural, economic and, political context of the time. The book also analyses changes and continuities in
individual and societal responses to suicide over time, especially with regard to the Weimar Republic and the post-1945 era.

Postlude
Kathryn Talalay

in Composition in Black and White: The Life of Philippa Schuyler

Published in print: 1998 Published Online: October 2011
Published in print: 1998 Published Online: October 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195113938.003.0038
Item type: chapter

On Tuesday morning, May 9, Josephine and George received a cable from Philippa informing them that she would arrive on Friday and on that same day they received a letter from her. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the phone rang and Josephine answered it, startled with the news she heard from the other side of the line, informing her that Philippa had died in a helicopter crash. Josephine screamed and hung up the phone, while George was in the state of shock too, not moving from his chair. The CBS Evening Radio News treated her death as a national story since Philippa was the tenth American correspondent and only the second woman journalist to die in Vietnam. Her mother didn't handle her daughter's death well at all and committed suicide before the first anniversary of Philippa's death. George was left alone and wished to follow his wife and daughter soon, but his agony was prolonged and he lived for another eight years.