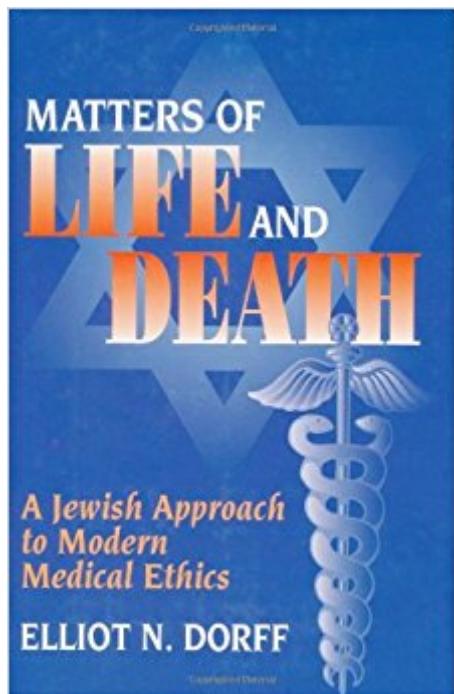


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Matters Of Life And Death



Synopsis

This book addresses the unavoidable confluence of medical technology and Jewish law and ethics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For many years now, religious thinkers have been at the forefront of medical ethics. Catholic and Jewish writers and physicians, in particular, have taken great care to address ethical questions raised by modern medicine and to examine how those ethical questions impinge upon their religious traditions. In this book, Dorff, a Conservative Jew who has participated in the Ethics Committee of the UCLA Medical Center, argues that "moral values [are] an integral part of the Jewish legal process by which contemporary decisions should be made." As Jews confront ethical questions surrounding the beginning of life and the end of life, according to Dorff, they must do so with religious law in one and their moral sensitivities in the other. In the book's first section, Dorff summarizes the beliefs underlying Jewish medical ethics?"the body belongs to God," "human worth stems from being created in God's image," "Jews have a mandate and duty to heal," "Jews must sanctify God's name"?to demonstrate their importance for contemporary discussions of Jewish medical ethics. Dorff then addresses a number of issues of medical ethics, ranging from infertility and the use of artificial insemination and issues surrounding reproductive technologies to assisted suicide, organ donation and the distribution of health care. In contrast to many Orthodox rabbis, who oppose donor insemination, Dorff argues in favor of the procedure because he says it helps couples to achieve "a precious goal in Jewish law and thought, the bearing of children." Though this and other of Dorff's positions are likely to be controversial within and without Judaism, his book is a

"Matters of Life and Death should be a fixture in the library of each Conservative Jewish home. It should lead Conservative Jews to recognize the salience of Jewish thought to critical medical ethical dilemmas." -- The Jewish Journal

Rabbi Dorff's book on Jewish medical ethics is written in language that makes his book easily accessible to all readers, Jews and non-Jews, lay readers and clergy. I have found it invaluable as a resource for a better understanding of contemporary issues through the lens, and the wisdom, of our tradition, one that dates back thousands of years.

Thorough in research and legal analysis, empathic, and genuinely wise.

Thought this was a later version, but it is what I had. No problem. I will keep the extra copy.

This book addresses a wide variety of issues relating to the human body -not just issues commonly thought of as "bioethics" issues (such as cloning, euthanasia and abortion) but also issues such as homosexuality and even tattoos. What I most liked is that (with some exceptions) Dorff generally makes a reasonable effort to discuss contrasting views and divisions of authority, rather than focusing solely on his own perspective. Dorff also emphasizes (at least in some areas) the commonalities between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews. For example:^{*}He suggests that classical Judaism opposes premarital sex because such a situation "is rife with the potential for miscommunication, misunderstood intentions, and deeply hurt feelings."^{**}His emphasis on the proposition that Jewish law generally forbids abortion, except when a woman's mental or physical health is threatened by pregnancy. He points out that the major difference between the most traditional rabbis and more liberal-minded ones is how broadly to define the "health exception."^{**}He emphasizes the importance of fertility for Jews, noting that traditional Jewish law requires males to have at least a couple of children, and suggesting that low birth rates are eviscerating the American Jewish population. In matters less relevant to Jewish law as such, such as matters of public policy and of good manners, this book is a bit weaker. For example, he is generally supportive of public support for the poor, but doesn't really discuss to what extent a secular state's rules should mirror those of Jewish law (which tends to favor a generous welfare system).

Rabbi Elliot Dorff has lectured widely on medical and bioethics facing moderns: artificial insemination, abortion, adoption, prolonging life artificially, organ donation, and more. In this book, he compiles his years of research into a cogent and accessible discussion of Jewish law to provide a profoundly human approach to some of the most difficult aspects of life any of us will ever face. Beginning with a discussion of the fundamental beliefs underlying Jewish medical ethics (The body belongs to God, Human worth stems from being created in God's Image, Jews have a mandate and duty to heal), he proceeds to first deal with moral issues at the beginning of life. Topics include having children with one's own genetic materials, using donated genetic materials, the social context for generating life (including a discussion on homosexuality). The second major part of the book deals with the matters at the end of life: the process of dying, after death issues (such as organ donation). He concludes with a section on "The Communal Context of Medical Care" (preventing illness, our duty to preserve health and visit the sick.) For this non-scholar, this was a wonderful book that deepened my appreciation for the value and dignity that Jewish law has for life and for the logical and scholarly wisdom of Rabbi Dorff.

Elliot Dorff is a scholar in this area and his book is modern, realistic, comprehensive and readable by the layperson. Highly recommended!

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