



Death before Dying: History, Medicine, and Brain Death

Gary Belkin

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Brain death—the condition of a non-functioning brain, has been widely adopted around the world as a definition of death since it was detailed in a Report by an Ad Hoc Committee of Harvard Medical School faculty in 1968. It also remains a focus of controversy and debate, an early source of criticism and scrutiny of the bioethics movement. *Death before Dying: History, Medicine, and Brain Death* looks at the work of the Committee in a way that has not been attempted before in terms of tracing back the context of its own sources—the reasoning of its Chair, Henry K Beecher, and the care of patients in coma and knowledge about coma and consciousness at the time. That history requires re-thinking the debate over brain death that followed which has tended to cast the Committee's work in ways this book questions. This book, then, also questions common assumptions about the place of bioethics in medicine. This book discusses if the advent of bioethics has distorted and limited the possibilities for harnessing medicine for social progress. It challenges historical scholarship of medicine to be more curious about how medical knowledge can work as a potentially innovative source of values.

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