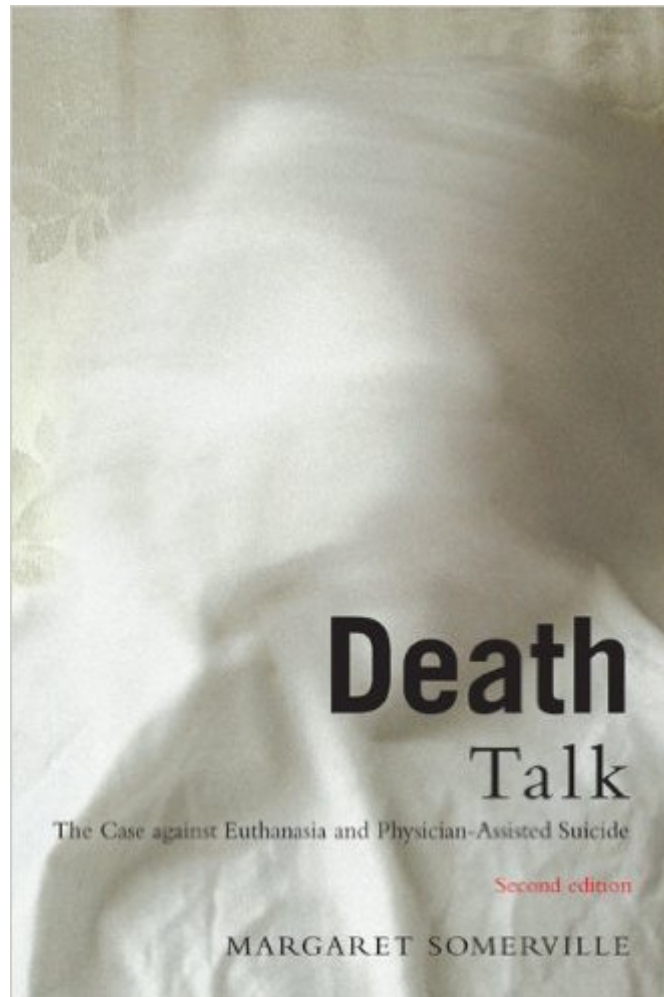


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Death Talk, Second Edition: The Case Against Euthanasia And Physician-Assisted Suicide



Synopsis

Death Talk asks why, when our society has rejected euthanasia for over two thousand years, are we now considering legalizing it? Has euthanasia been promoted by deliberately confusing it with other ethically acceptable acts? What is the relation between pain relief treatments that could shorten life and euthanasia? How do journalistic values and media ethics affect the public's perception of euthanasia? What impact would the legalization of euthanasia have on concepts of human rights, human responsibilities, and human ethics? Can we imagine teaching young physicians how to put their patients to death? There are vast ethical, legal, and social differences between natural death and euthanasia. In *Death Talk*, Margaret Somerville argues that legalizing euthanasia would cause irreparable harm to society's value of respect for human life, which in secular societies is carried primarily by the institutions of law and medicine. Death has always been a central focus of the discussion that we engage in as individuals and as a society in searching for meaning in life. Moreover, we accommodate the inevitable reality of death into the living of our lives by discussing it, that is, through "death talk." Until the last twenty years this discussion occurred largely as part of the practice of organized religion. Today, in industrialized western societies, the euthanasia debate provides a context for such discussion and is part of the search for a new societal-cultural paradigm. Seeking to balance the "death talk" articulated in the euthanasia debate with "life talk," Somerville identifies the very serious harms for individuals and society that would result from accepting euthanasia. A sense of the unfolding euthanasia debate is captured through the inclusion of Somerville's responses to or commentaries on several other authors' contributions.

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Customer Reviews

Somerville begins her behemoth case against assisted dying with a quote from Jeff Kennett, the former Premier of Victoria, Australia. Not only is this a completely fringe statement that is a red herring, but it does nothing to support her case (which is supposed to be against VOLUNTARY deaths between consenting individuals). Kennett claimed that the elderly should be "escorted out of life" with a minimum of fuss. Aside from Kennett (and the anti-choice lobby) I could not find any evidence of anyone else advocating such an extreme position. But I suppose it would be too much for Margaret to recognize the extreme irony of her own position. Anti-choicers are the ones who want to mandate a "natural" death on everyone. In her first chapter, *The Song of Death*, Somerville acknowledges that at least some hard cases do warrant assisted dying, but legalising it will change our norms. In doing so, she is advocating a continuation of the status quo, in which a privileged and wealthy minority can choose when, where and how to die, but everyone else is caught and seized by a system that mandates a "natural" death upon them (usually while being medicated to the gills with analgesics and utterly torpid, unable to even use their mental faculties). I do give Margaret credit for understanding that the modern trend is for most people to die from chronic and/or painful illnesses (including MND, some cancers, full-blown AIDS, 'natural' deaths from locked-in syndrome, quadriplegia, metastatic cancer, etc). But her claim that "society has rejected killing for two thousand years" is patently false. Wars were frequent, those who didn't profess belief in the dominant religion of the time were killed either directly or through social ostracism.

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