



History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture (Medicine and Culture)

Georges Minois

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In this compact and illuminating history, Georges Minois examines how a culture's attitudes about suicide reflect its larger beliefs and values?attitudes toward life and death, duty and honor, pain and pleasure. Minois begins his survey with classical Greece and Rome, where suicide was acceptable?even heroic?under some circumstances. With the rise of Christianity, however, suicide was unequivocally condemned as *self-murder* and an insult to God. With the Renaissance and its renewed interest in classical culture, suicide reemerged as a philosophical issue. Minois finds examples of changing attitudes in key Renaissance texts by Bacon, Montaigne, Sidney, Donne, and Shakespeare.

By 1700, the term *suicide* had replaced *self-murder* and the subject began to interest the emerging scientific disciplines. Minois follows the ongoing evaluation of suicide through the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods, and he examines attitudes that emerge in nineteenth- and twentieth-century science, law, philosophy, and literature. Minois concludes with comments on the most recent turn in this long and complex history?the emotional debate over euthanasia, assisted suicide, and the right to die.

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