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Aging, Death, and Human Longevity: A Philosophical Inquiry

Christine Overall

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With the help of medicine and technology we are living longer than ever before. As human life spans have increased, the moral and political issues surrounding longevity have become more complex. Should we desire to live as long as possible? What are the social ramifications of longer lives? How does a longer life span change the way we think about the value of our lives and about death and dying? Christine Overall offers a clear and intelligent discussion of the philosophical and cultural issues surrounding this difficult and often emotionally charged issue. Her book is unique in its comprehensive presentation and evaluation of the arguments—both ancient and contemporary—for and against prolonging life. It also proposes a progressive social policy for responding to dramatic increases in life expectancy.

Writing from a feminist perspective, Overall highlights the ways that our biases about race, class, and gender have affected our views of elderly people and longevity, and her policy recommendations represent an effort to overcome these biases. She also covers the arguments surrounding the question of the "duty to die" and includes a provocative discussion of immortality. After judiciously weighing the benefits and the risks of prolonging human life, Overall persuasively concludes that the length of life does matter and that its duration can make a difference to the quality and value of our lives. Her book will be an essential guide as we consider our social responsibilities, the meaning of human life, and the prospects of living longer.

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