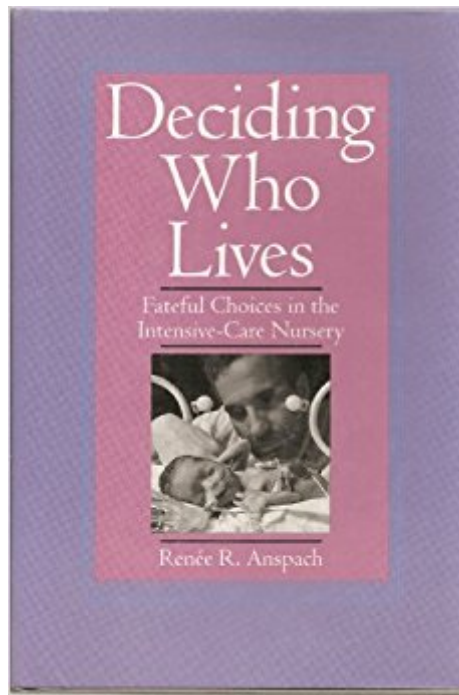




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Deciding Who Lives: Fateful Choices In The Intensive-Care Nursery



Synopsis

In this powerful and probing look at the reality of everyday choices in neonatal intensive care units, Renée Anspach explores the life-and-death dilemmas that have fueled national debate. Using case studies taken during sixteen months of extensive interviewing and observation, Anspach examines the roles of parents, doctors, nurses, and bioethicists in deciding whether critically ill newborns—be they premature, terminally ill, or severely malformed—should be saved by medical technology, or at least kept alive a little longer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Anspach's book provides a readable and, in my view, largely accurate account of how intensive-care professionals approach life-and-death decisions. We all have much to learn in reflecting on the process she details." -- Joel Frader, M.D., Journal of General Internal Medicine

"In making an argument for the social science paradigm in bioethics, Anspach's work is first-rate: coherent in its presentation, well organized and flawlessly written. . . . [Anspach] emerges as one of the finest theoretically ambitious field workers in medical sociology today." -- Daniel F. Chambliss, Contemporary Sociology

"This book is a clear challenge for further consideration of the nature of our moral life and of how we address the complex ethical questions that continue to perplex us. . . . [Anspach] has written a valuable and fascinating book that will be of interest to a wide audience." -- Mark J. Hanson, Society

Renée R. Anspach is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan.

Anspach shows how different groups of people (nurses, parents, surgeons, etc.) weigh life-and-death decisions. She puts the decisions in legal, institutional, political, economic and professional contexts. In other words, she describes the complexity and nuance of these decisions. Her prose is vivid and sensitive: you can imagine yourself on the scene and almost hear the anguish and frustration of some of the people she interviewed. Anspach brilliantly shows how the fates and troubles of a wide variety of individuals are shaped by larger social forces. This book is sociology at its best.

This is very informative, and thought-provoking, and fulfills the intent of its title. As a nurse and a parent, I realize the ambivalency felt by those who are involved with a baby needing intensive care. It will help those who have never been there understand just what a baby experiences in the Intensive-Care Nursery. Keep in mind though that this book was published in 1993, and its statistics are not up-to-date.

Since I was born premature, this was a hard book for me to read. It was about babies that were born premature or with serious health problems and how health professionals had to make decisions as to whether to withhold care or to treat them and have them survive, but with disabilities. There were cases when they had to decide if treating the babies was causing them more suffering than was needed and if it would be kinder to let them die. As someone with a disability, it was alarming and disturbing how the doctors viewed babies that would be disabled as being less valuable than others. There were parts of this book I found horrifying and other parts that I just found sad. I think I read it from a different perspective knowing that had the doctors treating me when I was born prematurely known the level of disability I would face as an adult, many of them would have advocated letting me die....and I would have missed out on my whole life. Maybe my inability to separate my own situation from that of the babies in the book skewed my perceptions....but I did find this a valuable book. I'm also coming at this from the point of view of a right to life....someone who feels babies should be given every chance at life whether they are deemed to have a good life or not. So I pretty much had a strong opinion going in, and this book did nothing to sway me.

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