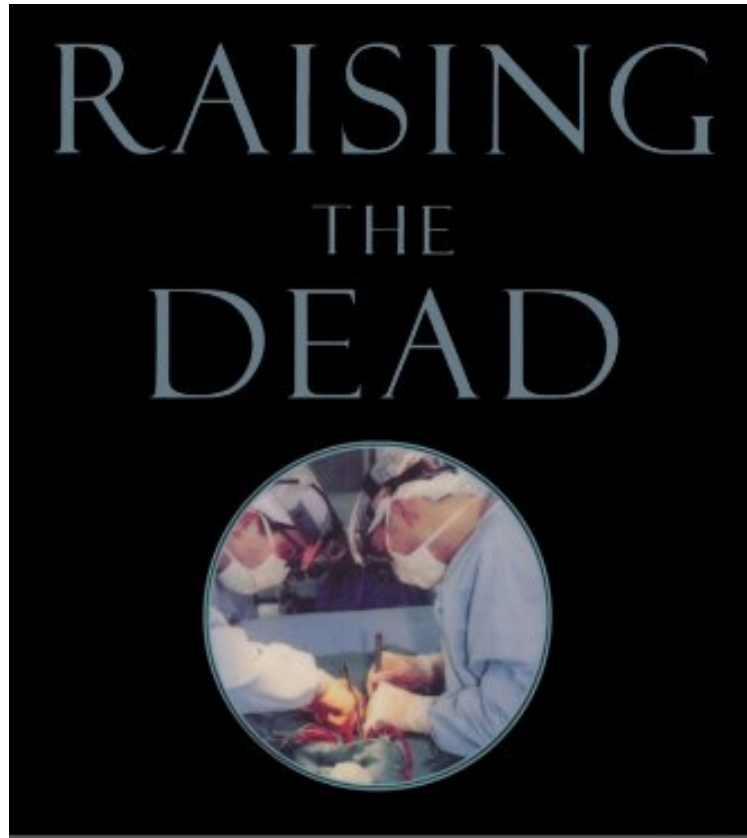


(Free pdf) Raising the Dead: Organ Transplants, Ethics, and Society

# Raising the Dead: Organ Transplants, Ethics, and Society

*Ronald Munson*

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ORGAN TRANSPLANTS, ETHICS,  
AND SOCIETY

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**Ronald Munson : Raising the Dead: Organ Transplants, Ethics, and Society** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Raising the Dead: Organ Transplants, Ethics, and Society:

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A sensitive treatment of a delicate topic By Paul There is no question to my mind that an organ or tissue transplant can be a life-giving and life-changing miracle for a recipient. I am one who should know this; after all, since 1990 I have had the benefit of two cadaveric kidney transplants. I know

from experience the transforming power that a transplant can have on one's thinking and feeling as much as on one's health. Among other things, a transplant gives its recipient an appreciation for sacrificial generosity, and perhaps even some kind of vicarious atonement. An organ transplant is a resurrection of sorts, for both donor and recipient. I have come to believe that part of the donor's mind and body lives on in the reinvigorated bodies and souls of recipients. One can hardly avoid thinking of this in terms of religious analogies, though this book does not take the religious dimension any further than its title and a few references to the raising of Lazarus. It is sobering, to say the least, to think of one's transplant as a gift of life from the dead. It is sobering to think of a donor family's grief, out of which that gift of life has come. One must also remember the thousands who die every year while waiting for a transplant of some kind, and those whose country's healthcare system does not provide universal free access to transplant assessments and procedures. One thinks of thousands of medically suitable potential donors who miss the opportunity to donate their organs, whether out of ignorance or from a hardhearted selfishness. Sadly, too, there are thousands of families who override the consent of their loved one, or are ignorant of it, and who bury their treasure in the ground--a treasure that could save the lives of six or more people. But above all else there is great joy at the extraordinary grace that organ donation represents, and countless lives changed for ever by these healing miracles. Surely "no medical breakthrough is more spectacular, more hope-giving, or more fraught with ethical questions than organ transplantation." *Raising the Dead* ranks with *The Nicholas Effect* among the greatest literature written on the subject of organ transplantation in recent years. Written by a renowned medical ethicist with several philosophical volumes and three novels to his credit, this book takes a heart-rending and dramatic case-study approach, in an effort to "remind us not to forget the personal and emotional dimension underlying the often arid discussions of transplant ethics" (p.24). Author Ronald Munson is a brilliant storyteller who has a way of simplifying complex issues and making them understandable to the lay reader. The ethical discussions and policy proposals one finds when reading this book make it required reading for anyone involved in the transplant process, whether recipients, teams of physicians and surgeons, or health policymakers. Where the book gets somewhat more controversial is in its treatment of anencephalic infants, as well as its advocacy of organ sales (under exceptional circumstances), xenotransplantation and stem-cell regenerative therapy. Being so recently published, the book is right up-to-date with the latest frontiers of research, and considers the ethical implications of them all. It is furnished with a full apparatus of references for those who want to follow up with a study of the relevant source materials. The author has even included his email address for those who want to provide direct feedback. I believe this book would make an excellent candidate for a no-holds-barred television documentary series. If such a documentary series were to be produced for a general audience, I am sure it would bring the issues surrounding organ transplantation and regenerative therapies the spotlight they surely deserve.

Perhaps no medical breakthrough in the twentieth century is more spectacular, more hope-giving, or more fraught with ethical questions than organ transplantation. Each year some 25,000 Americans are pulled back from the brink of death by receiving vital new organs. Another 5,000 die while waiting for them. And what distinguishes these two groups has become the source of one of our thorniest ethical questions. In *Raising the Dead*, Ronald Munson offers a vivid, often wrenchingly dramatic account of how transplants are performed, how we decide who receives them, and how we engage the entire range of tough issues that arise because of them. Each chapter begins with a detailed account of a specific case--Mickey Mantle's controversial liver transplant, for example--followed by careful analysis of its surrounding ethical questions (the charges that Mantle received special treatment because he was a celebrity, the larger problems involving how organs are allocated, and whether alcoholics should have an equal claim on donor livers). In approaching transplant ethics through specific cases, Munson reminds us of the complex personal and emotional dimension that underlies such issues. The book also ranges beyond our present capabilities to explore the future possibilities in xenotransplantation (transplanting animal organs into humans) and stem cell technology that would allow doctors to grow new organs from the patient's own cells. Based on extensive scientific research, but written with a novelist's eye for the human condition, *Raising the Dead* shows readers the reality of organ transplantation now, the possibility of what it may become, and how we might respond to the ethical challenges it forces us to confront.

From *Library Journal* Novelist and professor Munson (philosophy of science and medicine, Univ. of Missouri, St. Louis) here provides a wonderful introduction to a variety of ethical issues surrounding organ transplantation. With a minimum of technical terminology, he discusses the definition of death, methods for obtaining organs, recipient selection, xenotransplantation, and stem cell research. Using case studies, both real and fictitious, he also offers a current look at these difficult issues. The chapters on xenotransplants and stem cell research are particularly interesting for their jargon-free description of those processes and their potential. Although Munson is not hesitant to include opinions and recommendations, it is always clear when the opinions expressed are his own. Arthur Caplan's *The Ethics of Organ Transplants* (LJ 3/15/99) discusses many of the same issues, but it is slightly dated and somewhat more philosophical. Munson's extremely readable and affordable contribution is highly recommended for public library and undergraduate collections. Tina Neville, Univ. of South Florida Lib., St. Petersburg Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Although it has little to do with genuinely raising the dead, Munson's book

should rouse productive discussion of some controversial aspects of transplant medicine. Broadly experienced in academic, governmental, and commercial medical ethics programs, Munson uses case histories to set ethical questions in practical contexts, and he doesn't refrain from taking a stand. Early on he takes up the liver transplant for alcoholic Yankee great Mickey Mantle, which stirred a storm of criticism; he examines the major charges that Mantle got special treatment and shows that none were legitimate. That is typical of Munson's evenhanded approach. He makes a compelling case for taking organs from anencephalic infants, and he cogently argues that organs can, under some circumstances, be ethically purchased. He devotes two chapters to xenotransplants (from animal to human), discusses their ethical and scientific pros and cons, and suggests practical policies for their control. He expatiates at some length about how death is determined, and most controversially, perhaps, argues the value of stem-cell research. Lucid and compelling writing on a much-debated topic. William Beatty Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved "A wonderful introduction to a variety of ethical issues surrounding organ transplantation."--Library Journal "Munson provides a useful review of where we've been and what lies ahead.... He does a service in raising the issues and pointing to the needs of an aging society in which health care is anything but equitable."--Kirkus s