

The Limits of Medicine

What are the final limits of medicine? What should we not try to cure medically, even if we have the necessary financial resources and technology?

This book philosophically addresses these questions by examining two mirror-image debates in tandem. Members of certain groups, who are deemed by traditional standards to have a medical condition, such as deafness, obesity, or anorexia, have begun arguing that they have created their own cultures and ways of life. Curing their conditions, they claim, would be a form of genocide. At the same time, members of other groups are seeking medical cures for what would conventionally be deemed “cultural conditions.” Mild neurotics who take antidepressants to elevate their mood, runners who use steroids, or men and women seeking cosmetic surgery are pursuing medical treatment for problems that arguably might better be solved culturally, by changing norms, pressures, or expectations in the broader culture.

Each of these two debates endeavors to locate medicine’s final frontier and to articulate what it is that we should not treat medically even if we could. This volume analyzes what these two contemporary debates have to say to each other and thus offers a new way of determining medicine’s final limits.

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*for my parents,
Lois and Marvin Stark*

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