# RETHINKING LIFE & DEATH

The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics

# PETER SINGER



# CONTENTS

## PROLOGUE page 1

### PART I: Doubtful Endings page 7

#### 1. BIRTH AFTER DEATH

- An American story 9 A German story 12
- Our choice 16

#### 2. HOW DEATH WAS REDEFINED

- Pink, supple...and dead 20 'The burden is great': The Harvard committee on the determination of death 22
- A revolution without opposition 28 Brain death: Who believes it? 32 An unstable compromise 35

#### 3. DR SHANN'S DILEMMA

- Two babies 38 Breathing but dead? 42
- The case for a higher brain definition of death 46
- Against brain death 50 A way forward? 54

#### 4. TONY BLAND AND THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

- Fine phrases 57 Tony Bland's tragedy 57
- Deciding on the basis of quality of life 65 Lawfully intending to end innocent human life 68 Discarding a fig leaf 70 Beyond the sanctity of human life 73
- Acts and omissions 75

# PART II: Crumbling at the Edges page 81

#### 5. UNCERTAIN BEGINNINGS

- Peggy Stinson's puzzle 83 The unavoidable issue 85
- The era of legal abortion 90 New reproductive technology and the abortion debate 93
- Unlocking the abortion deadlock 100

#### 6. MAKING QUALITY OF LIFE JUDGMENTS

• How the Reagan administration chose a quality of life ethic 106 • Treating to die 115 • Selective non-treatment and infanticide 128

#### 7. ASKING FOR DEATH

• The problem 132 • The solution? 141 • How voluntary euthanasia became possible in the Netherlands 143 • The coming struggle for the right to die 147 • Sliding down a slippery slope? 150 • Breaking the commandment 157

#### 8. BEYOND THE DISCONTINUOUS MIND

- An unusual institution 159
  Whose organs may we take? 163
  In God's image and at the centre of the universe 165
  The western tradition under attack 169
- Who is Homo? 172 Who is a person? 180

PART III: Towards a Coherent Approach page 185

#### 9. IN PLACE OF THE OLD ETHIC

• The structure of ethical revolutions 187 • Rewriting the commandments 189 • Some answers 206 • The basis of the new approach to life and death 219

**NOTES 223** 

**BIBLIOGRAPHY 238** 

**INDEX 247**