

RATIONAL SUICIDE, IRRATIONAL LAWS

Examining Current Approaches to Suicide in Policy and Law

Susan Stefan

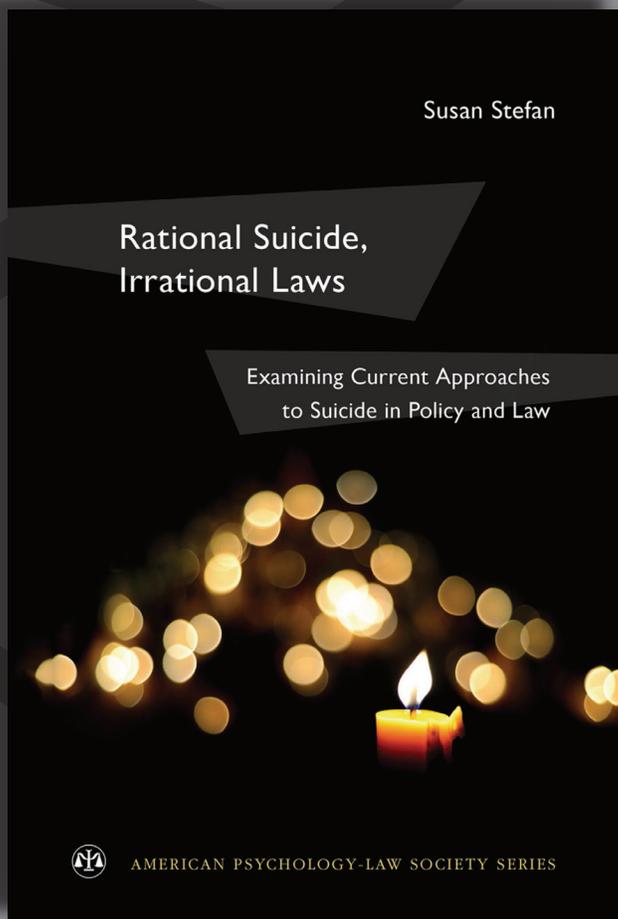
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SUSAN STEFAN is the author of four books on law and policy relating to people with psychiatric disabilities and has worked nationally and internationally as a consultant on the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities. She litigated class actions and systems reform cases for the Mental Health Law Project (now the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law) and the Center for Public Representation, served as an expert witness in federal litigation, and was a Professor of Law at the University of Miami School of Law.

Policy discussions and case law about suicide in the United States have proceeded along two separate and distinct tracks for the past two decades: laws aimed at preventing suicide and laws aimed at facilitating it. These laws co-exist because they are based on two radically disparate conceptions of the would-be suicide.

Rational Suicide, Irrational Laws is the first book to bring together these concepts to discuss assisted suicide in the context of people with psychiatric disabilities and examine the failure of suicide prevention policy. Based on surveys and interviews of over 300 suicide attempt survivors, doctors, lawyers, and mental health professionals, it painstakingly exposes the irrationality of current policies and laws about suicide, including assisted suicide. Susan Stefan suggests specific reforms, including increased protection of mental health professionals from liability, increased protection of suicidal people from coercive interventions, reframing medical involvement in assisted suicide, encouraging universities to stop forcing suicidal students to leave, and focusing on approaches to suicidal people that have helped them rather than assuming suicidality is always a symptom of an underlying mental illness. Stefan provides a comparison of US policies with those of countries in Europe, Asia, and Central America and covers the 2015 legalization of assisted suicide in Canada. The book includes a model statute, seven in-depth studies of people whose cases presented profound ethical, legal, and policy dilemmas, and over a thousand cases interpreting rights and responsibilities relating to suicide, especially in the area of psychiatric malpractice.

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