



Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It

By Jennifer Michael Hecht

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Worldwide, more people die by suicide than by murder, and many more are left behind to grieve. Despite distressing statistics that show suicide rates rising, the subject, long a taboo, is infrequently talked about. In this sweeping intellectual and cultural history, poet and historian Jennifer Michael Hecht channels her grief for two friends lost to suicide into a search for history's most persuasive arguments against the irretrievable act, arguments she hopes to bring back into public consciousness.

From the Stoics and the Bible to Dante, Shakespeare, Wittgenstein, and such twentieth-century writers as John Berryman, Hecht recasts the narrative of our "secular age" in new terms. She shows how religious prohibitions against self-killing were replaced by the Enlightenment's insistence on the rights of the individual, even when those rights had troubling applications. This transition, she movingly argues, resulted in a profound cultural and moral loss: the loss of shared, secular, logical arguments against suicide. By examining how people in other times have found powerful reasons to stay alive when suicide seems a tempting choice, she makes a persuasive intellectual and moral case against suicide.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Eloquent and affecting.”—David Brooks, *New York Times*
(David Brooks *New York Times*)

“Hecht is an intellectual historian and a poet, and her writing reflects both disciplines: The book is rigorous and deeply rewarding, both accessible and challenging. . . . She finds common threads: sympathy for life’s difficulty, yet a plea to stay, for the sake of one’s community and even for one’s future self.”—Kate Tuttle, *Boston Globe*
(Kate Tuttle *Boston Globe*)

“While not insensitive to people who use suicide as a way to end the suffering of terminal illness, Hecht brands suicide an immoral act that robs society — and the self-killer — of a life that is certainly more valuable than what it may seem in that dark moment. It solves nothing, complicates everything. . . . Her argument is that it — whatever dark truth that pronoun signifies — almost always gets better.”—*Newsweek*
(*Newsweek*)

“A history not only of suicide, but how we think about suicide. . . . Hecht proposes her own argument against suicide in the secular, modern world, presenting a humanist call for life. . . . Her final plea to the suicidal gives the book its title: she urges them to simply ‘stay.’ ”—Thomas Flynn, *The Daily Beast*
(*The Daily Beast*)

“*Stay* is more than a must-read — it’s a cultural necessity.”—Maria Popova, *Brain Pickings*
(Maria Popova *Brain Pickings*)

“The title of this book is an imperative against the departure that is suicide, and its contents provide a learned, illuminating look at the history of what is perhaps the darkest secret in all of human behavior.”—Billy Collins
(Billy Collins)

“Jennifer Michael Hecht addresses the problem of suicidal nihilism with intellectual sophistication and poetic subtlety. An impassioned defense of life and rejection of self-slaughter (as Hamlet termed it), *Stay* is an important book.”—David Lehman, Editor, *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*
(David Lehman)

“The perfect vehicle for an informed conversation about the virtues and vices of suicide, this book will literally save lives.”—Stephen Prothero, author of *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*
(Stephen Prothero)

“In this moving and meaningful book, mythology, poetry, history, and personal reflection all combine to persuade us to stay right here, among the living.”—Alan Wolfe, author of *Political Evil*
(Alan Wolfe)

"This defiantly positive note — this striving for hope — is the most uplifting part of *Stay*. . . . Current statistics clearly show that few of Hecht's potential readers will have lives completely untouched by suicide; all of those potential readers will find a great deal to interest them in these pages."—Steve Donoghue, *Open Letters Monthly*
(*Open Letters Monthly*)

"In her impassioned, compelling book *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, Jennifer Michael Hecht makes the sustained argument she wishes she could have made to two friends who committed suicide. . . . While Hecht's position is secular, religious people have nothing to fear from her, and would likely make common cause with her on many points. Her heartfelt book is the scholarly and literary equivalent of Kate Bush's vocals in a familiar Peter Gabriel song, singing to her despairing partner, 'Don't give up.' "—Jim Higgins, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*
(Jim Higgins *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

"In her eloquent and affecting book *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, Jennifer Michael Hecht presents two big counterideas that she hopes people contemplating potential suicides will keep in their heads. Her first is that, 'Suicide is delayed homicide.' Suicides happen in clusters, with one person's suicide influencing the other's. . . . Her second argument is that you owe it to your future self to live."—David Brooks, *New York Times*
(David Brooks *New York Times*)

"The author of the best-selling *Doubt* offers a history of suicide and of arguments against it. . . . Even Camus, who found the search for meaning as absurd as pushing the same boulder up a cliff every day, urged his readers to 'imagine Sisyphus happy,' and to live."—*New Yorker*
(*New Yorker*)

"One cannot but be impressed by Hecht's breadth of knowledge, mostly expressed with a light touch, and there are many fascinating details."
—Oliver James, *The Independent*
(Oliver James *The Independent* 2014-01-11)

"Hecht's intentions are patently generous and benign. She wants to save young lives that seem needlessly lost. . . . On these counts her book merits praise."—John Carey, *The Sunday Times* (John Carey *The Sunday Times* 2014-01-19)

"When I review a book I underline special passages, stick post-it notes and write comments in the margin. By that token this one has inspired me more than anything I've read in a very long time. Full of life and spirit and hope, and deeply moving, it communicates a generous love of suffering, flawed humanity. I cannot praise it highly enough."—Bel Mooney, *Daily Mail* (Bel Mooney *Daily Mail* 2014-01-24)

"Hecht's aim is to show that as suicide was secularised, it became too easy – a mere medical and therefore solipsistic condition which took no account of humans as members of a larger (caring) community. She wants to revitalise the idea that suicide is wrong, harms others and 'damages humanity'. No man or woman, even today, is an island."—Lisa Appignanesi, *The Observer* (Lisa Appignanesi *The Observer* 2014-01-26)

"That it's not all a drag and you might as well get on with life's vagaries is the strikingly simple and convincing argument of Jennifer Michael Hecht's *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*. . . . While not insensitive to people who use suicide as a way to end the suffering of terminal illness, Hecht brands suicide an immoral act that robs society — and the self-killer — of a life that is certainly more

valuable than what it may seem in that dark moment. It solves nothing, complicates everything. . . . Her argument is that it — whatever dark truth that pronoun signifies — almost always gets better.”—*Newsweek* (*Newsweek*)

“Hecht is an intellectual historian and a poet, and her writing reflects both disciplines: The book is rigorous and deeply rewarding, both accessible and challenging. . . . She finds common threads: sympathy for life’s difficulty, yet a plea to stay, for the sake of one’s community and even for one’s future self. ‘Bear witness to the night side of being human and the bravery it entails,’ she urges, ‘and wait for the sun.’ ”—Kate Tuttle, *Boston Globe* (Kate Tuttle *Boston Globe*)

“Suicide as a concept has been praised, defended, and vilified in various contexts throughout history as poet and scholar Hecht (*Doubt: A History*) painstakingly illustrates in this nuanced and unsettling work, whose title acts as a rallying refrain throughout. . . . The book’s conclusions are hopeful. Gratitude is owed to those who reject suicide, according to Hecht, not only by the community but also by one’s ‘future self’ who may be days, months, or years away. Like death, life can inspire, because one’s ‘ideas matter.’ ”—Publishers Weekly (*Publishers Weekly*)

“[Hecht] is a first-rate historian of ideas. . . . This gift of a book is as much about the issue of pain in life as it is about not ending your life because of the pain. Following in both a religious and a secular tradition, Hecht submits that suffering is soul-making. . . . This tender and well-reasoned book is sure to save lives.”—Gordon Marino, *The Christian Century* (Gordon Marino *The Christian Century*)

“If we are serious about helping people overcome the dark nights of their souls, we must insist with Chesterton that suicide is a moral, not just a clinical, problem. An important new book does just that. *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It* by the poet and philosopher Jennifer Michael Hecht challenges our culture’s acceptance of suicides and reinvigorates the moral arguments against it. At a time when few philosophers or intellectuals are offering strong, compelling, secular arguments against suicide, Hecht’s book steps in as a reminder that our liberal stance toward suicide is relatively new, in fact quite radical, and should be unequivocally challenged. . . . The book fills a hole in the cultural conversation. . . . Hecht writes, ‘The arguments against suicide that I intend to revivify in public consciousness assert that suicide is wrong, that it harms the community, that it damages humanity, that it unfairly preempts your future self.’ ”—Emily Esfahani Smith, *New Criterion* (Emily Esfahani Smith *New Criterion*)

“A humanist case for embracing life, as armor against cynicism. . . . *Stay* is compassionate, clear, rich, and even funny.”—Temma Ehrenfeld, *The Humanist Magazine* (Temma Ehrenfeld *The Humanist Magazine*)

‘*Stay* is passionate, sincere, well-researched, well written and commendably honest.’—Nick Spencer, *The Tablet*

(Nick Spencer *The Tablet* 2014-06-14)

About the Author

Jennifer Michael Hecht is a historian of science and culture and a poet. She has written seven books, including the best-selling *Doubt: A History*, the story of unbelief across the world. Hecht teaches at The New

School and lives in Brooklyn.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lisa Knight:

Here thing why that Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It are different and trusted to be yours. First of all looking at a book is good nonetheless it depends in the content of the usb ports which is the content is as delightful as food or not. Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It giving you information deeper including different ways, you can find any book out there but there is no e-book that similar with Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It. It gives you thrill examining journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing that will happened in the world which is possibly can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in park, café, or even in your approach home by train. For anyone who is having difficulties in bringing the published book maybe the form of Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It in e-book can be your option.

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The book untitled Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It is the book that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the e-book content that will be shown to you. The language that writer use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article author was did a lot of analysis when write the book, therefore the information that they share for your requirements is absolutely accurate. You also can get the e-book of Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It from the publisher to make you far more enjoy free time.

Francisco London:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a e-book. The book Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It it is quite good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book offers high quality.

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