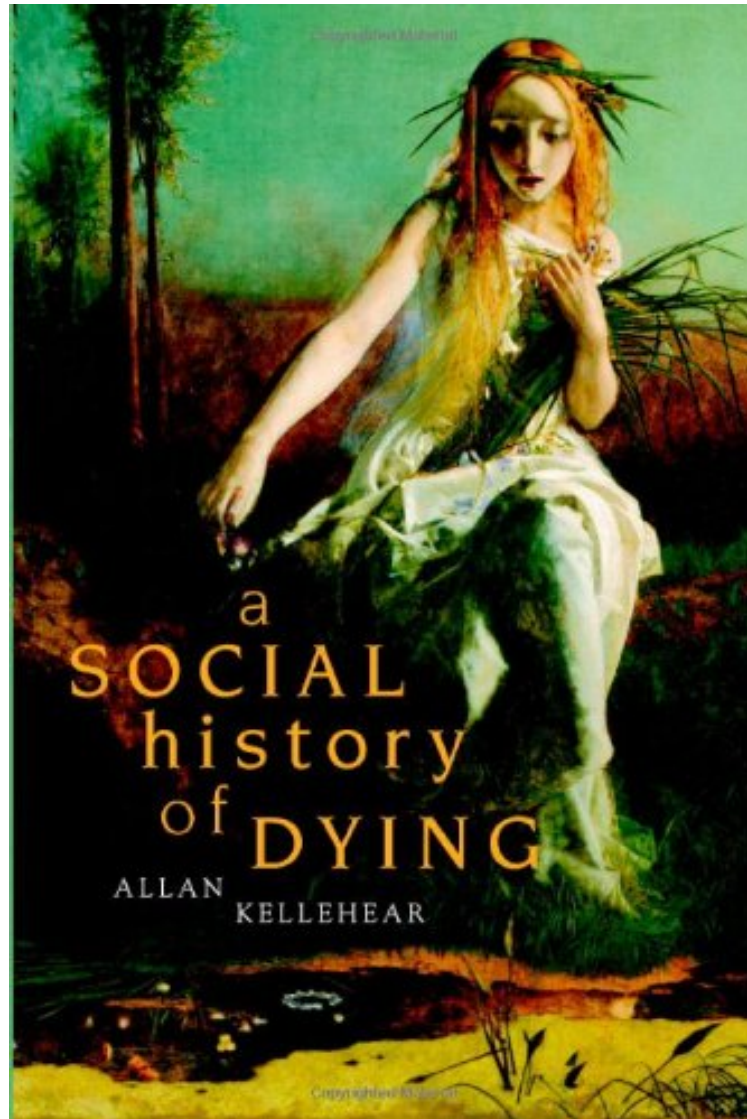


[FREE] A Social History of Dying

A Social History of Dying

Allan Kellehear

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Allan Kellehear : A Social History of Dying before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Social History of Dying:

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Scholarly look at dyingBy Capt BobThis is not your usual book. It is a scholarly styled form of writing covering the history of how we humans have dealt with this fact of our existence for the last few thousand years. While much of it is interesting, the writing style makes it a "thick" read.33 of 33 people found the following review helpful. The process of dying -a historical general frameworkBy Ceacute;sar Gonzaacute;lez RoucoAlthough the subject may be one about which we try not to think too much or often, I felt attracted by this book because it offers a general framework for understanding how we human beings have faced death

(or, better to say, "dying" as a social process, i.e., "as a shared set of overt social exchanges between dying individuals and those who care for them") so I decided it to give it a chance, in despite of not finding previous comments on it. Basically, there have been four ages in the social history of dying: 1) Otherworld journey. During the Stone Age, people usually died suddenly, so it was their community which understood death as an otherworld journey: a process with an imagined spirit moving towards tests and trials in the invisible otherworld. In that context, the brunt of the responsibility for inheritance was shouldered by community members, which designed and offered gifts to the dying person for their use in their future challenges. 2) Good Death. During the Pastoral Age (with the arrival of sedentism), awareness of approaching death is the responsibility of the dying person. In such settler societies the onus of inheritance falls to the dying person as part of fulfilling his final this-world social obligations, and deathbed exchanges and gifts were common. 3) Managed Death. With the rise and spread of cities, in the so-called "managed death", awareness of approaching death is usually purchased (financially and socially) by others, usually the medical profession. In cities, a well-managed dying would see at least some provisions made well in advance of the terminal phase of dying, particularly financial and property provisions of the middle and upper classes. Religious, medical and personal preparations for death might be made later at the death bed. 4) Shameful Death. Dying in the Cosmopolitan period is becoming increasingly tragic and antisocial. Among the lone elderly, those in nursing homes, and in other contexts of world poverty, we are witnessing the steady growth of shameful forms of death. In this period, when the prospect of death is unclear to most -dying people or their carers- dying people lose their roles as dying people and are placed in "holding" locations where health care rather than dying care is the priority. Dying as a professional concern disappears, replaced by round-the-clock nursing care, respite care or acute or even emergency management. Preparations for death are being severed from the process of dying and are now associated with the less urgent and more general recognition of mortality across the lifespan. All that (and much more that I do not mention in this summary) is developed in 255 pages (plus bibliography), the book being divided in the following parts and chapters: Introduction// Part I: The Stone Age. 1.- The dawn of Mortal Awareness. 2.- Otherworld journeys: death as Dying. 3.- The first challenge: anticipating death.// Part II: The Pastoral Age. 4.- The emergence of sedentism. 5.- The birth of good death. 6.- The second challenge: preparing for death.// Part III: The age of the city. 7.- The rise and spread of cities. 8.- The birth of the managed death. 9.- The third challenge: taming death.// Part IV. The cosmopolitan age. 10.- The exponential rise of modernity. 11.- The birth of the shameful death. 12.- The final challenge: timing death// Conclusion. The book is no very engaging, but it is not dry either. It can be savoured by the professional historian and by the educated layperson too. Therefore, my rating is between 5 (content) and 3 (pleasure, sometimes falling to 2, sometimes raising to 4). Other book that I would recommend reading, more or less related to the matter, would be "How we die" by S.B. Nuland, "The loneliness of Dying" by Norbert Elias and chapter 11th of "The Waning of the Middle Ages" by Johan Huizinga. Additionally, as a complement to "A Social History of Dying", I would also suggest reading the following works, whose scope is as amazingly global as Kellehear's: 1. Agrarian cultures: "Pre-industrial societies" by Patricia Crone; 2. Economy: "The world economy. A millennial perspective" (2001) plus "The world economy: Historical Statistics" (2003) by Angus Maddison (a combined edition of these two volumes is to appear on December 2007); 3. Government: "The History of Government" by S.E. Finer; 4. Ideas: "Ideas, a History from Fire to Freud", by Peter Watson; 5. Religion: "The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach" by Moojan Momen; and 6. War: "War in Human Civilization" by Azar Gat.

Our experiences of dying have been shaped by ancient ideas about death and social responsibility at the end of life. From Stone Age ideas about dying as otherworld journey to the contemporary Cosmopolitan Age of dying in nursing homes, Allan Kellehear takes the reader on a 2 million year journey of discovery that covers the major challenges we will all eventually face: anticipating, preparing, taming and timing for our eventual deaths. This book, first published in 2007, is a major review of the human and clinical sciences literature about human dying conduct. The historical approach of this book places our recent images of cancer dying and medical care in broader historical, epidemiological and global context. Professor Kellehear argues that we are witnessing a rise in shameful forms of dying. It is not cancer, heart disease or medical science that presents modern dying conduct with its greatest moral tests, but rather poverty, ageing and social exclusion.

'This is no ordinary book. The next generation of death scholars will have to come to terms with it. And it is superb in showing how sociology can illuminate the findings of archaeology and history.' The Times Higher Education Supplement 'A comprehensive text which will be of interest to anyone working in the field of death and dying or who is interested in its history.' Network About the Author Allan Kellehear is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Bath, UK.