



# A Brief History of Death

*W. M. Spellman*

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## **A Brief History of Death** W. M. Spellman

A Brief History of Death offers a topical survey of views concerning death and its aftermath in the Western tradition, from prehistory to the present. It explores how humans understand and come to terms with the fact of mortality and looks at the physical and social aspects of death, how dying people are treated, how the dying conduct themselves in the knowledge of their approaching demise and how survivors choose to remember the dead.

W. M. Spellman examines the work of archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists to give insight into prehistoric perspectives on death through the interpretation of physical remains. He spotlights the great philosophical and scientific traditions of the West, or what can be termed the rationalist approach to end-of-life issues. The book also examines the major religious traditions that emerged during the so-called 'Axial Age' of the ancient world, focusing particularly on the centuries-long evolution of the Western Christian tradition. Three approaches to the meaning of death – negation of life, continuity in another form and agnosticism – are examined in both religious and secular-scientific contexts.

A Brief History of Death considers how we have died throughout history, both in the causes of death and in our varying attitudes to actions that lead to the deaths of fellow humans. The book provides a deeper context for contemporary debates over end-of-life issues, especially the emerging tension between longevity and quality of life.

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