

Bookreport FE546
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Jeffrey A. Watson "The Courage to Care"

Jeffrey A. Watson's concern is how we care for the aging, the dying, and the grieving. How does a person process these events? Our modern society rejects death. Death is the ultimate enemy and the existence of it is denied as much as possible. The view is that our modern science should be able to cope with it but it still does not. The experience of death is taken away from everyday life. Instead the dying are handled by specialists. The family and friends barely have access.

Watson classifies persons according to how they approach death:

The *Death-Denying* person is highly anxious about death and tries to avoid any dangerous situation. Conversations are ended or the topic is changed when death comes up in a meeting. These people cannot cope with death and instead seek to get rid of the fear of death by the comfort of the world.

Death-Defying persons are just the opposite. They do not seem to have any anxiety of death. It can never happen to them. They feel in absolute control of their life and their destiny. This can lead to very risky behavior.

The way to cope with death is being a *Death-Accepting* person. These people accept that they will die one day, but still enjoy and love life. They are living in a balance of risk and being cautious.

Suicide and the factors in the life of the victims contributing to committing suicide are explained because the author's best friend died through suicide. External sociological factors such as religious, domestic and political alienation play an important role as also psychiatric factors like inability to perceive reality (psychosis), obsessive-compulsive disorders, habitual maladaptive behavior (for example alcoholism) and profound sadness or depression. Watson sees them as often combined in one who commits suicide and analyses the death of his friend in these terms. It is important to take people expressing thoughts of suicide earnest and help them through this. The longer a person with suicidal thoughts can be kept away from committing suicide the less the chance that he will ultimately commit suicide. Some recommend hospitalization in acute cases until the peak of the danger dies off.

Then Watson deals with the process of aging. Again this seems to be a taboo in our society. People do not want to be confronted with this.

Some old myths about aging are tackled like the - often postulated - inability to continue learning or adapting. Old people can still learn but learn in a different way than younger people. Old age is often also a preparation for the life thereafter. People have much more interest in religion and have more time to contemplate. Often age brings with it restrictions on life. Slowly the body deteriorates and one has to learn to cope with this.

It is important for Watson that children are not left ignorant of death. Big misunderstandings might result when a child feels rejected because it feels that the beloved person has left the child on his own free will.