

# DEATH AND DYING: COMPARATIVE VIEWS

## Fall 2019

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**Lecture:** Online Course

**Office:** Online  
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## **Course Description**

A comparative survey of the diversity of social and ritual practices, religious beliefs, and emotional responses surrounding death in a variety of non-Western cultural contexts.

## **Course Objectives**

- To provide students with an introductory survey of some of the cultural and religious considerations of death, dying and bereavement.
- To ensure that learners engage in analytical, reflective and critical thought regarding their own and others' attitudes toward death, dying and bereavement.
- To explore death related themes in various medias including movies, documentaries, news, music, art and/or the Internet.
- To demonstrate an understanding of the complexities involved in planning funeral experiences and death rituals.

## **Required Materials and Texts**

- Cacciato, J., & DeFrain, J. D. (Eds.). (2015). *The world of bereavement: Cultural perspectives on death in families*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. [e-book link Mills](#)
- Coward, H. & Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). (2012). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. [e-book link Mills](#)
- Robben, A. C. G. M. (Ed.). (2017). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. [e-book link Mills](#)
- Other online readings available on Avenue to Learn.
- Doughty, C. (2018). *From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the good death*. (Reprint ed.). New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (Available for purchase at Conestoga Bookstore or elsewhere).

## **Class Format**

This course is delivered online.

## **Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. Participation – 25%, due weekly
2. Online Quizzes – 20%, due biweekly
3. Book Report – 20%, due October 7, 11:59 PM
4. Essay—35%, due December 2, 11:59 PM

## **Course Evaluation – Details**

### **Participation (25%), due weekly**

Participation is critical for maximizing learning experiences in any distance education course. In this course students are required to be part of an online community of learners who collectively interact through discussion. Your grade will not only be based on the quality of your posting(s) but also your response(s) to your peers. Post as early as possible in the week so that your peers will have time to respond to your contributions. Be respectful of other people's ideas, opinions and beliefs. It is fine to disagree but please respect others' rights to think and believe differently. Unless otherwise specified, grades will be assessed according to a rubric, which you will find under course contents on Avenue to Learn. Please note that participation will also include a cemetery assignment that you will be required to complete. Your cemetery visit will be at a location of your choice.

### **Online Quizzes (20%), due biweekly**

There will be 6 quizzes in total. These are straightforward multiple-choice quizzes based on lecture material, audiovisual materials and the required readings. Each quiz will contain approximately 20 questions based on the weekly modules. You will be given 25 minutes to complete the quiz. I strongly suggest that you carefully review through all the material *before* challenging the quizzes.

### **Book Report (20%), due October 7, 11:59 PM**

For this assignment, you will be reading *From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the good death* by Caitlin Doughty. This will be a modified written assignment; in that you do not need to compose the report in a formal way. Instead, you will need to answer questions in a way that indicates you have read the book and have given it some thought. Please see the "Template for Book Report" for further instructions and expectations on Avenue to Learn.

### **Essay (35%), due December 2, 11:59 PM**

This formal essay will bring together course contents and analytical skills with your own experience of life and death. Drawing on academic resources and incorporating aspects of selected cultural/religious traditions that we have studied in this course, write a detailed account of how your funeral *could* be observed. You may also choose to incorporate the Jewish, Christian or Muslim chapters from *Religious understandings of a good death* or other unassigned chapters from either *Death, mourning and burial* or *The world of bereavement* as academic resources. Begin your essay with a short scenario describing the cause or type of death and initial reactions by others. You should also consider your own understanding of a "good death" in this essay. Is your death perceived of as "good" or "bad" by both yourself and others? In your essay, you will address the following questions: How is your body treated and "disposed of?" Why and where? Is there a service? Who officiates? What rituals are performed? How, why and by whom? What kinds of views of the afterlife will be presumed? How are the mourners

to react? What memorial rites or forms of remembrance will there be? Grading will not be based on individual choices, but rather on the analysis of your choices. You should use citations to course materials and other sources. Or, alternatively you could use footnotes/endnotes to make additional academic observations. I do not want to see just an imaginative narrative account—you must incorporate academic sources. Be creative! The essay should be approximately 2000 words in length. Please submit your essay to the appropriate drop box on Avenue to Learn.

## **Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

### **Module 1 (September 3-9)**

#### **The Cross-Cultural Study of Death**

Readings:

- Bordere, T.C. (2009). Culturally conscious thanatology. *The Forum* 35(2), p. 1, 3-4.
- Gire, J. (2014). How death imitates life: Cultural influences on conceptions of death and dying. *Online readings in psychology and culture*, 6(2).
- Robben, A. C. G. M. (2017). Death and anthropology: An introduction. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 1-16). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Notes: Participation due by September 9, 11:59 PM

### **Module 2 (September 10-16)**

#### **Concepts of Death**

Readings:

- Hertz, R. (2017). A contribution to the study of the collective presentation of death. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 19-33). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lifton, R. J. & Olson, E. (2017). Symbolic immortality. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 44-51). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Malinowski, B. (2017). Magic, science and religion. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 79-82). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (2017). Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 83-89). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Notes: Participation and Quiz 1 due by September 16, 11:59 PM

## Module 3 (September 17-23)

### Mortuary Rituals

Readings:

- van Gennep, A. (2017). The rites of passage. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 34-43). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Conklin, B. A. (2017). Hunting the ancestors: Death and alliance in Wari' cannibalism. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 211-216). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Haram, L. (2017). 'We are tired of mourning!' The economy of death and bereavement in a time of AIDS. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 250-261). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley- Blackwell.

Notes: Participation due by September 23, 11:59 PM

## Module 4 (September 24-30)

### Grief and Mourning

Readings:

- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (2017). The Andaman islanders. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 151-155). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rosaldo, R. Grief and a headhunter's rage. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 156-166). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley- Blackwell.
- Schepher-Hughes, N. (2017). Death without weeping. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp.167-180). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- King, B. J. The expression of grief in monkeys, apes, and other animals. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp.202-208). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Notes: Participation and Quiz 2 due by September 30, 11:59 PM

## Module 5 (October 1-7)

### Memorials: Relationships with the Dead

Readings:

- Kopytoff, I. Ancestors as elders in Africa. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 265-275). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Bacigalupo, A. M. (2017). The life, death, and rebirth of a Mapuche shaman: Remembering, disremembering, and the willful transformation of memory. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 276-292). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kwon, H. (2017). The ghosts of war and the spirit of cosmopolitanism. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.). *Death, mourning, and burial: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 293-305). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Notes: Book Report and Participation due by October 7, 11:59 PM

## Module 6 (October 8-13)

### Religious Understandings of a Good Death

Readings:

- Wright, M. & Clark, D. (2012). Cicely Saunders and the development of hospice palliative care. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 11-28). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Stajduhar, K. & Tschanz, C. (2012). Interfaith chaplaincy in hospice palliative care. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 277-295). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Notes: Participation and Quiz 3 due by October 13, 11:59 PM

## Module 7 (October 22-28)

### Dying in India

Readings:

- Rambachan, A. (2012). 'Like a ripe fruit separating effortlessly from its vine:' Religious understandings of a good death: Hinduism. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 29-50). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Nayar, K. E. (2012). Punjabi extended family hospice care. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 211-230). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Notes: Participation due by October 28, 11:59 PM

## Module 8 (October 29 – November 4)

### Death and the Ancestors in China

Readings:

- Hui, E. C. & Leung, D. C. (2012). Chinese religions and hospice care. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 145-164). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Qin, S. & Xia, Y. (2015). Grieving rituals and beliefs of Chinese families. In Cacciatore, J. & DeFrain, J. D. (Eds.). *The world of bereavement: Cultural perspectives on death in families* (pp. 69-80). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Notes: Participation and Quiz 4 due by November 4, 11:59 PM

## Module 9 (November 5-11)

### Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan Book of the Dead

Readings:

- Bruce, A. (2012). Welcoming an old friend: Buddhist perspectives on good death. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 51-75). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gielen, U. P. (1997). A death on the roof of the world. The perspective of Tibetan Buddhism (73-97). In Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P. & Young, B. (Eds.). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. New York: Routledge.

Notes: Participation due by November 11, 11:59 PM

## Module 10 (November 12-18)

### Death in Japan and Thailand

Readings:

- Florida, R. & Ratanakul, P. (2012). Buddhist hospice care in Thailand. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 167-189). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Cho, E. & Sung M. Death and grief in Korea: The continuum of life and death. In Cacciatore, J. & DeFrain, J. D. (Eds.). *The world of bereavement: Cultural perspectives on death in families* (pp. 81-97). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Notes: Participation and Quiz 5 due by November 18, 11:59 PM

## **Module 11 (November 19-25)**

### **Indigenous People of North America**

Readings:

- Kaufert, J. M., Wiebe, R., Lavallee, M. & Kaufert, P. A. (2012). Seeking physical, cultural, ethical and spiritual 'safe space' for a good death: The experience of indigenous peoples in accessing hospice care. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 231-256). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sharp, C., Beckstein, A., Limb, G. & Bullock, Z. (2015). Completing the Circle of Life: Death and Grief Among Native Americans. In Cacciato, J. & DeFrain, J. D. (Eds.). *The world of bereavement: Cultural perspectives on death in families* (pp. 221-239). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Notes: Participation due by November 25, 11:59 PM

## **Module 12 (November 26 – December 2)**

### **Death in African Cultures**

Readings:

- Hadley, M. L. & Agupio, G. (2012). The Ugandan way of living and dying. In Coward, H. & K. I. Stajduhar, K. I. (Eds.). *Religious understandings of a good death in hospice palliative care* (pp. 191-210). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Njue, J. R. M., Rombo, D., Lutomia, A. N., Smart, L.S., Mwaniki, L. M. & Sore, I. L. (2015). Death, Grief and Culture in Border Kenya: Experiential Strengths-Based Research. In Cacciato, J. & DeFrain, J. D. (Eds.). *The world of bereavement: Cultural perspectives on death in families* (pp. 3-23). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Notes: Essay, Participation and Quiz 6 due by December 2, 11:59 PM

## **Course Policies**

### **Submission of Assignments**

The book report and final essay are to be submitted online to the appropriate drop box on Avenue to Learn. The final essay is to be written using APA. For APA style and format please utilize <https://apa.conestogac.on.ca/Sections/GettingStarted>.

### **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

### **Late Assignments**

Students who cannot meet an assignment deadline are required to consult with the course instructor. This consultation must occur before the assignment is due. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day and will not be accepted more than 5 days after the due date unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.

### **Absences, Missed Work, Illness**

I do not allow for make-up work allowances for missed assignments, quizzes or participation unless it has to do with accommodating students registered through SAS.

### **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### **Turnitin.com**

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

### **Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

### **Course Modification**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable

notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.