Dying, Death, and Mourning
Syracuse University
Spring 2010
Rel 320.01
Mon/Wed 2.15pm-3.35pm
School of Management, Room 302

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Office hours
Tuesdays 2-3 pm and by appointment
Pages Library Café

Course Description
This course will examine religious and philosophical responses to dying, death, and mourning. While death is one of the few constants in human experience, we will address the variation in questions (and responses) about death as a part of life: what is the significance of death and dying, both individually and collectively? How do we care for the dying? How do we mourn the dead? What do we do with dead bodies, and why? How do we think about afterlife or otherworldly realms? In order to attend to such a range of questions, our class readings and discussions will draw from a variety of sources in religious studies (including history of religions, sociology of religion, anthropology, and psychology) and philosophy as well as art, literature, film, and pop culture. This course aims to provide insight into ways of thinking about dying, death, and mourning within the academic study of religions and philosophy in particular. Different traditions and approaches illuminate facets of the topic, but we cannot necessarily cover these traditions or approaches comprehensively.

Course Goals
After completing the course, students should be able to:
• Articulate an understanding of various questions and concerns surrounding dying, death, and mourning
• Be familiar with the variety of approaches to dying, death, and mourning and use these approaches to address relevant questions and concerns on the topic
• Have a critical understanding of multiple religious traditions’ understandings of dying, death, and/or mourning
• Have a critical understanding of the relationship between dying, death, and mourning and lived experience
Course Materials

Three required full-length texts are available for purchase from the University bookstore (or your preferred online vendor):


In addition to these texts, numerous other materials are required for this course. If not one of the three required texts above, readings are available in .pdf form on the Blackboard site for our course. Any other digital materials will also be made available via blackboard.

Assignments/Assessment

Your final grade is comprised of **500 total points**, broken down as follows:

- **Accountability Assignments**: 14% of final grade, 70 points (5 @ 14 points ea. with possibility of exempting 5th)
- **Essays**: 40% of final grade, 200 points
  - Essay 1: 10%, 50 points
  - Essay 2: 15%, 75 points
  - Essay 3: 15%, 75 points
- **Final Presentation with Peer Assessment and Write-up**: 30% of final grade, 150 points
- **Participation**: 16% of final grade, 80 points

Required Readings

The syllabus lists the readings we will discuss on a given date. Therefore, students must **complete designated readings before class on that date**. For the required hard copy texts, students must bring their books to class on the day they will be discussed. For electronic documents, students may use laptops to bring electronic copies of documents to class. The instructor reserves the right to require hard copies of electronic documents and prohibit laptop use if this privilege is abused.

Engaged, critical reading is expected. Occasionally we will discuss texts that are quite difficult to read and understand. Write down questions and comments as you read; think critically about all texts before coming to class; take notes and underline compelling passages. These practices will help with discussion and writing assignments.

Accountability Assignments (15%)

There are a total of five “accountability assignments” that are designed to encourage especially close reading and engagement with class material outside of the longer essay assignments. For these assignments, which will be assigned at random but be announced at least one class in advance, the requirements are as follows: in no more than one page [12 pt standard font], students will (1) briefly summarize the main argument or overarching concern of the reading, and (2) briefly raise two (to three) issues with the reading—you can list two main themes from the reading, list what you see as the two most significant points for the study of dying, death, and mourning, use the form of question and answer in which you raise two questions and try to answer
them, or other creative approaches (such as Socratic dialogue, etc.) as long as you have two (to three) distinct points in addition to your summary. Accountability assignments must be handed in at the beginning of class on the announced date. **No late accountability assignments will be accepted—NO EXCEPTIONS.**

**Note:** If you carry a 92% or higher average on the first four accountability assignments, you do not have to complete the fifth.

**Essays (40%)**

You will write three essays for the course, one after each of the first three sections. Each essay will have multiple set topics from which you can choose. These topic questions will require familiarity with readings, material presented in class, and films. Should you wish to propose an alternative topic covering the same required material, the topic must be approved by the instructor prior to the paper due date and you forfeit the right of blind review (see below).

- Essay 1, Dying: 3 pages, 10% of final grade
- Essay 2, Death: 3-5 pages, 15% of final grade
- Essay 3: Mourning, memory, and memorialization: 3-5 pages, 15% of final grade

**Format:** Essays must be typed and double-spaced in a standard 12-point font with 1-inch margins. I prefer to grade your papers “blindly,” i.e., without seeing your name. Type your name on a cover sheet that can be detached from your main paper. Indicate your chosen paper topic on the first full-text page. Pages should be numbered but should not include your name. You must cite author and page number when referring to class materials but are not required to include a bibliography unless you use additional sources or a different edition of a class text. More detailed instructions and a grading rubric will be handed out prior to the first essay assignment.

**Note:** If you have arranged to submit an alternative topic, you must include your name and a description of your topic either on a cover sheet or on the first full-text page.

**Submission:** Essays must be submitted in **hard copy at the start of class** on the date due. Unless you have made arrangements in advance, **do not email attachments!** They take up too much space, allow for too many cyberspace and server errors, and introduce security concerns. Plan ahead so that technical and other emergencies will not prevent on-time submission!

**Late policy:** To receive full credit, papers must be submitted at the start of class on the date due. Because the occasional emergency cannot be avoided, there is a one-class grace period: any essay submitted **after the start of class on the due date and until the end of one class following the due date will be accepted for one full letter grade deduction.** Any essay submitted thereafter will receive an **automatic F** (which is different from a zero). For essays 1 and 3, **there are no exceptions to this rule, no excuses allowed, and no questions asked.** **Caveat:** Because essay 2 is due right before spring break, there is NO grace period in which you may submit late for a letter-grade deduction. Any essay submitted after the start of class on the due date will receive an F. Get your paper in on time and enjoy your spring break.

**Final Presentation with Peer Assessment and Write-up (30%)**

Each student will conduct an independent research project related to themes of dying, death, mourning, or afterlife. Instead of producing a traditional research paper, at the end of the course, students will present their research to the class in groups assigned by the instructor based on thematic similarities. Each presentation will run 7 - 10 minutes. Each presentation will be evaluated not only by the instructor but by the other students in the class using a peer evaluation form. After the presentations, each student must produce a
scholarly, documented **five-page write-up overview** of his or her research and closing thoughts, which will be due **Monday, May 10**. Each student will be evaluated based on preparation and research, presentation, participation in peer evaluation, and final write-up. More details about this project will be distributed as the semester progresses.

**Other Assignments**

**Music Project**

Part of the argument of this course is that death is part of life and is all around us, and death figures prominently in art and popular culture. We will begin each class by listening to a song that students have selected. A sign-up sheet will be circulated early in the semester, and each student must choose one class day on which s/he is responsible for bringing in one music selection (songs or excerpts of songs under 5 minutes) and explaining in five minutes or less the significance of the song for the study of dying, death, and mourning. The music project is part of your participation grade.

**Cemetery Project**

As we will learn, Syracuse is home to the notable and stately Oakwood Cemetery, located on the south edge of our main campus. Later in the semester (hopefully as the weather warms up!), students will be given an extra credit "site visit" assignment involving close exploration of and acquaintance with Oakwood Cemetery, its history, landscape, and monuments. This assignment offers you the opportunity to earn up to 25 extra points toward your final grade.

**Participation (15%)**

- Class discussion allows us to share our ideas and work out questions from the readings and other issues brought up in class. It also helps us meet our course goals and plan our writing and research projects. Complete class reading and writing assignments and come prepared to discuss them.
- Remember that participation is about quality more than quantity, but be intellectually brave and do your best to contribute frequently to the discussion to the best of your ability.
- If you are profoundly uncomfortable participating verbally in class, email exchange or office hour meetings with the instructor regarding questions, concerns, and ideas about class material also can count toward your participation grade.

**Attendance**

- Attendance is an integral part of participation. It is impossible to duplicate what happens in class in any other format, and you must be present to receive vital information and announcements. Be in class regularly, be on time, and be prepared and ready for discussion. Attendance will be recorded.
- While you are required to be in class every period, you will each be granted three flex days—absences which will not affect your final grade. If, however, you miss more than three classes for any reason, your final grade will be lowered by one-third of a letter grade (i.e., from an A to A-) for each extra day missed.
- Your flex days cover emergencies, religious holidays not observed by the university, illness, and travel (personal or university-related). Discuss any absences in advance with the instructor when possible. Extenuating circumstances may be excused at the instructor’s discretion, but simply informing the instructor of an upcoming absence or the reasons for an absence does not suffice to excuse the absence.
- Arriving late is rude and distracting to your classmates and instructor; it also detracts from your ability to contribute to discussion. Make every effort to be in class on time. **If you arrive more than 10**
minutes late more than once, you will be counted as present but receive no credit for participation for that day. Excessive lateness will count as an absence.

- If you must miss class, you are responsible for completing any assignments due on the missed day as well as getting notes from your classmates, etc. You may consult with the instructor about what you missed, but I will not necessarily replicate notes or announcements—find a reliable classmate to help keep you on track.

The Grading System is as Follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73-77</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60-67</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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</tbody>
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Expectations

What I expect from you

- Thorough awareness of and adherence to course policies, assignments, and expectations as outlined in this syllabus and described in class.
- **Respectful participation:** You are not asked to leave your religious views at the door, but I urge respect and consideration while reflecting on or challenging your own beliefs, practices, and values and those that you learn about throughout the course. Remember that your classmates likely participate in many of the religions or practices we discuss. Similarly, consider that your neighbors also may have experienced significant loss personally—that questions of death are not simply abstract and can affect each of us profoundly. Treat your classmates, instructor, and any guests with respect. **Do not talk, text message, email, surf the web, etc.** Such actions are truly distracting and disrespectful.
- An understanding of your emotional and academic limits. This course deals with many sensitive issues, matters of what theologian Paul Tillich would call “ultimate concern.” If you have experienced a recent acute loss, you may be affected by these matters even more sharply and find class material especially difficult to engage. You therefore may want to consider withdrawing from the course, either now or after you have a sense of the material and approach. Note the following deadlines: 1/26 (end of schedule adjustment), 2/2 (grading option deadline), 2/9 (financial deadline for dropping courses), 3/23 (academic drop deadline), 4/20 (withdrawal deadline). Such a decision will not reflect negatively on you in any way.

What you can expect from me

- I will make every effort to cultivate a learning environment in which students are able and encouraged to express their questions and ideas respectfully.
- I will do my best to be in class regularly, arrive on time, and come prepared. I will provide notice as early as possible via blackboard email list if class is canceled for any emergency.
- I will keep regular office hours, and I encourage you to come to office hours with any questions, concerns, or ideas you may have. I will respond to emails as quickly and attentively as possible.
- I will support, be aware of, and hold you accountable for your work, attendance, and participation.
- I will offer feedback on your submitted work in a timely manner and be available to discuss your work both before it is submitted and after you receive feedback on it. I aim to evaluate your work fairly and thoroughly.

**Academic Integrity Statement**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of
signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu

**Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations and Serious Illness**

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 304 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the Office of Disability Services website: http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/. Documented serious illness will be approached similarly; please notify me as early as possible, and we can work with student support services to arrange appropriate accommodations.

**Changes to the Syllabus**

The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus during the course of the semester. If changes are made, you will receive advance notice.

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### Course Schedule

**Introduction**

**Weeks 1-2: Orientations to Dying, Death, and Mourning**

- **W Jan 20:** Introduction to class: syllabus, etc.
- **M Jan 25:** Aries pp. 55-68, 85-94, 103-107
- **Tues Jan 26:** End of schedule adjustment

**Dying**

**Weeks 2-3: The Significance of Dying**

- **W Jan 27:** *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, ch.1-4; Aries pp. 1-14, 27-46, 50-52
- **M Feb 1:** *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, ch. 5-12; *Being and Time* selections
  - Tues Feb 2: Grading option deadline
- **W Feb 3:** *Phaedo*, section 57 to section 95
  - Essay 1 topics handed out

**Week 4: Dying and the Status of the Soul**

- **M Feb 8:** *Phaedo*, section 95 to section 118; *Bhagavad Gita* selections
  - Tues Feb 9: Financial deadline for dropping courses
- **W Feb 10:** Harry Potter on Dying
  - Read:
Week 5: Cemetery History

**M Feb 15:** **ESSAY ONE DUE**

**W Feb 17:** Aries pp. 14-25, 46-50, 68-79; Last Great Necessity selections

Week 6: History of Death in America and the Death Industry

**M Feb 22:** Laderman, Sacred Remains selections; Laderman, Rest in Peace selections

**W Feb 24:** Continue Laderman; Thomas Lynch, “The Undertaking” (from The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade)

○ Essay 2 topics handed out

Week 7: Dealing with the Dead—Death and Funerary Practices

**M Mar 1:** Juan Eduardo Campo, “Muslim Ways of Death: Between the Prescribed and the Performed” (pp. 154-172; read/skim 147-154 for introduction)

**W Mar 3:** Elmore, “Contemporary Hindu Approaches to Death: Living with the Dead”

Week 8: Death Conclusion

**M Mar 8** (mid-term): Harry Potter on Death

Read:

**W Mar 10:** **ESSAY TWO DUE**

○ Handout for project proposals/ bibliographies

Spring Break

**M Mar 15:** No class, spring break

**W Mar 17:** No class, spring break

Mourning, Memory, and Memorialization

Week 9: Mourning and Memory

**M Mar 22:** Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” and “On Transience”

Tues Mar 23: Academic drop deadline

**W Mar 24:** Benjamin, “On the Concept of History;” start Casey

○ Essay 3 topics handed out

Week 10: Memory and Memorialization

**M Mar 29:** Edward Casey, “Public Memory in the Making: Ethics and Place in the Wake of 9/11;” Vietnam Memorial reading TBA

○ **PROJECT PROPOSALS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE**

**W Mar 31:** Kwon, After the Massacre selections

Week 11: Mourning and Memorialization Conclusion

**M Apr 5:** Harry Potter on Mourning, Memory, and Memorialization

Read:

**W Apr 7:** **ESSAY THREE DUE**
Week 12: The Lives of the Dead

M Apr 12: Van Gennep, “The Rites of Passage;” LaFleur, “Memorializing One’s Mizuko,” with introduction

W Apr 14: Eberhardt, “Souls into Spirits: Death as Self-Transformation”

Week 13: Repatriation and Conclusion

M Apr 19: Mihesuah, Repatriation Reader selections

Tues Apr 20: Withdrawal deadline

W Apr 21: Harry Potter on the Otherworldly

Read:

Weeks 14-15: Presentations

M Apr 26: Presentations and student assessment

W Apr 28: Presentations and student assessment

M May 3: Presentations and student assessment

Monday, May 10: FINAL WRITE-UP DUE by 4:00 pm in 501 Hall of Languages