

RELI2732 Notes Pre-Midterm

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1 Introduction

1.1 Definitions

1.1.1 Brain Death

- **complete loss of all brain function**
 - both voluntary **AND**
 - involuntary
 - this is how it differs from a vegetative state
- used as a **legal indicator of death** in many jurisdictions

1.1.2 Cosmology

- study of the **origins of life** and **the universe**
 - large scale properties of the universe as a whole
- what is the **religious culture's** view of the **universe**?

1.1.3 Discourse Community

- group of people who **share** a common discourse (**common rhetorical goals**)
 - i.e., a **set of basic values and assumptions**
 - think Dungeons and Dragons players
- in the past discourse communities were a lot harder to form
 - limitations of media
 - if a story was **important enough** to share **it was a big deal**

1.1.4 Epoché

- suspension of judgement
- withholding of assent
- all **judgements** on **non-evident** matters are **suspended**
- role in **phenomenology**
 - block biases and assumptions
 - explain a phenomenon in terms of an inherent system of meaning
 - this predisposition **must be assumed** before phenomenological study
- don't worry about the **truth of stories**
 - worry about what they mean to people

1.1.5 Iron Crutch Li

- **Li Tieguai**
- one of the **eight immortals** of **Taoist pantheon**
 - able to leave his body and commune with deities
 - while he was gone his body was **like a dead person**
 - always back within 7 days
- had an assistant
 - tasked with watching over his body
 - one day heard his mother was dying
 - decided to burn Li's body after 6 days instead of 7
 - but Li was not dead
 - when he came back he took the body of a beggar with an iron crutch

1.1.6 Memento Mori

- "reminder of mortality"

- “remembrance of death”
- medieval Latin Christian
- **reflection on mortality**
 - consider **vanity of earthly life**
- the idea of being conscious of death
 - reflect on
 - lives
 - morality
 - place in the world

1.1.7 Ontology

- study of **existence**
- what does it mean to exist?
 - **monistic**
 - one fundamental principle
 - e.g., scientism
 - **dualistic**
 - two fundamental principles
 - spirit and matter

1.1.8 Phenomenology

- consider **phenomena** as **distinct from being**
- focus on **consciousness** and **objects of direct experience**
- see definition of **Epoché**
 - actively not deciding the truth of a claim
- in the context of religious studies
 - look at the **lived experience** of religious people
 - do not approach from an internal faith-based perspective

1.1.9 Soteriology

- study of **religious doctrines of salvation**
- *soterios* = salvation in Latin
- Christianity
 - Christ is the savior
- some religions **don’t have a soteriology**

1.1.10 Taphophobia

- **fear** of being **buried alive**
- before medical advances, death was not always clear
 - safety coffins to address this
 - designs to allow the buried person to signal they are alive

1.1.11 Thanatology

- study of **death**

1.1.12 Theology

- how are gods understood?
- study of a **religion from within**

1.2 Buddhist Parable of the Mustard Seed

- begins with a commentary on **reincarnation**
 - “flowing-on for a hundred thousand ages”
 - “evolved in this Buddha-era among gods and men”
 - **cosmological claim**
- Gotami-tissa
 - poor family
 - “skinny Gotami”
- Gotami has a son
 - people respect her now
 - **son dies**
 - this **drives her crazy**
 - “sorrow-to-the-point-of-madness”
 - she still feels attached to the body
- she desperately carries the body around
 - begs for medicine for her dead son
 - people revile her but she does not understand
- finally, a wise man tells her to **ask the Buddha for “medicine”**

1.2.1 What Sort of Medicine is the Man Talking About?

- **advice/teaching** rather than physical medicine
- in fact, the Buddha tells her:
 - go to a house where they have not experienced death
 - ask them for a mustard seed
- Gotami searches for a family who has not experienced death
 - she cannot find one
 - so what use are their mustard seeds?
- finally she realizes the **futility of her madness**
 - death is a fact of life

1.3 Religious Ritual (Characteristics)

- rituals
 - **invariant**
 - tied into **understanding** of an overall act
- religious rituals
 - **embedded in cultural systems**
 - performed
 - real audience
 - ▷ marriage
 - ▷ funeral
 - imagined audience
 - ▷ prayer
 - formalistic
 - **rules-governed**
 - traditionalistic
 - **invariant**
 - not that it **doesn’t change**
 - rather that it **appears not to change**
- ritualization **posits the existence of an authoritative reality**
 - this reality **dictates the immediate situation**

1.3.1 Effects of Ritual

- forms/**reinforces communities**
- connect actions with **authoritative reality**
- experiential and performative explanation of social realities
 - reverence of elders in Chinese religion
 - at a funeral, the youngest descendent acts as the deceased for a day
 - they get to experience reverence for the day

1.3.2 Van Gennep's Rite of Passage

- involve a **change of social status**
 - e.g., Bar Mitzvah
- three stages
 1. **separation**
 - taken out of every day situation
 - separated from typical social circumstances
 2. **liminality**
 - between two different states
 - e.g., both boy and man at once
 - individuality is limited
 3. **reintegration**
 - often with special signs of having completed ritual
 - e.g., wedding rings

1.4 Various Definitions of "Death"

1.4.1 Traditional

- cessation of breath

1.4.2 Chinese Culture

- Iron Crutch Li
- the dead were left out and venerated for a period of time
 - perhaps like Iron Crutch Li they were just visiting the gods

1.4.3 Harvard

- a person can be declared dead IF
 - **brain function** is **irreversibly lost**
 - even though heart/lung activity is present due to **mechanical support**
- **brain death**

1.4.4 Veatch's Four Possibilities

1. irreversible loss of the **flow of vital fluids**
2. irreversible **loss of soul**
3. irreversible **loss of brain function**
 - including self-regulation (involuntary function)
4. **loss of capacity for social function** due to **loss of higher brain function**

1.5 Issues with Comparative Study of Religion

- there are *certain* cases for which this might be okay
 - keep it objective

- focus on specific comparison/contrast
 - how does a given religion handle death?

1.5.1 E.B. Tyler

- **primitive cultures**
 - somewhat pejorative
 - can one culture be more primitive than another?
 - inferior to another?

1.5.2 Essentialism

- the assumption that there is **one original religion** from which **all others branch**
- **no evidence for this whatsoever**

2 Indigenous Perspectives

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Animism

- elements of the natural world are
 - inhabited/animated by **spiritual beings**

2.1.2 Psychic Unit of Humanity

- **all beings** across **all cultures** and **all time periods**
 - have the **same cognitive ability**
 - the **difference** is **culture**

2.1.3 Numinous

- the **feeling** of **spiritual presence**
- defined by Rudolph Otto in *Idea of the Holy*
 - mysterium
 - mysterious
 - tremendum
 - scary
 - fascinans
 - fascinating
 - compelling
 - you *want* to engage

2.1.4 Tupilaq

- totem thrown into sea by Inuit
 - sends a vengeful spirit to kill enemies

2.1.5 Shaman

- **religious professional**
- **interacts** with the spiritual entities **directly**
- in many cultures
 - chosen by the spirits
 - mediate
 - healing

- spiritual combat (dispel demons of disease)
- non-ordinary states of consciousness
 - dreaming
 - ritual drumming
 - fasting
 - chanting
 - psychoactive substances

2.1.6 Near-Death Experience

- often cited as evidence of cosmological claims
- Eben Alexander
 - had a near-death experience
 - wrote a book about it
 - “Proof of Heaven”
- causal explanations
 - emotional chock
- physical explanations
 - metabolic imbalance
 - drug overdose
 - lack of oxygen in brain

2.1.7 Comensal Community

- **comensal**
 - sharing food

2.2 The Role of Affect in Religion

- **affect**
 - the way that humans **respond** to **phenomena**
- Rudolph Otto
 - the *Idea of the Holy* book
 - Otto **assumes** there is only **one** relationship between humans and spirit world
- early Japanese religion (Shinto)
 - *kami*
 - classification based on the **emotional impact** it has on people
 - it is through **stories** that the *kami* come into existence
 - what is worth telling a story about?
 - something that **impacts you**
- local cults develop
 - their **continued existence** is based on
 - **perceived efficacy** of the deity present
 - efficacy can be determined through **stories**

2.3 Common Characteristics of Indigenous Religions (Basilov)

2.3.1 Basilov Traits

1. **animism**
 - animation or spiritualization of the surrounding world
2. **connections** in nature
 - belief in all-embracing connections in nature
 - spirit-world is not discrete
3. **no separation** from surrounding world

- depend on the surrounding world for survival
- surrounding world **includes spirits**
- 4. the **cosmos** is **accessible**
 - spirit realms can be **accessed**
 - mostly **shamans**
 - possibly others
- 5. religion as **social consciousness**
 - creates **meaning** in the **bonds we have with each other**

2.3.2 Cosmology

- **visible** world and **invisible** world
 - human beings possess **one or more souls**
 - diversity
 - is our world in **superposition** with the spirit world?
 - **or** do these spirits live **elsewhere**
- **animism**
 - some elements of the natural world are
 - inhabited by spiritual beings
 - or animated by spiritual beings
 - **what elements** of the world are interpreted this way?
 - Nayaka
 - ▷ object must be **tied to a human community**
 - early Japanese
 - ▷ *kami*: objects or elements of nature with **superior power**
 - ▷ awe-inspiring
 - ▷ humans can be *kami* (emperors)
 - ▷ Gods are also *kami*
- **religious practice** and **shamans**

2.4 Souls in Indigenous Religions

2.4.1 Multiplicity

- ancient China
 - **hun soul**
 - breath
 - animates the body
 - leaves on death
 - **po soul**
 - in the bones
 - remains in the body at burial
- Tibet
 - souls in **various parts** of the body
 - each soul is an **internal protective deity**
 - internal souls spread out
 - they *protect* you from illness
- Inuit
 - soul in the **larynx**
 - another soul on the **left side of the body**
 - also souls the size of **finger joints** that live in the **limbs**
 - about the size of a sparrow
 - help to animate the body
 - affective experience of **being alive** related to bodily **activities of these souls**
 - sore back could be because back soul exited body while sleeping

2.4.2 Mobility

- some souls can **leave the body**
- not **always** the case that *every* soul can do this
 - ancient China
 - hun can leave
 - po stays
- soul loss
- souls earned at specific points in life

2.4.3 What Happens After Death to Souls

- **utopian vs locative**
 - utopian
 - you go to a **perfect place** discrete from the human world
 - heaven
 - locative
 - a real place
 - ▷ continued connection to this world
 - boundaries
 - Gurung people in Nepal
 - ▷ entry to land of ancestors on top of the Oble Dome

2.4.4 Materiality

- specific **shapes**
 - Inuit
 - souls size of sparrow
 - shaped like little people
- susceptible to interventions
 - ancient China
 - dead honored at feast
 - dead eat and drink too
 - ▷ deceased can become drunk!
 - Inuit
 - souls can be **attacked** by magic
 - spirits can be used to attack people
 - ▷ attack their **souls** not their **bodies**
 - ▷ has an **effect** on the body
 - Soyot of Siberia
 - dip soul in hot water \implies suffer fever
 - dip soul in cold water \implies shivers
 - twist hands and legs of the soul \implies pain in limbs
 - Hagen people of Papua New Guinea
 - sickness in the community
 - ▷ call upon the dead to help
 - ▷ say names of all the dead without leaving any out
 - if they forget a name, the spirit gets angry
 - ▷ send sickness in response
 - ▷ vindictive

2.5 The Melpa Understanding of Souls

2.5.1 Melpa Story

- eldest brother refuses to sacrifice sister's pig

- sister walks home and takes shelter in a sacrificial hut to sleep
 - dead mother's brother entered
 - hid her
 - she saw spirits of the dead come for a meeting
 - locative
 - mobility
- spirits need to decide who to let die in a battle
 - nobody wants to give their men up
 - because their men need to give them sacrifice
- father decides to let the eldest brother die
 - because he refused to sacrifice his pig
- sister goes back to the brothers and warns them
 - shows them sacrificial meat as proof
- brothers ignored her advice
 - eldest brother dies in battle
- moral of the story:
 - dead are vengeful
 - dead hear, see, and know all
 - must honor them with sacrifices

2.6 Wari Funeral Practice

2.6.1 Mortuary Cosmology

- locative
 - ancestral realm at the bottom of deep water
 - no hunting
- ancestors emerge as boars and allow themselves to be hunted
 - support the living
 - the dead continue to **provide for the living**
- the dead are **responsible** for the **sustenance of the living**

2.6.2 Death and Mourning

- from the moment of death until funeral's end
 - everyone screams
 - emotionally affective experience
- family
 - never allow the body to sit alone
- non-family
 - all other ritual obligations
 - prepare food
 - build pyre
- ritual piling
 - lay on the ground and pile on top of each other
 - until they pass out
- dismember body
 - place into cooking pots
 - inedible portions go to fire
 - non-family members eat the body

2.6.3 Affect

- detachment from the dead
- the “negative experience of nostalgia”

- destroy all material evidence of the dead's existence
 - burn material possessions
 - name no longer used
 - mourners change aspects of their lives

3 Death in the Ancient World

4 Jewish Perspectives

5 Christian Perspectives

6 Muslim Perspectives