



DEATH AND DYING IN WORLD RELIGIONS

Oxford College of Emory University

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Rel 323: Fall 2012

Tues/Thurs 1.40pm-3.20pm

Student Center 27

Office hours: Tues/Thurs 12.30-1.30pm, Branham/East Annex #4

Course Description

This course will examine religious and philosophical responses to dying, death, and mourning across religious traditions. 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), philosophy, 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 this course does not provide a survey of world religious traditions.

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:

- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*. ISBN-13: 978-1936594665
- Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Toward Death: from the middle ages to the present*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. ISBN-13: 978-0801817625
- Plato. Trans. GMA Grube. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. Hackett Publishing Company, 2nd Edition, 2002. ISBN-13: 978-0872206335

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 **600 total points**, broken down as follows:

Essays: 40% of final grade, 240 points

Essay 1: 70 points

Essay 2: 80 points

Essay 3: 90 points

Final Presentation, including proposals, bibliographies, and peer assessment: 20% of final grade, 120 points

Oakland Cemetery Site Report: 15% of final grade, 90 points

Reading Guides: 10% of final grade, 60 points (3 @ 20 points each)

Participation, including music project: 15% of final grade, 90 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 carefully about all texts before coming to class; take notes and underline compelling passages. These practices will help with discussion and writing assignments. You may face **unannounced reading quizzes** at any time, so come prepared!

Essays (40%)

You will write three essays for the course, one after each section. 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.

Essay 1, Dying: 4-6 pages, 70 points possible

Essay 2, Death: 4-6 pages, 80 points possible

Essay 3: Mourning, memory, and memorialization: 4-6 pages, 90 points possible

Essay Format: Essays must be typed and double-spaced in a standard 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Pages should be **numbered** but should *not* include your name. You must cite author/editor and page number when referring to class materials but are not required to include a bibliography unless you use additional sources (with permission) 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 brief description of your topic either on a cover sheet or on the first full-text page.

Submission: Essays (and your site report—see below) must be **submitted electronically using the Blackboard SafeAssign** feature. *Do not email* your assignments to the instructor. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand how to use SafeAssign in order to submit your assignments properly and on time. Please consult with Oxford IT if you are unfamiliar with this feature or unsure about using it. Essays are **due by 1.30pm (i.e., submit before class time) on the date due**. Plan ahead so that technical and other emergencies will not prevent on-time submission!

Please note that material submitted will be screened by Blackboard's SafeAssign feature against a variety of databases. The purpose of this feature is to minimize plagiarism and to help educate students about the proper citation of any borrowed content. The submission of another's work as one's own without adequate attribution is a violation of the Honor Code and may result in disciplinary action. Also, student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Late policy: To receive full credit, essays must be submitted **before class on the date due**. There is a one-class grace period for essays only: an 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). **There are no exceptions to this rule, no excuses allowed, and no questions asked.**

Final Presentation with proposal, bibliography, and peer assessment (20%)

Each student will conduct an independent research project related to themes of dying, death, or mourning/memorialization. Instead of producing a traditional research paper, at the end of the course, students will present their research to the class using a range of possible media. This project will be completed in stages, each of which is graded: **bibliography, proposal** with peer assessment, and **presentation**. The final 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. Each student will be evaluated based on preparation and research (including bibliography, proposal, and peer assessment of proposal), presentation form and content, and participation in final peer evaluation. More details about this project will be distributed as the semester progresses.

Oakland Cemetery Visit Report (15%)

Atlanta is home to the notable and stately Oakland Cemetery, a cemetery with a rich history and vivid landscape the significance of which we will discuss in class. Students will complete a "site visit" report involving close exploration of and acquaintance with Oakland Cemetery, its history, landscape, and monuments. The site visit can be made in groups, but research and write-up must be each individual's own work. More details about this assignment will be distributed.

Three Reading Guides (10%)

Each student must complete one reading guide for each section of the course, and each reading guide is worth 20 points. This means completing one reading guide during the Dying section (any reading listed from Sep 6-25), one during the Death section (any reading listed from Oct 2-23), and one during the Memory/Memorialization section (any reading listed from Oct 30 – Nov 15). You can choose to write on any reading of any length within each of the date ranges listed, but **you must hand in your reading guide in hard copy at the start of class on or before the date the reading is due**. *You can only complete one guide for each syllabus section (Dying, Death, Mourning/Memorialization), and you must complete one guide for each syllabus section.* If you do not hand in a reading guide by the last day of the ranges listed (i.e., Sep 25, Oct 23, and Nov 15), you will receive a zero. Plan accordingly based on your schedule and work load: you must be able to complete the reading early enough that you still have time to write your guide before the class for which it is due. Obviously, **no late reading guide will be accepted**.

Requirements: In no more than **two** pages [12 pt standard font, at least 1.5 spaced], students will (1) briefly summarize the main argument or overarching concern of the reading, and (2) explain how the reading connects to what we have discussed in class—another reading, something that came up in lecture or discussion, a film, etc.—and why the text is significant for the study of dying, death, and mourning.

Participation (15%)

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 a student has selected. A sign-up sheet will be circulated early in the semester, and each student must choose one or two class days (depending on enrollment) 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.

Regular Participation

- 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 replicate notes or announcements—find a reliable classmate to help keep you on track.

The Grading System is as Follows:

A: 93-100	B+: 88-89	C+: 78-79	D+: 68-69	F: <60
A-: 90-92	B: 83-87	C: 73-77	D: 60-67	
	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72		

Expectations

What I expect from you:

- Thorough awareness of and adherence to course policies, assignments, and expectations as outlined in this syllabus, in the student handbook, and as 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, browse 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. 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 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 provide notice as early as possible via blackboard email list if class is canceled for any emergency.
- 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 Oxford College Student Honor Code 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 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://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/

Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations and Serious Illness

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Access, Disability, Services and Resources (ADSR)—formerly (and still, in some places) known as the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Oxford College's program functions as a seamless extension of services offered to students at the Emory campus location, with staff located in the Student Health/Counseling Center. Students are responsible for initiating the accommodation request process by self-disclosing their disability and/or chronic medical condition directly to ADSR. More detailed information is available on the website at www.ods.emory.edu. A student can also make requests directly to the Office of Disability Services, Emory University, 201 Dowman Drive, University Administration Building, Suite 110, Atlanta, GA 30322. [Policy cited from <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/catalog/educational-resources/disability-services/>] Accommodations are not provided retroactively; therefore, plan for accommodations as early as possible.

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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction

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

Th Aug 30: Introduction to class: syllabus, etc.

Tu Sep 4: Aries pp. 55-68, 85-94, 103-107

Wed Sep 5: End of schedule adjustment

Th Sep 6: Aries pp. 1-14, 27-46, 50-52

Dying

Week 3: Dying and the Status of the Soul

Tu Sep 11: *Phaedo*, intro, section 57 to section 95

Th Sep 13: *Phaedo*, section 95 to end; *Bhagavad Gita* selections (BB)

☼ Essay 1 Topics handed out

Week 4: Existentialism and the Significance of Dying

Tu Sep 18: *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, ch.1-4; Julian Young's "Death and Authenticity" (BB)

☼ View *Seventh Seal*

Th Sep 20: **LAST CHANCE FOR READING GUIDE.** *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, ch. 5-12; Heidegger selection (BB)

☼ View *Seventh Seal*

Week 5: Dying Conclusion; Preview Death

Tu Sep 25: Preview Death section with some cemetery history: Aries pp. 14-25, 46-50, 68-79

☼ Instructions for Project Bibliographies and Proposals handed out

Th Sep 27: **ESSAY ONE DUE**

☼ Discuss Cemetery Site Visit

☼ Work on Projects

Death

Week 6: Cemetery History, History of Death in America

Tu Oct 2: Sloane, *Last Great Necessity* selections (BB)

Th Oct 4: Laderman, *Sacred Remains* selections (BB)

☼ View *Six Feet Under* clips today or Oct 9th/11th

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

Tu Oct 9: **BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND PROPOSALS DUE.** Thomas Lynch, "The Undertaking" (from *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*) (BB)

Th Oct 11: Laderman, *Rest in Peace* selections (BB)

☼ Essay 2 Topics handed out

Week 8: Living with the Dead

Tu Oct 16: No class—Fall Break

W Oct 17: Midterm Reports Due

Th Oct 18: Elmore, “Contemporary Hindu Approaches to Death: Living with the Dead” (BB)

☼View *Departures* selections

Week 9: Ways of Death: Death Conclusion

Tu Oct 23: **LAST CHANCE FOR READING GUIDE.** Juan Eduardo Campo, “Muslim Ways of Death: Between the Prescribed and the Performed” (BB)

Th Oct 25: **ESSAY TWO DUE**

☼Work on Projects

Mourning, Memory, and Memorialization

Week 10: Mourning and Memory

Tu Oct 30: Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (BB).

Th Nov 1: Read Edward Casey, “Public Memory in the Making: Ethics and Place in the Wake of 9/11”

Week 11: Memorialization

Tu Nov 6: Read Marita Sturken, “The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial” (BB)

Th Nov 8: Kwon, *After the Massacre* selections (BB)

☼ Essay 3 Topics handed out

Week 12: Serving the Lives of the Dead

Tu Nov 13: Van Gennep, “The Rites of Passage;” LaFleur, “Memorializing One’s *Mizuko*,” with intro (all BB)

☼View clips from *After Life* and *What Dreams May Come*

Th Nov 15: **LAST CHANCE FOR READING GUIDE.** Eberhardt, “Souls into Spirits: Death as Self-Transformation” (BB)

☼View clips from *After Life* and *What Dreams May Come*

Weeks 13-14: Repatriation

Tu Nov 20: NO CLASS: AAR

Th Nov 22: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving

Tu Nov 27: Mihe-suah, *Repatriation Reader* selections (BB)

Th Nov 29: **ESSAY 3 DUE**

☼Work on Projects

Weeks 15-16: Nearing the End

Tu Dec 4: Presentations and student assessment

Th Dec 6: Presentations and student assessment

Tu Dec 11: LAST DAY OF CLASS: Presentations and student assessment

Wed Dec 12: Reading Day

Final Exam: **CEMETERY SITE VISIT REPORT DUE** via SafeAssign by **2pm on Wednesday, December 19.** There is no other final exam for this class.