

REL 373R Death and Dying in World Religions
Oxford College of Emory University
Fall 2007, 4309, 02A
MW 2:00-3:15pm, Seney 215

Dr. Eve Mullen
Office hours: Mon 11:30-1:45 and Tue/Th 2:30-4:00
Office: Seney 115C; Tel. 784-8428
email: emullen@emory.edu

Course Description and Aims

The main aim of the course is to achieve an understanding of death through a study of religious attitudes and practices, modern therapies for the dying, ethical issues, and Western and Asian theological perspectives.

This semester's course examines varying concepts of the ideal death, and relatedly the ideal life, in the world's religions from a comparative studies perspective. We will explore religious, psychological and philosophical perspectives on the process of dying, care for the dying, bereavement and funeral rituals, and death and immortality within the world's religious traditions. Does personal identity persist after death? What beliefs about the nature of the divine or ultimate reality and human beings are tied to ideas of death and post-death existence? What are some of the mourning practices followed by different religions? As this class deals with sometimes emotionally sensitive material, if you have very recently experienced grief in your personal life, please consider taking the course at a later time. Any study of cultural traditions has as an aim an understanding of the basic assumptions and practices of different peoples. Students will also be encouraged to reflect analytically upon the methodologies of study and scholarly categories within the course.

This course fulfills the Sophomore Writing Requirement. The various writing assignments in this class will enhance your skills and competence as a writer.

Course Requirements

One's final grade will be calculated according to the following:

Class Participation, including presentation	10%
Tests I – IV	40% (10% each)
2 Free Reflection Papers	10% (5% each)
2 Reading Reflection Papers	10% (5% each)
Obituary and Ritual Arrangements Paper	5%
Research Paper	15%
Revised Writing Portfolio	10%

Class Participation: Students must be present for class meetings in order to perform well, particularly on tests, in the course. In-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more will supplement assigned readings. Your class participation grade will be based partly upon participation in class discussions and exercises. All readings are due at the beginning of each week. Students will be called upon often and asked about the content of assigned readings.

Included in the class participation is your presentation of a reading summary. The reading for which you will present an in-class summary and at least one discussion question for your peers will be assigned to you by the professor. Presentations should be between 10 and 15 minutes long, should offer at least one discussion question for the class, and should cover the highlights or main points of the reading. Please bring a handout for your fellow students to serve as an outline of your talk. This outline will help your classmates follow your presentation. All students must keep up with all reading assignments, regardless of who is presenting a summary.

Tests: Tests will cover both the reading assignments and in-class material. The four tests will consist of a diversity of questions, including a short essay section, and are meant to evaluate the student's comprehension of material covered. Test IV is the course's final examination during exam week.

Research Paper: One research paper on a topic of the student's choice is also required. This paper should be between 10 and 12 pages long, typed, double-spaced (use 12pt font and one-inch margins). It is designed to allow the student to explore, in more detail than was achieved in class, a topic of his or her own interest. Any ritual, tradition, text, author, book, interview/s or issue relating to our course will be permissible. Please email the professor by **Wednesday, Oct. 24 for approval** of your topic and for friendly help in finding sources. The paper's **due date is Wednesday, Nov. 14** (in class). The **revised draft** of the

paper is due in the final exam week as part of your Revised Writing Portfolio. See the section on the Revised Writing Portfolio below. No late papers will be accepted. Staple or paper clip the pages together; do not use a report cover.

As this is a research paper, citations and a list of references are required. Be sure to cite all references, including quoted passages and unquoted ideas. Citations must consist at least of author, source, and year, as well as page numbers when necessary. For help with proper citations, consult any manual of style for the humanities or social sciences. You will find such manuals in the library. Plagiarism is easy to spot and harshly punished by the University; trust your own words and analyses. Internet research is not encouraged. Many sites online contain simplifications unsuitable for scholarly work. Use the library and the interlibrary loan system for obtaining valid, scholarly research materials. Start your research early.

Students are given freedom in choosing a paper topic. Any subject matter relating to the course is acceptable. Choosing a topic of your own interest will make your paper more engaging and your research easier. Do, however, choose a topic appropriate for this assignment: a focused topic one can treat thoroughly in the assigned paper length is required. In your research paper, maintain a journalistic, bias-free voice. Your paper should reflect a thorough understanding of your chosen topic but should not contain your own judgments on the topic.

2 Free Reflection Papers: This short paper, 3 to 4 pages, is meant as a free reflection opportunity. The student will reflect in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner on any topic of lecture, class discussion, or reading assignment. The paper is an outlet for one's thoughts on any topic relating to the course. The reflection papers will be graded based upon evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the material. The first reflection paper is due no later than in class on **Wednesday, Oct. 3**. The second may be turned in any time before **Monday, Dec. 10**. No late papers will be accepted.

Obituary and Ritual Arrangements Paper: The due date for this exercise, 2 pages in length only, is **Monday, Oct. 29** in class. The student is encouraged to be creative! Two main tasks are required: 1. Begin the paper with your own obituary, as might appear in your local newspaper after your death in the future. Assume you have lived a long, productive life; what goals had you accomplished in life for which you would like to be remembered? 2. Describe and explain the reasons for your wishes for your religious or non-religious funeral arrangements or related death ritual. Be sure to provide a grieving opportunity for your loved ones! Your obituary may be read aloud in class; please write with this possibility in mind. And remember, your obit and ritual wishes need not conform to any religious or other standards. Feel free to think outside the pine box, so to speak...

2 Reading Reflection Papers: The assignment (3-4 pages in length) is to read and reflect upon the two assigned books for the course: C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, and Yukio Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. Due Dates: **Monday, Oct. 15** for Lewis; and **Wednesday, Dec. 5** for Mishima. Late papers will not be accepted. The student will reflect in a thoughtful, mature, informed, and scholarly manner on the readings. The papers are outlets for one's thoughts on the book assignments. These are two very different books: be mindful of the differing formats and goals of the authors. The reflection papers will be graded based upon evidence of understanding and sensitive, informed level of engagement with the material. You should spend no more than the first page of your reflection summarizing the contents of the book. As an example, what elements in the book are treated with priority and privilege? What are the major themes of the book? What is required is more than just a simple synopsis of the book. Instead, you should give an accurate and balanced description of the book's relevant content and your own analyses or well-argued assertions about and interpretations of the book content.

Revised Writing Portfolio: You will submit a writing portfolio that showcases examples of your *revised* work from the semester. All pieces included in the portfolio must be revised. All of these assignments must be handed in along with their respective first drafts and comments. When you revise each manuscript, please also attach a **brief memo** (no more than one page each) to me explaining how the new version differs from the original and, if you decided not to take any major advice offered on your writing, the reasons for your decision. The most explicit **grading criterion** for this assignment is your level of effort and success in enhancing your work. Writing is a process of reviewing and revising. You should therefore continually revise your work as soon as you receive feedback from me and/or through general

class discussion of the subject of your work. The portfolio gives you a chance to showcase examples of your revised work from the entire semester. Your writing portfolio should include three works:

- one revised Reading Reflection Paper (either on C.S. Lewis or Yukio Mishima)
- one revised Free Reflection Paper (your first or second reflection on the topic of your choice)
- the revised Research Paper

Your writing portfolio is **due by or at the final exam's start**. Do not leave your work in my mailbox or under my door, please. You must hand in your portfolio personally.

Conferencing about Your Writing

The number and nature of the writing assignments make this a writing-intensive course. Class discussion and written feedback that I give you on your assignments are meant to help you reflect on your writing and to enhance your written work through revisions. In addition to these formal procedures, I also encourage you to see me during my office hours in order for us to reflect together on how to improve your writing. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, I will be happy to make an appointment with you at a more convenient time. At a minimum, I expect everyone to **stop by my office at least once** in the semester—by yourself, in pairs, or in small groups. Bring a piece of writing together with feedback or comments so that we have something useful to discuss.

Academic Honesty

Finally, all students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code (pages 49-51 in the Oxford College Catalog), which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work” (p.49). The Honor Code also indicates that actions that violate this code are not to be tolerated, so we are all obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully.

Required Texts

Required course textbooks: 1. Lucy Bregman, ed. *Death and Dying in World Religions: An Anthology*. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004. 2. Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. San Francisco: Harper, 2001. 3. Yukio Mishima. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. New York: Vintage International, 1994. These texts are available in the bookstore. Mishima is available in a limited fashion but is also in your library and online (see the “Ereserves”) for the course. Primary and other secondary readings may be provided.

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Events

Week 1 (8/29)	Introductions to each other and the class
Week 2 (Labor Day, 9/5)	The Comparative Study of Religion and “Death and Dying” Reading: Bregman’s Introduction
Week 3 (9/10, 9/12)	Mesopotamia and Zoroaster of Persia: influences on western religions Reading: Lorah’s chapter in Bregman
Week 4 (9/17, 9/19)	Plato and the Greeks: Mind-Body Dualism Reading: Krummel’s chapter in Bregman <u>Test I Wednesday</u>
Week 5 (9/24, 9/26)	Judaic Rituals and Theodicies; Effects of the Shoah upon Jewish Theology Reading: Alpert’s chapter Film: <i>Survivors of the Holocaust</i>

Week 6 (10/1, 10/3)	Protestant “Triumphant Dying”; Catholicism: Suffering as Valuable Reading: Bregman’s chapter and McGovern’s chapter <u>Free Reflection Paper I due Wednesday</u>
	Fall Break
Week 7 (10/15, 10/17)	<u>Lewis Reading Reflection due Monday</u> ; Discussion on Lewis <u>Test II Wednesday</u>
Midterm reports from professors due 10/17	
Week 8 (10/22, 10/24)	Awareness of death in Islam Reading: Webb’s chapter and Pojman <i>Anthology</i> selections (provided) Philosophy of Religion: Is it reasonable to believe in an afterlife? Rewards, Punishments, and Identity <u>Research Paper topics due via email by Monday</u>
Week 9 (10/29, 10/31)	Day of the Dead, Samhain, All Saints’ and All Souls’ Days and All Hallows’ Eve week! Discussion of death in American popular culture Film: <i>Harold and Maude</i> <u>Personal Obit and Arrangements Paper due Monday</u>
Week 10 (11/5, 11/7)	Samsara, Dharma and Karma in Hinduism Reading: Allen’s chapter
Week 11 (11/12, 11/14)	Good Death and Good Rebirth: Vajrayana Buddhism Reading: Mullen’s chapter <u>Research Papers due Wednesday</u>
Week 12 (11/19)	No class: American Academy of Religion Meeting and Thanksgiving
Week 13 (11/26, 11/28)	Ghosts, Gods, and Ancestors: China in Modernity Reading: Weigand’s chapter <u>Test III Wednesday</u>
Week 14 (12/3, 12/5)	Japanese Religions and the Dead; Discussion on Mishima Reading: Winfield’s chapter <u>Mishima Reading Reflection due Wednesday</u>
Week 15 (12/10, Monday only)	Comparative Conclusions: Ideal Lives and Deaths <u>Free Reflection Paper II due</u>
Exam Week (12/13-12/19)	Final Exam (<u>Test IV</u>). Monday, Dec. 17 from 9am - noon. <u>Revised Writing Portfolio due.</u>

Suggested Further Reading and Helpful Sources. Titles marked with an asterisk (*) are works of fiction, not scholarly texts or sacred scriptures.

General

Alger, W.R. *A Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life*. New York: 1981.

Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide*. Free Press, 1997.

DeSpelder, L.A. and A. L. DeSpelder. *Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001.

Hiroshi Obayashi (ed.). *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*. Westport: Praeger, 1992.

Kastenbaum, Robert (ed.). *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan Reference, 2002.

Sullivan, Lawrence E., ed. *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1989.

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilich**. Blackwell Publishers, 1984.

Ancient Mesopotamia

Enuma Elish. Leonard W. King, ed. Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

The Epic of Gilgamesh. Translated by Andrew George. London: Penguin, 2003.

Lambert, W.G. and A.R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Ancient Greece

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. New York: Signet, 1969.

Nilsson, Martin P. *A History of Greek Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Plato (ed. John M. Cooper). *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1997.

Judaism

Alpert, Rebecca T. *Confronting Morality and Facing Grief: Jewish Perspectives on Death and Mourning*. Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1997.

Solomon, Lewis D. *The Jewish Tradition and Choices at the End of Life: New Judaic Approach to Illness and Dying*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001.

Wieseltier, Leon. *Kaddish*. London: Picador, 2000.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night**. New York: Bantam, 1982.

Christianity

Bregman, Lucy. *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

Cullman, Oscar. *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*. London, 1958.

Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. San Francisco: HarperSanFran, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. Harvest Books, 1966.

McDannell, Colleen and Bernard Lang. *Heaven: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Stendahl, Krister, ed. *Resurrection and Immortality*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

Wesley, John and Charles. *Selected Writings and Hymns*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Islam

Esposito, John. *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Khan, Sorayya. *Noor**. Publishing Laboratory, 2006.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Smith, Jane and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Schmitt, Eric-Emmanuel. *Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Quran**. A&C Black, 2006.

Hinduism

Justice, Christopher. *Dying the Good Death: The Pilgrimage to Die in India's Holy City*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997.

Mitchell, Stephen, trans. *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

Parry, Jonathan. *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepali. *The Brahma Sutra: the Philosophy of Spiritual Life*. New York: 1963.

Buddhism

Conze, Edward, trans. *Buddhist Scriptures*. London: Penguin Press, 1959.

Evans-Wentz, W.Y., trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. With a Commentary by C.G. Jung. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Mullin, Glenn H. *Living in the Face of Death: The Tibetan Tradition*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1998.

Shinto/Japan

Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. *Kamikazes, Cherry Blossoms and Nationalisms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Reader, Ian. *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991.

Scott-Stokes, Henry. *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*. San Francisco: Cooper Square Press, 2000.

Chinese Philosophies

Chuang Tzu. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. Burton Watson, trans. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Confucius. *Analects*. D.C. Lau, trans. London: Penguin Press, 1979.

Kohn, Livia. *Daoism and Chinese Culture*. Cambridge: Three Pines Press, 2000.

Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. D.C. Lau, trans. London: Penguin Press, 1963.

Wolf, Arthur P. (ed.). *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974.

Xingzhong Yao. *An Introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

African Traditions

Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Guildford: Biddles Ltd., 1969.

Some, Malidoma P. *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 1997.

AND:

This Web page has useful links to scholarly, popular, and other sites on death, death rituals, dying, hospice systems, cross-cultural studies of death and dying, and more:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/people/leming/death.html#perspective>