

---

Throughout history, religions and ideologies did not sanctify life itself. They always sanctified something above or beyond earthly existence, and were consequently quite tolerant of death. Indeed, some of them have been downright fond of the Grim Reaper. Because Christianity, Islam and Hinduism insisted that the meaning of our existence depended on our fate in the afterlife, they viewed death as a vital and positive part of the world. Humans died because God decreed it, and their moment of death was a sacred metaphysical experience exploding with meaning. When a human was about to breathe his last, this was the time to call priests, rabbis and shamans, to draw out the balance of life, and to embrace one's true role in the universe. Just try to imagine Christianity, Islam or Hinduism in a world without death – which is also a world without heaven, hell or reincarnation.

Modern science and modern culture have an entirely different take on life and death. They don't think of death as a metaphysical mystery, and they certainly don't view death as the source of life's meaning. Rather, for modern people death is a technical problem that we can and should solve.

How exactly do humans die? Medieval fairy tales depicted Death as a figure in a hooded black cloak, his hand gripping a large scythe. A man lives his life, worrying about this and that, running here and there, when suddenly the Grim Reaper appears before him, taps him on the shoulder with a bony finger and says, 'Come!' And the man implores: 'No, please! Wait just a year, a month, a day!' But the hooded figure hisses: 'No! You must come NOW!' And this is how we die.

In reality, however, humans don't die because a figure in a black cloak taps them on the shoulder, or because God decreed it, or because mortality is an essential part of some great cosmic plan. Humans always die due to some technical glitch. The heart stops pumping blood. The main artery is clogged by fatty deposits. Cancerous cells spread in the liver. Germs multiply in the lungs. And what is responsible for all these technical problems? Other technical problems. The heart stops pumping blood because not enough oxygen reaches the heart muscle. Cancerous cells spread because a chance genetic mutation