

Death (REL-R 202)

Professor: Michael Ing
Office: Sycamore Hall 203
Office hours: M 4-5:30pm

Class time: TR 4-6:30pm
Class location: WH 005
Email: ming@indiana.edu

Description:

This course will explore several issues under the broad topic of ‘death.’ In particular we will study various cultural responses to personal death (i.e., one’s own death) and the death of others. We will spend much of the semester thinking about question such as, how have people thought about death? How do people cope with personal death anxiety? How have various cultures dealt with the grief associated with losing someone significant?

In thinking through these questions we will read the work of contemporary philosophers, anthropologists, and scholars of religious studies. This will involve learning about Japan, contemporary Europe, and the United States. Considered in the broader terms of enhancing life, this course will examine the ways in which the prospect of death compels reflection on life—what it means to have a life worth living, and what conditions are necessary for creating a full life.

Objectives:

Students who take this class will be able to:

1. Identify the major issues in death studies
2. Analyze various approaches to coping with anxieties associated with death
3. Understand the role of mourning across cultures
4. Read actively
5. Write persuasively

Requirements:

1. Attendance, participation, and general professionalism. Since this class is discussion based you are expected to not only attend every class, but to actively participate in the class by demonstrating that you have done the reading and have thought about it. Failure to bring *printed* versions of the readings to class will result in a less than positive participation grade. Due to the setup of the classroom, laptops or other electronic devices are not allowed. Removing yourself from the class by surfing the internet or texting will also negatively impact your participation grade. (100 points; about 10% of the total grade) **Attendance policy:** In general, only excused, documented absences are acceptable. If you have 3 or more unexcused absences, you cannot score higher than a B in this class; 4 or more, no higher than a C; 5 or more, no higher than a D; 6 or more, no higher than an F. I take attendance each day. (I will excuse one day for illness based on your word; if you are sick enough to miss another day, or get sick repeatedly, you are

- sick enough to go to the doctor and get a note. If you have some sort of family emergency, please discuss it with me as promptly as you can.)
2. Summaries of the readings. You are responsible for proving that you have done the reading ahead of time and have thought about it. An hour before each class meeting (3p.m.) you will turn in a (one to two page) summary of the reading assigned for that day (via Canvas). These summaries should identify the primary argument made by each reading; then explain in several sentences how the author substantiates his or her argument. Finally, in a couple of sentences, you should reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of the argument. (10 summaries at 20 points each for a total of 200 points or about 20% of the total grade; note that there are 14 days with reading assignments, which means that I will drop the lowest four scores)
 3. Death and the body assignment. In approximately 500 words (roughly two-pages) explain how would you like your body to be handled after death and why. There is no wrong answer for this assignment, but papers written in haste will be penalized. This exercise is due Friday, 3/25 by 10p.m. (submitted via the Canvas). (100 points; about 10% of the total grade)
 4. Write at least a 750 word (approximately three-pages) eulogy for someone you care about. Similar to the death and the body exercise, there is no wrong answer for this assignment, but papers written in haste will be penalized. The eulogies are due Friday, 4/8 by 10p.m. (submitted via Canvas). (100 points; about 10% of the total grade)
 5. A mid-term paper and outline. This 1,250 word paper (about four to six pages) will be written on a topic of your choice. Its purpose is to provide you with the opportunity to integrate some of the things learned throughout the semester. This paper should be interpretive in nature. In other words you will take a primary source and analyze its view on death. This is not a reflection paper where you share your personal insights on a topic. An outline for this paper is due Friday, 4/22 by 10p.m. (submitted via Canvas). The outline should state a clear thesis and list how you will argue the thesis. It need not be longer than one page. The paper must be submitted on Canvas before 10p.m. Friday, 4/29. (100 points for the outline and 250 points for the paper; about 35% of the total grade)
 6. A final exam. This will be a written sit-down test held during the final exam period. It may be comprised of identification, short essay, and long essay sections. It is currently scheduled for 5-7pm on Tuesday, May 3. (150 points; about 15% of the total grade)

Grading Scale:

97-100%	A+	73-76	C
93-96	A	70-72	C-
90-92	A-	67-69	D+
87-89	B+	63-66	D
83-86	B	60-62	D-
80-82	B-	59 and below	F
77-79	C+		

Writing Tutorial Services (WTS) provides free help at any phase of the writing process—from brainstorming to polishing the final draft. Call (812)855-6738 to schedule an appointment. When you visit WTS, you will find a tutor who is a sympathetic and helpful reader of your prose. To be assured of an appointment with the tutor who will know most about your class, please call in advance.

WTS, on the first floor of the Information Commons in Wells Library, is open Monday-Thursday 10am to 8pm and Friday 10am to 5pm. WTS tutors are also available in the Academic Support Centers in Briscoe, Forest, and Teter residence halls, open Sunday-Thursday 7pm to 11pm.

Students that submit papers with major and consistent grammatical errors may be required to schedule an appointment with a writing tutor.

Academic Integrity: As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* (<http://studentcode.iu.edu>). When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the *Code* will be handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, or a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities, and must include a report to the Dean of Students, who may impose additional disciplinary sanctions including expulsion from the University.

Books to Purchase:

Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 2009. ISBN 978-0393334876

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage, 2004 (unabridged version). ISBN 978-1400033416.

Additional required readings will be accessible via Canvas (under “Files”). You must print them out.

Note: Acquiring these books is your responsibility. If the bookstores will not have them in time, you should order them online and expedite the shipping.

Tentative Schedule:

Week 1: **Introduction**
 Tuesday 3/8

- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor, 1990, 1-51.
 [Canvas]

Thursday 3/10

- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor, 1990, 52-80. [Canvas]

Week 2: **Spring Break**

Week 3: **American Death Culture**

Tuesday 3/22

- Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 2009, 3-99.

Thursday 3/24

- Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 2009, 103-199.

Week 4: **Death and Religious Studies**

Tuesday 3/29

- Davies, Douglas. *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. New York: Continuum, 2002, 1-42. [Canvas]

Thursday 3/31

- Davies, Douglas. *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. New York: Continuum, 2002, 43-80. [Canvas]

DEATH AND THE BODY EXERCISE DUE FRIDAY, 3/25 BY 10p.m.

Week 5: **Western Attitudes Toward Death**

Tuesday 4/5

- Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Toward Death*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1-52 & 85-107. [Canvas]

Thursday 4/7

- Gorer, Geoffrey. *Death, Grief, and Mourning*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967, 192-199. [Canvas]
- Marvin, Carolyn and David W. Ingle. *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1-44. [Canvas]

EULOGIES DUE FRIDAY, 4/8 BY 10p.m.

Week 6: **Grief and Mourning**

Tuesday 4/12

- Leming, Michael R. and George E. Dickson. *Understanding Dying, Death & Bereavement*. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998, 469-504. [Canvas]
- Moller, Dan. "Love and Death." *The Journal of Philosophy* 104.6 (June 2007): 301-316. [Canvas]

Thursday 4/14

Spring 2016

- Walsh, Katherine. *Grief and Loss: Theories and Skills for the Helping Professions*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012, 9-18, 64-76. [Canvas]
- Liu, Ken. "Mono no Aware." [Canvas]

Week 7: **Thinking about Death**

Tuesday 4/19

- Nagel, Thomas. "Death." In *Language, Metaphysics, and Death*, edited by John Donnelly, 62-68. New York: Fordham University Press, 1978. [Canvas]
- Malpas, Jeff and Robert C. Solomon. Eds. *Death and Philosophy*, 5-15.
- Malpas, Jeff and Robert C. Solomon. Eds. *Death and Philosophy*, 50-56.

Thursday 4/21

- Kagan, Shelly. *Death*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, 247-263, 318-361. [Canvas]

OUTLINE DUE FRIDAY, 4/22 BY 10p.m.

Week 8: **Death in Fiction**

Tuesday 4/26

- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage, 2004, 1st half.

Thursday 4/28

- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage, 2004, 2nd half.

PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, 4/29 BY 10p.m.

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED FOR 5-7p.m. on Tuesday, May 3.