

**Death and Afterlife**  
01:840:112, Section 2  
M-Th 9:50-11:10 am  
Fall 2020

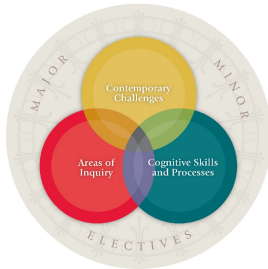
\*\*There may be minor revisions of this syllabus before September. The final version will be posted in Canvas.\*\*

Professor: Dr. Dugan McGinley  
Phone: 848-932-6849; 848-932-9640 (Department Administrator)  
E-Mail: [duganmcg@religion.rutgers.edu](mailto:duganmcg@religion.rutgers.edu) ([dugan.mcginley@rutgers.edu](mailto:dugan.mcginley@rutgers.edu))  
Office and Mailbox: Room 201, 64 College Avenue, Department of Religion  
Office Hours: Thursday 12:00-3:00 pm and other times by appointment

This course deals with a variety of issues and concerns related to death, the dying process, and what comes after. We will alternate between analyzing the current state of affairs regarding death in America and learning what various religions posit about the afterlife. We will focus on medical, psychological, and spiritual perspectives on death and dying, and then relate these perspectives to a variety of ethical and legal issues. We will also discuss loss, grief, bereavement, remembrance, and funeral practices – especially as these have been impacted by the current Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, we will explore religious views of the afterlife, attending to questions of God, reality, personal identity, and post-death existence.

NOTE: This course deals with emotionally sensitive issues, reflected upon through critical analysis. If you recently experienced the death of someone close to you, you may find this course will help you understand your experience; but it may also be stressful for you. If you think this might be the case, you may want to consider taking the course at a later time.

This course fulfills the following core curriculum learning goals of Rutgers University: **[AHo]**



### **Philosophical and Theoretical Issues: Arts and Humanities**

Students will examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

### Required Texts:

*The Good Death: An Exploration of Dying in America*, by Ann Neumann. Beacon Press. ISBN: 978-0-8070-7699-6 (paperback). Also available as e-book: ISBN: 978-0-8070-8063-4

*Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions (Second Edition)*, by Christopher Moreman. Rowman and Littlefield. ISBN: 978-1-4422-7495-2 (paperback). Also available as e-book: ISBN: 978-1-4422-7469-9 (Viewable online through Rutgers Libraries).

Additional articles available on Canvas.

You will also need to be able to use the Respondus Lockdown Browser for tests.

### Recommended Texts:

*From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death*, by Caitlyn Doughty. W.W. Norton. ISBN: 978-0-393-35628-1

*A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis. HarperOne. ISBN: 978-0060652388 (Any version is fine.) (Viewable online through Rutgers Libraries).

### Course Requirements:

#### 1. *Participation:*

We will be holding synchronous online sessions of the course, so attending each session by logging in and being engaged during that time is important. If you have a hardship that prevents you from logging in live, each session will be recorded and you will be able to watch it that way. Some of the material covered in lectures and in-class discussion is not found in the textbooks, additional details may be given in class regarding particular assignments, and you will often be asked to contribute something particular to discussion boards at the end of the class; so if you are unable to attend a live session, it is vital that you watch it before the next session occurs.

In general, good participation requires completing the assignments before each class session, taking notes, and being actively engaged in any class discussion inasmuch as this is possible for you. How and what you learn from listening to a lecture, reading a textbook, doing research, etc., is exponentially enhanced when you have immediate access to other students' perspectives on the material. Thus, it is equally important and helpful that you share your perspective so that others may benefit from what you have to say. It also proves that you are thinking about the material. I encourage you to make vocal contributions when you can and also to add brief comments and/or questions to the public chat. While not ideal, the online format may actually be more comfortable for those who are shy about speaking in public. You will also be asked at least once in the semester to be a chat monitor as a way of helping me to moderate the synchronous discussions.

Participation also includes posting asynchronous responses to the discussions forum on Canvas. Specific instructions will be given within the class session as to what the discussion will involve. In most cases, you will need to respond to a particular question based on a short video or something that was covered in the lecture or reading for the day. In some cases, you will also need to go back and respond to other students' posts. Each discussion will remain open for a limited time, so be sure to make your contribution in a timely manner. Further instructions and grading rubrics will be given in class and in the Modules.

At other times, you will be asked to complete a short quiz online after the class session that will either ask for your responses to survey-style questions or help you to review the material covered in that class session. These will be graded automatically through Canvas Quizzes.

Sometimes, participation will also include going into virtual breakout rooms with other students in the class in order to enable a deeper synchronous discussion. In these cases, your group will generate a brief shared document reporting what your group talked about. This will also allow students who were unable to log on during the session to add their thoughts as well. Again, more specific instructions will be given in class and in the Modules.

In general, you should think of participation being assessed according to the following standards:

- A: You have completed all assigned work before each class session and consistently play an active role in discussions. Your comments reflect excellent preparation and project a commitment to the learning goals of the course. Your contributions reflect a deep and serious engagement with the subject matter. In the discussion forums, you build upon the comments of others and pose insightful critical questions that foster further discussion and advance the level and depth of the conversation. You complete all of the quizzes successfully within the allotted time frame
  - B: You have completed your assigned work before most class sessions and often play an active role in discussion. Your comments reflect good preparation and a desire to learn. Your contributions are mostly on target and demonstrate interest. Your contributions in discussion forums are relevant and demonstrate that you are paying attention to the contributions of other students. You complete the quizzes in a timely manner.
  - C: Your preparation is inconsistent and you only occasionally engage in discussions. Your comments reflect adequate preparation when you do contribute. Your postings in discussion forums are inconsistent and do not always demonstrate interest in the material or awareness of other students' remarks. You fail to complete some of the quizzes.
  - D: You are often unprepared and almost never contribute to discussions or complete the quizzes -and/or- your comments reflect a lack of interest, engagement, or focus.
  - F: You never contribute or participate at all or your participation disrespects others.
2. *I-C-Q Briefs*, due as listed on the syllabus. Based on the assigned reading of the day, you will submit a thought brief highlighting one thing you found particularly Interesting, one thing that Challenged you to think about something in a new way, and one thing that raised a Question for you. These will need to be submitted just before class begins and will be used as a basis for our discussion that day, as I will call upon a few students to share elements of their briefs with the class. You will be called upon to share at least once (possibly more) over the course of the semester. These are designed to enable more active reading. More details and instructions will be given both in class and in the Modules.
  3. *Reflection Papers* based on readings dealing with contemporary death and dying issues, due as indicated on the syllabus. These should be **one page maximum**, typed double-spaced in 12-point font (**or smaller**) with 1" margins (**or less**) all around. Do NOT waste space for a heading; you will be submitting the paper via Canvas once you have logged in, so you can simply begin your text on the first typed line. You should fill the page. These are succinct, analytical responses to the assigned readings **for the day** in light of what was read and discussed in the prior class session. In each paper, you should begin with something about the reading that most interested you; then address some thoughtful reactions, concerns, questions, and insights you have had, especially in light of other material covered in class. You should use first-person voice, write more than one paragraph, and prove through your paper that you did the entire reading.

Remember the point of the assignment is to prove that you did the whole reading and thought about it. You must complete **four** (4) total from the five that are assigned, though you should read all of the chapters and be prepared for the in-class discussions. These are graded according to the following scale and will be lowered one whole number for each class a paper is turned in late. If not completed within the possible allotted time, the grade will be zero.

- 4 = A (Wow! Very insightful and nearly flawless! It exceeds expectations in substance)
- 3 = B (**The typical grade for completing the paper as assigned, without mistakes**)
- 2 = C (Not complete or not clear or poorly written or some mistakes)
- 1 = D (Overly problematic, but at least you wrote something)

(Note: while late written assignments will be penalized as described above, you will be allowed one late paper (one class period) without a penalty. Just be aware that you will have benefitted from the class discussion and this will be taken into account in the assessment of your paper.)

4. *Pandemic Focus Response Papers*, due as listed on the syllabus. These are brief (one-page) papers responding to material dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on the various issues and practices we are discussing in class. More details to come.
5. *Movie review or book report*, due on Monday, December 7. You will choose a documentary movie from a list to be provided -or- read Lewis's book -or- read selected chapters from Doughty's book. Then you will write an essay based on specific question prompts to be posted on Canvas.

The paper should be two-pages **minimum**, typed double-spaced in 12-point (no larger) Times New Roman font with 1" margins (or less) all around. Again, do NOT waste space for a heading; you may begin your text on the first typed line. Each paper is graded on the following 1-10 numbered scale and will drop a half-number for each class period the paper is late.

- 10 = A (An extraordinary paper. Thorough. Effective critical thinking. Rare but possible)
- 9.5 = A- (An excellent paper – well above and beyond expectations)
- 9 = B+ (Insightfully completed paper as expected and written very well)
- 8.5 = B (**This is the typical grade for completing the paper as assigned**)
- 8 = B- (Not quite up to expectations)
- 7.5 = C+ (Falls short in length or critical thinking)
- 7 = C (Falls short as above and/or too much summary without analysis)
- 6.5 = C- (Falls short as above and/or poor writing skills)
- 6 = D+ (These grades and below are compounding the problems mentioned above)
- 5.5 = D
- 5 = D-

6. *Two Tests*, on October 5 and November 9. Failure to take the tests in the allotted time frame without **prior** notification and arrangements will result in a **zero** grade.
7. *Final Exam*, date and time frame to be determined. Again, failure to take the exam within the allotted time frame without **prior** arrangements will result in a **zero** grade.

General Criteria for Evaluation:

- accuracy and precision of scholarship
- clarity of oral and written expression
- progress in critical thinking skills
- completion of assignments and readings on due dates
- thoroughness, creativity, originality and contribution to field of inquiry

Grades will be based on the following formula:

Participation	20%
I-C-Q Briefs	10%
Reflection Papers	20%
Pandemic Focus Responses	10%
Movie Review or Book Report	10%
Two Tests	20% (10% each)
Final Exam	10%

A Note about Grading: A's are supposed to be exceptional grades. In order to earn an A (Outstanding) in this course, you must complete all assignments **really well**. Your work should not only be flawless, but also above and beyond expectations. Doing all assignments **well** fits more appropriately in the B(+) range of grades ((Very) Good). When work is flawed, late, or incomplete, it fits into the C (Satisfactory) and D (Poor) range.

NOTE: If you have any special needs or a disability that requires any special accommodation to fulfill any course requirements, you need to provide acceptable documentation to the Office of Disability Services. That office will then make arrangements as needed with Dr. McGinley.

Be sure to take advantage of the many academic support services Rutgers offers through a variety of Learning Centers. Go to <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/about-us> for more information.

Remember that if you EVER consult an outside source for something you are writing, you MUST acknowledge it through an appropriate citation. Portraying someone else's ideas or work as your own is **plagiarism** and any student found plagiarizing will receive an F for the entire course. (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>)

**Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments:**

Readings and papers are DUE on the date for which they are listed.

Sep 3	Course Introduction: From <i>Ars Moriendi</i> to <i>Death with Dignity</i>
Sep 8 (Follow Monday Schedule)	Death and Dying Awareness Neumann, Chapter 1: Terminal Restlessness

Sep 10	Coping with Dying: Hospice Neumann, Chapter 2: Mortality Parade	Reflection Paper #1
Sep 14	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 1: Ancient Conceptions	I-C-Q Brief
Sep 17	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 2: Judaism	I-C-Q Brief
Sep 21	Medical Overtreatment and Medical Ethics Neumann, Chapter 3: Priceless Days	
Sep 24	Euthanasia and End of Life Ethics Neumann, Chapter 4: Double Effect	Reflection Paper #2
Sep 28	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 3: Christianity	I-C-Q Brief
Oct 1	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 4: Islam	I-C-Q Brief
Oct 5	Test #1	
Oct 8	SPECIAL FOCUS on Coronavirus (COVID-19) Impact: "Dying, Recovering, and Caring During the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Art of Dying Well Podcast) and other media articles TBD (Canvas)	Pandemic Focus Response #1
Oct 12	Religion, Medicine, and Law Neumann, Chapter 5: Hunger and Thirst	
Oct 15	Religion and Politics Neumann, Chapter 6: A Small but Significant Minority	Reflection Paper #3
Oct 19	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 5: Hinduism	I-C-Q Brief
Oct 22	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 6: Buddhism	I-C-Q Brief
Oct 26	End-of-Life Choices and Disability Rights Neumann, Chapter 7: The Most Vulnerable	
Oct 29	Death and Punishment Neumann, Chapter 8: Dying Inside	Reflection Paper #4
Nov 2	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 7: Chinese Religions	I-C-Q Brief

Nov 5	Afterlife Beliefs Moreman, Chapter 8: African Traditions	I-C-Q Brief
Nov 9	Test #2	
Nov 12	Coping with Loss: Grief/Bereavement & Rituals Klass, "Grief, Religion, and Spirituality" Selection; Garces-Foley and Holcomb, "Contemporary American Funerals: Personalizing Tradition" Part I (Canvas)	I-C-Q Brief
Nov 16	Modern Funerals Garces-Foley and Holcomb, "Contemporary American Funerals: Personalizing Tradition" Part II; Doughty, Introduction and Colorado (Canvas)	I-C-Q Brief
Nov 19	SPECIAL FOCUS on Coronavirus (COVID-19) Impact: "Lockdown, Loss, and Pandemic Trauma" (Art of Dying Well Podcast) and other media articles TBD (Canvas)	Pandemic Focus Response #2
Nov 23	A Modern <i>Ars Moriendi</i> ? Neumann, Chapter 9: A Good Death (Guest Lecturer: Ann Neumann)	Reflection Paper #5
Nov 26	No Class: Thanksgiving Recess	
Nov 30	Afterlife and Reincarnation Experiences Moreman, Chapter 11: Near-Death and Out-of- Body Experiences Moreman, Chapter 12: Past-Life Memories	I-C-Q Brief
Dec 3	Public Testaments and Remembrance Ferre, "Last Words: Death and Public Self- Expression" (Canvas)	I-C-Q Brief
Dec 7	Religion and End-of-Life Ethics Bulow, Sprung, Reinhart, Prayag, Du, Armagenidis, Abroug, Levy, "The World's Major Religions' Points of View on End-of-Life Decisions in the Intensive Care Unit" and Campbell, "Euthanasia and Religion" (available on Canvas)	Movie Review/Book Report
Dec 10	Course Conclusion and Synthesis Moreman, Chapter 13: Comparison of Beliefs	

**Final Examination**

