

Death and Dying

ECA Annual Conference
Presentation

The Mystery of Death

1. Hospitals
 2. Nursing Homes
- When a loved one goes to these places we often don't see them come back alive.
 - We do little to teach about finality. Have we left the discussion of death to philosophers and theologians?

Down on the Farm

- Death is always near in an agricultural society
- (Less than 10% of the US is engaged in farming)
- Death is always near in a basic society (formerly a primitive society)
- Death is always near in low developed, low income nations

Terror

- Are we prone to an invasion? If so, who will die and how will one die?
- An horrific nightmare of the magnitude of 9/11 is enough to make us think more of death in our modern era. We rightly ask, what kind of religion or belief uses suicide or death to its advantage?
- Do we sense a paranoia in major centers and buildings and is this felt abroad?

Pandemics

- No one could have imagined the challenges to our world like the COVID 19 pandemic.
- People see exploitation by leaders or overcoming by other leaders.
- Mistakes are made that cause many people to question the meaning of life.

Ethics

- Prolongation of life includes,
 1. Life-support,
 2. Transplants,
 3. Antibiotics,
 4. Modern equipment,
 5. Advanced techniques

- Ethics is concerned with philosophical questions like,
 1. When is someone alive and when is someone dead
 2. Who determines death; doctors, lawyers, statesmen, philosophers or theologians
 3. What did our forefathers and mothers do?

Media and Popular Culture

- We are a media driven society. Stop and think what you or our life would be like if there was no TV, smart phone/pad, cinema, theatre, arts, including; music, drama, novel, and the plastic arts. Think too how our media shapes our attention on special subjects and objects. Newspapers are notorious for scandal and mayhem to attract an audience.

Death at the Movies

- What was the last film you saw that had a scene of death or dying portrayed in it? Was it linked to reality?
- Of your recent favorites can you name a film that had no death in it?

Death Education

- It seems funny that we have to be educated about something that every one will experience.
- If you were teaching a class on thanatology what would you include?
- Does the mission of the seminary/Bible school you attended seem to equip students for this inevitable reality?

Publications

- The Meaning of Death, 1959. Herman Feifel
- The American Way of Death, 1963. Jessica Mitford
- On Death and Dying, 1969. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
- The Denial of Death, 1973. Ernest Becker

Where do you want to die?

- Home, where you have spent most of your adult life, or
- An impersonal institution?
- Of course there will be many other locations if you are in a big city, doing extreme sports, in the military, or serving the Lord in a foreign land.

- **Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying**, Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley
- This remarkable book by two hospice nurses shows how communication at end of life takes on special meaning. Touching case stories show how approaching death can give a clarity and importance to how we all relate to one another. The book affirms that you can live fully to the very end, and that the final gifts received by caregivers can outweigh the burdens they must carry. Practical suggestions on how to respond to the requests of the dying will be of value to anyone in a caregiving role.

- Is speaking and teaching about death a taboo, like celebrating sex (was or is)?
- Are we culturally conscious of death?
- What do we think of the funeral industry?
- Do you agree with the 5 stages of dying?
 1. Denial,
 2. anger,
 3. bargaining,
 4. depression,
 5. acceptance

Approaches to Study

- Biological
 - Psychological
 - Anthropological
 - Theological
 - Sociological
1. Structural-functional theory
 2. Social-conflict theory
 3. Social-Exchange theory
 4. Symbolic-interaction theory

Summary

- Institutions
- Youth and glamour over age and dying
- Media
- Ethics, causes and life expectancy
- Approaches

Dealing with the Tragic

- Desensitized by the mediation of experience (How do you deal?)
- Death is distant
- Secularization, heterogeneity, specialization, and dense populations make us move on from the tragic and keep from getting involved in death.

Colin Turnbull (1972) The Mountain People

- The family has lost value as a social unit
- Religion is marginalized
- Community is lost to the wants of the individual
- I am the measure of all things, “The individual in Paramount.”

Kathy Charmaz (1980)

The Social Reality of Death

- Society is not obliged to have responsibility for the dead, instead all social responsibilities are left to the dying and their family
- Social concern is lacking for the dying because we value individualism and privacy.

American's value

- Individualism
- Self-reliance
- Privatism
- Stoicism
- Health and welfare organizations are for the living not the dying.

Statistics

- 80% of deaths occur in hospitals and nursing homes (1996)
- But not too long ago the percentages were as follows
 - 50 % in 1949
 - 61% in 1958
 - 70% in 1977

Defining Death

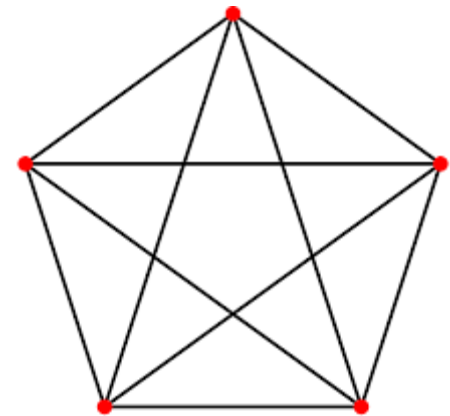
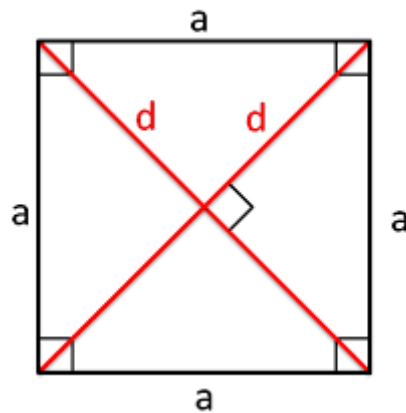
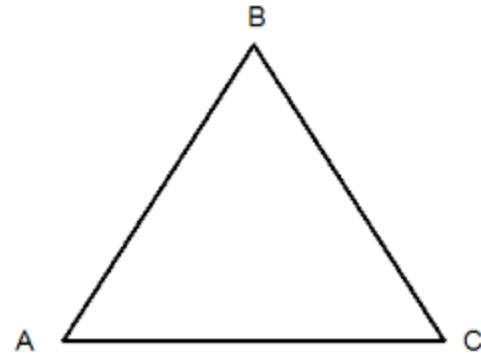
- International definition: the WHO definition is a 56 page brochure
<https://www.who.int/patientsafety/montreal-forum-report.pdf>
- American definition: traditional...when heartbeat and breathing stop
- The exception does not make the rule.

Meaning

- Social meaning: every act of dying influences others, therefore it is a social or shared event.
- Meaning from the situation; where we die is also given meaning.
- Lost relationship; consider the mathematical exponent of relationship you have.

Group size and relationships

- Mathematical number of dynamics of the group



The micro evolution of social meaning

- Meaning in culture continues through an evolution of symbolic transmission
- Awareness of your values and meaning as well as the values and meanings of those dying
- Assumptions Theoretic, Existential, Popular

Philosophical assumptions

- Theory-logic (argue)
- Existential-my meaning is drawn from my experience (illustrate)
- Popular-prescribing ideas (apply)
- Phenomenology-the thing itself

Shifts in American experience

- Factors that have influenced the changes from Puritans to today.
- The changing way of life reflects in the changing ideas of death.
- 1600 to 1830
- 1830 to 1945
- 1945 to now

1600 to 1830

- America was a rural nation, affected heavily by its religious belief and practice.
- Constant preparation for death
- Puritan (Episcopal, Separatist, Reformed) ideas of redemption from the Holy Bible
- Community--all of life was lived in community

The church bells rang, the family grieved and the community was together

1830 to 1945 the dying of death

- The rise of Transcendental influences
- The growth of other religions (Roman Catholic, Oriental and mystery)
- The rise of the funeral industry
- The rise of the middle class
- Specialization (a growing aesthetic and artistic custom)

1945 to the present the resurrection of death

- The end of WW II introduced us to the atomic age.
- Atomic bomb death meant the end of the world or life as we know it
- Terrorist attacks means an ever present reality that death could occur at any moment in an horrific way.
- Pandemics

What is your attitude?

- Denial, obscured with other things we deny death and death language.
 1. Euphemisms...enduring terms
 2. Taboo...against custom
 3. Cryonics...freezing the future
 4. “Napping”...when will I get up
 5. Professionals...leave it to someone else?
 6. Last trip (Lowering the casket)...dust to dust

Attitude continued

- Fear, the ultimate question, “Am I ready for death, because I know what is next?”
 1. Who am I?
 2. Why am I here?
 3. Is there life after life, life after death?
 4. Origin, meaning, morality, destiny.

Fears

- B.F. Skinner
- Timothy Leary
- 8 types of fears (p 62) (p 65)
- Death anxiety (table 2.1 p 63) (p 66)
- Understanding Dying, Death, and Bereavement. Leming and Dickinson; Wadsworth/Cengage 7th ed. 2011

Summary

- Defining death varies from culture and through history
- All people exhibit death-related behavior
- Social relationships and networks die in some way, when we die
- Dying is a social process

- Death meanings evolve
- America has had at least 3 stages of dealing with death
- Americans like to deny death
- Most Americans fear death
- Most Americans have anxiety about death
- Religious beliefs can relieve this for some
- All of us should get ready

Suicide

- “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”
- Albert Camus

- **Suicide** (from Latin *sui caedere*, to kill oneself) is the act of willfully ending one's own life. *Suicide* can also refer to the individual who has committed or attempted the act. Many attitudes exist
- Early societies (Roman) Patriotic
- Judaism (ancient=sin, modern=possible)
- Christian western Civilization
- Middle ages (abuse the dead)
- Japanese and Chinese
- Modern Islamic extremists

Famous and infamous

- Among the many who have taken their own lives are Boudicca, Brutus, Mark Antony, Cleopatra VII of Egypt, Judas Iscariot, Hannibal, Nero, Virginia Woolf, Sadeq Hedayat, Sigmund Freud, Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun, Ernest Hemingway, Alan Turing, Sylvia Plath, Marina Tsvetaeva, Yukio Mishima, Hunter S. Thompson, Kurt Cobain, Ludwig Boltzmann, Ian Curtis, and Vincent van Gogh.

Our attitudes

- Stigma (Moral proscription=we don't do that)
- Producing shame
- Those who commit it were crazy, mentally ill or under too much stress
- An undesirable and abnormal act

Defining

- “any death resulting either from a deliberate act of self-destruction or from inaction with fatal consequence from that inaction.”
- Suicidal behavior/gesture...smoking, extreme sports, over eating, abusing drugs, alcohol or sexual activity outside of monogamy.

Gestures

- **Suicide gesture** (in psychiatric nursing) an apparent attempt by a patient to cause self-injury without lethal consequences and generally without actual intent to commit suicide. A suicide gesture serves to attract attention to the patient's disturbed emotional status but is not as serious as a suicide attempt, although it may result in suicide, intentional or not.

Ideation

- **Suicidal ideation** means wanting to take one's own life or thinking about suicide without actually making plans to commit suicide. However, the term suicidal ideation is often used more generally to refer to having the intent to commit suicide, including planning how it will be done. Suicidal ideation is one of the symptoms of both major depression and bipolar depression.

Social factors

- Age,
- Gender,
- Region, and
- Marital Status Factors
- Socioeconomic and
- Cultural Factors

Rates

- <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db362.htm>
- More are dying from suicide than in all the armed conflicts around the world.
- One million suicide deaths annually are more than the casualties in all of several armed conflicts around the world and, in many places about the same or more than those dying from motor vehicle collisions.

Be of good cheer

- Those who accept and live the teachings of our Savior find the strength to be of **good cheer**, for he declared, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:25.)

Cheer up

- “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33
- Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 1 John 4:4