

Death & Culture – Lecture 1

- Death is the window to an array of concepts and concerns that relate to what it means to be human
- The ordinary experience of death is kept from us until we enter into circumstances where we have to deal with death
- Invisible until it is visible
- How we live dictates the way we die (materially, legally and practically)
- E.g.
 - How individuals manage their own health
 - The choices they face in what it is they'll die from (as much as possible)
 - Treatment – people will be treated differently on a basis of an assessment
 - People in India who have sold a kidney – doctors can be reluctant to treat them because they may blame them
- We can be held accountable for our choice at the ends of our lives (subtle or not)
- E.g.
 - Religiously – spiritual and religious preparations of death
 - On the back of faith and practice
- E.g.
 - Materially
 - If you lived well as opposed to if you had no money at all
 - Choices (narrowed or widened) – no money are likely to die sooner because of lower levels of health, healthcare/interventions etc.

The Big Questions

- Is natural death 'hidden' and unnatural death the visible face of contemporary death?
- To what extent (if at all) do we live in a culture of death denial?
- How do we manage and time our own deaths? How do we manage the death of others?
 - Option of suicide
 - No legal option of assisted suicide in Australia
- What political and economic pressures shape our dying?
- How do we treat the dead body and its part? And what can our treatment of the corpse tell us about attitudes to death and dying today?
- How has our dying, and practices of mourning, changed in the Internet age?
- What is the impact of living longer lives on the experience of dying?

Natural Death

- You would have not lived longer either way
- Less visibly
- Usually occurs in hospitals/homes/nursing homes
- In a private sphere (ordinary but hidden from view)

Un-natural Death

- Accidents
- Disasters
- Disproportionately covered by the media
- In a public sphere (worked over in public spaces and the media)
- We're outliving our body parts (having get things replaced e.g. teeth)
- But now, more commonly, we're outliving our memory and minds