DOUGLAS DAVIES

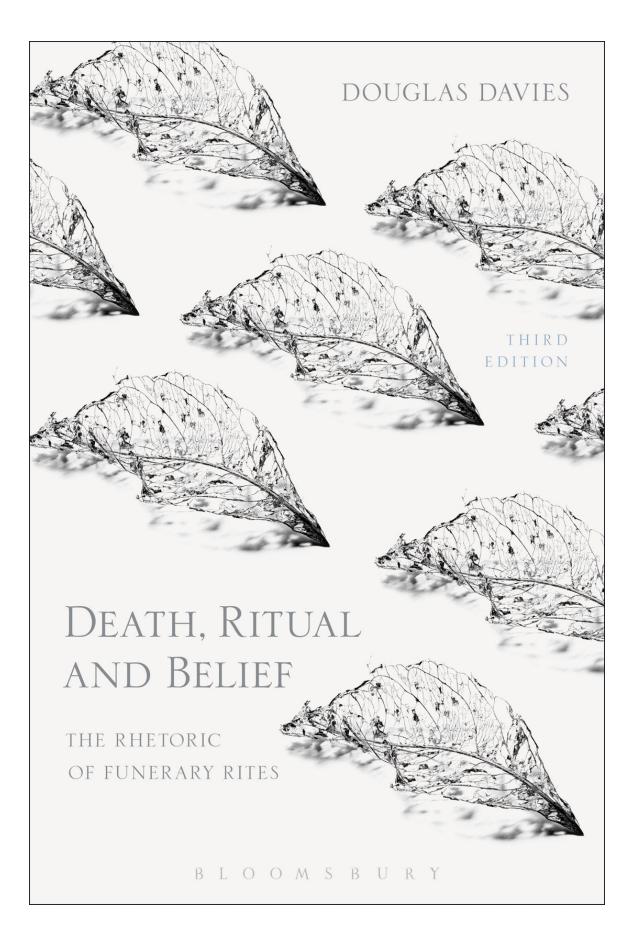
THIRD

EDITION

Death, Ritual and Belief

THE RHETORIC OF FUNERARY RITES

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Death, Ritual and Belief

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Third Edition

Douglas Davies

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

As well as revising parts of the original text of *Death*, *Ritual and Belief* this expanded edition also includes several significant developments. Particular attention should be drawn to what I call the 'theory of offending deaths' and to the place of death and grief in the experience of religious founders as explained in Chapter 14. The new material in Chapter 3, and Chapter 10, deal with theories of grief and the locations of death; further material has also been developed on the death of Jesus within Christianity in Chapter 8 and on near-death experience in Chapters 9 and 14. These various developments extend the essential argument of the first edition with its stress on 'words against death' expressed through a great variety of human responses to death, whether in ritual, belief, art or architecture.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

As well as revising much of the text of the second edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief* (2002), this third edition includes several significant developments reflecting the recent surge of interest in dying, death and memorialization across many academic and professional fields and even in social media. Innovations from my own work are included in Chapter 1 on emotional issues, Chapter 3 on grief theories, Chapter 6 on ecological burial, Chapter 14 on terrorism and Chapter 15 on spirituality, secularism and world view studies. Other inclusions from history, philosophy, theology, sociology and anthropology appear throughout this text and extend the first and second editions' stress on the 'words against death' manifest through varied human responses to death in ritual, belief, art or architecture.

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Permission to reprint excerpts from Dylan Thomas, *Poems of Dylan Thomas*, copyright 1952 by Dylan Thomas, is given by New Directions Publishing, New York, and David Higham Associates, London. Permission to quote from 'Not Waving but Drowning', from the *Collected Poems of Stevie Smith* (Penguin Twentieth Century Classics), is given by James MacGibbon. I thank Reverend Rupert Martin and the parish of Sandal Magna for permission to use a photograph of their Tree of Life memorial, and also colleagues of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, for the photograph of the All Souls College sculpture. Thanks, too, to the publishers, especially Lalle Pursglove and colleagues, for encouragement and patience over this third edition. In retrospect, I am grateful to the Fabretti Foundation of Turin for translating the first edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief* and publishing it in 2000 as *Riti, morte, credenze*. Since the publication of the first edition I moved from Nottingham University to Durham University and thank colleagues from both for their support, so too

the many generations of undergraduates on the 'Death module' and the postgraduate students, who have made teaching, supervision and mutual learning so pleasurable.

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Introduction

Since the first and second editions of this book were published in 1997 and 2002 the interest in death has continued to increase through the media, burgeoning numbers of conferences and publications on mortality and bereavement. Alongside that growing sense of risk in daily life fostered in developed societies and captured in 'health and safety' legislation there runs a strong counter-narrative of danger and peril engendered by acts of international and intra-national homicide, terrorism and war. Other fears lie in epidemics, whether in HIV-AIDS in some African and other contexts, or in threats of infected food supplies or global warming. Contrary to many hopes and expectations of peace and international law, warring factions and international involvement in Middle Eastern countries have led to thousands of deaths and to mass migrations of people that move with startling force across the political map of Europe.

Globalization, rooted in this media-filled world of information and fostered by a postmodern context in which time and space become condensed into immediate awareness, makes these risk factors all the more locally and keenly felt. The world has come to feel decreasingly secure, contradicting the optimism of even the first decade of the twenty-first century. Meanwhile the European Union's unified identity is far from secure with political-economic consequences of global import and with much concern over militarism and terrorism. Russian political pathways, for example, are seen by some former USSR states to be potentially intrusive, as with Georgia. Meanwhile the United States is experiencing its own internal conflicts of race, gun-crime and health-security schemes, and internal terrorism has become increasingly problematic for 'homeland security'. Even the election of a president (elect) in late 2015 fostered its own fears of international politics. On the religious front, the rise of Russian Orthodoxy and its alignment with political leaders is remarkable when compared with the Soviet era: though less obvious, something similar is also true for Romania in Eastern Europe. Political concerns related to aspects of religious fundamentalism, not least within differing Islamic contexts, now compete with liberal engagements, with ecology and with human well-being in the broadest of senses to generate a wide spectrum of potential concern and danger.

These factors make the prime thesis of the first two editions of this book – 'words against death' – more important than ever as 'death' marks many public maps enhanced by media attention. Still, this motif underlies the human desire to live with hope for the future and captures a great deal of the material in the following chapters. Still, I stress that these chapters touch only the tips of many icebergs for much research remains to be done on every topic discussed, a continuing challenge for contemporary generations of younger scholars to engage in 'death studies' as a profoundly important field of interdisciplinary work.

Death and the study of death are now increasingly popular in the later teenage years of the twenty-first century with death studies emerging as a field shared by a variety of academic and healthcare professionals across many formal disciplines, from the arts and humanities, through the social sciences, to more medical and service-user points of contact (e.g. Moreman, 2008; Cottrell and Marx, 2014). This is perfectly understandable since death, its expectation and subsequent entailments touch all aspects of human existence, providing extensive historical, artistic and contemporary materials for analysis and posing questions for the future. From comparative religion's view on afterlife (Sumegi, 2014), to insightful intellectual studies bringing many perspectives to bear on dying (Kellehear, 2009) and major encyclopaedic works (Kastenbaum, 2003; Bryant and Peck, 2009), mortality stands high on academic agendas. Even so, while the time may not be entirely right for any extensive account of death studies the term will be used fairly frequently in this book and, in a moment, will also be given some anchorage in the figure of Sir Thomas Browne as one clear historical exemplar of the interests and phenomena captured in the idiom of 'death studies'. Here I also note that some countries, especially the United States and parts of Europe, often speak of 'thanatology', and it is simply a matter of general British usage that I will generally refer to 'death studies'.

Interpreting death rites

At the outset we observe how the social media make for instant response to the death of virtual and real 'friends' and celebrities, while the public media of television, online access and newsfeed sources allow rapid interplay between world-events of natural disasters, war and terrorism, and personal emotion. Yet, amid these many channels of communication, individuals still have to cope with and adapt to the loss of those they love as best they may. This double-world of public and private engagement with death threads its way throughout this book whose title Death, Ritual and Belief embraces the visible and invisible, the performed and experienced realms of dying, death, grief and their intimate, community and even global consequences.

In academic terms, more disciplines than ever are taking these themes of mortality into their own competence and modes of analysis. Archaeologists describe the prehistory of death rites, historians compare and contrast the mortuary rites of more recent eras, while anthropologists and sociologists describe and, sometimes, prescribe contemporary patterns of dealing with the dead. Meanwhile increasing numbers of bereaved people tell of their experience and seek to help others in growing volumes of biographies, booklets and pamphlets, detailing how they have suffered and sought to cope with their loss. Medical professionals join in with psychologists and social scientists to fine-tune theories of grief. Despite the challenge of this wealth of deeply significant material for any single volume, this third edition of Death, Ritual and Belief maintains and develops its original theme of 'words against death', while I have explored more political aspects of the social forces embracing the military, the British National Health Service, aspects of celebrity and of 'Establishment' dimensions of British society in relation to death in a different book (Davies, 2015b). Though every society merits detailed accounts of its own distinctive practices the following chapters can only sketch a few brief cases set against a more generally comparative and theoretical world-view approach captured in the phrase 'words against death'.

Introducing the theory

The expression 'words against death' encapsulates a theory which views death rites as an adaptation to the fact of death not only by the major world religions but also in local religious practice. Though, as formal theologies and philosophies, these 'words against death' are expressed in books and lectures, they also pass into the public domain through the verbal form of prayer, blessing, invocation, eulogies and orations. Allied to music, they gain great power in liturgical hymns, while as architectural memorials they assume a durable public profile.

Human beings are animals and die. But they are, more importantly, also self-conscious. Adding these facts together we argue, from an evolutionary perspective, that death is part of the environment to which the human animal needs to adapt. Accordingly, mortuary ritual is viewed as the human adaptive response to death, with ritual language and its ritual practice singled out as its crucial form of response. It is precisely because language is the very medium through which human beings obtain their sense of selfconsciousness that it can serve so well as the basis of reaction to the awareness of death. We then argue that, having encountered and overcome this experience, both the individual and society are transformed and gain a sense of power which motivates ongoing life.

To state this same argument in a series of propositions we may say that (1) humans are self-conscious; (2) language is the key medium of self-consciousness; (3) death is perceived as a challenge to self-consciousness; (4) language is used as the crucial response to this challenge; (5) funerary rites frame this verbal response, relating it to other behavioural features of music, movement, place, myth and history; and (6) having encountered and survived bereavement through funerary rites and associated behaviour, human beings are transformed in ways which make them better adapted for

their own and for their society's survival in the world. These assumptions constitute the speculative theory underlying this book, and in subsequent chapters they are related to a wide variety of funeral rituals drawn from many societies and periods of history. As will be argued below, Maurice Bloch's (1992) anthropological development of the notion of rebounding conquest has been particularly influential in framing this argument.

Rhetoric

As for 'rhetoric' in this book's subtitle, we note from the 1960s the topic of rhetoric has assumed increasing significance not only in literary studies (Andrews, 1992) and in theology (Wilder, 1964; Hart, 1968; Hughes, 1989; Warner, 1990; Cameron, 1991; Hinze, 1996) but even in social psychology (Billig, 1987). Some scholars, quite properly, warn against easy use of the word, marked as it has been by too close an association with ideas of 'sophistication (in the less positive sense of that word), cant and emptiness' (Andrews, 1992: 2), as in titles such as Acid Rain: Rhetoric and Reality (Park, 1987) or, more incisively, Better Meat Marketing: Rhetoric or Realism (1981). Here I use 'rhetoric' without any 'and' or 'but' and quite devoid of sophisticated cynicism because, judiciously employed, it leads us to the task and traditions of persuasion, as Aristotle long ago showed in The Art of Rhetoric (Lawson-Tancred, 1991).

As a general category rhetoric is valuable when framing the formal use of words in funeral rites, liturgies, séances, talking about the dead and grief therapies. One task lying ahead is to provide a typology of funerary rhetoric to embrace its many forms apparent in numerous social contexts. This would, for example, embrace such cases as Piers Vitebsky's (1993) focus on 'dialogues with the dead' among the Sora of eastern India, Tony Walter's (1996b: 7–25) idea of the conversational construction of biographies of the dead, the analysis of sermons on the death of famous people (Wolffe, 1996: 283–96; 2000), the 'In Memoriam' sections of local newspapers, the more architectural realm of 'tombs and epitaphs' as described by Philippe Ariès (1991: 202ff.) or even the silent rites of Puritan England's 'dumb funerals' (Sparrow, 1722: 226). Since the rhetoric of death need not be religious it would also describe the speeches of secular memorial rites (Gould, 1923), including the stories that evoke the identity of the dead as told by family and friends and reflected, for example, in Ned Sherrin's (1996) anthology of

readings, prayers and music for memorial services. Even today, Homer's ancient account of the cremation of Achilles conveys the power of a classical rhetoric against death. In its 'clothing of the gods', lavish unguents, the marching round the pyre and the collection of 'the white bones at dawn' to steep them in 'unmixed wine and oil', we sense that death was not left as master of ceremonies (*Odyssey*, Book 24, lines 70–5).

Variety and caution

The extent of funerary rhetoric can, of course, vary a great deal, since some mortuary rites are extensive and some cursory. This variation is daunting for anyone seeking to describe, let alone explain, funerary rites. So even if we accept that one of the fundamental and universal problems of humanity is 'the consciousness of the possibility of death and having to cope with that finality in terms of after-death beliefs and mortuary rites and cults of the dead' we still need reminding that 'mankind's cultural constructions have been so prof usely rich and varied that we are well advised to be circumspect about the prospect of isolating worthwhile generalities beyond the superficial' (Tambiah, 1990: 114). This caution is clearly important in that the theory of 'words against death' certainly does belong to the realm of generalities. Still, it remains my hope that as an interpretation of human ritual response to the perception of mortality it will take us beyond the superficial.

Emotional ideas

One theoretical perspective that will help this third edition's deployment of words against death concerns the importance of human emotion for 'words' at large and especially in words against death. I propose to formulate the issue by considering the series of notions – ideas, values, beliefs and religious beliefs – in a specific way. While it is obvious that there are millions of 'ideas' in the world, it is equally obvious that certain ideas come to be especially meaningful to specific individuals and to specific societies. I suggest that when some particular emotion becomes attached to, pervades or frames an 'idea', what emerges is a 'value'. In other words, a 'value' is an emotion-laden 'idea'. At the next stage I suggest that when a value contributes in a significant way to a person's sense of identity it becomes a 'belief'. To speak of 'belief' in this way does not imply an idea of

supernatural agents. It simply refers to those emotion-laden ideas that provide values underlying a person's sense of who they are. This applies as much to a theist, atheist, agnostic or self-defined 'spiritual' person. Then, in a final stage we could argue that when such a belief comes to frame a person's sense of destiny, it becomes a 'religious belief'. Yet again, this need not imply any notion of deity or supernatural agent. It could easily apply, for example, to a Buddhist who would not refer to deities or the supernatural, but whose emotion-pervaded ideas of the Buddha not only gave him a sense of identity but also of his own destiny. It might be, of course, that some people are more than happy to own a sense of identity without wanting to go further and talk about destiny – that step might seem too expansive a term, one that they might associate with traditional religions to which they have no attachment. Some might think it unwise to use the word 'religion' at all, but I retain it as a long-used and widely understood term, even though I give it a very particular meaning here.

Let me exemplify the usefulness of this approach in the word 'garden'. For many people this simple noun describes a plot of land, for many others, however, their 'garden' means a great deal to them, not least in terms of emotion. They gain great pleasure and joy from working, planning and watching plants grow in it. They enjoy the fragrance of flowers and taste of vegetables as well as the feel and smell of the soil at different times of day and at different seasons. When plants die they may well make compost of it which carries a not unpleasant smell of its own, with the final material being returned to the soil to enhance its quality in the future. Other diverse emotions might be associated with the pleasures of silence or birdsong, or with the rhythm of work and of the sweat and periods of relaxation associated with gardening. Gardeners might also speak of the pleasure of simply looking at their garden at different seasons of the year, as well as of their failures and successes in growing particular plants.

I propose that such a 'garden' has passed from being 'just an idea' to being a value. More than that, some persons gain part of their sense of identity from this life interest and the potentially large investment of time and money in their garden: for them the garden has become a 'belief'. For the great majority, I propose that this is where the idea-value-belief series ends, but we cannot assume that is the case for every gardener. What of those committed people who wish their future cremated remains to be placed in their garden, or those very few who have the resources to plan ahead and have themselves buried in their garden, or on their own land? Much as we will see in Chapter 6 for woodland burial, there can be a strong alliance between attitudes to gardens and the extended sense of the growing world of 'nature' and a person's sense of their post-mortem location. In such a context it would not be inappropriate to speak of their future burial site in terms of a sense of destiny. That being the case we would be speaking of a 'religious belief'. Even if a critic might complain about this scheme of thought, and say that they wished to be buried in their garden but also believed that their soul would pass on to another domain, we could still argue for the 'religious belief' element of garden burial for, as will appear at several points in this book, a person may have not one but a cluster of themes in mind when pondering their identity, an issue that will reappear in Chapters 3 and 11 when discussing the nature of a 'person' and of gardens of remembrance.

What has been said about 'garden' could also apply to a host of other 'ideas' many directly associated with the themes of death, ritual and belief. Ideas of God, soul and afterlife as well as funeral, cremation and burial, are simply 'just words' for some but deeply held values, beliefs or religious beliefs for others. So too with the word 'grief'; it is likely that most people first encounter 'grief' as a simple word people use of others, but the time usually comes in their own life when death brings the loss of someone they love. At that point emotions pervade the word and 'grief' becomes a value. Over time the dynamics of grief tend to become part of who a person is and could be argued to contribute to their sense of identity. At that point we could speak of grief as a 'belief', for their experience of loss and how they engaged with it is something that means a great deal to them. While they might never talk much about it they could, under the right circumstances, say much to another person in need in a telling and poignant fashion. For a few, their experience of grief might go on to overwhelm their lives in ways that some would see as pathological and hindering their ongoing development in life. At that point, in our terminology, it could be shaping their own sense of destiny in some way and be described as a 'religious belief'. It is obvious that great care is needed in using the word 'religious' in that kind of extreme context. Far more usual is the link between a sense of destiny and 'religious belief' in the context of the great religious

traditions of the world. Here our special use of 'religious belief' to describe the destiny frame of identity comes alongside its more familiar use in the context of the world's major religious traditions.

Rites of destiny

So it is that many cultures host these religious world views, their sense of post-mortem destiny and their provision of funerary rites conveying the deceased from the land of the living to whatever lies ahead. Even apparently secular contexts entertain funerary rites that frame the identity of the deceased by recalling their lives and community contribution, and avowing them a place in future memory. This chapter's sociological emphasis demonstrates this transformative capacity in the ritual use of language while some philosophical, theological and brief psychological comments begin to pinpoint their focus on identity and death.

Intrinsic to the use of complex language as a distinguishing feature of the human species is its ritual contribution not only in coping with death but even in triumphing over it. But here societies differ with some seeming just able to cope with corpses while others appear to use rites as the very basis for gaining cultural energy to motivate ongoing life. The custom of pygmies in simply pulling down a hut over a corpse and wandering elsewhere in the forest is, for example, different from their village neighbours' more elaborate rites, and is far removed from elaborate city funerals entombing the dead under monumental architecture (Turnbull, 1965: 74). It would even be possible to provide a rough classification of cultures in terms, for example, of the degree of energy – economic, physical and ritual – put into death rites or the extent to which the rites are used as a positive cultural resource. Indeed, it may well be that part of the success of distinctive 'religions' lies in the benefit they confer upon members by turning death into an advantage. This combined emphasis on the verbal nature of death rites and the sense of triumph over death through mortuary rites comprises the distinctive feature of this book as we see how human cultures assert the ongoing power of human existence despite death's ravages. In particular we trace how death rites take the 'idea' of death and, through their management of grief-based emotions, influence human identity within a wider framework of destiny. In this process, self-consciousness, challenged by mortality, responds in its own defence through literal and metaphorical 'words against death'.

Identity and death

At death, identity and social status undergo major changes. These cannot be ignored despite the fact that 'identity' is an extremely difficult word to define, raising significant anthropological and philosophical questions concerning degrees of self-awareness and group membership in different cultures (Mauss, 1979: 57ff.; Carrithers, Collins and Lukes, 1985; Morris, 1991; Schweder and Bourne, 1991: 113). I take identity to refer to the way people understand themselves in relation to other persons, to the world around them and often also to supernatural realms. Identity is a consequence of self-consciousness within particular social networks embedded within a particular language. Throughout life, the relationships which grow between individual men, women and children, as members of families and society, help foster their sense of who they are and of their purpose in the world. Here identity and destiny become intimately combined and, as we have seen, this includes the way emotions pervade ideas to generate values and beliefs.

Historians have done much to document and relate changing patterns of death rites, social attitudes and ideas of identity. Philippe Ariès (1991) has provided one magisterial interpretation of the way death has been perceived and experienced over a thousand years of European history, drawing extensively from literary and theological sources. He not only emphasized human awareness but also saw death rites as a 'defence of society against untamed nature', and concluded that 'the ritualization of death is a special aspect of the total strategy of man against nature' (603, 604).

This 'strategy of man against nature' resembles my own focus on 'words against death' except that Ariès followed the French trend of setting human culture against animal nature in too stark a form. Despite appreciating his cultural analysis of Western European life, my own argument does not work on the basis of this binary opposition between culture and nature, one which led Ariès (1991: 392) into the more Freudian association of death with sex, an alliance which may be far too culturally specific to be of real use in comparative studies. I reject this type of argument, focused on what anthropologists call the binary opposition of culture and nature, because it is too preoccupied with categorizing things in pairs, something not all societies do (Needham, 1980: 41ff.). Indeed in some Western societies even the long-held binary divide between male and female is challenged by notions of transgender and gender-neutral identities. I prefer to see death rites as an inevitable consequence of human self-awareness in which death is but poorly categorized as 'nature' or as 'animal' in opposition to 'culture' or 'human'. We will see some distinctive reasons for this in Chapter 12 on pet death. Death is problematic precisely because it is intrinsically part of the human condition and the idea of 'words against death' reflects this self-consciousness. This awareness of a strange aspect of the human situation can be encountered in a wide variety of ways, from asserting belief in an immortal soul to emphasizing the continuity of identity through heirs and successors.

This is an important point because I do not wish to argue that some fear of death inevitably pushed humanity into generating a belief in an immortal soul. While it can and has been argued philosophically that self-consciousness cannot entertain the idea of its own cessation, individuals can think of their own absence from society by pondering the death and removal of others. This is why the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1957) is, I believe, correct in saying that 'death is always beyond my subjectivity'. 'Death', he says, 'is in no way an ontological structure of my being. ... It is the Other who is mortal in his being' (546).

Self-consciousness is intimately linked with a sense of identity and one might see identity as self-consciousness expressed in the public sphere. Some religious experiences, especially conversion, mysticism and possession, help generate a sense of identity while some rites actively confer identity, as in baptism, or Islamic pilgrimage. Indeed, some sociologists think that the sense of personal identity can become so important to individuals that they, in turn, invest the source of their identity with great significance, even seeing it as divine in some sense (Mol, 1976; Davies and Powell, 2015). At death identity is altered not only through the loss of figures who have served as sources of identity but also by the new responsibilities the living take upon themselves. While grief expresses human emotions following death's rupturing of relationships it is also a form of self-reflection energized by the depth of human life itself. As we have seen, grief passes from being some neutral idea to a powerful value that touches our physical experience of ourselves, of our 'dead' and of those with whom we live and work. The closer the living is bound to the deceased, the greater is the sense of loss at death as Chapter 3 makes clear. Even the death of a national leader or some stage, screen or sports star can affect an individual's outlook on life with celebrity death bringing its own complexity to our understanding of media-perfused cultures. This book explores just how people from different countries, times and places have responded to death, grief and the changes in identity following bereavement, whether transforming wives into widows, children into orphans or the dead into ancestors.

Such transformations, whether performed through the rites of major religions, secular agencies or in small local groups, occur when the living manipulate human remains to effect these new statuses for themselves and for the dead. A variety of theoretical positions have sought to describe these processes. For example, Cumpsty (1991: 207) classified what he calls 'the modelling of survival after death' into the three neat groups of 'nature religion' in which the dead become ancestors, 'withdrawal religion' where they are reincarnated and 'secular world affirming religion' where they go to a distinct heaven. More theoretically useful is Chidester's (1990: 14ff.) excellent study which explored 'four characteristic ways of symbolizing the transcendence of death' as ancestral, experiential, cultural and mythic patterns of transcendence. His discussion, a long with that of John Bowker (1991), furnishes two of the more significant reflections on death rites in contemporary literature considered at the end of this chapter.

Doubting death

One of the most interesting facts about death is that human attitudes often seem to contradict what meets the eye for, despite the obvious fact that an actively self-motivated person has become a passive corpse subject to decay, human cultures frequently assert that something of the individual continues after death. Even the smell of decay can symbolize the process of transition (Howes, 1991: 135ff.). This contradiction is frequently explained by drawing a distinction between the physical body and some other sort of dynamic element which may be called the soul, the life force, the social status or some other vital phenomenon. While it is easy to see such beliefs as a wish-fulfilment on the part of grieving relatives, closer sociological analysis shows that a post-mortem identity of the dead also relates to the community's ongoing social life. Death rites are as much concerned with issues of identity and social continuity as with the very practical fact that human bodies decay and become offensive to the sight and smell of the living who are in need of some comfort.

Confronting death

The fact that, in addition to the practical tasks of disposing of a corpse, practically all human societies possess some formalized funerary ritual suggests that such rites possess their own social and personal functions. In evolutionary terms, we might think of them as having positive adaptive significance, for if they possessed no such benefit they would have been abandoned long ago. More than that, however, this book follows the assumption that funerary rites foster a commitment to life despite the fact of death. This is certainly not a unique suggestion, as accounts of several scholars will show, but its distinctive emphasis here focuses on the power of verbal rites to express human triumph over death, always accepting that 'words' are set in social and spatial contexts.

Words and humanity

Humanity is distinguished by a strong sense of self-awareness combined with powerful linguistic abilities and it is precisely when this awareness that frames human identity is challenged by death that the powerful weapon of language is deployed to defy death. Archaeology suggests that burial was an early human activity, and certainly the historic religions have given much attention to the ritual disposal of the dead. Though Laughlin and McManus (1979) emphasize the speculative nature of their suggestion, they would not be surprised if ritual activity had arisen very early among prehuman hominids whose developed brains would enable them to picture issues beyond their immediate sense-experience. They felt it not inappropriate to 'consider that Australopithecus might have directed conceptualised ritual at such problems as ... the death of fellow group members' (110).

In evolutionary terms language has enabled human self-consciousness as one key means by which people become aware of themselves and relate to each other (Tambiah, 1990: 81ff.). With this in mind I assume that death has been widely seen to challenge human identity at the personal level and to frustrate society's destiny at the community level of existence. In symbolic terms words represent the ongoing and positive nature of human identity, with society as its cradle, while silent corpses represent the negative domain of short-lived physical existence. Funerary rites mark this divide between the paradox of social eternity and bodily mortality. In this, funerals symbolize society.

This kind of argument underlies the following chapters and, while not ignoring non-verbal communication, I emphasize linguistic factors given the way they help shape behaviour, relationships and identity (Davies, 2011). The way words combine in ritual and echo within specially designated places is a reminder of the total process of human meaning-making which, in religious terminology, often shades into the language of salvation. In an earlier book I examined this relationship between meaning and salvation in terms of the anthropology and sociology of knowledge (Davies, 1984). Those arguments closely resembled that sense of plausibility underlying human destiny as discussed by Peter Berger (1967: 33), who himself spoke of death rites as one means of keeping members of society 'reality-orientated'.

Those theoretical discussions highlight the fact that funerary rites make it difficult to draw distinctions between the well-known salvation religions of the world and the traditional religions of small ethnic groups. All show a concern with death, and most societies set about ritual performances which help make sense of the ending of a life by reconstructing the identity of the dead within some wider framework of significance. In all this, the power of language assumes a dramatic, though often ignored, part in accompanying other ritual acts in emphasizing human belief in the triumph of humanity over death and in asserting the plausibility of existence. And this is something that also applies to both more implicit and more explicit social contexts.

Performative utterances

Language influences people to remarkable degrees by helping to structure thought, direct emotion and mood and, especially during critically formal moments in life, to create new situations. When marriage vows are taken, or when vows are made in law courts, the words used determine forthcoming behaviour and create expectations with considerable consequences, especially if those vows are broken. Similar situations occur when certain professional groups make formal vows as with doctors, veterinary surgeons or priests.

At times of death language often assumes significance when sympathy is expressed to comfort the bereaved or eulogies reflect the life of the dead. Philosophers and Christian theologians have made much of this special nature of religious language in general (Ramsey, 1957), have shown how language operates both within liturgy and in secular contexts (Fenn, 1982), and have explored ways in which Christianity's emphasis upon verbal truth has influenced Western cultures (Fenn, 1987). Though many have also discussed the issue of death (e.g. MacKinnon, 1957: 261; Cohn-Sherbok and Lewis, 1995), they have rarely pursued the debate within the area of death rites as such.

One concept much used by philosophers and theologians is that of the 'performative utterance', introduced in a direct and even humorous paper by philosopher J. L. Austin (1961: 220) to describe statements such as 'I name this ship' or 'I pronounce them man and wife'; within appropriate contexts, and given what Austin called a certain kind of 'force', these function as actions. Though explored in terms of prayer and other religious utterances, this idea could well be given greater consideration for funerary rites. In Britain, for example, we can see how the traditional statement 'we commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' constitutes a clear performative utterance, one accompanied by the act of throwing soil on the coffin, and this combined utterance and act marks the ritual moment of burial, even though it follows the lowering of the coffin into the grave. In cremation services such expressions as 'we commit his body to be consumed by fire' were, in the UK, once frequently accompanied by actions that removed the coffin or the drawing of curtains around the coffin. The words and the action joined in the performative

utterance achieving its goal. In very recent times people in the UK have tended to avoid these acts of coffin-separation as something that upsets them too much. When words are left, as it were, hanging in the air, their power as performative utterances is considerably reduced for it is easy to forget that the 'performative' element was usually part of an action – words were not left 'on their own'. When ships are 'named' the act becomes a rite not unlike that of baby baptism except it is champagne rather than water that is splashed on them. When a legal vow is taken it often involves a person swearing on a sacred text, as on the Bible, while raising their right hand. So it is that 'words against death' always need to be considered in the context of accompanying actions and the place where the words are used. This fact of saying and acting together may well inform increasing numbers of contemporary funerals in which family and others may place something on, or touch, the coffin and not only sit to hear 'actionless words' being spoken. In fact Bailey and Walter (2016) have developed this notion further, and provide some empirical evidence, when considering 'relationships against death', as they account for the role of family and friends when leading or speaking at funerals as non-professionals.

Words and hugs

As for the death of a person, Donovan Ochs (1993: 21) made the important observation that such an event can be seen as 'bringing into existence a rhetorical situation'. Rhetoric is, itself, the process of employing speech to persuade people of some particular point. In this case it not only embraces what can be said about the dead and their place in society but also how words may be used to encourage and give the bereaved strength and hope during their trials. This is worth emphasizing because of the contemporary British trend of downplaying words in an attempt to stress behavioural aspects of life. Some individuals emphasize the importance of simply being with the bereaved, giving physical comfort through touch or by hugging them, rather than place much significance upon words. Part of the reason for this is that people often comment that they 'do not know what to say'. This sense of inadequacy may come from not having experienced personal bereavement, a situation true for many British adults under the age of forty, or it may derive from not possessing any shared belief in life after death. All this tends to play down the power of words in situations of grief and is

the outcome of a very particular social world of urban, cosmopolitan and weakly secularized contexts, in which people do not share ultimate values in implicit ways. Indeed, it is this which makes it hard for some people to 'find the right words' to speak to someone who has been bereaved. We should not assume that this is true for other contexts, nor indeed for much of human history, nor even that it is increasingly inevitable in a secular world. As we will see, other words may well come to fill the partial vacuum. Here our earlier discussion of how emotion comes to ideas to generate a value or a belief is relevant for, even if people think they cannot find the right 'words to say', even the simplest 'word' or 'idea' that comes with a sympathetic emotion attached it is likely to be much appreciated.

Traditionally, however, many have been called upon to speak, to sing laments or to perform traditional ritual at times of death, and their words can assume particular importance for those involved given the power of words to trigger and direct emotion. And this is further intensified when words combine with music, song or chant. It is probably no accident that what are called life-centred funerals have become popular (see Chapter 15). Highlighting the life of the deceased, these often employ professionals other than clergy to engage in what is, effectively, a rhetoric of bereavement. Though rhetoric long held a place in the funerals or memorial services of famous people, it increasingly applies to ordinary members of society. This use of language often reflects on memory rather than dwells on destiny. In our terms the dead are valued within a family-belief cluster of notions if not in a religious belief of future destiny.

That focus matches the increasingly common British trend of having various family members taking part in funerals, and even more so if and when a memorial service is held sometime after the funeral. In situations of group tragedies where, for example, schoolchildren have died or been killed, other pupils or friends may speak or play music to involve them in the corporate event. Here words against death may even be all the more powerful coming from the young, yet still within the frame of ritual. These and other trends will be examined in later chapters but now our task is to map out some significant thinkers whose work helps set some theoretical perspectives for our wide approach to death, ritual and belief.

Perspectives in death studies

Having already alluded to death studies as an increasingly shared interest across disciplines I now take this opportunity to introduce one historical figure who merits attention as one of this field's early proponents, and as an example of the utter breadth of mind weaving together the most practical and theoretical, and the most earthy and philosophical-religious pursuits of his imagination. If this figure is not the 'father of death studies', he must, I think, stand as one of its attractive and instructive forebears.

Sir Thomas Browne, 1605–82

Thomas Browne, a prolific scholar, medical doctor and renowned polymath, pursued medical studies at Leiden and Padua and was a member of Pembroke College Oxford. He later became a famous resident of Norwich, and when King Charles II visited that city in 1671 he knighted Dr Browne, making him Sir Thomas. Not only would his life as a doctor guarantee familiarity with death but both Leiden and Padua were famed for their medical studies, including their dissection theatres. Though his knowledge and interests were enormous it is enough to mention two of his publications, first and foremost his Hydriotaphia of 1658, and secondarily his Religio Medici of 1642. The former, which takes its name from the Greek for funeral urn combined with tomb, describes a host of funeral rites from across the world. His curiosity had been triggered by the unearthing of what were likely to have been Bronze-Age funeral urns near Norwich. This led him into an extended description of world death rites along with his own philosophical reflections on mortality. Though of Christian more persuasion, he exhibited little of the Protestant-Catholic argument that framed his era. He had, after all, lived-experience in Protestant Holland as well as Catholic Italy. His was an open and eclectic mind which did not favour the Christian world in his more naturally descriptive accounts of world practices, though examples are drawn from the Bible and, as would be expected from a scholar of his day, from classical antiquity. He discussed transmigration of souls, the 'purifying virtue of fire' among the Brahmins (100), the exposure of Persian and Parsee bodies, the embalming practices of Egypt, including the fact that mummies could be purchased in his day. He also added Scythian air and some North African sea-burial, as well as

the planting of trees on graves in China. Islam was not ignored; indeed, he discusses the angelic visitors to the recently dead and the form of grave structure to allow the 'dead' to greet the visitors. Jews, too, were included, noting their preference for inhumation while, occasionally, also cremating. For 'westward' peoples he described rites among Celts, Druids, Germans, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Americans. He gives accounts of such themes as funeral feasts, lamentations and weeping, as well as rites of washing, clothing, kissing and closing the eyes of the dead. So, too, with types of grave goods, wood used in funerals, the decorations on ancient Christian tombs, the posture of bodies in graves, the use of cremated remains and jokes in relation to death. His eclectic mind is evident in topics including martyrs, ghosts, the gender of spirits, the different rate of decay in different soil types and the nature and role of memorial monuments.

Browne is also alert to such topics as the cremation of children and the likelihood of there being very few cremated remains. Neither does he evade emotions of sorrow and hope, melancholy at the thought of one's own death and hope of a future existence. He ends Hydriotaphia with religious reflections on faith and immortality, on the pomposity of humanity and the fact that, for example,

there is no antidote against the Opium of time; Our fathers finde their graves in our short memories; Grave-stones tell truth scarce forty years. (138)

The Latin title of his other major work, Religio Medici, marks the theme of the religion of medical doctors and discusses their place in society. It appeared officially in 1643 having been improperly publicized by others the year before. Some two hundred years before Darwin it speaks of the 'human animal', with Sir Thomas viewing this creature as a wonder, prompting him to think of many things including how grass is turned into flesh, how it is 'carnified' in us. Indeed, his use of language is remarkable and he contributed an enormous number of words to the English language, including 'suicide'. As for death he felt himself less afraid of it than 'ashamed' by it because it can, for example, disfigure us so rapidly. One insight into his world view lies in his alliance with St Paul's biblical idea that 'the way to be immortal is to die daily' (64). Still he believes in resurrection when all 'elements' are restored 'to their primitive shapes' even though they may have passed through many other forms (68); for him, the world was less an 'inn' than a 'hospital' (104).

Sociological and anthropological explanations

From Browne's wide spectrum of medical, natural science, archaeological, philosophical and theological perspectives of the seventeenth century we now focus more sharply on the late-nineteenth-century to the early-twentyfirst-century period and on the new and maturing fields of both sociology and anthropology. As scholars increasingly saw 'society' as a proper object of study they soon pinpointed 'religion' and 'death' as social factors demanding social scientific rather than philosophical or theological analysis. While E. B. Tylor and his once influential evolution-influenced theories on souls and animism will be discussed in Chapter 11, we now take up the contribution of a distinctive cluster of scholars whose work sets the scene for a study of death, ritual and belief. Of these, Durkheim, Hertz, Malinowski and van Gennep preceded Douglas, Bauman and Bloch but together they illuminate the nature of mortuary ritual as behaviour assisting the living through the stress of death, helping to re-form disrupted social networks and reassigning new identities both to the dead and their survivors.

Durkheim

We begin with Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) whose sociological perspective has deeply influenced ideas of ritual, as pinpointed here, and even more so the phenomenon of suicide which we detail in Chapter 4. We begin with ritual and experience as presented in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. There he expounded the idea of ritual as a force for community integration framing an individual sense of transcendence. That approach had been greatly inspired by the Scots theologian William Robertson Smith's Religion of the Semites (1889) which portrayed the power sensed during collective sacrificial rites, and played much upon the distinction between the holy and the common as categories of human experience. Durkheim expanded these ideas in his distinction between the sacred and the profane and by arguing that social ritual yielded a sense of transcendence which was, in effect, the human experience of 'society'.

Theologians criticize Durkheim for replacing 'God' with the idea of 'society' but that was precisely what Durkheim wanted to say. For just as 'God' is the greatest notion for theology so is 'Society' for Durkheim. Society is the universe of a people's existence, providing them with language and ways of classifying the world, and deeply influencing their personal management of emotion, not least in funeral rites.

Both Robertson Smith and Durkheim acknowledged the positive function of death rites. Smith (1894: 370) acknowledged the 'great range of funeral rites' which exists, but beneath this variety he saw them as being 'all directed to make sure that the corpse is properly disposed of, and can no longer be a source of danger to the living, but rather of blessing'. This additional identification of blessing is important, for it shows how Smith saw death rites as taken beyond the level of utilitarianism in corpse disposal into a more positive domain which has to do with the flourishing of a community. Durkheim (1915: 382), too, is strongly positive on the 'increased courage and ardour' with which people enter back into the profane world once they have acquitted themselves of their ritual duties, for him the sense of transcendence which might accompany ritual was directly derived from the effect of group activity. This social focus was retained when he considered mourning rituals as serving social ends even more than they served the private needs of the bereaved. 'Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions ... it is a duty imposed by the group' (397). And the duty is imposed because 'the foundation of mourning is the impression of a loss which the group feels when it loses one of its members' (401).

Durkheim (1915) the sociologist sees the sense of loss in mourning in terms more of a weakening of group membership than of individual grief, with emotions being 'intensified and affirmed' when they are shared collectively. In fact, he cautiously suggests that the origin of belief in the soul emerges from funeral rites and from the expression both of loss and of a degree of fear occasioned by the social disruption of death (400). All this makes sociological sense for Durkheim's commitment to the idea that society existed before us and will exist after us, and must be maintained through all periods of potential fragmentation, including loss of members through death. While this kind of sociological argument may be acceptable as a fairly abstract discussion on the nature of society, it can easily be criticized as ignoring individuals and their personal experience of grief, even though it was not Durkheim's intention to discuss individuals. We will return to this theme in Chapter 4 when showing how Durkheim laid the foundation for modern understanding of suicide, a phenomenon which brings individual and social factors to intense alliance.

Hertz

Robert Hertz (1882–1915) died as a 33-year-old second lieutenant leading his troops in battle in April 1915. In a classic anthropological essay entitled 'The Collective Representation of Death' (1960: 77; first published 1905–1906), which has influenced many subsequent studies of mortuary rites, he sketched the idea that society has a close relationship with the physical bodies of its constituent members:

Society imparts its own character of permanence to the individuals who compose it: because it feels itself immortal and wants to be so, it cannot normally believe that its members ... in whom it incarnates itself should die. (Hertz, 1960: 77; first published 1905–06)

This way of talking seems to give 'society' a reality all of its own, a perspective that was intentional in these scholars involved with Durkheim, and one that brought them to think about death ritual in a distinctive way. It led Hertz to interpret death as a two-phased process. The first affected the dead body shortly after death and the second the remains of that body at some later date. The first set of rites dealt with the corruptible flesh, with what Hertz called the 'wet' medium of the body. The second set of rites dealt with the bony remains or ashes and constituted the 'dry' medium of the body. The first phase, whether involving interment, cremation or storage, was a time for the bones to dry, whether slowly through decay or rapidly through fire. This means that, for example, he describes cremation in a very distinctive way: 'This is precisely the meaning of cremation: far from destroying the body of the deceased, it recreates it and makes it capable of entering into new life' (43).

Symbolically speaking this will be important for the way we speak below of the death of a microcosm, taking the body to represent society. In theoretical terms, the death of the body might be thought to devalue the society which it symbolizes: the death of a microcosm issuing, as it were, a challenge to the integrity of the continuing cosmos. But, if Hertz is right, funerary rites rise to the challenge and turn the negative face of death into a positive image of some transcending reality. The identity of the body is not extinguished; it is simply transformed and revealed in its new state. The first rite removes the dead from the realm of daily social life while the second places the dead into the supernatural world of the ancestors. This is precisely why Hertz's (1960: 42) comparative material led him to say, 'As for cremation, it is usually neither a final act, nor sufficient in itself; it calls for a later and complementary rite.'

Hertz devoted his analysis to primitive Indonesian cultures with only passing comments on Europe. He was, after all, writing at a time when there was practically no cremation in Western European countries and when burial rites were still both dominant and often elaborate, not least in France where, for example, in the mid-nineteenth century there were at least ten types of horse-drawn hearses available in Paris, depending upon the cost (Kselman, 1993: 241). But Hertz, I believe, discovered a principle of the dual-focused process of funerary rites, applicable not only to cremation and burial but also to other forms of funerary ritual and significantly illuminating several other theories now to be outlined in the rest of this chapter. Together they provide a powerful basis for interpreting the rites described in the remainder of this book.

Marcel Mauss (1979), friend and collaborator of Hertz, also saw the powerful relationship between society and the death of its members, as did Mary Douglas (1970: 93) whose anthropological approach to the human body clearly spoke of it as a microcosm of society. If we assume with Hertz and Douglas that the human body may be regarded as a model expressing social values, then, theoretically, we can see how the life and health of flourishing bodies may depict the dynamics and values of social life. Similarly, the illness and particularly the death of a body may be expected to involve a kind of challenge to society.

Human body as microcosm

The idea that the human body may be viewed as a microcosm of society needs some further explanation for those unfamiliar with this kind of anthropological perspective. In what sense is a body a microcosm of society? We can answer this question by acknowledging that on the one hand, we have bodies, and on the other, we are members of a society. If we pressed these points to an extreme position we would, on the one hand, in the most literal sense, have the biological body studied by anatomists, while on the other would lie a much more metaphorical way of speaking about the 'social body' or 'society' studied by sociologists. The social body represents men and women, boys and girls, all together as parts of their community and wider society. 'Society', in this sense, is an abstract term used as a shorthand word to embrace a great mass of people with their values, beliefs and customs. In other words, the physical body is a very material entity while society is an abstract idea, a distinction that begs the question of how they may be linked. One easy answer would be to say that people acting for society write down its laws and beliefs which can then be read and learnt by each individual member. As the human baby grows, it is, as it were, nurtured in such a way that it passes from being simply a biological body to becoming human. And part of this nurturing involves learning to read and then learning the laws and rules of its society.

There is much truth in this picture, especially in literate societies, but there is another dimension of even greater significance. For, as the baby grows through childhood and into adulthood, it acquires a tremendous amount of information about its world by imitating other people, by learning how to walk and talk in particular ways, by simply learning how to behave. Much of this learning is implicit and not taught in any formal way. If, following the anthropologist Dan Sperber (1975), we draw a distinction between factual or encyclopaedic knowledge on the one hand, and implicit or symbolic knowledge on the other, we could say that encyclopaedic knowledge is learnt while symbolic knowledge is acquired (1975). Some have even seen this sort of distinction as expressing the way the brain operates with some processes being more concerned with language and rational aspects of knowledge while others deal with non-verbal aspects of knowing (Blakeslee, 1980). It is as though individuals have social values 'packed' into them through the way they learn how to behave. In a figurative sense the rule book of society comes to be 'written' into their deportment and carriage, each person being a little representation of the society at large, each body being a microcosm of society (Blacking, 1977). The African Tallensi people offer a good example where the sense of the individual is tied up with various kinship relationships, only some of which change after death. 'What dies is the matrilineal person or the individual', associated with the soft parts of the body and corpse, while the patrilineal 'person' continues in the form of hard bones and as a continuing identity within the kinship group (Bloch, 1988: 19).

This brief background helps explain the idea of a body as the microcosm of society. For the greater part of history the majority of humans have been preliterate or illiterate. Laws, beliefs and customs have been acquired through oral tradition, often implicitly rather than explicitly. Accordingly, the power and authority present in society are, in a sense, 'written' on the body of individuals. In Mary Douglas's (1966, 1970) anthropological argument, the kind of control a society exerted over its members was expressed and reflected in the way individuals controlled their own bodies. In some religious groups, for example, the tight social control over members is reflected in their dress, hairstyle and demeanour. Where control is lax or hardly existent the individual reflects this in personal free expression of dress, hair and general behaviour. Within social life itself the body tends to be more fully controlled the more 'social' the occasion: civic functions usually involve careful grooming, accompanied by highly stylized bodily movements and speech. If we picture social life as a series of concentric circles, then the closer people are to the very centre for a specific event, the greater will be their bodily control. The further they are from that centre, the more the decrease in their control over themselves.

Within British culture we find that, in religious worship or in courts of law, dress, speech and movement are all more highly controlled than they are outside of those contexts. We interpret this as being because these are moments when individuals are closest to their central values and beliefs. These two examples are important because they remind us that in most societies such concerns are often identified with the bodies of particular persons. Judges and bishops, for example, embody the law and the faith and, similarly, in the UK, the body of the monarch is clearly made to bear in a literal sense the marks of state at the coronation. The very breast of the monarch is anointed with oil, just as her head wears the crown and her hands carry the orb and sceptre. In accord with this perspective, highly symbolic people, like monarchs or archbishops, cannot simply put on and put off their symbols of office, because their very body becomes the symbol. Their body and its behaviour is a microcosm of the whole world they represent. This is what is meant by consecration as the whole life is committed to a set of beliefs and values. It is also the reason why the distinction between private and public morality becomes hard to sustain. It is an issue which is also, probably, reflected in the bodies of actors and sport celebrities and, clearly, in the president of the United States and in the presidents of many other countries.

Death of the microcosm

To speak in this symbolic way of the body as a microcosm of society inevitably raises the theoretical question of death, interpreted as what we might call the 'death of a microcosm'. If the human body is a kind of model of society, it is, obviously, much more than a mere physical body. As a symbol of society a body participates in what it represents. In this sense, for example, spouses, parents, children, friends or pop stars are symbols of marriage, kinship, friendship or fame, so that when an individual dies these very ideas are attacked or impugned in some way. It is against that background that I speak of the death of a microcosm. It is as though society is challenged when one of its 'expressions' within an individual dies. So, for example, parenthood is challenged when a child dies, or friendship challenged when a friend dies.

This perspective places great weight on the human body as the vehicle and bearer of social values and beliefs. It is insufficient to speak only of roles or role models when dealing with the depths of human life and relationships. This is an important point which can easily be ignored by people unfamiliar with the social sciences, especially since the term 'role model' flourishes in popular speech despite the fact that some sociologists like Anthony Giddens (1979: 117) have cast serious doubts on its usefulness in sociology. In this book I largely avoid talking about roles and prefer to speak of embodiment or of social status and identity. Embodiment is, in particular, one important theoretical idea in many academic disciplines and is an attempt at dealing with the wide range of experience, mood and gesture which provides the context and medium of human life (Howes, 1991). The death of the body, as a microcosm, shows that death is not simply some problem of a philosophical or rational kind but reaches deep into the biological and social nature of human beings.

Identity and embodiment

For our discussion of death, for its ritual arena and the beliefs framing mortality, it is also important to add a more personal dimension to the combined biological and social nature of people and this is where the theme of identity is helpful even though the idea is hard to define. Most people 'know' what 'identity' is in general conversation even if it is extremely hard to define and establish agreement from experts in different fields (Mol, 1976: 55ff; Davies, 2011: 5, 15). Some have described such words as 'deutero-truths', that is, terms that are immediately recognized and understood at an ordinary level of conversation but are extremely hard to define if pressed for a higher (or second = deutero) level of precise meaning (Rappaport, 1999). In this book I take a broad view of identity, holding it to be the sense persons have of who they are and of what makes them what they are. This includes their beliefs and values, as well as the awareness they have of their own bodies, sensations and environments. For religious individuals it may often include an awareness of God. While all such experience of who we are is set within our personal history and the history of our family, society and cultural tradition, it embraces relationships with people, things and places that give a framework of significance to our lives and is an issue to be taken up again in Chapter 3 when exploring the idea not of the 'individual' but of the 'dividual' nature of a person. For the moment, however, we remain with another classic figure of anthropology and death rites, the Polish scholar Bronislaw Malinowski.

Malinowski: Ritualizing optimism

In Malinowski, Durkheim's abstract sociological emphasis on society met an appropriate challenge. Unlike Durkheim, who always lived in France as a professor, Malinowski possessed prolonged and intimate experience of life in preliterate societies. For him 'savages' or 'primitives' were real people, especially in the case of the Trobriand Islanders, whose language he spoke and whose life he had, to some degree, shared. This reinforced his sense of the importance of individual people and opposed the way Durkheim tended to ignore individual emotional experience (Malinowski, 1974: 59). Malinowski speaks of death as touching deeply the private lives of people and tells his European readers that the Trobriand response to death is 'more akin to our own, than is usually assumed' (47). He speaks of the mixed emotions of longing, fear and disgust associated with the dead and focuses on the 'double-edged play of hope and fear which sets in always in the face of death' (51). Religion, for him, helped people choose and emphasize the sense of hope in life rather than the sense of fear; it gives them a conviction of continuing life and not of despair. The whole of mortuary ritual must, he thinks, serve some 'biological function of religion' (53), one that 'saves man from surrender to death and destruction', and reinforces 'the desire for life' (51). So it is that funerary rites help and assist individuals over the period of their distress as well as expressing the social loss of a member of society. In fact Malinowski adds, in a simple yet telling way, that to lose somebody in a society made up of a relatively small number of people is an obvious problem. His view of funerary rites as a desire for life is echoed by another early though often ignored anthropologist, A. M. Hocart (1973: 46, 47; first published 1935), who placed great emphasis on ritual as something that helped people in 'securing life' or in 'promoting life'.

These ideas of life-promoting ritual or of acts r itualizing man's optimism provide a basis for seeing humanity as social animals possessing a shared hope of survival, at once complex and fascinating. When extended into the past, this hope can constitute history or myth, for people have been extremely creative in constructing interpretations of past events and in filling those events with a significance that transcends the simple event itself as we see in Chapter 3. Similarly, groups look into the future, filling it with plans and optimism to bring a sense of meaning to what, in the present, is still quite unformed. So it is that hope, as a basic human emotion, comprises one aspect of self-conscious social nature and becomes particularly apparent in contexts of strong patriotism and nationalism as well as in the intense social groups of some churches. When human emotions become strained by grief and when sadness threatens to overwhelm those who have lost those they love or to whom they are closely bound, death rites come to their aid. Through death ritual the afflicted feel the support of others, many of whom are not so directly affected by the death, until such time as they gain a sense of their own ability to cope. Communal support overcomes the sense of hopelessness of the individual who might otherwise have to stand alone.

Bauman: Hiding death

The contemporary sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1992a) follows Malinowski in seeing death as such a profound problem that it may swamp human beings and their will to live. For him the various institutions of society actively hide the reality of death from its members by giving the impression that death is under control, not least through religious ritual. While the reality of death cannot be totally eliminated, death rites do their best to keep its impact to a minimum. Bauman is strongly of the opinion that ordinary social life might well be seriously damaged if the fact of death was allowed a free hand to strike at people.

Even though in some societies, such as that of contemporary Britain, the work of hospitals and undertakers can easily mask death, it is still easy for individuals to dwell upon the death of family or friends and come to feel that life is not worth living. Bereaved people sometimes say that life has lost its meaning for them, or that it seems so hard to find a purpose in life. This response to bereavement is perfectly understandable when key individuals have died, leaving a fragmented social world behind them. Bauman stresses that death is such an unanswerable problem that people would lose the motive to live if they had to dwell upon it for too long. If he is right, death ritual serves the purpose of removing the dead from the world of the living so as to enable the survivors to give their minds to life issues as soon as is possible. It is obvious that human societies could not survive if death came to anaesthetize the living, making them feel a permanent sense of hopelessness.

Those who possess a religious belief will, very likely, think that Bauman goes too far in interpreting religions as themselves part of the social deception. Others may well agree with him and see religion as yet another means of preventing people from facing the stark fact that in the end we quite simply die and that is the end of life's endeavour. It could even be argued that in modem societies, where social rituals are reduced in their scope and where individuals are left much more to their own privacy, without the support of extensive networks of kin, the loss of death strikes home particularly hard. It may well be that individuals need a fairly extensive group to help survive grief or to perform adequately as a griefstricken person. In terms of 'words against death' many relatively isolated individuals may simply not belong to a suitable speech community able to voice powerful ritual words. This is precisely where the established funeral professions move into action and provide various sets of traditional words against death, whether derived from the churches, from the funeraldirecting world or from death counsellors.

The argument that hospitals and funeral directors often seem to take over the processes of death and funerals, alienating the bereaved from the dead body, needs judicious consideration in this context. While there may be some truth in this alienation model of contemporary trends in modem urban societies it should not be allowed to obliterate other possible factors such as the density of kinship relationships available to people at times of stress. It could be that a bereaved person living alone or with one child would find it much more difficult having the corpse in the home prior to the funeral, in comparison with an extended family of four or more persons along with neighbours prepared to be closely involved with the bereaved. Moreover, funeral directors, with their practical experience and accumulated sense of emotional situations, can be of considerable help for people at critical times of bereavement (Silverman, 2000: 197). These are, at least, some important issues surrounding death rites for, as subsequent chapters show, death is often a time when members of a community are triggered into community action. But that always assumes that a community exists which can be activated, and in many modern urban contexts this is not often the case.

Rites of passage

The community context of death rites is one of the most important features of many of the following chapters. The individual's response to death is framed by the social group, whether composed of kin, friends, neighbours or just of paid professionals. One of the concepts most frequently used to interpret death ritual in its social context is described by the term 'rites of passage'. This is one of the best-known ideas from anthropology that have passed into popular use. 'Rites of passage' is a term first used by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960) in 1908 to describe the way people passed from one social status to another. His focus was on changes in status, which he likened to moving from one room to another through passages or across thresholds within a house. Such changes in social status were brought about, van Gennep believed, through a three-staged process given the overall name of rites of passage. These rites consisted in a separation from the old status, a period of transition to help in learning aspects of the new identity and, finally, a reincorporation into new status. So the rite might begin with someone being a boy or girl and end with them being a man or a woman. Similarly they might begin as a single person and end as married, or begin as a layperson and end as a priest. He argued that one of these stages of separation, transition and reincorporation would be stressed above the other two, depending on the final purpose of the rites of passage. Using the Latin word 'limen' (threshold) to describe these phases, he spoke of pre-liminal (separation), liminal (transition) and post-liminal (reincorporation) stages of rites of passage. Though these terms are very useful when interpreting death rites, great care is needed in using them. For example, the main focus for the bereaved relative may be separation from the dead while for the dead person the main ritual emphasis may be on reincorporation into the society of the ancestors or of the heavenly community.

Van Gennep thought that his idea of rites of passage had uncovered something of a universal phenomenon. Certainly it has received wide acceptance and extensive use, not only by successive generations of anthropologists but even among the general public. But his analysis of changes in social status through a ritual process has also been developed in other important ways. Two anthropologists stand out for the way they have taken germinal ideas from van Gennep and developed them in very creative ways. Victor Turner (1969) focused on the liminal period and explored the dynamics of what happens to people when thrown together in periods of stress and change of identity; he developed the concept of communitas to describe this shared fellow-feeling and we will explore this in Chapter 4. The other major development, one involving a greater degree of criticism of van Gennep, comes from the anthropologist Maurice Bloch (1992), whose idea of 'rebounding violence' or 'rebounding conquest' is of particular importance in the study of death rites and to much of the rest of this book.

Bloch: Life to death and death to life

The natural facts of life which cannot be disputed are that people are born, grow old and die. They may reproduce themselves and achieve great or

little things, but at the end of their life they die. While this is biologically obvious Bloch argues that world religions and many local traditions often turn these facts of life on their head by rituals of initiation which, symbolically, begin with 'death' and proceed into a higher order of 'life'. Though Bloch (1992) coined the terms 'rebounding violence' or 'rebounding conquest' primarily to describe such initiation rites, they are also extremely useful for interpreting death rituals and are of fundamental importance for my own theory of 'words against death'.

While Bloch accepts that there is much truth in van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, he thinks that van Gennep did not go far enough in explaining the power of ritual in people's lives. Van Gennep focuses his attention on social statuses and on the shift of individuals from one social status to another. Bloch wants to add a new, existential dimension to these rites because he thinks that through them individuals gain a sense of having encountered some sort of transcendent power or dimension. This sensation influences their lives, giving a sense of becoming different people in some way. Once possessing this new sense of power they are impelled to use it to demonstrate that they are now different people from what they were. Just as their own identity has changed through contact with the transcendent power, so they wish that power to conquer that same old identity present in others. This becomes especially clear when the language of ritual speaks of the individual's old nature being killed or transformed by a new nature. It is as though humanity interrupts the natural process of birth, growth and death, replacing it, in a symbolic way, with a process of ritual death and ritual rebirth.

In the Christian tradition, for example, there is a strong belief that because of sin and wickedness human life ends in death as a natural process. But, because of a divinely initiated salvation, it is now possible for people to become Christians and, accordingly, to overcome death. The symbolic language speaks of this in terms of baptism, through which the old nature of humanity – involving death and destruction – comes to an end as the baptized person is 'born again' in a spiritual sense. This new birth takes place here and now and means that when the physical body dies the baptized Christian will not ultimately die but will, by God's power, be caused to continue to live in an afterlife. In other words, the new birth begins a new process which does not end in death, and this is achieved in close conjunction with a verbal formula of baptism. There can be no silent baptism; words are necessary just as they are for the central act in the Mass or Eucharist where words are directly linked to the bread which is to become the 'body' of Christ. Here, once again, we encounter the performative utterance at the heart of Christian ritual.

This inversion of the natural life cycle is repeated in several chapters in this book for a variety of other religious traditions. What it shows is that, in the history of human culture, men and women have been active in addressing themselves to the obvious fact of death by asserting that human life transcends death in some way, as in the case of the Dinka live-burial in Chapters 4 and 6. This reflects something of that tremendous dynamism, inherent in human nature, which drives social groups forward with a sense of real optimism and possibility. It is worth emphasizing Bloch's idea because it adds a new dimension to earlier anthropological interpretations of ritual and of human behaviour. Instead of simply agreeing with Durkheim that funeral rites help to reintegrate society, or assenting to Malinowski's view that the bereaved need support through their period of bereavement, or even with van Gennep that social changes need to be ritually performed, Bloch's perspective adds the new dimension of a power to leap forward. If it is permissible to extend this argument to embrace death rites, we may suggest that death rites do not simply have the capacity to patch up tears in the social or psychological fabric of life but actually add a new energy to those who are left, as they set about the rest of their life in society. If this is true, it makes it all the more important to study the death rites of the world because in them we have a powerhouse of energy which benefits society and adds to that human self-awareness and that power of identity with which we started this chapter.

Psychological explanations

This anthropological perspective plays a much larger part in this book than do psychological ideas, even though later in the book we will consider psychological issues of attachment between people and the way they result in grief when severed. One, more negative, psychological avenue involves thinkers like Feuerbach (1957) and Freud (1927) who see beliefs in the soul, God and an afterlife in terms of an illusion and as a projection of the human tendency to assert its survival. With Freud, as with some of the secular groups mentioned in Chapter 15, many will agree that such beliefs are real wish fulfilments grounded only in illusion, one which humanity will need to give up if it is to become intellectually and emotionally mature. Others, especially devotees of the world religions, will radically disagree, arguing that, without some aspect of continuing identity, life is relatively absurd and pointless. Though I agree with that majority of psychologists and anthropologists who give little credence to Freud, his theories need mentioning because they continue to influence some writers in the humanities and in the general study of cultures (Badcock, 1980; Obeyesekere, 1981). Walter Goldschmidt (1980), for example, refers to a Freudian perspective in exploring his own view that fear of the evil inherent in death lay at the heart of human attitudes to mortality. In his study of the African Sebei people he showed how their rites were called the 'driving' away of death' and not of the dead. The Sebei paid scant attention to the body or indeed to the soul of the deceased, arguing that 'psychologically and metaphysically it is death that they feared and not the spirit of the deceased' (35). Similarly, in her description of how Jewish mothers responded to the sudden death of sons in the Yom Kippur War, Lea Barinbaum (1980: 121) drew heavily from Freud's idea of the three defence mechanisms of the ego expressed as retreat, attack and the ability to cope.

Later in his life, during the stresses of the First World War, Freud began to distinguish between what he categorized as the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts in his small book Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1922). He called ego-instincts the death-instincts and identified them as negative forces seeking to reduce the human being to its original, lifeles s, state while life-instincts were part of the sexual drive to perpetuate life (67). It was a speculative shift in outlook and one that only a few of his followers pursued (Jones, 1961: 406ff.). Freud had established a kind of battle in the self between the forces of life and of death, a battle mirrored in the forces leading to the Second World War, but possessing very little scientific validity as far as psychological life was concerned.

Hope and survival

Still, these psychological explanations of death rites do entertain hope as an important human attribute helping to drive communities forward by providing an optimism for life. Kübler-Ross (1970: 123) spoke of hope as a profoundly important part of her dying patients' outlook on life and, as she said, 'If a patient stops expressing hope, it is usually a sign of imminent death.' In fact several social and psychological scientists have identified hope as a significant topic of study (Stotland, 1969; Bloch, 1986; Holbrook, 1971; Desroche, 1979). Christian theologians have grounded hope not in simple membership of a society but in the very existence of God as a transcending fact of life. Accordingly, people may have hope because there actually exists something greater than them in the reality of God (Moltmann, 1969; Tutu, 1984).

It is, perhaps, when either a strong sense of religious belief or a sense of community fades that some people find hope hard to grasp. And if that lack of belief coincides with minimal involvement in supportive social groups, as in late-twentieth-century urban individualism, then the sense of hopelessness discussed by Bauman would be easily fostered. It would be in such circumstances that we might also expect to find a decrease in the sense of history as a significant dimension in life. Interestingly, however, the contemporary world of the media is not content to assert life as a meaningless mess of accidental events but is forever bringing experts to the screen to explain the problems of life. So, for example, while many recent catastrophes have thrown bereaved people into apparently hopeless conditions, government agencies set out to foster hope, not least through the media. They speak words against death and tragedy by setting up inquiries into the cause of death so that, as the phrase repeatedly expresses it, 'this will never happen again'. It sometimes seems as though this very expression functions as a performative utterance ensuring that death can be coped with if it is not seen as senseless and meaningless. If some lesson can be learnt, or some new procedure put into place, then tragic deaths have not 'been in vain'. This shows how important hope and optimism are in motivating society. To have ritualized human optimism, expressing it in verbal form and dramatizing it in death ritual, is a major achievement of humanity.

Death and transcendence

These issues of optimism and hope return us to the theme of transcendence raised earlier in connection with Durkheim, which is, broadly speaking, linked with my own focus on the adaptive significance of death rites through verbal ritual as explored in this book. Among more recent scholars, John Bowker and David Chidester have also dealt with this topic, and some comment is necessary to see how their arguments both resemble and differ from my own.

For John Bowker (1991), writing from the perspective of Christian theology informed by phenomenology, death is best interpreted through the idea of sacrifice. Arguing keenly against evolutionist explanations of afterlife beliefs as a compensation for fear of death, he asserts that 'at the root of all major, continuing religions, earliest speculations about death did not produce belief that there is a desirable life with God beyond this life, after death' (29). Rather, he sees early death rites as a means of avoiding disruption and disorder and affirming value (38). He thinks that death, as an inevitable part of the evolution of the universe, should be seen by believers as a form of sacrifice, of 'life yielding for life' (41). Here Bowker borders on the creative social benefit of death ritual in general but ultimately, as a Christian theologian, he diverts to the Christian theological issue of the death and resurrection of Jesus to ponder the theme that runs through several of his books, namely, that perhaps human beings and the universe are 'constructed in such a way that we are capable of entering into relationships not only with each other but (with) ... God?' Ultimately this is a matter of faith, grounded in the fact that one may 'know that our resistance to the tide of entropy establishes within us such miracles of relationship and grace and love that we know already that the fact of death is transcended' (228). In one sense Bowker's approach is strongly individual in terms of the intuition of faith rather than being sociological. Though he emphasizes the significance of liturgy and ritual, of music, architecture and poetry, he concludes that 'words are so much the currency of our consciousness that we sometimes rely on them when they cannot bear the weight'. He deplores 'people who talk at grief, instead of holding hands with grief' (42). By contrast with this particularly personal emphasis, my own stress both on the social context and on verbal ritual allows the dynamics of sacrifice to be explained a little more fully than in Bowker. This is possible with the help of Bloch in describing how a vitality is generated which feeds back into the resourcing of hope for the living.

A slightly similar case emerges with Chidester's most useful and wideranging analysis of death rites with its stress on 'transcendence' expressed through his fourfold scheme of ancestral, experiential, cultural and mythic types. One problem lies in the fact that Chidester leaves the term 'transcendence' largely undefined and seemingly referring simply to a human coping device, largely following James Frazer's (1990: 2) approach to the history of religions as a 'catalogue of attempts to transcend death'. Once more the positive addition of value to society through death rites is not identified and the verbal power of the ritual is, similarly, taken for granted and not seen as a key feature in the process of benefiting from transcendence.

Both Bowker and Chidester show the importance which Bloch's work has brought to the analysis of death ritual, in that their work reaches a point beyond which it does not seem to pass. Some idea of transcendence is held but its essential feature of adding a dynamic to society to foster ongoing social life remains largely hidden, and this means that much remains to be done.

Coping with corpses: Impurity, fertility and fear

The corpse is the prime symbol of death. Its initial silence and subsequent decay enshrine the radical changes of mortality that challenge the living to respond. Burial and cremation, as the two major universal cultural responses, along with several other funerary methods, are discussed in this chapter. So, too, are issues of impurity, fertility and fear that often surround times of death and funerary rites.

Burying, caves and cemeteries

Archaeological evidence from earliest human times suggests that dead bodies were buried, often in the floor of caves. Early Old Stone Age cases of burial suggest that bodies had been given a foetal position or laid as asleep; some skulls are even arranged in apparently symbolic ways (Breuil and Lantier, 1965: 231ff.). So for at least some 30,000 years or more humanity has, occasionally at least, paid special attention to the dead. In the upper period of the Old Stone Age, a time when cave-art began to develop, bodies were often placed in graves, sometimes lying on layers of ash or set in thick layers of red ochre powder. Food and weapons were included with the body and, though it is a speculative interpretation, this may have been to aid the dead in passing to another world (Maringer, 1960: 1ff., 50ff.).

The Neolithic or New Stone Age period, from some 10,000 or so years ago, provides extensive evidence of elaborate treatment of the dead which might have been part of a wider scheme of religious understanding. In South America, for example, there are several early finds of burials from north Peru dating from perhaps as early as 10,000 BC, while from as early as 5,000 BC cases of artificial mummification begin to appear in Chile, and at Chilca, near Lima in Peru and dating to approximately 3,000 BC, some skeletons show marks of having been burnt (Arriaza, 1995: 54ff.)

Rather later, in the Mediterranean world, for instance, in Malta, there are large stone structures which are often interpreted as being temples and perhaps memorials of some sort. These originate sometime between 2,000 BC and 1,500 BC, the same period reflected in the temples of Crete, especially at Knossos, which many view as a royal palace but others regard as a temple to the dead. It has even been argued that Crete was important as a source of the honey used as part of the mummification process and renowned for having preserved the body of Alexander the Great; Cretan priests may well have been experts at embalming, plying their trade and necessary products across the Mediterranean to Egypt (Wunderlich, 1983: 184). Sometimes, as at Chania in Crete, tholos tombs were built, either of baked brick or of stone. These domed subterranean structures resemble large beehives and had the dead buried beneath the floor; they also look rather like caves.

Along with tombs placed in pits and tunnels, these examples show the care that human beings have taken over the dead, although exactly what they intended by these structures it is impossible to say. The only certainty is that, for as long ago as archaeological evidence extends, human beings have dealt ritually with their dead. Though these sites stand silent today it is unlikely that the rites performed in them were silent. It would be surprising if they did not include some address to the dead or to the ancestors, but that remains unrecorded.

Burning bodies

But not all early funerals took the form of burials, for other evidence shows that, for example, cremation was employed in parts of Greece from nearly 2,000 BC. There are periods, even within the same area, when cremation and burial alternate without any apparent reason. Extensive accounts of cremation of warriors and heroic figures are found in later classical literature and show that cremation could serve as a means of bringing remains home from military campaigns as well as a way of coping with corpses on the field of battle (Wunderlich, 1983: 228ff.). Although cremation is usually a positive way of treating the dead it can, occasionally, be a form of punishment. Generally speaking, cremation is often only part of a larger process of dealing with a corpse because people are left with its cremated remains and usually think it necessary to do something with them.

Funerals as two-phased rituals

Cremation and burial funerals, in widely differing parts of the world, often involve two different processes, each related to the identity of the deceased. One represents the removal of the body from the realm of the living and the other gives it a status in the realm of the dead. Robert Hertz's theory of the two sets of rites involved in processing the identity of the dead person has already been outlined in Chapter 1. He distinguished between the original corpse and its later remains, whether as bones from burial or ashes from cremation, speaking symbolically of the corpse as representing the 'wet' medium of the body while the bones or ashes were the body's 'dry' medium with different rites for each symbolic form.

His study focused mainly on Indonesia, where a great variety of ritual was employed to dry out the corpse before its final mortuary ceremony. In this work Hertz, as Robert Parkin (1996: 87) his intellectual biographer shows, 'inaugurates the investigation of the dynamics of ritual that van Gennep was to make even more explicit'. Hertz interpreted the first set of rites as embracing the period of death. His sociological approach explored the social processes of death alongside what we might call the biological aspects of death. He argued that 'death is not completed in one instantaneous act ... it involves a lasting procedure ... which is terminated only when the dissolution of the body has been completed' (48). And then, when all seems at an end, yet another process begins, since, as he puts it, 'death is not a mere destruction but a transition'.

Many Indonesian practices involved placing the corpse in a container connected to a pot which collected the liquids draining from the decaying body, usually with some formal ceremony. Only when this 'wet' phase was ended was the 'dry' skeleton taken and finally buried. As one important part of this process of movement from the 'wet' to the 'dry' condition Hertz stressed the shift of status of the deceased from the realm of living people to that of the ancestors. The dead person first entered into a period that seemed to be not quite that of the living and not quite that of the dead. The corpse might be kept in the house or in a specially prepared building where it was, in a sense, on the margins of human life. The corpse was, in a symbolic sense, lonely and isolated. Only after the period of decay had been completed did it go to join in the life of the ancestors, placed in a special cave or building alongside the remains of other dead kinsfolk. This gives a clear example of the way in which identity is changed through the funerary processes associated with death.

The double nature of burial

One of the best examples of the double aspect of burial may be found in some Mediterranean countries, especially Greece. Traditionally, the body is buried for a period of several years until it has decayed, then the skeleton is exhumed and placed in an ossuary, a special building for holding bones. A full account of one such practice is given in Chapter 8 in the context of Greek Orthodox life in a contemporary Greek village, but similar replacin g of bones has been widespread in space and time. The storage of disinterred bones in charnel houses and other buildings close to churches was common in earlier centuries in Europe (Ariès, 1991: 59ff.), while extensive cemetery finds in southern Ecuador in South America, dating from about 6,000 BC, contain remains indicating secondary burial where the bones of the decayed body were rearranged and reburied (Arriaza, 1995: 54).

When speaking of the contemporary Greek example of a double burial rite we refer only to what happens to the body and bones in a physical sense. In terms of religious belief it might be wise to speak not of a double but of a triple funerary process, for not only is the body first buried and the bones subsequently placed in an ossuary but there remains a strong belief in a final resurrection when the human being will be transformed and given a new resurrection body. At that time the forgiven and purified soul of the dead will rejoin its purified and transformed body. The place of the soul in the total picture of death is discussed in several of the following chapters.

The double nature of cremation

The dry cremated remains of people are almost always subjected to a second ritual, as stressed by Hertz (1960: 42): 'cremation ... calls for a later and complementary rite'. He wrote at the very beginning of the twentieth century when there was very little cremation taking place in Europe, despite early conferences on cremation at Padua in 1869 and Rome in 1871 under the influence of anticlerical groups and Freemasons. In fact, although a crematorium was established in Paris in 1887 it was two years before anyone chose to be cremated there (Ragon, 1983: 285). Hertz dealt, primarily, with preliterate groups employing various methods of turning the corpse into skeletal remains and transforming the identity of the dead into ancestral identities. Despite that original narrow focus he discovered a principle that is also widely applicable to modern cremation practices in many parts of the world. It would, of course, be impossible to know of secondary rites associated with cremation if in former cultures the ashes had been simply scattered or thrown away, but many remains were specifically deposited in a location associated with some sort of memorial and have fallen to archaeological discovery. Indeed there are many known cases from imperial Rome where cremated remains are found alongside buried remains, from periods when both practices were maintained at the same time (Nock, 1932: 328).

One interesting historical example of a double cremation rite in which cremation was followed by a special entombment of the ashes was discovered near London and exhibited at the British Museum under the name of its original site as the Welwyn Garden City Burial. Belonging to the period 55 bc to ad 43, this represents one of the richest Iron Age burials in Britain. The underground chamber contained a group of large Italian wine containers along with a silver drinking cup. The cremated remains were found in a neat pile to one side of the chamber; and in front of them there was laid out a neat row of small bead-like objects which probably represent pieces used in a game. All this suggests a high-status individual who, after cremation, was given a tomb burial with wine and games provided for the afterlife. This is one of the clearest examples of cremation followed by a burial of remains which are treated as though they were the body itself.

Modern cremation rites

Because cremation is increasingly employed in modern societies it is important to sketch something of its development, and this we do in some detail for England, since it was there that cremation first became most firmly established during the course of the twentieth century. It is also important to consider some of the social consequences of cremation, for these have, until very recently, received sparse sociological or theological attention. Lahtinen has explored the slow emergence of cremation in Finland (1989), as have Sozzi and Porset in Italy (1999), but Metcalf and Huntington's (1991) comparative study of mortuary ritual in the United States practically ignored cremation, simply noting its extremely low incidence in the population at large. They offer no analysis, for example, of the extreme contrast between the United States and Britain which, by 1999, was reflected in cremation rates of approximately 25 per cent in the United States and 70 per cent in Britain (Pharos, 2001: 36). In 2001, however, Stephen Prothero's Purified by Fire provided the first serious history of cremation in the United States, a considerable time after the first modem American cremation of Baron De Palm in 1876. From a rather different cultural context, Prébin (2014) has documented a marked shift from burial to cremation in South Korea where an approximately 60 per cent cremation rate has supplanted something like 7 per cent only 20 years previously when cremation framed premature, violent or suicidal deaths.

Cremation in Britain

By sharp contrast, and for entirely different contexts and cultural reasons of innovation, the growth of cremation in Britain was initially very slow indeed: three bodies were cremated in 1885, ten in 1886 and thirteen in 1887. In terms of percentage of the population it was not until the early 1930s that 1 per cent of the dead were cremated; this became 2 per cent by 1936, and 3 per cent by 1939. Growth then increasingly speeded up, from 7 per cent in 1944 to nearly 15 per cent in 1948, and to some 31 per cent by 1958. But it was the decade of the 1960s that witnessed the balance between burial and cremation in the Britain, with 1967 marking the 50 per cent line. By the mid-1970s this touched 60 per cent of the population and

by the mid-1980s something of a plateau was attained, with some 70 per cent of the dead being cremated by 1993. This growth was, obviously, matched by a dramatic rise in the number of crematoria, from, for example, 58 in 1950 to 148 in 1960, a number that subsequently expanded to 241 by 2000, and 277 by 2014 as shown in the full table in Chapter 15 (p. 261).

The rites

While the obvious purpose of cremation is to reduce a corpse to ashes, the actual act is seldom witnessed in Britain. As far as most kin and practically all members of wider friendship networks are concerned, a cremation rite involves a religious service in a crematorium chapel, with the act of cremation taking place 'behind the scenes' as a socially invisible act. The only general, though still indirect, indications that cremation occurs lie in the visual cue of smoke and the olfactory cue of smell, both regarded as socially unacceptable, with crematorium technology and European legislation aiming at their elimination as far as possible. This hides the fact of fire in the process and contrasts, for example, with some European crematoria, as in the Czech Republic and Hungary, where crematorium architecture includes stands of burning flame – rather like those that hold the flame at the Olympic Games – outside and even inside crematoria. This reflects a long-standing cultural practice of using fire and torches at burials which was transferred to the cremation rite when they were introduced.

More elaborate rites may be built around these basic features; in its fullest form, the cremation funeral can involve an initial religious service at a church followed by a brief, and usually less public, rite at the crematorium chapel. Sometime later, the cremated remains may be buried in a preexisting grave by a priest in a rite resembling the burial of a corpse; otherwise, the remains are likely to be placed in a garden of remembrance at the crematorium by its staff in an entirely utilitarian act devoid of any particular ritual. Alternatively the remains may be taken and used in a great variety of ways by the surviving kin. It is this last option which makes cremation a particularly interesting form of contemporary British funerary practice, as traditional patterns of burial under priestly authority contrast with scattering as a totally private act. The first makes use of formal liturgies, the second often involves impromptu ritual in a radical invention of tradition. In a traditional burial, by contrast, nothing remains to be done after interment except to place a memorial stone over the grave and tend the site as time goes on. Cremation has introduced this optional rite where the single mourner takes the cremated remains of partner, child or friend and locates them wherever desired. This marks a new ritual process in the modem Western world, largely undocumented, difficult to assess in terms of frequency of occurrence and extremely difficult to study in terms of 'words against death' precisely because these are personal and private. The offer by a craftsman in New Mexico to turn cremated remains into 'mugs glazed with' such ashes that 'allow you to engage in a sensory level with your memories' is but one of increasing numbers of ash options (Bridge, 2016: 3).

Local practices

As for British crematoria there is something of a lack of earlier records to show the proportion of ashes privately deposited, but many crematoria have information which can, indirectly, furnish some indication of this practice. Material drawn from some twelve crematoria from different parts of England and Scotland and representing older and newer, urban and more rural crematoria shows that in 1993 some 41 per cent of cremated remains were taken away from crematoria. This figure cannot be taken to apply to the country at large because it reflects a tremendous variation depending on the age, region and location of crematoria. For example, Birmingham Crematorium, an older crematorium in a large city, had 20 per cent of its remains removed, but also received the equivalent of 4 per cent of its annual cremations in remains from other crematoria in different parts of the country. Matching these exports and imports of cremated remains helps furnish a more realistic picture of the traffic of ashes in the country at large and also hints at the complexity of modem British death rites in relation to the place of residence, death and post-mortem interment of the dead. Social mobility seems to be reflected in the mobility of cremated remains. So on this reckoning of outgoing and incoming remains Birmingham had 16 per cent of its cremations removed and the urban South London Crematorium had 18 per cent removed.

These older crematoria reflect the tradition established during the first half of the twentieth century when cremated remains were nearly always deposited at the crematorium where a cremation took place. At its most formal, the early practice was to place cremated remains in urns and highly stylized containers which were located within a columbarium: a hall of niches at a crematorium bearing some resemblance to a crypt except that it contains small urns rather than normal-sized coffins and is not subterranean. Less formally, cremated remains are buried or scattered in gardens of remembrance at many crematoria. This became the dominant form of deposition of ashes from the 1940s and continues to be of major importance. Many people are probably still told that it is 'customary' for crematorium staff to deposit the remains without the kin being present. Even so, such depositions attract the remains of subsequent kinsfolk in growing family traditions; once one set of remains has been placed in a particular location others are likely to join them.

Ashes as private memorials

Towards the end of the twentieth century in Britain private disposal of ashes in personalized significant spots marked a shift away from public gardens of remembrance, especially in areas where crematoria have only made a relatively recent appearance. Newer crematoria reflect this, so that, for example, Bodmin, set in the extensively rural county of Devon, had a 67 per cent removal rate and practically a zero rate of reception of remains from elsewhere. What is evident is that the majority of cremated remains are increasingly laid to rest either by a crematorium official or privately by a family member and without any institutional form of ritual. Instead, there is a growing sense of freedom available to people in contemporary Britain when it comes to the final treatment of cremated remains of deceased family members. Neither religious professionals nor crematorium staff need have the last word or conduct the last ritual action.

This situation differs from that in many other countries. Only in 1994 did it become possible to gain possession of cremated remains in Holland, for example, while the Swedes still retain public control over deposition of ashes in established cemeteries. This is one practical example of Jean Baudrillard's (1993: 130) interesting discussion of the ecclesiastical monopoly over death with its concomitant gaining of power over the living.

Hertz and cremation

With this fact in mind we return to Hertz and to the three points of his argument, already detailed earlier and in Chapter 1, which dealt with (1) the abstract problem concerning the relation between society and the body of each of its constituent individuals, (2) the partial nature of cremation within a larger ritual process and (3) cremation as a form of initiation.

The challenge death brings to society is not devastating precisely because ritual processes are at hand to ensure that some kind of symbolic permanence ensues through a corrective act. The old identity is destroyed, and this challenges social stability, but a new identity is created. Though the body as a microcosm of society does die, the person associated with it does not cease to exist because his or her identity is transformed. In its transformed state that person continues to symbolize aspects of the total social world as an ancestor, as one of the Communion of Saints in Christianity. Despite Metcalf and Huntington's (1991: 79ff.) extensive qualification of Hertz's scheme as far as America is concerned, it still remains a useful model for approaching cremation in Britain. The first set of rites, dealing with the 'wet' symbolic medium of the body, consists of the funeral service, either in a church or at a crematorium chapel, and focuses on the past life, identity and social status of the deceased. The visible ritual object is the coffin with its contained body which is subject to decay. The second set of rites deals with the 'dry' symbolic medium of the cremated remains. Ritual practices connected with these remains have, since about the 1980s, begun to undergo a marked change. The direction of the change is, as shown above with data from some crematoria, from an institutional to a personal placing of the remains in a significant context, from public verbal utterances to subdued whispers or internalized thoughts.

The shift to a personal placing of remains involves surviving kin taking cremated remains and locating them in some spot already invested with significance in relation to the deceased's life. This is the case when, for example, ashes are buried or scattered on a racing track, cricket ground or favourite fishing river, all of which reflect pleasure gained through hobbies and leisure time. So, for example, approximately half a dozen sets of ashes have been buried annually over the past decade at the world-famous Trent Bridge cricket ground in Nottingham; these tend to be located in the soil near to a seat favoured by the person who has been cremated. A slightly different case comes from the even more frequent placing of ashes at places

of natural beauty or within the garden of the deceased's house. Here the ashes may be interpreted as marking the married life of the dead, serving as a memorial of a relationship within the couple-companionate world of much modem urban life in Britain. This could be interpreted as a British form of 'fulfilment' of the social person within a retrospective view of their lives. It contrasts with Metcalf and Huntington's (1991: 210) suggestion that in the United States it is the embalming and viewing of the dead as 'asleep' which reflects their fulfilment.

Modern treatment of ashes

So it is that since the development of modem cremation from the late nineteenth century cremated remains have, variously, been buried in graves as though they were a body, taken to locations of private significance or located in special buildings called 'columbaria', designed in imitation of classical Italian columbaria developed by the Romans for funerary urns (Robinson, 1880). One of the most interesting British examples is the columbarium at Golders Green Crematorium in London that houses thousands of remains including a great number of famous individuals whose urns are often elaborate and quite distinctive, including, for example, Sigmund Freud. One of the earliest columbaria in the United States was that in San Francisco in 1895 (Prothero, 2001: 114). The Episcopal Church also established one in New York in 1928; more recently a columbarium was built into an active church at Bel Air, Maryland, next to the font to signify that life and death are both part of the Christian faith. Similarly, a new columbarium was built at the Arlington National Cemetery in 1979 including 50,000 niches for cremated remains (Phipps, 1989: 69, 71). In Britain, columbaria became relatively less used as the twentieth century went on, though this is not the case elsewhere.

But cultural invention is always at work with many innovative ways of dealing with remains as, for example, with the Anglican parish of Sandal Magna in the Diocese of Leeds (Rupert Martin, 2016: 14). Seeking to make provision for cremated remains amid Christian symbolism it took a biblical text describing an ever fruitful tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22.1–2) and developed it into a horizontal architectural feature with some six branches that could take 'leaves' under which

cremated remains could be located. It also included a semicircular depiction of roots on which stands a memorial seat for visitors (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Tree of life, St Helen's Church, Sandal Magna, Leeds

Much less fixed and wide open to individual imagination are the remains planned to be sent into outer space by the Celestis Corporation, discussed in Chapter 15, or deposited in the sea by California's Neptune Society. In a much more traditional way the Royal Navy in Great Britain offers a service of 'burying' ashes at sea for those who had been members of the Royal Navy. Symbolically speaking, there is something particularly appropriate about this kind of water dispersal of cremated remains, in that the natural elements of the body are returned to the natural medium of water in the most direct of ways. While this developed into a religious notion within Indian religious traditions, where both fire and water carried deep significance, in the West its significance is drawn from an overarching sense either of nature itself or of seafaring. But, even here, care is needed, because each culture possesses its own rationale for life's symbolism. Icelanders, for example, show a strong preference for interring cremated remains and not for scattering them at sea, as might be expected in such a seagoing people. For them the idea of sea-burial is associated with the negative emotion of individuals being lost at sea and is contrasted with the ideal of being buried amid one's home community.

The politics of burial and cremation

Death affords opportunity to use the identity of the deceased for a variety of political purposes (Barley, 1995: 114ff.). This is a significant fact reminding us that death is not simply a matter of personal grief for close family members. In revolutionary China in the 1950s it was initially decided that high party officials should be cremated so that neither grave sites nor mausoleums should be raised to differentiate leaders from the mass of the people. This decision was motivated by what was seen as the unfortunate cult of Lenin in the then Soviet Union, but in China there was a twist in the direction of funerary rites when Chairman Mao ultimately died in 1976. Frederick Wakeman Jr (1988: 259) describes this problem of cremation versus preservation as the opposition between the egalitarianism of political party members on the one hand and the power and significance of the single party leader on the other. The preservation of the remains of a leader also opens the possibility of the desecration of the body if, at some time in the future, an opposing political party rises to power.

Cremation, by contrast, removes all possibility of that kind of personal destruction of a historical identity. But other political avenues are possible as far as such remains are concerned: for example, numerous Communist Party leaders in Hungary were cremated and had their remains placed in an immense columbarium in the form of a subterranean mausoleum in Budapest. After the collapse of the communist regime practically no political leader would have their own cremated remains placed in that mausoleum, in which only a half or so of the available niches are occupied. It stands as a sharp reminder of the way communism preferred cremation over the traditional Catholic burials of Hungary and of the end of that particular era. Communist commitments have not always led to sharp distinctions between funerary rites, at least not at village and local levels of community life. In Romania, for example, local communist leaders at the village level did not always extend their ideology as far as death and would receive the last rites and end up being buried in the village cemetery, which

was reserved for those belonging to the Christian community of the church (Kligman, 1988: 165).

A rather different problem, one associated with cremated remains, emerged in India in 1996 when some of Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were found to have been deposited in a bank in the state of Orissa. Portions of his remains had been sent to many states in India after his cremation to be placed in sacred rivers, according to Hindu custom and devotion, so the discovery that some had not been so treated raised a slight political pr oblem, especially when no one seemed prepared to take responsibility for them. This is a good example of a case where 'words against death' could not finally be spoken, because of bureaucratic ineptitude. One recent example of remains being used for political purposes took place at the end of November 2016 following the death and cremation of Fidel Castro, former political leader of Cuba. His remains were taken from Havana on a four-day journey of some 590 miles across Cuba (Arangua, 2016).

A more domestic form of funerary politics, one affecting individual families, emerged from the 1950s as Christian missionaries sought to convert people in Nepal, where cremation had been normative for generations. These incoming and largely Western missionaries encouraged burial as a 'Christian' mode of funeral. As and when individual family members might become Christians the issue of their funeral and rites before and after the focal event could assume high significance in terms of both individual and family identity amid the local community. As Bal Krishna Sharma's (2013) account of Christian ritual life in Nepal has amply demonstrated, conflicts between divergent faith and customary traditions even with a single family can lead to exhumations of a buried corpse and its subsequent cremation, under local-traditional views that this alone would help the departed person gain peace and not trouble the living. His analysis takes 'issues of adaptation and contextualization' seriously and sees potential in local Christians adopting cremation by framing it with their own beliefs as by viewing fire as the 'holy fire of God' or the 'fire of the Holy Spirit' (199). Similar ritual competition has been observed elsewhere in the world even when interment is the preferred funerary option, as, for example, in a study of conversion to Catholicism and its rites in relation to local-traditional custom in Burkina Faso (Langewiesche, 2011: 138–41).

The evil politics of cremation

By complete contrast with the established cultural mode of cremation as the positively preferred form of funeral in India, or the innovation of Christian burial in Nepal, cremation reached the height of negative value when used by the Nazis in the Second World War as a major means of disposing of very many Jews and others regarded as unworthy of human life. Cremation as an immoral form of destruction has come to be symbolized by the camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau, now located in Poland.

For the first time in human history thousands of individuals were subjected to mass, impersonal cremation. The fact that this destruction, especially of the Jews, has come to be called the Holocaust is particularly important, since that was the word used for the burnt offering made as a sacrifice in the Old Testament. The inhumanity of this episode has been extensively documented, not least by survivors of the death camps. One tells how Sergeant Otto Moll was promoted in May 1944 to be director of all crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau, camps separated by only a few miles. He is described as telling arriving prisoners that they would work at the camp after having a shower and being disinfected (Czech, 1990: 622). In fact many of them were killed and cremated. He is described as having pits dug alongside the crematoria into which excess bodies were placed to be incinerated. Accounts also exist of SS soldiers loading children into wheelbarrows and dumping them in these 'fiery ravines', where 'living children burned like torches'. Dr Sara Nomberg (1985: 81), who gave that account of her own experience, asked, rhetorically, how it was that she and others experiencing such things 'did not all go crazy?' Her question expresses the sense of horror elicited at events which deemed human life so obviously worthless. This is a particularly important case as far as this book is concerned, for it raises the theoretical observation that such mass destruction completely contradicts human 'words against death'. In the broadest sense, whether religiously against God or secularly against society, the Holocaust becomes a blasphemy because it contradicts human purposes. No words are set against death but death is actively pursued, and this runs counter to the nature of human culture.

This may be one way to begin a response to Palgi and Abramovitch's (1984: 408) observation that 'anthropologists appear to have scrupulously

avoided confrontation with ... the Nazi regime' and its death plan. This remains one of the first situations in human history in which the world at large has come to its own decision on the act of a group in one nation and set it apart as a type and example of inhumanity. Because of this, great controversy is caused by any attempt to minimize or even, in the extreme case, deny the mass slaughter at places like Auschwitz (Staeglich, 1986).

Many hundreds of thousands were killed in the Second World War, both in action and through disease, but these deaths are spoken of in patriotic language, in ways which often glorify war. They died 'For King and Country', or Pro Patria, for the fatherland. Drawing added validation from the biblical source of St John's Gospel another key memorial-statement declares soldiers to have possessed that greater love which led them to lay down their life for others. They are said to have 'made the final sacrifice'. All these constitute words against death and assert the importance of life lived according to a social morality to which we return in Chapter 4 when looking at the 'sacrifice' in military death.

Air, earth and water disposal

Returning to non-war situations, and to other means of coping with corpses, mention must be made of disposal by exposure on platforms, in trees or in special enclosures as well as by being placed in water, methods to which we return in future chapters. In terms of more ancient history we can mention here the use of marshes because, occasionally, they also served to preserve bodies which historians have been able to study. One of the most famous examples is that of the Lindow Man. This ancient Briton was discovered in a peat bog, where it is possible he had been placed after having been killed. This remarkable case shows an individual who still carried round his neck the garrotte by which he had been strangled and a knife wound probably made after strangulation. The fact that his nails were well cared for suggested that he might have held a privileged status in early British society and some think that he might have been killed in some ritual way by the Druids of the ancient British and Roman period of history. What is sure is that his body ended up in a bog where the nature of the water and soil, and further deposits of peat, served to preserve it to a remarkable extent.

Space for bodies

Just what a society does with dead bodies depends to a large extent both upon afterlife beliefs and on attitudes towards death itself. Rapid dissolution of the body in cremation, with the scattering of ashes and no memorial plaque, can be viewed as the symbolic opposite of mummification, whether in hidden tomb locations of the Chinchorro of Chile or the high-profile capping structure of pyramids in Egypt. While we might well agree with Michel Ragon (1983: 287) that funerary architecture is negated in cremation, his rather philosophical style leads to an overemphatic suggestion that 'the space of death is no longer enclosed by a structured space. It is space, all sp ace. And the immaterial body becomes as immaterial as the soul'. He ignores the emergence of permanent crematoria as the major contribution of the twentieth century to the history of death in human cultures. Crematoria like those at Golders Green in London, the majestic arena designed by Asplund at Stockholm or the gigantic crematorium at Seoul in South Korea are, to many modern cities, what the pyramids were to Egypt: they are the places of death ritual and can also be locations for memorializing the dead (see Takamura, 2014, for Seoul). Hilary Grainger (2005, 2017) has contributed a magisterial study on such themes as far as the UK is concerned, providing a wealth of material on the landscape setting of these ever-changing centres of human emotion. Petersson and Wingren have also given important consideration to designing memorial places, with Wingren (2011) also depicting the nature of 'passage landscapes' that capture experiences of the nature and speed of travel over places, including where accidents occur.

Just how emotion is captured and expressed is, of course, far from easy to assess though one later-twentieth-century study was able to show something of the emotional charge carried by crematoria in terms of their being 'sacred places' of some kind (Davies, 1996b). Lindsay Jones (2000) has, magisterially, discussed the allure that architectural forms and their location can take. As for space and the dead, this has become increasingly significant through the notion of 'deathscapes' and the many spatial contexts and their material-culture through which societies bring meaning to their sense of their dead (Davies, 2005; Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010; Hockey, Komaromy and Woodthorpe, 2010.). Some scholars, including my colleague Jonathan Miles-Watson (2015: 153), have also applied the notion of 'capital', widely used by scholars in terms of cultural capital, to apply to 'space and landscape', and with his notion of "landscape capital". That idea could well be developed when accounting for cemeteries and other locations where the dead, and ongoing rituals for them, add cultural value to an otherwise bare site.

Funeral parlours, mortuaries and the home

From ancient Egypt and Chile to the contemporary United States and the United Kingdom may seem an immense distance in time, yet in funerary terms some real similarities exist, expressing the human need to oppose or transcend death. Until the twentieth century most families in Western Europe and the United States cared for their own family members while dying and for the body after death. From approximately the middle of the twentieth century, but with great regional variation, hospitals increasingly cared for the dying and funeral directors for the dead. In other words, professionalism took over from domestic and community responsibilities (Howarth, 1996).

One consequence of this was the emergence of funeral parlours, premises owned by funeral directors, where the dead are usually embalmed and treated cosmetically before being laid out in their coffins for viewing by family and friends. Whereas in Great Britain the word 'mortuary' is largely restricted to a place, usually at a hospital, where bodies are kept in cold storage and perhaps undergo a post-mortem, in the United States the name is applied to the equivalent of the British funeral parlour where the body is fully prepared for the funeral and where the family and, perhaps even more, public viewing of the corpse takes place. Some of these mortuaries are very large and elegant buildings and may be found in prestigious parts of North American towns. One interesting feature of mortuary culture is the sense they give of a domestic setting, usually consisting of larger and smaller rooms furnished with some items which would normally be found in people's homes. In this sense mortuaries provide a home beyond the home, or a homely setting outside the home. There is, usually, opportunity and space for family members to meet and greet each other in such a way that, near to the deceased's body, the atmosphere is more restrained, while at the other end of the room or just outside there may be a fair degree of conversation. The deceased may often be viewed in the 'slumber room', a telling term for the North American description of death and the dead.

The extensive preparation of bodies in North America has led some commentators to criticize the practice because it appears to deny the reality of death. Bodies are regularly embalmed and given extensive cosmetic treatment to make the dead look as lifelike and healthy as possible. Set in their relatively expensive and elaborate caskets, they look just as though they are asleep. Indeed, the dressed and powdered corpse is often said by relatives to look peaceful or at sleep rather than dead. This imitation of life in the dead attracted much attention in the later part of the twentieth century and was taken by some to reflect an avoidance of the bare facts of death on the part of some North Americans. The provision of costly caskets and tombs, often built of brick with metal reinforcement below ground level, as well as of mausoleums where coffins are placed in above-ground compartments, seems to imply a preservation of the body separated from the earth rather than simply providing an environment where decay may naturally take place.

Practically nothing is ever said of the fact that modern embalming is only a temporary and partial act, and that the sealed container will simply provide a context for the decay of the body without opportunity for the elements to return to the earth. While talk about a guaranteed tomb and casket can give the impression of some sort of guarantee on the state of the deceased, it reflects the fact that the living tend to give but partial thought to what actually happens after death.

Though it has become fashionable to speak of permanent graves, costly caskets and the decoration of the death as a denial of death, some see it in the opposite light as a clear acknowledgement of death, which shows how important interpretations are when dealing with clearly observable facts. Dumont and Foss (1972) surveyed groups of clergy in the United States and found that they thought their congregations possessed a degree of openness about death; indeed, much depends upon context, and a great deal depends upon geographical location and the cultural and religious background of people. For example, Garrity and Wyss (1980) studied death in Kentucky in the 1970s and argued that death rites were relatively open to the community, which suggests that a degree of caution is needed when making broad generalizations about death and society at large. It is always tempting

for authors who lack an appropriate comparative dimension to generalize from their own narrow social experience or ideological-theoretical stance. For example, Ernest Becker's (1973: 15, 183) renowned account of *The Denial of Death* 'based on the universality of the fear of death, or "terror" as he prefers to call it, is rooted in how he sees people living "in a total way made possible by symbols"'. In terms of this present study it is precisely such symbols that are, frequently, constructed and deployed as 'words against death'.

Contemporary society, then, involves a tremendous mix of attitudes, beliefs and opinions as far as death is concerned. Now, probably more than at any time in the history of humanity, it is likely that among a group of neighbours some believe that there will be life after death, others do not, some will wish to be buried whi le others will opt for cremation. Similarly, some will opt for practically impregnable concrete graves while a small but growing number of people, especially in England, are thinking more in terms of a cardboard coffin to be buried in a woodland grave. Such a burial would ultimately lead not to a large cemetery but to a small woodland, and matches the mood of many urban Britons in the late twentieth century with their preferences for ecologically supportive procedures.

Still, in many parts of the United Kingdom and the United States funeral directors and their facilities have taken over from the home as the location of the dead immediately before their funeral. Though this might suggest that the identity of the dead moves relatively rapidly away from their prior domestic identity, it should be understood that, in modern societies, where a great many services are provided beyond the home for people while they are alive, there is a sense in which death simply follows the pattern of other healthcare, leisure and dining facilities. Still, it is true that the wider community in which someone once lived is decreasingly involved with death. In many parts of the world neighbours, or more distant kin, used to be involved in the whole period of sickness prior to death, in preparing the body or in visiting the bereaved and supporting them in their grief and in sharing words against death, but now, with the professionalization of death, this involvement has largely decreased and the range of words spoken has been reduced. Many see these changes as reflecting the growing privatization of life, especially in urban contexts but also in much more traditional areas, as, for example, in the North American Appalachian region including Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina and West Virginia (Crissman, 1994). In the UK, too, the role of funeral directors as a key element in funeral management has not passed without criticism. One informative, deeply humorous and semi-fictional volume by an incisive author with much experience of funerary worlds in Britain covers a wide spectrum of tradition, change and management while being critical of some funeral professionals. He even speaks in terms of 'the incestuous world of funeral directing' where 'anybody could be a funeral director' and with 'the top hat ... this icon of funeral directing' (Ken West, 2013: 5, 9).

Impurity, fear and fertility: Value s of the corpse

So far we have considered numerous practical and ritual aspects of funeral rites but there remains one profoundly significant topic that needs consideration as we move from those ritual factors into the next chapter and its more psychological consideration of grief. This bridging topic embraces the three elements of impurity, fertility and fear. Although these are not always treated together there is much to be gained from taking them as an integrated whole. Here we do this in a very general way, stressing the fact that in different cultures and periods of history the differences may vary a great deal and need to be analysed in detail for each case. The human corpse is invested with numerous values; it is not a neutral object. These values reflect social relationships as well as the more personal feelings between the living and their dead and are set within the wider cultural framework concerning the meaning of life, often including beliefs about the afterlife. Broadly speaking, the three ideas of impurity, fertility and fear focus many of these human responses to the dead and each deserves some consideration.

Impurity

The word 'impurity' is usually used in the phrase 'ritual impurity', and this in turn is the simple opposite of 'ritual purity', the form that is most often found in connection with accounts of ritual behaviour. At its simplest, ritual purity describes the status of an individual able to conduct a particular ritual or to engage in some form of normal activity that itself carries significant social values. It is a qualification for action. Ritual impurity, accordingly, is a state in which someone cannot conduct a ritual or engage in some form of normal activity. Ritual itself is behaviour in which key values are expressed in symbols, symbols that are manipulated by the performer to achieve some benefit for individuals or society at large. Strong positive values, beliefs and experiences are associated with many of these rites and to say that someone is ritually impure is one way of guarding the value invested in the rite. Ritual impurity is, then, a forceful means of guarding boundaries.

One widespread feature of dead bodies is that they are regarded as impure, having the capacity to render impure those who touch them or deal with them, as described in some detail for Judaism in Chapter 7. One reason for this, in symbolic terms, may well be that the corpse is not only a boundary marker between the living and the dead but is also the vehicle through which the living individual now moves into the realm of the afterlife. As such a dynamic point of change it shares in the attribute of many liminal moments, as discussed in Chapter 1, that are viewed as potentially dangerous. The corpse is a much more dynamic entity than is grasped by modem life-experience where bodily decay is masked or inhibited. For the great majority of cultures in history the corpse was a dynamic element in that it changed, it decayed. While it may well be that one aspect of its impurity derived from this physical fact of dissolution, something that is intrinsically unpleasant to the human senses, the social fact of impurity lay in the obvious change that was besetting someone who had been a human being. Uncertainty, unpleasantness, along with a moment when social relationships were disrupted and this world and the next had dealings with each other, all contributed to a situation of potential danger. The ordinariness of life, its routine and balance of power all come under stress at the time of death. It is a time of uncertainty and potential chaos, partly for the psychological reasons we discuss in the next chapter. But socially, too, there are potential perils surrounding the dead and their passage from the land of the living. Accordingly, many cultures employ rites of purification for mourners or for ritual specialists dealing with death, often involving water or fire or periods of time. Each is its own form of rhetoric against death and through them death and life are kept at a distance from each other. It is also possible to interpret the ritual impurity of the dead in terms of ideas of violence, an issue we address in Chapter 4.

Fear of the dead

Fear is a more psychological term and, in the context of death, relates to some of the same issues dealt with mere sociologically by the category of ritual impurity. Fear in general often involves uncertainty, a threat to ordinary life and a question about coping in the future. In the context of death it involves a sense of uncertainty over what has happened, what will become of the dead and, if the deceased are becoming ancestors, how will they treat the living? Will they punish or bless? There is even some evidence suggesting that the very sight of dead or immobile and unresponsive members of one's species causes a distress that can be related to fear (Frijda, 1986: 197, 274).

Fertility

However, these negative aspects of ritual impurity and fear do possess a positive complement in a no tion that may, perhaps, be best identified as 'fertility'. It is clear to most cultures that, despite death, life goes on as part of some larger process. Chapter 5 explores this continuation for Hindu thought, not simply in terms of the transmigration of souls and their reincarnation but also in the 'fertilizing' power of bones placed in the Ganges or the smoke from the funeral pyre coming back to earth as rain to 'fertilize' the ground, become plants and enter into the making of semen once again. In Chapter 4 we also refer to the practice of sati: indeed, it is not unknown for the sites of such devoted widow-cremation to become a local centre visited by childless Hindus in search of the blessing of fertility. In Christianity, too, we show in Chapter 8 the power of martyrs' graves to attract the faithful. Relics and centres of Christian pilgrimage continued unabated until the Reformation, and in Catholic countries to the present. The dead bodies of the saints were often believed to have power to cure illness, especially if their bodies had not decayed. St Cuthbert at the medieval cathedral and monastery of Durham, for example, was said to have not rotted and it is told that his body even gave off a sweet smell when his coffin was opened in subsequent generations. This positively valued 'odour of sanctity' is the specific opposite of the negative smell of decay. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1982) have provided numerous

examples of the way in which such negative and positive values are related in their study of death and the regeneration of life.

One aspect of the 'fertility' dimension of funerals concerns food and the positive values of food as the symbol of survival and of community integration. One major response to death takes the form of funerary food. It often happens that after the main funeral rite of burial or cremation the participants join together in some sort of festivity involving food and drink. In classical literature Achilles, while he mourns the death of Patroklos, still lets his companions 'feast the heart-pleasing burial' (Burkert, 1983: 50). There is also evidence of food offerings sustaining the dead in their rather shadow-like afterlife (Erasmo, 2012: 121–32). The practice of eating at graves was well known in ancient Greece and was practised by early Christians in the Mediterranean world who not only, initially at least, buried their dead alongside pagan neighbours but also held similar memorial banquets (Colvin, 1991: 105ff.). In modern times, especially in Ireland, a wake was held at the death of a relative at which the family members along with neighbours could drink and eat in an occasion which allowed sympathy to be expressed within a context of relatively high spirits. It is still widely the custom that people hold a gathering for something to eat and drink after a funeral, and such traditions develop with changing circumstances.

If it is possible to generalize about such party-events, especially following funerals, we might say that they are marked by a shift in mood. The funeral itself inevitably evokes the negative experiences of sadness, anxiety and some fear. The obvious act of finally parting from the one who is buried or cremated is a major emotional moment in the life of the family. But intense negative emotion cannot be sustained for long periods, nor is it good for society or individuals that it should be maintained; this is where the party as a time for the shifting of mood in a positive direction comes to be important (Yoder, 1986). While the negative mood is often focused on the site of the funeral, coming at the end of a negative period in the household of the deceased, back in the house again there is a switch to the positive focus. This reflects the fact that 'life must go on'. And it is in the household that life must go on, which is why it is all the more important that it is in the house that the party should occur. But this is not always the case, as, for example, in contemporary Holland, where a more public celebration may be

held instead of, or in addition to, the domestic event. At one of Amsterdam's crematoria, for example, there are halls where the funeral party may eat and drink with wider family and friends after a cremation service, a facility which some British crematoria are also considering. In such contexts the site of negative emotion can also be the same general locale as the place of festivity. It is a time of life-affirmation, often when stories may be told about the dead person to reflect happy times. The positive aspects of the deceased's life will be emphasized as part of life-affirmation rather than, say, the period of suffering preceding death.

Food against death

There is no better way of expressing the positive and ongoing nature of life than by sharing food together, expressing as it does the sustaining of life and working for the future, just as fasting or eating very little is a way of showing corporate discipline in the face of potentially destructive elements of life. When alcohol is drunk, as it often is at funerals in many parts of the world, it also conduces to an increased feeling of well-being. Parties are often accompanied by noise, by much talking and by general bustle as opposed to the restrained and silent house of mourning before the funeral. Sounds and noise are further signs of life just as silence, the deathly hush, is typically a sign of mortality.

But even more may be said than this. Following Bloch's (1992: 37) theory of rebounding conquest in Chapter 1 and applying it to mortuary rites in general, we can suggest that 'the consumptions which follow rebounding conquests ... may not be just a restoration of lost vitality. The recovery is triumphalist and outward directed and 'may indeed lead to a legitimate increase in vitality'. While Bloch saw the significance of powerful words, particularly in the case of Godfrey Lienhardt's (1961) classic study of the Sudanese Dinka, it is possible to enhance them even further in the transcending of mortality, not least when they are associated with such positive post-funerary acts as communal eating.

In this chapter, then, we have begun to see how corpses, the immediate outcome of death, are treated symbolically in a variety of ancient and modern cultures as the identity of the dead and their network of links with the living changes. Subsequent chapters provide further examples of human responses to the challenge of mortality, with the next chapter bringing together their personal and communal dimensions in the notion of grief.

Theories of grief

Theories of Grief describes emotional responses to death that include both personal and social dynamics. Emotions and the management of emotion are key to this theme which means that psychological and sociological dynamics will inevitably complement each other in this chapter, while not forgetting the significance of philosophical, theological and other approaches to human life even though they gain greater attention in other chapters. This interlinking of perspectives is important to offset a tendency in death studies to stress one or another theory of grief rather than to see each as but one element in the complex task of 'interpreting grief'. Accordingly, this chapter might be taken less as a single lens and more as a kaleidoscope that allows for different theories to colour any particular context of grief. It will, towards the conclusion, seek to add another 'colour' or theoretical perspective to those already familiar. From a wider perspective it is also important to recognize that for the majority of human history grief has been part and parcel of personal, family and community life but, as some societies have developed medical and social welfare systems, they have explained grief in more technical terms in ways that can medicalize grief which has led to some subdivision of grief into different types. This chapter will cover only some aspects of 'local' and 'medical' grief, and strikes a note of caution about being overly precise in terms of classification of human experiences.

It is, nevertheless, safe to begin this kaleidoscopic approach by recalling Chapter 1 and the transformation of 'grief' as a simple 'idea' into a 'value', then into a 'belief' and perhaps even into a 'religious belief'. This scheme allows us to highlight both the force of emotion surrounding death and the way people's social worlds influence their responses. Because the whole of a person's life is grounded in emotional sensations it is understandable that when bereavement rends the fabric of daily life, people experience powerful sensations and meet with surrounding social responses. Moreover, most if not all of us are unprepared for bereavement when first experienced. Rather like birth when new mothers, despite the provision of antenatal classes, encounter particular bodily experiences of pain for the first time, so too with bereavement and grief, for which there are no ante-mortal classes. Though a certain degree of sympathy with the bereavement of others does occur, one's own experience may seem to inhabit a world of its own. Given bereavement's emotional wavelengths it is likely to become something of a 'value', and may even gain an impact resembling 'belief' when affecting a person's sense of identity.

Though it is probably too ambitious, or even misleading, to follow the 'idea-series' to the point of 'religious belief', there are some, albeit relatively rare cases, where 'grief' becomes rather all-consuming and generates something analogous to a sense of 'destiny'. As we see later in this chapter, 'grief' has, in some societies, become subject to medical classification, shifting from something people experience and cope with as best they can, to a pathological condition needing to be controlled by expert opinion. That itself might justify the partial resetting of our theoretical 'idea-series' formula, though great care would be needed in paralleling 'the pathological' and 'religious belief'. Their equivalence would lie in the sense of 'destiny' or extremely strong framing of life's meaning and possibilities and not in making 'religion' a pathological condition. Whether adopting that perspective or not, what remains obvious is that grief embraces widespread emotional experiences touching all of us at some time in our lives, leaving many of us changed and leaving a minority quite transformed.

In tracing approaches to grief the following kaleidoscopic components are not presented in any order of importance but rather in a largely historical series. Moreover, we have already discussed some significant figures and theories in Chapter 1, and these should be read as their own frameworks for ideas of grief even when they did not set themselves up as 'theories of grief'. This was the case, for example, with Thomas Browne (1605–82), and it was even more evident in his close contemporary Robert Burton (1577–1640) whose famous *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) deals not only with the loss of close kin but also with a national sense of loss at 'the delight of humankind, Prince Henry's immature death, as if all our dearest friends' lives had exhaled with his!' (1951: 307). That sentiment is worth bearing in mind for when we discuss the social impact of the death of Diana, princess of Wales, in Chapter 14. Almost in the same breath Burton likens the loss of bereavement to the actual loss of money as part of his rather staunch, sympathetic, but unsentimental approach to human emotion and experience. As with Burton and the princess, the following accounts of grief theories are given in historical sequence except when some strong alignment of ideas makes it more sensible to link theories that otherwise sit in quite different decades. This will now be the case, for example, with Freud on the one hand and with Bowlby and Averill on the other, for all depict the power of emotion in grief as the response to loss.

Psychoanalytic forces

Freud is responsible for the psychoanalytic view of mankind and there are two aspects of his work that need to be sketched here, namely, this specific issue of attachment and loss, and then the more abstract depiction of lifeand death-instincts underlying human nature. Although his early and wellknown paper on 'mourning and melancholia' (1917) was primarily about depression it identified depression and grief as similar as responses to loss. And it is precisely this notion of loss that increasingly informed a wide variety of psychological practitioners. The descriptive hypothesis takes human relationships as involving the growing attachment of one person to another in a process that employs a considerable amount of inner psychological energy, an energy that we can also interpret as love (Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde and Marris, 1991). When the object of love is removed by death it occasions a major problem for the survivor who now has to move from the former state of deep attachment through a new situation of detachment from that dead relation and of attachment to some new focus of relationship. This process has come to be called 'grief work'. And 'work' is an appropriate term in the broad psychoanalytical interpretation because it involves the expending of 'energy', of the special psychological energy or 'libido' in Freudian terms. Even so, some considerable caution is needed when using this much-overworked term for, as Stroebe and Stroebe (1987: 97) have pointed out, 'the concept of grief work has never been clearly defined'. For Freud it was possible for this process to be hindered if the survivor failed to detach from the image and memory of the deceased or if the dead came to be blamed for dying or in some other way had come to disappoint the survivor. In such cases guilt emerged and could lead to pathological depression.

It is not easy to speak directly about 'energy', nor about the links between 'energy' and 'emotion'. Much depends upon analogy and, in Freud's case, on images of 'force' as discussed in Newtonian physics. Moreover time has not always been favourable to Freud and Freudianism with the topics of the life and death 'instincts', for example, being 'more alive now in departments of literature than in the consulting rooms of therapists' (Breger, 2009: 2). Still, it is important to sketch the se hypothetical notions of opposing forces underlying human nature not only for historical purposes but also to give a sense of the complex inner world within which Freud saw his patients' experiences of attachment to and loss of others. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1922) Freud defined an instinct as 'an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things'. It is a 'kind of organic elasticity ... an expression of the inertia inherent in organic life'. For him 'everything living dies from causes within itself' and he emphatically asserts that 'the goal of all life is death', not least because 'the inanimate was there before the animate' (12). Thus we arrive at the death-instinct: the instinct to return to the inanimate state. Freud speaks of the origin of conscious life as a kind of response of the inanimate to some external force and then, once coming into existence, of the desire to be free from it again. Others had used similar ideas before him and one of his biographers even suggested that Freud came to use the novel phrase 'death-instinct' only a few weeks after experiencing the death of his daughter Sophie (Clark, 1982: 432).

Freud now comes to talk of the life-instinct and the death-instinct, Eros and Thanatos. Eros embraces the sexual drive and the drive to self-preservation, while the death-instinct motivates the return to the inanimate. Freud was fond of motifs taken from antiquity as with the ancient Greek mythological figures of *Eros* – deity of love – and *Thanatos* – deity of

death. Others close to Freud's concern with dreams, for example, were *Thanatos*'s brother, *Hypnos* (sleep), and his mythological children, gods of the dream-world, *Morpheus*, *Phobetur* and *Phantasmos*. Freud's consulting room and, especially, his desk were full of statues and representations of Greco-Roman, Egyptian and Oriental figures which he began to collect shortly after his own father's death, another milestone in his personal life (Spitz, 1989: 402). Ernest Jones (1961, 405), perhaps the most psychologically astute of Freud's biographers, stresses the innovative dimension of this death-wave of Freud's thought as, finally, he reckons to discover some powerful influence of mind that was different from sexrelated forces and realizes that 'the ultimate aim of life must be death'. Now Freud not only came to stress masochism as a form of the death-instinct, a force directed against the self, but also saw war as an expression of this primary masochism directed away from the self to others.

Evolutionary aspects

Ideas of loss are not new but found worldwide in literary and other narratives, but within the narrower confines of psychiatric and psychological endeavours Freud and others have given 'loss' a distinctively authoritative validation, one with an affinity with ordinary life-experience. Pre-Freudian Christian culture history, for example, was replete with parables of lost sheep, coins, sons and even loss of taste (e.g. Lk. 15.6, 8 and 24 and Mt. 5.13, respectively). But here it is with Freud and later generations, notably John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), that we are concerned. The latter strongly related the nature of loss associated with bereavement with experiences of attachment and detachment between, for example, parents and children in the ordinary course of life. This approach has also drawn on studies of animals, especially primates, to show the nature of infant dependency upon a mother-figure and the negative responses that occur when that figure is removed. Here issues of security and of stress around the presence and removal of succour are paramount. In this context, grief becomes a form of anxiety bred by separation from the loved object of our attention. Some have argued that there are strong biological and even evolutionary advantages inherent in the strong bonding between human beings and that the pain of separation is simply an inevitable outcome of that otherwise beneficial experience. Bowlby sees protest and despair as major aspects of response to loss and also sees the importance of group support for the bereaved instead of Freud's rather individual focus on 'grief work'.

Given the evolution-inspired assumption behind my argument that funerary rites are part of human adaptation to death we can benefit here from James Averill's (1968) distinction between grief and mourning. For his early psychological paper located grief within a biological and evolutionary framework with mourning set in the social domain, allowing him to argue that the combined act of grief and mourning was beneficial to society at large. Biologically speaking, he sees the strong bonds existing between individuals as necessary for ongoing human social life but with the unfortunate consequence that when they are broken through death or separation, the individual suffers grief. Grief is, then, a 'biological reaction the evolutionary function of which is to ensure a social form of existence ... necessary for survival. This is accomplished by making separation from the group, or from specific members of the group, an extremely stressful event both psychologically and physiologically' (729). In other words, grief is an inevitable negative consequence which has to be paid for the positive advantage of strong group attachment.

Averill takes up Freud's and Bowlby's psychological theories of attachment to the mother or other significant persons, an attachment which causes grief when it is broken and leads to a search for the lost person before, finally, reaching a point of acceptance of the loss (Schulz, 1978: 142). This important contribution will be pressed further when we consider the 'dividual' theory of grief towards the end of this chapter but, for the moment, I set his accentuation of grief as the negative side of attachment against what can be identified as a positive outcome of funerary rites. The assumption of many theorists is that death involves a profound setback for the individual, one that is inevitable for a social primate like Homo sapiens; the deprivation behaviour observed in some chimpanzees and other apes is even taken to reinforce this point (Averill, 1968: 71).

In a rather different academic domain Walter Burkert's (1983: 55) important book on Greek mythology and death also drew from a biological perspective when arguing that 'man's neoteny, the long period of time he spends in the process of learning, forged a new relationship between young

and old, above all between son and father, in which the catastrophe of death became especially disturbing and dangerous'. Though we might want to broaden Burkert's stress on the relationship between son and father, it is likely that his speculation on the long period which children spend with their parents in the process of growing up and learning how to live does influence in a deep way their own reaction to the death of such influential parents. The long duration of infancy and childhood guarantees that the child's developing identity is suffused with identity-elements of his or her parents. Similarly, spouses who live in deep dependence upon each other for many decades can suffer debilitating loss when the partner dies. The grief can be as extensive as their mutual interdependence was great, and such times test the adequacy of wider society in supporting the remaining person.

Alongside grief's 'biological' power, whi ch Averill so clearly documents, cultural power provides its own mode of defence with intelligent selfconsciousness directing language and ritual-symbolic forms at the source of dismay. The ritual setting for the use of these words itself adds power to their effect as performance moves through solemn to more joyous movement, dance and music, conduces to a sense of achievement and purpose. As we saw in Chapter 2 with Bloch and Parry (1982), the entailment of funerary rites often carry motifs of fertility and regeneration. Funerary rites, in particular, reinforce the hypothesis that 'ritual behaviour is one of the few mechanisms at man's disposal that can possibly solve the ultimate problems and paradoxes of human existence' (d'Aquili and Laughlin, 1979: 179). I think that the extremely widespread nature of death rites shows just how significant they have been in aiding human adaptation to the new verbal environment of self-consciousness and awareness of death.

Ritual transcendence

Still, the enormity of grief for some people should not be too easily glossed in terms of what society can provide. Epstein (1992: 185), echoing something of Bauman's position discussed in Chapter 1, speaks of grief as a 'serious problem for society', one posing the question of how to 'assuage the anguish of the individuals concerned, and at the same time reawaken the interest that would restore them to group life'. While offering no single solution, Epstein's description of the Tolai of New Guinea sketches one answer in the many opportunities provided when grief is revived and individuals recall their loss, occasions in which sorrow can end with 'festival and celebration'. Similarly, Gail Kligman's (1988: 155) thorough study of Transylvanian villagers provides a detailed account of the use of many occasions when the living address the dead through mourning, festivals, dreams and religious rites, all as a response to the 'stark reality of mortality'.

This complex facing up to and even facing-off death's affront to consciousness reflects Bloch's powerful theory of rebounding vitality, already discussed in Chapter 1, and which describes that higher existential state conferred upon those who have undergone a ritual of rebounding conquest. Put simply, the power of funeral rituals lies in the fact that death is directly faced, addressed and is, in one sense, experienced as a kind of transcendence.

This unusual application of the idea of transcendence fits well with Bloch's notion that in certain rites people encounter something other than their usual level of awareness and are changed by it. This alliance of awareness and transcendence could be mapped across many disciplines. We have already seen it in Durkheim's sociology, but it flourished decades earlier in Matthew Arnold's (1873: 56) telling essay on what we would now call secularization, when he pursued the motif of that which we encounter but which is 'not ourselves'. Shortly after it made an impact in William James's (1902) psychology of religion, and again in Rudolph Otto's ([1917] 1924) theology of religious experience. Today accounts of human perception of otherness find descriptive explanation in evolutionary and cognitive anthropology (Davies, 2011: 228–32, 262–8). In most of these cases 'transcendence' usually carries powerfully positive connotations but, for our purposes it is also worth identifying something of its shadow side. Indeed, it is through funerary rites that, philosophically speaking, the shadow side of 'otherness', including the 'not ourselves, which is in us and in the world around us', is confronted and not ignored (Arnold, 1873: 56). Ritual words and songs press significance upon the participants, who do not return to some prior 'normal' state of life, but who develop and change in the process. Though some may never be 'happy again', and probably nobody really knows just what kind of proportion this is in different societies, many more have, as it were, touched 'the depths' and yet survived. Though the idiom of 'time being a healer' will appear later in this chapter, it is just such a saying that echoes the experience of surviving the immediate period of loss and then flourishing as time, and life with its new impinging realities, makes its presence felt. It is, then, in what can be viewed as the new 'strength' of bereavement that they have the power to speak words of comfort to other people. In so doing they speak words against death: words invested with significance because of what they have experienced in the face of grief. It has been the genius of the human animal to turn a biological state of grief, with all its negative consequences, into a positive social status of one who has survived to tell the tale. In terms of the sociology of knowledge a sense of meaning is not simply maintained but enhanced through funerary rites. It is, perhaps, no accident that many traditional societies invest older people with a sense of respect, for they were those who had survived life and its rigours and, in days before formal education, included in their number those who could be said to be wise. Wisdom, in this sense, is not simply some vague idea but reflects the concrete fact of having gained a perspective upon life not only by surviving it but having learnt the worth of existence through its trials. It may well be that one major reason why religions became so pervasive in human cultures was precisely because they provided the vehicle for this insightful adaptation to death. Those religions which became active world religions are particularly noteworthy in this very element.

Reservations

Even so, to speak of world religions as a means of coping with death by engendering wisdom or fostering forms of transcendence is not to ignore the deeply personal situation of some for whom 'transcendence' does not 'work'. Those for whom 'death conquest' may be more public than private and who experience the cultural resources of ritual but without gaining its intimate affect. To pinpoint this potential arena of dismay is important in this particular book because academic disciplines, whether social, psychological or medical, operate with their own theories, 'wavelengths' and target groups but may overlook or ignore some persons or groups. While this is largely inevitable it is worth pausing at this point of our study to emphasize the fact that, even when social customs are strong they may not achieve their goal for each person, for some may well respond in different ways (Epstein, 1992: 150ff.). In our own lives we know people vary a great deal, so that, even within a single family, responses to grief may take divergent paths. These are important cautions especially since our emphasis will always tend to fall on the shared and traditional behaviour in a society rather than upon individual differences. Persons may follow custom, be carried along by social expectations, present an acceptable public response and, to all appearance, be 'coping' well with their circumstances while, at the same time, suffer their own pain, anguished dreams and stimuli that are unimagined by others. So it is that tears, for example, may display ideals and reveal social values, giving clearer insight into what we so easily take for granted; tears hold an established place in a sociological understanding of ritual as well as in psychology (Prior, 1989: 133ff.). Still, some psychologists distinguish between the tears of weeping and of crying, seeing crying as a call of distress in the hope that some immedia te help may come while weeping is an acknowledgement of helplessness. Weeping may express 'loss ... recognized as final and irrevocable' while also affording a 'strong consolation' and a 'relief from isolation' (Frijda, 1986: 53–4).

Performing grief

It is almost easier, perhaps, to accept the fact that not all cultures practise grief in the same way than to admit the failure of ritual within our own social worlds. Still, it is with the more public domain that we remain while seeking not to let our own experience dictate the way we seek to appreciate the emotion, ritual and belief of other people. And this certainly applies to what Epstein (1992: 172) calls the 'pageant of death' as he described some mortuary rites in which certain basic human attributes such as 'vanity and egoism' may also accompany standardized conventions of mourning. There is a real sense in saying that a great deal of human activity is a performance of some kind. We learn how to behave in many different contexts and recognize that some seem better able to realize and fulfil what is normally expected in a typical situation than are others (Schechner, 1988).

We should not, of course, confuse the idea of performance with the issue of sincerity. The degree to which people are aware of giving a performance in any explicit way will vary from society to society and perhaps even from one person to another. What seems to be true is that differences can be observed among distinct groups. It is often the case in Britain, for example, that televised accounts of the funerals of people who have been killed in some sort of tragedy even show a difference between social classes. Many working-class women are often shown being quite literally supported by the physical contact of others lest they collapse under the weight of grief, while in more upper-class cases female kin walk unaided in a firm display of controlled emotion.

One society in which the display of grief was very dramatic and required was that of the New Zealand Maori. Death for the Maori was, traditionally, a time of potential danger because it engendered high levels of *tapu* (taboo), which was a kind of spiritual power grounded in respect for a kind of supernatural authority and power (Schwimmer, 1966; Metge, 1976). The house in which a person might have died would be burnt. The corpse would be dressed and then the kinsfolk would keep watch over it, maintaining a continuous moaning sound. When a new relative arrived this moan would rise to a loud wailing sound. Relatives might cut themselves until they bled and, as Eric Schwimmer's (1966: 59) detailed description outlines the scene, all kinsfolk would 'weep copiously and mucus would run out of their noses. Grief had to be totally unrestrained'.

Tears and emotion

For simplicity's sake we may focus on two 'types' of tears, private and public, as a useful background for approaching some high-profile theories of grief. In this brief description I offer no more than a sketch as a reminder that apparently familiar phenomena may yet have deeper significance.

Private tears will usually be shed when quite alone or with very close partners or friends. As symbols of grief they speak of the loss that one self feels in the sensed departure of another. They speak both of pain in the one left behind and of sorrow for the one now gone. It would be inhuman and morally aloof to speak of such tears for self as selfish, just as it would be insensitive to speak of tears shed for another as useless. Private tears are symbols in the profoundest sense: they participate in what they represent, and they represent both the living and the dead. What is obvious is that such tears provide an active emotional provision whose 'meaning' defies any full propositional statement. 'Why am I crying?' is no simple question. Just as there is an anthropological case for taking some ritual action to be simply an end in and of itself (Davies, 2002: 112–19), so too with private tears: such crying is something to do! Just as some ritual is not a code to be cracked to get the meaning but an act that achieves something for its actor in and of itself, so too with some crying. Humans as enormously complex emotional beings sometimes need relief. But, even as an act that is an end in itself, private tears can become part of a person's own self-narrative. Just as most of us talk to ourselves a great deal (Davies, 2006), so may our internal self-narrative grow as emotion-laden experiences accumulate. We say to ourselves, 'I cried', 'I wept', 'I had no tears left'. And in that self-saying our identity grows as part of a 'self' that is not intended for the public world. I will take up this issue of 'self' below. But what of more public tears?

Public tears will usually be shed in the presence of others, including more distant kin, friends and neighbours. Many people have the experience of sitting with a bereaved person or family with no one crying at all, despite the sadness of the occasion. Then as another person comes to the house or enters the circle of bereaved relatives, one or more of them greets the newcomer with tears and an upsurge of emotion, the newcomer acting as a trigger for emotion. This is an important point and raises the often ignored question of emotion itself. What is emotion? How do we understand it in general and in the context of bereavement in particular? Emotion is one aspect of life which all cultures take for granted but treat differently. The apparent difference between English reserve and Italian effervescence is but the tip of an iceberg of human variation. Yet within a society people are apt to think that the way they live and experience life is firm, concrete and absolute. There is much to be gained from taking a wider view, as with Rosaldo's (1984: 143) comparative anthropological approach to emotion in which 'feeling is ever given shape through thought and that thought is laden with emotional meaning ... Emotions are thoughts somehow "felt" in flushes, pulses, "movements" of our livers, minds, hearts, stomach, skin. They are embodied thoughts'.

Embodiment, soul and role

To approach life primarily through this theoretical perspective of embodiment, rather than through roles, is particularly fruitful in the case of bereavement and grief for to speak of embodiment is to talk of human beings as total and whole entities, not splitting them into souls or bodies, nor even into real selves and mere parts played in some social drama of existence. When it comes to understanding ourselves and other people the duality that lies behind the theological body-soul division is as unhelpful as the sociological division between role and performer. But, as we see below, there is another kind of 'duality' that is of fundamental importance for 'the person'.

Yet there is rarely smoke without fire, and the eager acceptance of roletheory throughout the middle of the twentieth century in Western, urban, societies tells its own tale of lives that are perceived as being lived between a private world of the 'real self' and the public world of roles played. This model of division is only another version of the Freudian distinction between unconscious and conscious levels of life. Western culture has long been given to believing in some sort of distinction of this kind. Plato's doctrine of the divide between the body and the soul was one ancient foundation for this c onviction that men and women are fundamentally not what they seem. In an odd sense this is a Western version of the Indian idea of illusion, the belief that what is seen is not the ultimate reality but simply a veil or covering of deceit for perception.

When it comes to emotion, this idea of split-level life becomes apparent within the British context through what is called the Jamesian Theory of emotion. Roughly speaking, this theory sees a person as a kind of container which gets filled with an emotion, a container not ordinarily visible to the outside world. In terms of bereavement the emotion which fills the inner container is grief. A healthy response to bereavement requires that the container be emptied or grief be released. According to this interpretation, tears expelled through the act of crying afford the preferred mode of release. Tears bring the inner world to the outside. Tears are healthy.

This popular theory of emotion, grief and healthy reactions is widespread and has assumed a status of truth, especially in English middle-class society, which itself is the source of many involved in death and grief counselling. This view may not be true. Or at least it is not the whole truth, and in some cases may be positively misleading. Some who would like to help bereaved people are seldom happy until the bereaved person weeps, until they 'let it all out'. Perhaps they may even feel that they have failed in trying to help someone if that person does not end up crying, for crying can easily be taken as an index of a certain kind of relationship. Few would be so calculating or explicit in their thinking to see crying in this way; for them crying is the sign of catharsis or, more properly speaking, crying is the symbol of catharsis, participating in what it represents. Of course there can be no doubt that for some people crying is a very necessary part of their life at moments of climactic joy or sorrow. But context is as important in the act of crying as is some deep-lying emotion just waiting to escape.

The empirical research conducted in one important study of grief and bereavement – the Leiden Bereavement Project – shows, contrary to popular opinion, that excessive emotional behaviour, including crying, may not actually lead to better adaptation to bereavement, at least as far as some folk are concerned. As Marc Cleiren (1991: 257), the project director, expressed it: 'A bereaved person showing strong emotional release and intense occupation with the event some months after the loss is, by the laypublic, sometimes seen as evidencing adequate coping with the death. The opposite seems to be true.'

This suggests that those actively involved in grief counselling should be aware of their own power in trying to influence the behaviour of others in ways they deem most suitable. In our society, as in some others, tears attest to social relationships as markers of degrees of affinity and friendship. In this sense they are also context-dependent, as certain moments and places demand a display while others do not. The cultural complexity of grief is, obviously, great and we are only beginning to understand its many levels. Several examples from European contexts will help show some of these complexities while also bringing to the surface some of the more implicit assumptions which normally lie unconsidered.

Beginning in England, one of my own studies shows how people react differently to emotion and funerals in different sorts of contexts. Some sixty-two persons were interviewed as part of a survey of the general public in Nottinghamshire (Davies, 1990a). When asked which they found to be the more emotional occasion, burial or cremation, none said they had found cremation more emotional than burial. About a half found burials and cremation equally emotional, while the rest found burial a more emotional event than cremation. The greatest distinction lay in those adults who had attended the funeral of at least one of their own parents. Of the twenty-three in that category, seventeen thought that in general terms burial was a more emotional rite than cremation and six thought there was no difference. What is of additional interest is that a further question asked all of the sixty-two if they felt there was some difference between the therapeutic capacity of burial and cremation. As far as those who had lost parents, spouses or children were concerned, they practically all felt there was no difference between the rite and the degree of therapy afforded them. Only two felt there was a difference and in both cases cremation was viewed more positively than burial. The point worth stressing is that even those who thought burial was a more emotional occasion than cremation did not think that burial was any more therapeutic because of it. This example, drawn from an admittedly small sample of interviewed people, would seem to reinforce the idea that emotion may be as well interpreted in terms of a display within a context as a discharge of some sort of inner energy. Quite a different case, drawn from traditional Greece, will bring its own cultural complement to the more qualitative material just sketched.

Popular psychology of grief in Greece

Chapters 2 and 8 describe ways in which traditional Greek Orthodox villagers practised burial, exhumation and final placing of bones. One feature of that entire process of bereavement includes popular attitudes to the emotions associated with grief. Danforth's (1982) study of Greek villagers speaks of the five-year (or so) period between burial of the corpse and the exhumation of the bones as a time of accommodation to death. Though the final exhumation is marked by intense emotion it also tends to bring the period of grief to a close, expressing what he calls an 'indigenous theory of catharsis'. 'The result of this process is as complete an acceptance of the final and irreversible nature of death as is possible' (144).

This theory of catharsis reflects a belief that repeated talking about the death finally rids people of the intense emotion of death described as pain and anguish. But great caution is needed in understanding this issue for

while the popular view is that singing and crying not only permit a 'knot' to leave the throat but also bring a 'lightening' and 'cooling' to a person, there still remains a 'wound that will never heal', as Danforth (1982: 117ff.) entitles one of his chapters. This suggests that while it is important for the grief-stricken to work some emotion out of their system, as we might explain it, this does not mean that the system 'returns to normal'; instead, there is an expression of emotion which is important for coping with the immediate experiences of grief and for accommodating to bereavement over a period of time. But, ultimately, the bereaved person is changed and altered and now lives with a degree of acceptance of death that was not there before. The acts and the words of the funerary rites have achieved their purpose.

Danforth even suggests that people attend the grave and go to the funerals of others in order to experience again their sense of pain as a way of remembering the dead and maintaining a relationship with them. He also discusses the ways in which women who have experienced what might be called ordinary grief, as with the death of aged parents, come to an acceptance of death which helps them bring a degree of acceptance to women whose bereavement is stark, as with the loss of a young child or a young husband. Their more intense grief is, in a sense, moderated by the realism of the larger number of people. This is a good example of how embodiment derives from and feeds back into community life.

Grief: Normality or illness?

While this Greek case reflects our earlier discussion on the social distance of mourners in relation to grief, it also raises the issue of 'normality' in relation to bereavement. Here sociological ideas of kinship distance are inevitably associated with psychological aspects of emotion. Given the complex interrelationships between social and psychological dimensions it is worth exploring one particular aspect of grief, namely, what might be called the 'medical model', in which grief is viewed more as an illness than as a change in social or religious status. A good place to begin is with the idea of normality, even though this may seem a strange concept to apply to bereavement, assuming as it does that there is some kind of level path in life from which the bereaved deviate and back to which they will come in time. In many respects this outlook likens grief to illness, implying that when death comes to someone their relatives become 'ill' in some sense. They are 'wounded' and it will take some time for this wound to heal. This medical model of illness, as perhaps it might be called, has many levels of significance. Many deaths in contemporary societies take place in hospital, often following periods of illness involving hospitalization. Although not often discussed this fact may, in itself, lead to an association of hospitals with death and with the idea of terminal illness.

But there is also the fact that the death of someone is often said to come 'as a shock'. Even after long illness relatives quite often say that the actual event and its aftermath took them by surprise. This element of surprisedshock can easily be perceived in terms of a medical condition, since in many Western societies most dramatic changes of mood are more likely to be interpreted medically than theologically, sociologically or philosophically.

A popular phrase reflecting this view of bereavement is that 'time is a healer'. To see how popular an idea this is, we asked people, in the Nottinghamshire survey already mentioned, if, in their experience, they had found it to be true. For a large majority, some 79 per cent, it was indeed felt to be the case, but for 11 per cent it was not true. For them, aspects of their bereavement remained significant in their continuing life. Some 10 per cent had no comment on this matter. Interestingly enough, those who did not think time was a healer tended to argue along very similar lines to those who did basically agree with this popular formula but placed a much stronger emphasis on memory. Many agreed that time healed but also stressed the place of memories which may or may not be painful ones. Whether or not memories ceased to be painful seemed to lie at the heart of agreeing that time could heal. The husbands who had lost their wives seemed particularly involved in memories, but it happened that in the small interviewed group their bereavement was within the prior two years.

The following quotations reflect something of that experience known by many when it comes to memory and time:

'I don't feel it so strongly now, but the loss stays with you.'

'Yes, time heals in one way, you get things in perspective, but missing somebody never goes away.'

'Time doesn't heal but it's not so vivid now' (two years after husband's death). 'Yes, but it is still fresh in my mind' (thirteen years after sister's death).

One person, who had experienced a powerful religious conversion to Christianity from active atheism, also disagreed with the idea of time as a healer, not because changes had not taken place over time but because she wished to stress her belief that 'God is the healer'. She had, in fact 'received prayers for healing the pain' and now felt that while the pain of bereavement for her father was still influential it was more distant from her. She described it in vivid terms as 'like labour-pains in reverse'.

Another, more specific, question asked how long it took people to return to normal. The majority (45 per cent) reckoned it to have been days, for 23 per cent it was a matter of weeks, for 18 per cent months and for 15 per cent years. This spread of time reflects the closeness of relationship between mourner and deceased. One woman said it had taken her 40 years to come to the point of being able to speak of her mother's death, while for quite distant relations or neighbours there is no real need to 'return to normal' since the ordinary ongoing nature of life has not, in any real sense, been altered. The sample presented here covers a wide variety of distance between the dead and the bereaved and reflects the much more detailed Dutch research of Marc Cleiren (1991), who found that adaptation after bereavement varied significantly between people of different kinship relationships.

Cleiren describes how parents continue to suffer the loss of a child for a considerable period of time; this was especially true as far as mothers were concerned. In his sample some 35 per cent of mothers showed no sign of decreased attachment to their dead child at a 14-month period after the child's death. Cleiren also stressed the point that while fathers often appear less troubled shortly after being bereaved of a child than do mothers, this may be due to the support they have to give to their wives, since fathers often come to show the strain months later. He also found that widowers adapted much less well to bereavement than did widows, and that sisters constituted a category of people who often suffered very much at the loss of a sibling. Cleiren called sisters a 'forgotten group' when it came to grief and bereavement. Adult sisters of a dead person are much less likely to receive

support and attention than the surviving spouse or children. This is interesting in the light of the fact that the least troubled group in the long term are adult children, especially sons, of deceased parents. Young children, of course, offer quite a different category with needs of considerable diversity (Silverman, 2000).

These findings stress the fact that death often involves a varied group of people each one of whom is caught up to a greater or lesser extent in the network of relationships focused on the dead person. It is important to stress this variation because it is too easy to focus only on the immediate kin of the deceased and forget the others less centrally involved. This has often been the case in research pinpointing widows but, for example, ignoring sisters.

What these various studies show is that the idea of bereaved people 'getting back to normal' is misleading because for many close family members there is no return to some former state as though nothing had happened. New experiences have been gained which change people in perpetuity. The idea of 'getting back to normal' is rather like the idea of 'getting well again' after some relatively mild illness. More sense can be made of the idea of getting 'back to normal' if we take it as referring to the social world and not to the realm of inner experience. During the immediate period of bereavement people are frequently perceived as being in a special situation; they are given a status of their own which, to a greater or lesser extent, is separate from that of everyone else whose lives continue in an ordinary way. 'Getting back to normal' refers to their return to an ordinary flow of life in everyday terms. Inner ch anges in experience, memory and outlook may give quite a different picture from that of mere appearance. Even so, for some, bereavement changes even the way they live once they are back in the ordinary flow of social life. So much depends on the way the deceased person is related to the identity of the survivor and on the degree that social rites have made their impact.

Motherhood and loss of child

Cleiren's studies give substance to the experience familiar to most of us, that personal identity is made up, in part, by the influence of others as we argue more extensively below. It is no wonder that some mothers simply do

not 'recover' after the death of a child; indeed, the very use of the word hides the significance of a child's death. To speak of recovering is to use illness as the model of bereavement. It is as though a mother has been ill with some unfortunate and inconveniencing malady but is now undergoing a recuperation which will, sooner or later, leave her normal again. Great care, then, is needed when speaking of grief as an illness just as when emotions in general are discussed as diseases (Averill, 1968: 743). Yet this attitude was particularly obvious until quite recently in women who experienced the stillbirth of their babies. Jane Robinson's (1989) work on perinatal deaths is particularly sensitive to the profound importance many mothers give to the birth of their child, whether or not it is alive on delivery. She rightly documents the unsympathetic situation where, after a spontaneous premature birth of a stillborn baby, the mother was not only told that since the event was classified as an abortion the hospital would arrange disposal, but was also further upset by being told that she was young and had plenty of time to have another child (17). Here the issue focuses on how the stillbirth is identified precisely because the way it is classified feeds into the way the woman relates to it, to him or to her, and also determines how others, including the medical profession, relate to the woman. The stark framework of possibilities of a non-human or certainly of a non-personal identification of a stillbirth is dramatically emphasized by Robinson when she quotes Lovell referring to the fact that 'if the baby is delivered before twenty-eight weeks legally it can be treated in the same way as gynaecological scrapings and incinerated. It is not treated as a dead person, it is a thing. Its potential identity is destroyed with its remains.'

Perspectives like this express an underlying medical model that ignores deep facts of existence, whether existential experiences lying at the heart of life, or religious experiences at the centre of faith. Some experiences influence human life so much that people are never the same again, simply becoming different people through what has happened to them. To speak of recovery is to talk about a kind of backwards change, an undoing of what has been done, an unliving of part of life. And this is impossible. As far as many women are concerned, the process of conceiving and carrying a child, of giving birth to a boy or girl, of nurturing them through years of helplessness into childhood and perhaps also into adulthood takes up an enormous amount of personal attention, time and psychological energy as

well as creatively producing a new dimension to the woman's life. The woman becomes a mother through this experience, so that if she is bereaved of her child it is the mother and not only a woman who is bereaved. In this sense motherhood is an existential fact of life and not simply a sociological description. This is a telling fact, even in terms of sociology, because in English a bereaved wife is called a widow while there is no word for a mother who has lost her child. It is both physiologically and psychologically true that a child is part of its mother in a different way from the way it is part of its father. This is not to deny the grief of fathers towards their children, not least in cultures in which the father-son link is very strong, but simply to indicate the obvious difference resulting from facts of pregnancy.

The hopes, aspirations, longings and fears which parents may have for their children are all part of the identity of each parent, just as the relationship between parents is partly made up of shared anticipations. When these are crushed through death it is foolish, both philosophically and theologically, to speak of bereavement in terms more appropriate to physical illness. And, to a certain extent, this truth about mothers and children can also apply to other intimate relationships where people become 'part of each other'. This has been widely studied by anthropologists in terms of the social links and networks between people which are altered through death (Epstein, 1992; Vitebsky, 1993).

To some degree, then, human identity includes the identity of others, a point we soon develop in terms of personhood. A mother is a mother because she has children. When she no longer has children her identity is radically altered. This is probably even more important in modern Britain where women tend to have very few children and where each child is invested with great significance, often long before it is born. So, while death may be the annihilation of someone else's life, the memory of that person still forms part of the life and identity of the living. In strictly social terms this change is very clear as far as certain categories of people are concerned. So, as we have already said, a wife becomes a widow and a husband a widower on the death of their spouse. Similarly children become orphans on the death of their parents, but there is no name change for parents whose children have died. This may be taken to indicate that marriage changes social status in Britain more than does childbirth, but it should certainly not be read psychologically to mean that being a mother is less significant to the woman concerned than being a wife. This fact is increasingly important with the rise of single-parent families, where the identity of motherhood is more to the fore than that of being a wife. Certainly it is important not to ignore the fact that motherhood is an existential fact of life and not simply a sociological description.

It may well be that descriptive terms are closely linked to the social benefit or lack of it derived from their use. The absence in English of a word for a mother who has lost her child may say much about traditional attitudes to childbearing and gender, but such descriptive bareness is not the case in every culture. So, for example, in contemporary Israeli society not only is there a phrase, *ima shkula*, meaning a bereaved mother but there are similar terms for a bereaved father, *aba shkul*, and for bereaved parents, *horim shkulim*. Not only do these terms have a psychological significance in relation to be eavement, but they also carry powerful social and political significance in the context of lsrael's military defence strategy. To have lost a son serving in the army, in defence of the country, is deemed an honourable sacrifice for the nation. The regular and extensive televising of military funerals in Israel reflects these values. This is a constant reminder to us of the need to be alert to the interplay of the rhetoric of power and sympathy, of politics and psychology, in human life. This is, perhaps, especially important when care and counselling have financial implications, and funding is often a political issue.

So it is that the medical model of bereavement as an illness, followed by stages of recuperation, is inappropriate. In some ways this idea that bereaveme nt is an illness can be linked to Philippe Ariès's (1976: 88) argument that in modern Western Europe death itself has become a technical phenomenon focused on the hospital. But an existential model focused on issues of identity and change in identity is far more appropriate for matters of life and death than the medical model, not least because it brings a distinctive person to sharp focus rather than leaving him or her subject to imperious forces. So it is that Cleiren's important research showed that many mothers simply do not 'return to normal' after the death of a child. The loss of a child involves a partial loss of self which cannot be compensated for in any simple way; as Dennis Klass (1993: 344) expressed it in his extensive study of bereaved parents, 'like amputation, parental

bereavement is a permanent condition'. And certainly no simple stage theory of grief can cope with this kind of bereavement, as several critiques of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stage-theory approach to bereavement increasingly make clear (Corr, 1993: 69–83).

One highly significant aspect of this extensive issue of the nature of grief erupted before, during and after the 2013 publication of the influential American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. Unlike previous editions this fifth edition's discussion of major depressive disorders allowed for some cases of grief after bereavement to be classified as an illness and receive appropriate medicalized treatment. Here fine judgements would be needed between 'ordinary' and 'complicated' forms of grief. In widespread debate some argued that this was medicalizing the ordinary human experience of grief, while others thought it wise to acknowledge that, for some people, grief might be such that medical help certainly should be available (Pies, 2014).

Whatever view is taken of grief, however, this chapter has urged that the combined biological and social dimensions produce, in general terms, persons who have been changed through the experience of bereavement. By means of funerary rites, not least the power of words, they have so overcome life's hardship as to affirm the social goal of their culture. The reason it is wrong to interpret grief as an illness is precisely because that implies that recovery returns someone to a normal state. The whole thrust of our argument is that the rituals of bereavement produce a different kind of person. While funeral rites do constitute a rite of passage in van Gennep's sense of shifting an individual from one social status to another social status, they also need to be viewed in Bloch's terms as a process of rebounding conquest, through which a personal change occurs because of what has been encountered.

The public sign of this transformation is often that of formal memorials which stand as testimony not only of the one who has died but of those who consent to continue to live a social life. War memorials constitute a particularly good example of texts and architecture standing together as a witness of the way that death can be used as a vehicle to oppose evil and to foster the ongoing life of society (Davies, 1993: 112ff.). A good example is in the development of a memorial to the dead of The Falklands War at Pangbourne College, an English public school (Hudson, 2002). In terms of this book, memorials express the triumph of words against death and are symbolic of that rebounding vitality which ensures society's continuation (Davies, 2015b: 256–61).

Behavioural, cognitive and stress-focused theories

It is only after this wider discussion of grief with its sociological and anthropological consideration of bereavement and identity that we, finally, consider more specific and largely psychological theories of grief. The reason for this delay is partly because some psychological theories of grief have achieved wide popularity, often without excessive concern for the social context of the bereaved, and partly to provide a background for introducing a relatively new perspective on grief grounded in the nature of 'personhood'.

A good place to resume our more formal engagement with grief theories is with a behavioural perspective which works in terms of more socialpsychological perspectives upon the actual behaviour of bereaved people for, when someone dies, that absence will lead to inevitable changes in the life of those closest to them. Patterns of behaviour that once made up daily life are broken, and that very rupture influences the survivor, who may seek to avoid certain places or events because of the pain involved in their changed significance. Loss of someone leads to a reduction of opportunity for triggers for action, and behaviour reduces in extent. The rewards for acting are lacking. Life becomes impoverished, a kind of depression occurs. This is especially significant in close partnerships such as marriage where the sense of mutuality and not only of attachment is important. A more cognitive perspective on such relationships comes in what is known, for example, as the 'learned helplessness model' of grief. This approach is well documented and applied to grief by Wolfgang and Margaret Stroebe (1987: 69ff.) in their important study Bereavement and Health. On this account the bereaved feel a sense of helplessness because they have depended upon the deceased to a great extent during their mutual life together. They see little hope of improving their situation and, quite simply, learn a form of helplessness. This cognitive theory thus involves loss of control and is derived from experiments with animals that learnt they were helpless in particular situations. In the human context, for example, someone might think that failure in exams could be viewed as inevitable and a learned helplessness be extended to many other aspects of life. So with grief, if the loss is seen as being helpless then a learned helplessness ensues, while others see that something can be done and avoid learned helplessness. Overdependence upon a partner may foster this, as may guilt after suicide.

Stroebe and Stroebe (1987: 91ff.) are particularly interested in stress and the way a life situation may exceed the ability of someone to cope with it, resulting in a decrease of well-being, especially in terms of close married relationships. For this they have their own 'deficit model of partner loss'. This emphasizes the various supports that disappear when one partner loses another, from lack of support for ordinary household tasks through the loss of emotional support to a loss of social identity. They also cite Holmes and Rahe's (1987: 85) Social Readjustment Rating Scale on the measure of readjustment needed in response to some life circumstances, though they note its relatively poor empirical foundation. That scale is ranked from 1 to 43 on the basis of the magnitude of readjustment required by the event, with death of a spouse being first, death of a close relative fifth, retirement and death of a close friend equal tenth and Christmas holidays forty-second. Unlike Freud's highly person-focused sense of grief as an expression of the inner dynamics of the self, Stroebe and Stroebe offer a more judicious approach to both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal forms of coping with grief. For them, life after bereavement must involve a search for meaning in the experience, an attempt to regain mastery over life and some attempt to enhance one's self-esteem.

Stage theories of grief

One of the most popular answers to the question of how people respond to bereavement is to provide a set of stages of grief. Indeed, stage theories have gained an immense popularity in contemporary society, a fact that is not without its own problems. Indeed, this discussion of stages of grief has been left until now to ensure caution over too easy an acceptance of such stages. Having considered some sociological and psychological background factors we can now take up this topic of stages of grief with all due caution. The key problem lies in the image created by the word 'stages', especially when it is taken to mean fixed levels through which someone must pass, a step at a time. Such 'stages' are easily confused with 'symptoms', with simple descriptions of moods, states of feeling or actions and behaviour. Different psychologists, for example, offer a range of descriptive symptoms, often emphasizing a three-stage, four-stage or five-stage theory. Stroebe and Stroebe (1987: 10–15) give a summary of some twenty-four symptoms of grief before settling upon the four 'regularities' of numbness, yearning and protest, despair, recovery and restitution. Practically all who now write on this topic add a caution to the effect that not all people experience each symptom or that numerous symptoms may occur at once or in varying patterns. In effect they describe sets of moods moving over time into a new pattern of accommodation with life rather than stages of development.

The one book that exerted considerable influence in fostering a stage-view of grief was Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's On Death and Dying, originally published in 1968. It was written in one way and often read in another. Though an account of how some terminally ill people in Chicago responded to the news of their impending death it has often been read as an account of how bereaved people respond to bereavement - two rather different situations. Kübler-Ross sketched five stages for the 200 or so people she studied – denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. She clearly identified these as 'coping mechanisms' that may 'last for different periods of time and will replace each other or exist at times side by side', a fact that indicates the general inappropriateness of the stage idea (1970: 122). One reason why such stages may have been adopted for bereavement was because Kübler-Ross includes an account of what she calls 'preparatory grief in which 'family members undergo different stages of adjustment similar to the ones described for our patients' (149). However, writing shortly before, the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, influenced by a variety of professionals including Freud, Melanie Klein, Lindemann, Marris and Bowlby - all key thinkers on death and grief arrived at his own stage theory, not simply of grief, but of mourning. 'Mourning typically falls into three stages, an initial period of shock, a stage of violent grief and disorganisation, and a usually longer period of reorganization': moreover, he suggested that the second stage tended to last 'between six and twelve weeks in Britain' (Gorer, 1965: 132). We return to

Gorer below, for his emphasis on social context is vital for what I want to argue over the idea of personhood and death.

Still, bearing these critical factors in mind, numerous commentators have encouraged great caution over Kübler-Ross's stages (e.g. Corr, 1993). The interesting sociological fact is that so many people, often those involved in bereavement counselling or in reading material related to their own bereavement, fostered this particular stage theory throughout the 1980s and 1990s to the point that it became popularly canonical. This may well have been because death and bereavement became matters of more public discussion and self-help groups also began to emerge alongside a growing number of death counsellors who were often not highly trained medical personnel. In an atmosphere that combined relative popular ignorance about grief, both experientially and theoretically, with a desire to be informed and competent, Kübler-Ross's scheme offered a ready-made solution. Working from accounts of people with near-death experiences Kübler-Ross (1997: 189–192) later also offered an account of four phases encountered by people after death, namely, floating out of the body with an experience of wholeness, having a sense of being 'spirit and energy' able to travel far and also encountering guardian-angel type figures, passing into some realm of unconditional love and beauty that would permanently change their attitudes in life and finally being 'in the presence of the Higher Source' and being 'spiritual energy' no longer needing 'their ethereal shape'.

Having been so critical of the way her work has been used, it is important not only to reiterate the point made in Chapter 1 on the significance of 'hope' in her final chapter in *On Death and Dying* but also, in a more general way, to see that study and its popular reception as one form of a rhetoric of survival, of 'words against death'. Kübler-Ross (1970: 233) is profoundly human in exploring the desire of the dying to 'give a little gift' or perhaps to 'create an illusion of immortality' on the one hand, and in seeing the living as offering their own 'help, inspiration, and encouragement' to the dying on the other.

Continuing bonds and narrative approaches

One approach to grief that assumed increasing popularity from the mid-1990s has been described in terms of 'continuing bonds' (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996). As the phrase implies, this approach acknowledges the sense that many have of a variety of ongoing relationships with our dead. Whether with kin or others, this they take to be 'normal' rather than pathological. The phrase is also, however, a way of turning the tables on the 'loss' element in 'attachment and loss' for while we obviously 'lose' a person in the sense that they die and are removed from us through funeral rites, they may still remain 'present' in a variety of ways through memory, some distinctive sensory mode of awareness or through objects and places. There is a timeliness to this approach as Freudian influences were increasingly rendered redundant in the later twentieth century (Breger, 2009), and as a person's life-experience was increasingly given its own experiential value, including its format in narrative that allowed bereaved people to talk of their dead in more open a way (Walter, 1996).

One classic anthropological account of personal emotional experience gained from the death of babies in a Brazilian context and its impact upon subsequent research lies in Nancy Scheper-Hughes's (1992) work on death and the place of suffering in life (see also Kohn, 1994: 24). One slightly analogous account, though focused on interview settings, comes in Christine Valentine's *Bereavement Narratives, Continuing Bonds in the Twentieth Century* (2008). This not only exemplifies an understanding of the sensory awareness that can emerge between people, not only in the closing moments of life, but also in the research-interview context where both partners are very much alive. She describes how some interviews seemed to create 'space for the deceased person', so much so that she gained 'a feeling of his or her presence between us' (172).This takes us beyond Walter's 'conversational remembering' of the dead into an embodied activity where intimacy can emerge as person seems to elide with person and even include the dead in the process.

Valentine's (2008: 40) study is fruitful precisely because of its theoretical struggle over the very notion of personhood, especially as it is frequently portrayed as 'coherent, bounded, individualised, intentional, the locus of thought, action and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography' (citing Rose, 1996: 3). She indicates the constraints of that perspective, noting how the self is 'intimately linked to the selves of others', and calls for 'a more flexible and nuanced understanding of personhood', both for those who are dying and for the bereaved (2008: 83,

174). To overcome such constraints we adopt a different view of personhood, one drawn not from almost routine Western sociological-philosophical notions of individuality but from an anthropological analysis typified in 'dividual' personhood. However, as a brief prelude to 'dividuality', it is worth recalling that Gorer's (1965: 131–2) anthropological concern over death, grief and mourning expressed dissatisfaction with the 'picture of the solitary mourner alone with his grief' as being a 'very considerable simplification', despite Britain being relatively poor in accepting people's needs at time of death and in a relative ignoring of ritual as potentially valuable as part of that support.

Dividuality and grief

It is with these issues of individuality and a questioning of it that we now turn to the idea of dividuality. In anticipation of this I have, on many occasions in this chapter, written 'person' where 'individual' might have been anticipated. This marks a change from Chapters 1 and 2, and from accounts of theories of grief in previous editions of this book. However, far from negating previous themes of versions of attachment, loss, continuing bonds and narrative approaches, this dividual approach offers its own perspective on elements of each.

To explain 'dividuality' I begin with the anthropologist McKim Marriott's (1976) seminal work on Indian material that has not, as yet, been incorporated into death studies' engagement with grief (Deleuze, 1992, was a later and different use of the same term). In 'Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism', Marriott argued that anthropological attempts at understanding many aspects of social life in India would be enhanced by approaching the notion of a person not as individual but as 'dividual'. In this context, echoing Valentine above, 'individual' described a person as self-contained and, despite networks with other individuals, remaining firmly bounded and almost insular. Such individuals often played a significant role in an increasingly conventional sociological stress on 'postmodernity' with its own idea of a lack of widely shared narratives of life. Issues of people living alone, and of loneliness, seemed to add weight to the sense of the individual as being apart from others yet, as in the previous two editions of this book, I express caution over an over-easy

acceptance of notions of postmodernity when interpreting many aspects of contemporary Western society.

My immediate purpose, however, is to pursue Marriott's theme of dividuality and personhood as a more insightful and creative approach to grief. His theoretical insight is not restricted to the notion of a person as intrinsically set amid a multitude of interactions as in the sociological idea of networked-identity (Castells, 2010), but expands to include the pervasive nature of social and natural environments engaging with or flowing into and out of a person. This highlights the notion of embodiment and the material basis of human and social life. To repeat the point, dividuality depicts a flow of phenomena out of a person and into others and into the surrounding world at large. In other words, and always remembering that we speak theoretically and use models by means of which to 'think about things' – in this case, human persons – we can say that the dividual person is a more dynamic and interactive entity than the individual. To describe the interplay of person and environment Marriott utilized the technical phrase 'substance-code': he spoke of 'dividual persons' as being 'always composites of the substance-codes that they take in'. 'Substance-code' is key to his perspective. It includes a great variety of entities that would need considerable analysis for any full account of the application of Marriott's (1976: 111) approach to the domain of death studies but he includes in it, for example, 'parentage, marriage, trade, payments, alms, feasts' as well as 'words' and 'appearances'. Within the context of his Indian studies and the caste-related contexts of life it is relatively easy to see how 'substancecodes' contribute to a sense of personhood in contexts where the food that is eaten, and by whom it is prepared matters and could affect a person's status and ritual purity. So, too, with marriage. In other words, our interplay with the world around us matters a great deal in making us who we are and making it what it is. The increasing use of the notion of the Anthropocene as the era of human action on 'the world' offers its own example of the value of 'dividual' over 'individual', for it is the deeply interactive and environment processing person who both affects that world and is affected by it. An even greater critique of both individualism and of the Anthropocene has been pursued, for example, by others not least by Haraway (2016) and her pursuit of 'Making Kin in the Chthulucene', weaving conceptual and emotional webs of significance to bind all sorts of earthy, living and other companionable things in their local and wider worlds. She certainly has no time for 'human exceptionalism and bounded individualism' (2–5, 30).

While there is a sense in which this interplay may seem as obvious to 'Western' as to subcontinental Indian peoples, I suspect that 'Western' understanding is actually more superficial than profound; more alert to 'relationships' and individuals than to eating, touching or speaking for dividual persons. We might, however, begin to get a glimpse of this perspective when, for example, a person becomes committed to a particular diet, and 'see' that their 'body' really is a composite of what is eaten. What is taken into the body affects that body and becomes part of it. But, accepting such material examples, we can now take it further in terms of less obviously material factors of a 'substance-code' such as 'parentage'. Our parents contribute in deeply fundamental ways to who we are, not simply in the radically material sense of our genetic composition, but in terms of the values we adopt, and even in terms of how we act and behave. Katherine Brown's (2002) insightful paper concerning 'the memory of the flesh' offered its own account of the sense of presence of the dead through accounts of how some older people see in their own actions reflections of their deceased parents. Something we have just done or said not only reminds us of our deceased parents but, in a more visceral sense, allows us to 'see' or 'feel' them not only *in* our own activity but, almost, *as* our own activity. This means that it is insufficient to speak of 'memory' here but of a kind of shared embodiment. We become them, they become us, whether momentarily or in a developing sensitivity. Doubtless there are degrees of such awareness that may even 'border on pathological reactions' if we encounter 'the appearance of traits of the deceased in the behaviour of the bereaved', as Gorer (1965: 128) noted when citing Eric Lindemann (1944) on grief. Perhaps even the popula r comment on how a baby has its father's eyes or mother's nose provides its own cultural example of what theoretically we can identify as a 'substance-code' comment. For those familiar with sociological terminology the idea of 'habitus' could also be entirely applicable to this reflection on mirrored embodiment.

The step-change in thinking in terms of dividuality rather than individuality provides its own means of reframing existing research as, for example, with Margaret Gibson's (2008) insightful work on objects that we inherit from the dead. Her reference to bodies as 'encrypting machines of the living and the dead' is but a small step removed from the idea of 'substance codes' (151). Or, again, the idea of inheritance, rather like memory, is probably too weak a term to carry the emotional load felt in and through objects now 'owned' by us but previously owned by our dead. In other words our sense of identity is pervaded to various degrees, and at various times, by the embodiment-coded nature of these 'substances'.

The step-change also affects our analysis of words, phrases or ideas acquired from our parents since, for Marriott, words or ideas are as much a candidate for inclusion in a 'substance-code' as food. It is not unusual to hear parents comment that they sometimes hear themselves say something to their own child that forcefully reminds them of what their parent said to them. They could, as it were, hear their own mother or father speaking. They say things such as, 'I could hear myself talking like my mother' or, 'I couldn't believe that I said the same thing as my father'. Given the meaning-making assumptions underlying this study of *Death*, *Ritual and* Belief and, especially, in terms of the power of rhetoric in human relationships, this aspect of dividuality is all the more telling. Others who have seen the value of this 'dividual' perspective on personhood have included the influential Cambridge anthropologist Marylin Strathern (1988), archaeologist Chris Fowler (2004) and anthropologists Sabine Hess (2006), Benjamin R. Smith (2016) and the entangling reflections of Haraway (2016) mentioned above. The fact that Strathern focused on Melanesia and Hess on the people of Vanuata in the Banks Islands, and not on Western societies so often sociologically described as individualist, should not detract from the potential theoretical power of Marriott's insightful perspective. Strathern's (1988: 13) argument that 'persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them' merits careful consideration for social contexts of very many kinds. Arnar Árnason (2012: 68), an anthropologist with a deep knowledge of Western Europe and who has also worked in Japan, has firmly pointed in the direction of my argument when questioning the 'Western individual' and the emphasis upon the 'relations' between individuals: His theoretical doubt concerns 'the assumptions that social relations exist between points, or roles, in a structure, or at best between the people temporarily occupying these posts' (2012: 68).

In terms of grief, then, there is much to be learnt from Strathern's (1988: 13) interpretation of 'Melanesian persons' being 'as dividually as they are individually conceived': among much detailed analysis she says that 'they contain a generalized sociality within'. So, too, with Árnason's sense of the inadequacy of 'relations'. In this, both echo how I would read Durkheim's idea of personhood captured in his notion of *Homo duplex*, describing how 'society' is so represented with an individual as to lead to a more expansive sense of embodiment. These perspectives will be taken further in Chapter 13, in terms of what I have described elsewhere as 'moral-somatic' relationships (Davies, 2011: 187–91; 2015b: 49). What this chapter has shown is just how much our emotional responses to death are influenced by our cultural expectations and how these may change over time. This realm of emotions and their dynamic control will now become increasingly apparent as the next chapter takes up the role of violence in relation to sacrifice and conquest.

Violence, sacrifice and conquest

If ritual 'words against death' impart hope in contexts where grief is treated sympathetically, they assume a quite different tone in contexts where violence is the dominant medium of death. Context becomes crucial in assessing the significance of particular deaths and of death in general for every society. On a very broad canvas Philippe Ariès (1976, 1991) furnished an influential interpretation of historical eras as contexts for death in Europe. This begins with a traditional sense of 'tame' death, natural and inevitable for all, and passes through a change in the twelfth century when death became more individual and people thought of their own death as crucial. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an ever-growing sense of mutuality shifted the focus to a sense of concern at the death of others rather than with one's own. Finally, Ariès (1976: 1, 106) talks of death in the twentieth century as something 'unnameable' and distant from everyday experience. While these broad trends across centuries and eras are useful general guides, they should not be pressed too far by applying them to cultures beyond those of France, which is his prime historical concern. Some specific contexts and times demand greater accuracy, as with his generalizations about modern cremation in Britain, which are highly questionable and in some ways misguiding (91, 101). Unlike Ariès and his approach, this chapter is preoccupied both with more historical psychological explanations of death related to ideas of violence and with sociological issues of power and the control of the lives of individual members of society.

Control and death

Still, some generalizations are inevitable, and one that gained increased significance in Western thought throughout the twentieth century concerns the issue of control. Because death challenges life it is likely that death's inevitability will increasingly become more problematic as people become increasingly competent in, apparently, mastering the natural world. It has often been argued, following the sociologist Max Weber (1930), that the process of secularization, by which religious institutions and belief lose influence over people's lives, increased in direct proportion to the increase of human rational mastery and control over the world. Work in factories, for example, was much more under human control than work in fields, since the weather was much less important for indoor workers. Just as the nineteenth century witnessed the rapid growth of modes of production governed and influenced by rational forms of control, the twentieth century added to this human capacity the significant capacity of medicine to control illness. As the twenty-first century now begins, more people have greater access to the control of life-processes than ever before in the history of the world. The Human Genome Project with its detailing of the genetic basis of human life stands as a kind of testament of human capability, a keynote at the beginning of a new millennium. But, and this is the significant point, no matter how influential medical control becomes in delaying the moment of death, that moment still arrives. Some even think that it is wise to envisage the unpredictability of life and death as part of a normal outlook on life (Vickio, 2000: 739–58). And this is wise, since risk remains a socially hidden yet inevitable factor in all of human existence, most especially as far as death is concerned. Risk is another aspect of probability but, while there is a very low probability and minimal risk that an individual will be killed when drinking a glass of water, there is absolute certainty – and that is a great rarity, indeed almost a contradiction, in terms of risk and probability – that everyone will die. While cultures and eras may vary in their acceptance of these facts, there remains no ultimate control over death. In this sense death continues to oppose human beings, especially those who are in their strength and prime of life and who may experience extensive powers of control in their daily life and work. Ultimately, however, as with all others, death controls their end; if they insist on seeking control, they ultimately fail. Often this failure is set in the framework of medicine, especially of surgery, where professionals are often said to regard death as a failure.

But human beings do seek to control even death, whether through religious beliefs or through rituals. They act upon the lives of particular members of society, using life as a sort of tool to make a social or philosophical point. With this in mind we can say that, odd as it may seem, death by natural causes is rare. This is especially true in modern societies, where doctors and hospitals play a major part in managing and controlling life and death and each death is accompanied by a medical certificate stating the cause of death (Mims, 1998: 9ff.). Often these causes belong to a relatively small range of options with 'natural causes' a seldom-used category.

So it is that the medicalization of death is a kind of control over death.

Indeed, giving a reason for a death is itself a kind of control and many find a degree of comfort in having this named cause of death. It is as though a medical cause of death answers part of the human need to know why someone died. Though in a logical sense it is not persuasive, it still remains true that some people see the cause of death as part of the reason for death.

In cases of unexpected death, the moral question of why someone has died takes dramatic precedence over how they died, not least with suicide, as we see below. So, too, in the case of an infant, when parents see no sense in the loss of such a young life, irrespective of the cause. The death of an aged parent, by contrast, seems more natural and inevitable, though relatives still expect a cause of death to be given, since in modern societies there is a general expectation that people will live until some illness carries them off in old age. These deaths by illness, accident or natural causes can all be contrasted with what we may call death by social causes and in this chapter we focus on just such deaths. Although it is possible to dispute just which kinds of death may be classified as social causes, here we place together execution, suicide and what might be called sacrificial deaths, each bearing different positive and negative social values. Here we begin with what are often regarded as negative aspects of death related to violence.

Sacrificial violence and war

Among the most influential theories dealing with violence and death are those associated with Sigmund Freud. Despite the fact that significant psychological and anthropological studies have subsequently judged these theories to have been mistaken, this has not prevented their welcomed reception by some literary and cultural circles. Here our task is to describe key aspects rather than criticize them and we begin with Freud's (1960) Totem and Taboo, his grand conjecture on the history of humanity rooted in the speculation of a violent murder of a father by his sons at the dawn of mankind. This is a myth of the origin of culture, of the incest taboo and of the Oedipus complex all in one, yet it holds no basis in archaeological, historical or psychological fact. It was informed by Freud's own clinical experience of neurotic patients and, significantly, inspired by the equally speculative work of the Scottish theologian and early anthropologist William Robertson Smith, whose book The Religion of the Semites (1894) we have already discussed in Chapter 1, centred on a communal sacrificial ritual that, devoid of a sense of violence as far as Smith was concerned, gave participants a close sense of unity among each other and with their God. Freud took this element of sacrificial killing, furnished characters of his own and added the element of violence to provide the moment of patricide, to give psychoanalysis one of its foundations and to furnish a fertile resource for subsequent authors. Of these, we single out Girard's treatment of violence underlying sacrifice and Marvin and Ingle's study of violence and sacrifice underlying American military culture.

Holy violence

Rene Girard, a linguist, historian and philosopher of culture, places violence at the heart of society in his work *Violence and the Sacred* (1977). He does so because he believes violence to lie at the centre of human nature. His book offers a generous analysis of Freud's Totem and Taboo as a counterblast to the great majority of anti-Freudians and some Freudians alike who seem 'intent on covering' it 'with obloquy and condemning it to oblivion' (195). For Girard religion exists to deal with violence, and for him, 'violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred' with ritual functioning 'to purify violence', a necessity if we are to 'keep violence outside the community' (31, 36, 92). Violence is dealt with through sacrifice and sacrificial victims; indeed, religion itself can be defined as 'any phenomenon associated with the acts of remembering, commemorating, and perpetuating a unanimity that springs from the murder of a surrogate victim' (315). But all this is hidden from people in everyday life because humanity cannot 'confront the naked truth of their own violence without the risk of abandoning themselves to it entirely': he even interprets sexuality as impure 'because it has to do with violence', accordingly 'the cause of ritual impurity is violence' (29, 34, 82). The reason why religion is less significant in many modem societies is, he reckons, because processes of law, centred on the judicial system, now save us from vengeance (18). While Girard is most interested in sacrificial deaths he thinks that even ordinary deaths 'like any passage' contain the potential for violence, not least because they often occasion disagreements over property among survivors (312).

Many of Girard's claims and assertions are, however, far from secure once subjected to detailed scrutiny in terms of the academic disciplines from which he draws to establish his overly neat theory of violence and scapegoating. This has been incisively demonstrated by John Dunhill (2013) whose masterly critique demonstrates, among other things, an absence of subtly understood ideas of 'the gift' in Girard's grasp of sacrifice. Dunhill argues for an interplay of theological and anthropological ideas of sacrifice, as well as of the human body, to generate an understanding of sacrificial phenomena that can become the basis for a Christian self-understanding and way of life. His threefold scheme, involving notions of 'exchange, transformation, and action', resembles and explicitly refers to Bloch's idea of rebounding conquest, much as we discussed in Chapter 1, except that he brings a strong Christian theological frame to seeing 'more of life' emerging through exchanges embedded in sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of Christ, the Eucharist, and 'the dynamic and energizing component of religious culture', including ideas of the Holy Trinity (214). Though these detailed aspects of Dunhill's theological drivers, which reveal his own kind of practical piety and devotionalism, may appeal more to Christians than other readers, his study will remain valuable for the deep knowledge it brings to bear critically upon texts that many, perhaps, have accepted too readily in a certain fashion for Girard's work.

Military sacrifice

The caution that Dunhill encourages over Girard provides incisive instruction when approaching an intriguing study of violence framed by military life and death in the United States by Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle (1999). Their work was, almost prophetically, validated by the terrorist devastation of the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001. Under the descriptive title Blood Sacrifice and the Nation they offer a distinctive interpretation of the significance of the death of military personnel, taking the death of soldiers to be a form of sacrifice underlying and reinforcing the very life of the United States. This sacrifice is, they argue, not unique but continues an extensive Western tradition of civilization, one that is typified by the double symbol of the Parthenon at Athens. The Parthenon stands as a symbol of that classical Greek culture that was taken as the basis of much Western self-interpretation in philosophy, art, architecture and politics. But, and this is their crucial observation, one of the sculptured friezes on the Parthenon depicts human sacrifice and leads them to the conclusion that 'the bloody slaughter of our own children lies at its heart' (312). The subtitle of their book, Totem Rituals and the American Flag, provides an essentially Durkheimian framework for their Freudian-Girardian interpretation, guided by the sociological conviction that society is held together through key ritual performances central to which is warfare. What has often been called American civil religion, a shared sense of divine providence rooted in a mutuality of democracy among groups of varied ethnic and religious origin and conferring a distinctive American identity, is seen to emerge from the violent blood sacrifice of warfare. All this comes to sharp focus in the flag of the United States. Marvin and Ingle interpret the flag through the anthropological idea of a totem: a symbol through which people corporately identify themselves and come to think of themselves in a distinctive way. But the totemic process operates in such a way that individuals are not consciously aware of this binding quality of the prime symbol and of the rituals that frame it. Accordingly the sacrificial civil religion with the flag as its totem constitutes a kind of powerful secret, binding the group together. The underlying truth is the 'knowledge that society depends upon the death of its own members at the hands of the group' (2). Because the language of death is couched in a language of self-sacrifice of honourable men in war, the 'secret' is far from obvious; it is revealed only through sociological analysis.

So powerful is this scheme of things that the military are interpreted as a form of sacred community upholding and expressing prime social values. Marvin and Ingle even interpret soldiers' wounds as a kind of sacrament that is symbolized in medals. The medal is a sacrament of the wound: something cherished and acknowledged by society at large. And it is 'the cult of the flag' that expresses this entire system of sacrificial social bonding. The flag is important to citizens of the United States, present in classrooms, courtrooms and public offices and having its own ritual of pledging allegiance that would in Great Britain, for example, be impossible to think of practising within schools. But it is at military funerals that the flag comes to its most formal expression in relation to death. Marvin and Ingle not only describe military funerals but they also interpret the folding of the flag and the giving of that folded flag, now transformed into a symbol of the deceased person – almost as an infant child – back to a blood relative of the dead. Here there is a remarkable transformation taking place in the symb olic rites. The folded flag, itself reckoned to have its origin in the shape of the hats of the soldiers of the American Revolutionary army, is transformed into a symbol of the deceased not simply as a dead person but as an infant, a person expressing new life. This is a good example of the theme of the transformation of death into life that frequently occurs in death rites. One additional feature of their interpretation of military personnel lies in the definition of soldiers as those who 'touch death' and who, as deathtouchers, hold a special identity, different from that of ordinary citizens. They also explore the important distinction between men and women as death-touchers in American society and give another view of the 'American way of death' that is valuable even if it is debatable.

As a broader background for Marvin and Ingle it is important to know that the United States accords a distinctive status to soldiers in that every person who has been honourably discharged from the armed forces is allowed a free grave when they die, a benefit also granted to the spouse and any minor children of the deceased. They may be buried in one of approximately 114 national cemeteries located across the country. This system was created by President Abraham Lincoln as long ago as 1862 to acknowledge the death of Union soldiers in the American Civil War. That has, itself, been creatively analysed against the shared belief in a Christian afterlife by both sides of the conflict (Schantz, 2008). Something of the size of this funerary provision programme can be gained by realizing that, for example, in 1995 there were twenty-seven million veterans still alive who would be eligible for a state funeral even though only about 10 per cent apparently choose to accept this option, largely because national cemeteries do not often exist near to their place of residence (Deseret News, 28 May 1995). We return to this issue in Chapter 10 when considering those dying in war in Europe. Here, however, it is worth taking this entire scheme of Marvin and Ingle as a means of reflecting upon the terrorist attack on New York in September 2001, when those who died were not soldiers but civilians, with the international marketplace becoming the field of conflict. The fact that it was not soldiers who died disrupted American symbolic life, with the result that almost immediately stress fell upon the firefighters and other uniformed personnel who ploughed into the hazards with significant loss of life. These identifiable and uniformed representatives of society were greatly applauded and much commemorated in their deaths.

Bodies and blood

Also significant was the absence of bodies, which were either incinerated in the conflagration or destroyed in the buildings' collapse. Few were 'brought home' for burial, in a culture where cremation is relatively alien compared with Western, Protestant Europe. Hundreds of medical personnel waited at hospitals for the casualties who did not arrive, leaving the media to view only the queues of volunteer blood donors. Catastrophe often elicits the response of help, almost echoing the 'flight or fight' response triggered by personal fright. There is what we might call a 'gather to help' drive when society is assailed and blood is shed.

Like death, blood is no neutral substance but often serves powerful symbolic ends. As a survival symbol and in religious terms, it even transforms survival into salvation. In the Jewish world, powerful in New York, it is the blood of the covenant and must be shed at circumcision to mark the alliance between God and humanity and among community members. Christianity shifted its power to Christ's death and, symbolically, to the Eucharist. As the language of gift interfused with salvation in Christianity, so the motif of blood spoke of new kinship between God and humanity and within humanity. Even 'secular' blood becomes precious, too precious to be bought and sold, but worthy of being 'given'. So it was that many formed a queue, a crowd ordered against confusion. And half a world away, in Palestine, an Arab leader publicly donated blood, as symbolic as transfusible.

Civil violence and personal freedom

Very many societies have, in the history of human cultures, regarded themselves as possessing the power of life and death over their members. In return for the benefits of protection and survival coming from belonging to a society, individuals are expected to act according to its social rules in helping to maintain the unity and integrity of a community. To break those rules is to expect a degree of retribution, whether minor or major. In other words, individuals are expected to sacrifice part of their own freedom in order not to infringe the freedom of others. This is an intriguing issue, especially in modem societies where individual freedom is increasing to the point at which private pleasure seems to take pride of place above social duties and obligation.

Once more Freud is influential in this field, addressing this problem in his book *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930) by exploring the sacrifice of personal freedom necessary to live with other people and to derive protective benefit from society. This issue is sharply focused in the misplaced expression 'It's my body and I can do what I like with it.' Human history shows that most cultures do not accept this statement of misplaced individualism precisely because many people have vested interests in particular human bodies. Parents, spouses and relatives, as well as agents of law enforcement or, indeed, of medicine and religion, have often had some interest in and power over an individual's body. This remains true, for example, in respect of dead bodies. In contemporary England, for example, a corpse does not belong legally to the person who once lived as that body; rather it is the next of kin who have certain rights of ownership (Smale, 1994: 46). So even if a person sincerely wanted, say, to be buried, the next of kin could still opt to have that body cremated.

Execution takes this control of bodies one step further by taking away the very life of a person in an ultimate form of social control. The power and

also the potential horror of execution lies precisely in the way a life is officially and, in a real sense, cold-bloodedly taken from someone (Rachel King, 2003). This ultimate sanction is often reserved for those who have wrongly taken the life of another person or who have acted against the welfare of the whole society in some profound way, as, for example, in treason. It is one of the clearest examples of society using death to demonstrate that society itself is of the greatest value. Though executions normally occur in societies with an advanced system of law and of social hierarchy, they can be found in a wide variety of social groups. The once influential anthropologist of India Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf tells of an execution of a man for persistent theft of cattle beyond the level of social acceptability among the Apa Tani peoples of North-East Frontier India.

When the hour for execution came several prominent (leaders) told him he had to die for his thieving habits: it was his own fault and he should bear them no grudge. Then they cut off his hand 'with which he had stolen', slashed him over the eyes 'with which he had spied on other men's cattle' and over the mouth 'with which he had eaten stolen goods'. In a few moments he was dead (1967: 76). But the same anthropologist showed how some tribes of relatively simple organization would allow retribution to be made even for homicide without taking the life of the murderer.

One of the major differences between contemporary societies lies precisely in attitudes to execution. Those who are deeply influenced by Western liberal thought tend to argue that the death penalty is uncivilized because, for example, it treats murderers in the same way that murderers treated their victims. In terms of anthropology this kind of argument is perfectly intelligible in that the kind of society which allows people to hold liberal thoughts also treats criminals in less exacting ways. The extent to which the death penalty is imposed is the extent to which a society exerts strong pressure over its members. The degree of social power expressed in the death penalty matches the degree of social power used in ordinary social control within a society and, most probably, will reflect the extent to which that society has a widely shared set of moral values and also a firm sense of the boundary between that society and other surrounding societies.

China provides one clear example of official power used to maintain society through the execution of its criminals. In its Imperial past, execution was couched in language and symbolism expressing an auspicious occasion

'in which the forces of righteousness and justice won another exorcistic battle against the forces of demonic evil and darkness' (Ho, 2000: 149). The idea was that the public authorities were not engaging in violence but were correcting the disrupted world caused by the criminal's violence. Even the swords of decapitation were borrowed to hang by the beds of the sick on the assumption that since they dispatched criminals who were evil they might also fend off evil spirits causing illness. In contemporary China there is evidence that people collect the spent bullet shells currently used in official execution, and preferably dipped in the shed blood of the deceased, in the hope of a similar protection (Ho, 2000: 156). Virgil Kit-yiu Ho analyses contemporary Chinese executions to show how violence, though it seems to be a practically universal concept, comes to be invested with local significance, as in this case of evil and sickness. The death of the criminal stands to affirm the importance of the life taken or spoiled through criminality. The criminal's family is even expected to pay for the bullet used in the execution, a reminder that they should have produced a more worthy family member and member of society and a clear affirmation that this act of official killing is fully justified.

Genocide

A quite different social world appears in contexts where one major segment of a population decides to exact vengeance upon another as part of political and economically motivated warfare, as in the African case of Rwanda in 1994 where approximately a million people died. In his telling study Chris Taylor (1999) reminds us of the numerous forms of genocide that have taken place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the Nazi Holocaust, the Turks and Armenians with two million dead, Stalin's purges of some six million and the Khmer Rouge's two million dead in the 'killing fields'. And then there was the slaughter of Native American Indians and Tasmanians and of many other indigenous populations during periods of colonialization and independence, as in India and Pakistan in 1947. Taylor (1999) focuses on Rwanda and on the internal conflict between people bearing Tutsi and Hutu identities in which nearly a million Tutsi people were killed in less than four months in 1994. He documents the historical background to the event and shows how indigenous theories of power related to openness and to the flow of energy within the physical body and in the 'body' of society came to expression in the forms of violence employing roadblocks, impalements, castrations and breast removal, all of which cut off or block the normal paths of bodily energy. Tutsi bodies were also thrown into rivers to be washed out of the country. He notes, almost in passing, how the readily available films of 'James Bond, Bruce Lee, Rambo and Arnold Schwarzenegger' influenced Hutu uniforms and bodily gestures (142), which says something about the globalization of images of violence and their usefulness within very different cultural contexts. In writing this book Taylor expresses his own human dazed astonishment and sadness at the cruelty shown by people to each other. It is a reminder of the even more recent cruelty that neighbours enacted upon each other in the Balkan wars that marked the European transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century.

Head-hunting

From execution and genocide we pass to two rather different forms of violence where the direction of force is outward rather than inward, namely, war and head-hunting. Both of these involve death and situations where the killer is viewed in a positive and not in a negative way. International warfare, as in the First and Second World Wars, furnishes a dramatically large-scale example of this positively valued human behaviour, while head-hunting presents a relatively local and limited form of formal aggression between groups. One element of both activities lies in the official sanction on killing particular categories of people, usually defined as enemies. Indeed, to kill an enemy can be viewed as being as virtuous as killing a fellow citizen is wicked. This shows the power of society to define death in terms of bad and good behaviour and also of death itself as a phenomenon open to carry different loads of meaning.

On a different scale from war and with limited incidence in human history is head-hunting, a practice described in several cultures, often as a means of the hunter gaining status and prestige or to engage in retribution for earlier harm done to his own kinship group. Here we use the masculine gender because head-hunting, like most warfare, is a male activity. Fuhrer-Haimendorf (1967: 114) speaks of how an elderly Konyak Naga tribesman of north India 'expressed pity for a boy he and his fellow-clansmen had bought with the express purpose of cutting off his head'. In another culture, that of the Ilongot of the Philippines, Rosaldo (1980) describes how young men learnt how to control themselves and gain the bearing of adult males through the taking of heads. Here the life of an enemy, taken by stealth, was a means of gaining personal status. Though such head-hunting seems to exist on quite a different plane from the sombre funerals of Western suburban life, they both deal with the issues of identity and death. Death is used as a vehicle for increased status and identity.

Suicide

Suicide involves many complex questions and any full account would need to discuss its significance in the social context of the cultures where it occurs (Rosengren, 1988: 215; Honkasalo and Tuominen, 2014). The foundation for modern studies of suicide was established by Emile Durkheim whose sociology of religion grounded in integrative power of collective ritual was sketched in Chapter 1. However, before that work in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) he published *Suicide* (1897). Richard Sennett (2006), a recent and highly influential sociologist, began his Introduction to the 2006 Penguin edition of *Suicide* by saying that Durkheim 'taught the modern world how to think about suicide'. Sennett emphasized how 'Durkheim saw that suicide has a social dimension. People from different religions, classes and religious backgrounds destroy themselves in different proportions. Durkheim asked why this should be' (xi).

Durkheim was eager to identify 'social facts', clusters of ideas or behaviours that stood out and demanded focused analysis. Suicide was just such a fact and Durkheim's analysis led him to propose the following three major and one potentially minor type of suicide, each depicting the dynamics of relationship between the individual and society.

Egoistic suicide is the outcome of people not being totally enmeshed in networks of social support yet sensing a powerful pressure on themselves. This meant that, as he saw it for later-nineteenth-century Europe, Catholics were less likely to commit suicide than Protestants, and he wondered whether this was due to a Protestant overemphasis upon the self as a religious entity standing alone before God. *Altruistic suicide* saw the individual as too enmeshed in, for example, a kinship or military group and finding there too great a pressure upon identity. As a way of escaping such

pressure the individual may see a positive sense to death under these circumstances (Weinberg et al., 2009; Pedahzur, 2006). In *anomic suicide* people find themselves in a world without rules, or where rules seem to shift as social change occurs. Questions of meaning and meaninglessness arise under such unstable circumstances, not least if a person is set amid economic shifts in contexts of upward social mobility. Finally, Durkheim also alludes to *fatalistic suicide* when social situations are sensed as oppressive and overwhelming with no obvious likelihood of change. Durkheim's study of suicide was deeply informed by statistics of death and by his sociological theorizing this has led some, like Sennett, to see something of a leap from statistic to theoretical explanation with little concern for any intermediate consideration of psychological or psychiatric dynamics.

With this great French sociologist, as with every scholar found in this book, thought is influenced by personal life. For Durkheim this included his Jewish identity and decision, when aged about twenty-one, not to follow the religious lifestyle including its tradition of rabbis. He would, as with many in his day, suffer other deaths, most especially that of his son during the war in 1915, when Durkheim was fifty-seven. He would, himself, die in 1917, a death which his nephew, the influential thinker Marcel Mauss, reckoned to have been sped up by his loss. Also in 1915 he suffered the loss of his student and friend, the extremely promising sociologist Robert Hertz. But, long before that, when he was twenty-eight, one of Durkheim's friends committed suicide and it is hard not to see his 'suicide studies' as prompted by that experience.

Reflecting on Durkheim's work we might say that suicide is the opposite of a 'proper' death as far as the idea of death-transcendence is concerned. It inverts the ideal of triumph over death, for suicide is often, though not always, interpreted as a kind of failure of an individual or the failure of society against the hardships of life. It raises the question of responsibility and guilt as well as the 'search for explanation' (Bailley, Dunham and Kral, 2000: 731). In this sense suicide is an expression of hopelessness or of the triumph of negative forces over positive social forces. It does not present an opportunity for a society or, at first sight, for the suicide to speak words against death. Perhaps it is for this reason that numerous societies have, traditionally, chosen to bury suicides apart from other people. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994: 491), 'Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him.' To commit suicide is to act irresponsibly both to self and to one's neighbour, let alone to God – always assuming the individual possessed rational control and self-reflection at the time; indeed, a feature of the way in which numerous societies view suicide concerns whether the person was of sound mind and judgement or not, itself a way in which a society can come to terms with the problem of suicide.

Many other cultures have adopted their own rationale of suicide. For example, the Chevenne of North America traditionally spoke of suicides as individuals whose souls did not take the full journey to dwell alongside the Great Wise One; rather, they were diverted when they arrived at the fork in the Milky Way and went on their way into nothingness. The one significant exception to this lay in the destiny of warriors who had taken a suicide vow to die in battle (Hoebel, 1978: 92). This example demonstrates the value placed on life and the way in which life is lost. To kill oneself is quite different from being killed, especially in a culture where great value is placed upon the dignity of the individual along with the duty owed to the wider community, not least as a community of warriors. This is also a culture in which certain men may decide to undergo considerable pain in the Sundance ritual, when they have heavy symbolic objects suspended from ropes attached to wounds in their chest or face. Self-inflicted pain of this type is believed to bring advantage to the community and is a kind of self-sacrifice quite opposed to suicide and more expressive of the transcendence of fear and mortality. One unusual context of death and suicide was found among the traditional Kwakiutl people of British Columbia for whom accidents were said to constitute the 'principal cause of death', with drowning being the chief form of accident: some anthropologists suspected that 'some reputedly accidental drownings are not accidents at all' (Rohner and Rohner, 1970: 52).

I intimated above that suicide, 'at first sight', did not allow for words against death to be spoken. But this is not entirely the case because of the very fact of those literate cultures in which the 'suicide note' occurs. Speaking generally, we could take many of these to be 'words against death' written by those who, nevertheless, intend to kill themselves; at least, it appears that many a suicide does not leave the world wordlessly. Janet Todd (1993: 103), in her interesting account of Mary Wollstonecraft's attempted suicide, suggests that 'the suicide note is an odd document, almost tactless to investigate'. Yet, tact apart, such notes provide a fascinating cross-cultural study of death.

Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, as part of a book including valuable cross-cultural and historical studies of suicide provides one good example of a detailed account of suicide letters in contemporary Finland that allow us to see that many working-class men living at the margins of engaged social life see suicide as taking responsibility for themselves amid what they sense as an impossible situation (Honkasalo and Tuominnen, 2014). She stresses how the cultural motif of 'endurance or perseverance, or ... solitary self-control' needs to be understood in relation to cultural ideas of violence and of Finland as 'the most violent country in Western Europe', for example, in the use of alcohol by men as its own coping strategy. She provides a valuable analysis of how emotions, especially shame or, for example, fear of losing a spouse by divorce, underlies expressions of some final act of mastery. Moreover she pinpoints the phenomenon of 'murder-suicides' where a man kills his wife and then himself, and also of 'filicide' where he kills his and her children too in the total act: to draw attention to the high rate of killing women she also refers to 'femi cide' (Honkasalo and Tuominnen, 2014: 175–9). Some of these suicide events, notably of the person of himself, can, locally, fall into a category of an act to be admired as a person takes final responsibility for himself, a feature that expresses something of a local understanding of Lutheran theology upon individual existence. Such cases show how the fine texture of cultural interpretation is always important in death studies.

Sacrificial deaths

Such detailed accounts of local circumstances make it difficult to draw anything like universal generalizations about 'good' and 'bad' deaths. Even so, many societies do draw distinctions between different types of death, not least in the way they are socially marked and remembered. This allows us to think of some other forms of death that may be classified together as socially positive sacrificial deaths. It is in sacrificial deaths that the value of life comes into prominence, whether as a valued life that is being sacrificed or as a life which will, somehow, be preserved if a sacrificial offering is made for it. Some sorts of human or animal sacrifice, acts of valiant death in war and even some sorts of suicide may all constitute sacrificial deaths. It is with this in mind that it is worth looking at some specific forms of sacrifice connected with death.

Michael Bourdillon spoke of the 'ritual control of death' when introducing Sir James Frazer's late Victorian and highly speculative theory of sacrifice (Bourdillon and Fortes, 1980: 19). This was part of Frazer's romantic interpretation of ancient classical myths in which he reckoned that a failing priest-king, unsuccessful in achieving his goal of maintaining the prosperity of his people, would be sacrificed. By contrast with this speculative interpretation Bourdillon rehearses the well-known and important anthropological account of the voluntary death of a ritual expert among the Dinka of the Sudan, as documented by Godfrey Lienhardt (1961). Lienhardt tells how the master of the fishing spear, a person invested with power and the capacity to bless the people, did not simply die, whether by illness, old age or natural causes, but was put to death in a voluntary act of being buried alive. This he did for the good of his people, and accordingly was not to be mourned, since his death brought benefit to them. In a symbolic sense this act of voluntary death left alive the ideal and image of the dynamism of life in the master of the fishing spear. There is a tremendous sense of awe and power underlying Lienhardt's account of this live-burial (described in greater detail in Chapter 6). It seems to strike at the heart of life itself, showing that a person can have such a depth of commitment to the community that death itself can be embraced for the well-being of that society and expressed in the dying person's own final words against death.

Sati

One practice which has also been interpreted as expressing a sense of commitment to social ideals is that of sati in India. This is sometimes called 'concremation' and involves the joint cremation of a live widow on the cremation pyre of her dead husband. While it has, indeed, been interpreted as an act of devotion of the wife to her husband, sati has also been vigorously opposed as a cruel act of violence to women. Several different kinds of vested interest underlie the interpretations that have been given (Anand, 1989).

Much depends on how a few sacred Hindu texts are interpreted. The key text from the Rig Veda (X, hymn 18, verse 8) describes a funeral rite in which a woman is presented lying on the pyre alongside her husband before being summoned to leave to be united with his living brother. Some traditionalists seem to stress the first half of this verse indicating that the wife should lie with her dead husband as he is cremated and so be cremated herself. Certain strictures were applied to prevent sati on the part of women who were pregnant, nursing small children, menstruating or drugged; this last item of drugs is relevant because in some parts of India bereaved people might be given medicines to assist them in their grief. Part of the religious tradition argued that when a woman gave herself to this death, 'she would follow her husband to another world and shall dwell in a region of glory for so many years as there are hairs on the human body, or 35,000,000' (60). Others stress the second half of the text showing that she should leave her dead husband and be joined in marriage to her living brother-in-law to raise children to the name of her dead husband. Yet others argue that if she does not engage in such widow-remarriage she should live as an ascetic.

Numerous early political rulers in India and more contemporary reformers, especially Ram Mohan Roy, have campaigned against this practice of widow concremation. What often seems unclear is the precise motivation for the act: whether it is entirely voluntary on the part of a devoted and bereaved wife or whether there are degrees of coercion from family or community or from the context of death itself. One example from July 1979 illustrates this clearly. A seventeen-year-old woman's husband was shot dead along with his twin brother. Jivatri, the wife, was griefstricken. Her dead husband's family was said to have blamed her for bringing bad fortune on the family and she responded by saying that she would become sati. She did so. She is said to have sat smiling as she was cremated, the very pyre is said to have burst into flames of its own accord and the police, who were present and who should have prevented the now illegal act, failed to do so and ultimately were said to have ended up paying homage to the cremated woman. Subsequently a temple has been built at the spot of cremation and is becoming a place of local pilgrimage which brings clear economic benefit to the family and community (Anand, 1989: 164ff.). Several similar recent cases have also resulted in temples as sites of local devotion.

But these examples should not give the impression that widow concremation is widespread and very common in India; it is not. In a brief but important essay on the sociology of sati, Ashish Nandy (1989) distinguished between occasional occurrence and regular custom. Nandy found three periods in Indian history when it became more customary than spasmodic; all three were periods of political conquest and social change, including the medieval period when Rajput kingdoms were under attack, and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the British were establishing themselves in India. Nandy also found that sati occurred among upper castes or in castes that sought upward mobility, especially under British rule, and that it took place more in Westernized and urban sectors of the population; almost no sati took place in villages not exposed to colonialism. Over a four-year period some 1,500 cases were found in Calcutta and these represented two-thirds of all recorded cases. Nandy argued that 'in all known cases direct or indirect coercion was used' (158). His conclusion is slightly mixed, arguing that death by concremation asserted the value of self-sacrifice at periods when it sounded hypocritical and that concremation was a means to economic success. Such problems of interpretation of sacred texts surround the question of whether human sacrifice was ever practised in ancient India (Chakrabarti, 1974: 221).

A different and telling account of more obvious suicidal death in India is traced through many individual cases by Jocelyn Lim Chua's (2014) excellent stu dy of markedly high suicide rates in Kerala, South India, from the later 1990s. She departs from Durkheim's perspective to describe 'suicide in a nation of lack', and yet as 'the fallout of false or failed aspiration, a social pathology symptomatic of the lofty dreams and blighted hopes'. This she sets in contexts of 'the struggles for visions of the good life' among certain middle-class people 'whose struggles sometimes desperately fail', and whose 'elite parenting in the home' becomes a necessity in the relative absence of wider 'social support systems' (3, 186). What is obvious from this and the other accounts cited above is that suicidal deaths are open to several kinds of meaning and emphasis depending upon cultural contexts and the standpoint of the interpreter.

Aztec human sacrifice

On the other side of the world, in Mexico, human sacrifice was practised in the Aztec culture as recently as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, until the Spanish conquest. This offering of human life was part of a religion which saw close relationships between the deities, nature and society within a mythical system reckoning that the sun was kept on its daily cycle by the power of blood. Slaves or other captives were laid out on altars high on the sacred pyramids before having their hearts cut out by the sacrificing priests; their flayed skins were also worn as part of the total ritual.

The heart was called the 'precious eagle-cactus fruit' in a reference to one of the key myths of the culture which said that the people should settle where they found an eagle killing a snake while perched on a cactus; one interpretation of these rites sees the gods as living on 'the transfigured energy of human hearts torn from the living body in solemn sacrifice' (Sanday, 1986: 173, 177).

This example illustrates the idea of power or vitality emerging from a death and contributing to a higher level of life in the form of the sun-deity in its daily rising. In the ancient Mayan civilization a similar myth urged the necessity of using human sacrificial blood to strengthen the sun after its daily crossing of the heavens. The many human sacrifices of the ancient Mayans are said to have been followed by cannibalistic meals as well as by a dance in which the priest wore the flayed skin of the sacrificed human, usually a prisoner of war (Hultkrantz, 1979: 237).

Conquering death

Here, once more, we may draw from Maurice Bloch's theory of rebounding violence to interpret the power of these diverse rites. Bloch suggests that the ordinary biological facts of life as a picture of birth, reproduction and death are often negated by particular societies which introduce a social ritual in which someone is said to die and to be born again as a new kind of person over whom death has lost control. So the social facts of life involve natural birth, a ritual and social death and a ritual rebirth. For Christianity people are said to die to self through baptism and to be reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thereby to share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I have developed this theme elsewhere in terms of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. This Christian case is of particular importance because it

came to influence emergent Christianity in the most powerful of ways and, I suspect, fostered Christianity as a world religion (Davies, 1995b).

My interpretation of the coming of the Spirit to the early Christians was derived, in part, from Bloch's account of ritual processes in which, symbolically speaking, life is transformed into death prior to death being transformed into a higher form of life. Just as the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) took the liminal stage of van Gennep's scheme of rites of passage and elaborated it in his own study of *communitas* which represented a sense of unity and empathy between people undergoing ritual events together, so, in effect, Bloch (1992: 15) focused on the post-liminal phase to argue, for example, that initiates do not simply leave 'one form of existence behind with such panache simply to return to it'; instead, they attain a new level of existence, 'achieving a combination of the sacred and the profane', at least in Durkheim's terms.

'Rebounding violence', as an idiom, resonates with earlier Marxist, Freudian and post-Freudian arguments grounded in the belief that violence is intrinsic to human culture, whether in the conflict between social classes or in the dynamics of individual psyches. Both Freud (1960) and Girard (1977) strike obvious notes, while Lienhardt's (1961) study of the Dinka affords a classic and more substantial study of the relationship between weakness and strength within cultural classifications of humanity.

In death the human body comes to the end of its capabilities. Even the power of medicine in its ideal hospital environment ultimately proves weak before the power of disease and accident. Here the process of cremation may itself come to serve a positive end. Even though most Britons place their dead in coffins, and in that sense may seek to overcome the ravages of the earthen grave, there is little sense of any ultimate triumph over death, except for those who adhere to traditional Christian belief in eternal life. In many parts of the United States the sense of triumph over death may well have more to do with the cosmetic presentation of the dead in their extremely durable caskets which are, in turn, placed in reinforced concrete graves, ignoring the fact that the only purpose served is to contain the rottenness of human decay, preventing it being absorbed by the earth in a more natural process.

Cremation, by contrast, offers the symbolic possibility of taking the process of decay into human hands through the sped-up process of

cremation where society is more in control of the body-microcosm in cremation than in burial. We show how true this is for cremation in Hinduism in the next chapter. Cremation is not simply an act of incineration. The ultimate product, cremated remains or 'cremains' as they are termed in the United States, is invested with a high value, representing the person who once existed. The rebounding violence factor involves taking the dead body and, instead of leaving it to decay through biological processes, working a transformation upon it. The ashes which result from the process represent the element of rebounding violence; they mark the transfer of the deceased to a new symbolic existence as one who can be rooted in memory and enter into a new, though abstract, relation with the living.

Cremation and rebounding violence

It is through this speculative interpretation that cremation can be seen to involve violence done to the dead. Though the violence is largely impersonal, unseen and part of the technological ritual of cremation, it lies at the heart of the conquest of death. And conquest is, for Bloch, practically synonymous with violence in his understanding of the ritual process of the transformation of initiate. In the British context people know that bodies are burnt but do not see them being burnt, or talk of them as being burnt. As already mentioned, the sight and smell of cremation attract highly negative valuation in British society. It is only specifically Indian cultural groups within British society who desire to see some smoke rise from the chimney as a reminiscent symbol of traditional Hindu cremation rites which come with their own appropriate mythology of the cremation as a kind of an offering to deity.

In the United States, as in parts of Sweden, the funeral service may take place in a mortuary funeral home or in a church, with the cremation being a quite separate act attended by very few or no family members at all. The cremation comes to be absolutely distinct from the social rites performed by the living. Traditional American and British culture has no positive mythical or theological value for the act of cremation itself. Instead, there is either a borrowing of symbolic meaning from burial, or else, instead of myth, there is an ideological silence, offset only by utilitarian ideas of hygiene or the saving of space. Even so, the deceased's body is not ultimately destroyed by cremation because the cremated remains offer a new symbolic medium, Hertz's 'dry' medium, which can be interpreted through Bloch's idiom of rebounding violence or conquest. As the relatives take the cremated remains to place them in sites of private significance they, in a sense, engage in a transcending of death. The dead transcend the fact of death; the deposition of ashes invests a site with a significance it did not possess before.

To focus specifically on the idea of cremation and violence is not an easy thing to do because there is a great deal of silence surrounding the idea of actually burning the dead in most Western societies. The European culture history of crematoria, through the experience of the Holocaust, is as much negative as positive. In fact the Holocaust is interesting here because it seems to furnish an example of non-ritualistic incineration rather than of a ritual cremation. This, perhaps, is a significant factor which has not been sufficiently explored and may explain how devastating a cultural image is presented through the marked utilitarian and technological device of mass incineration of human beings. For here we have the rare phenomenon of an act which 'should' be a ritual performance involving dead persons but which, instead, is a mechanical destruction of bodies. Here there could be no 'rebounding violence' or 'conquest' of death precisely because those conducting the act specifically sought to eliminate the very social identity of those they had killed. In the most speculative sense the modem state of Israel is the rebounding violence response to the Holocaust; it is probably no accident that cremation is not practised in Israel.

Returning to contemporary Britain, we have already mentioned the fact that smoke from crematorium chimneys is not socially acceptable, reflecting an avoidance of the reality of fire in association with cremation. Similarly, the mid-European examples where open flames burn on symbolic stands outside and inside some crematoria would not, for whatever complex reasons, be architecturally or socially countenanced in Britain. It may be that part of the reason for this reticence lies precisely in an awareness that the living are, in some way, destroying their dead. When, for example, the Catholic Truth Society (McDonald, 1966: 2) explained how cremation came to be accepted by the Roman Catholic Church it spoke very directly of 'violently destroying the corpse by fire' and of the 'violent destruction by fire'. Because people seldom voice this idea, it is difficult to be sure whether the idea itself informs people's thinking at some unvoiced level or whether it is an idea that does not actually present itself to Britons. This is, obviously, a real problem for interpretation but, if only for theoretical reasons and as a basis for future research, it is worth posing the question in relation to Bloch's theme of rebounding violence.

In this context it is also worth observing that Bloch's notion of rebounding violence bears a certain family resemblance to Tambiah's (1968: 105) important notion of 'ethical vitality' used to interpret bodily control in the creation of merit in specific Buddhist ritual contexts. Both 'rebounding violence' and 'ethical vitality' deal with symbolic mastery and control of bodies in relation to highly prized social values focused on life and on the relation between life and death. It is precisely because these terms engage with life and death that they have an obvious appeal when it comes to interpreting the ritual of cremation.

We have already suggested that cremation in Britain involves a kind of social control over bodies resulting in a socially beneficial goal; to this we may add the hypothesis that when cremated remains are taken and used to give positive reinforcement to former relationships they may be viewed as conferring value on these contexts. They bring merit to a past life and to the continuing relationship of the living with the memory of the dead and in so doing imply that death has not finally triumphed.

The fact remains that opportunity is increasingly available in Britain to take and use cremated remains idiosyncratically. Theoretically speaking, this might be interpreted as involving an awareness of having done something positive for the person against whom one has earlier engaged in the negative act of cremation. Though it would be improper to use the language of sacrifice for this process in the British context, it might be possible to speak of the process of cremation as one of symbolic change in such a way as to reflect Bloch's notion of rebounding violence as a means of achieving transcendence over death.

One interesting application of this theory can be made to Garrity and Wyss's (1980: 105) account of North American death ritual in the particular context of Kentucky in the 1970s. They gave an account of the way in which these strongly Christian communities used funerals as the occasion for evangelistic preaching by several noted ministers. Singing and preaching were combined until, as often happened, someone 'came

forward' to be 'saved' from their sin. In terms of Bloch's theory of rebounding violence we might argue that the occasion of death was transcended by the example of a person undergoing a ritual or symbolic death at the graveside to be 'born again' as a Christian. Spiritual newness of life came to stand, symbolically, over against the physical death of a member of that community. In this case the gospel message constituted words against death just as it promised spiritual life for the new convert.

Euthanasia and 'rational suicide'

As a final example I want to suggest that euthanasia, as currently being developed in parts of the Western world, is a clear example of an attempt at conquering death. As a conquest it gains added power from the medical world in which it is most likely to take place. It is often said in contemporary society that many people are not afraid of death but are afraid of the process of dying, and of the pain they may suffer at the end of an illness. The word so often used is 'dignity', as when people speak of wanting to die 'with dignity'. This can be interpreted to mean that they wish to retain that status and sense of identity which they had developed throughout their life. They do not wish to be reduced to some sort of suffering individual, lacking all control and increasingly devoid of their sense of self-worth. In this context medicine gains a great power, both as the context in which terminal illness finds its normal definition and as the source of control available for this last phase of life.

Some speak of these issues in terms not of euthanasia but of 'rational suicide', of the logical capacity to ponder one's situation in life and, weighing up all considerations, decide on the option of death (cf. Werth, 1996). This deeply problematic field concerns the very issue of whether individuals do possess the right to die as well as the consequences for individuals involved in organizing the death. Whether in terms of euthanasia or of rational suicide, the active process of a terminally ill individual deciding on the context and time of death allows for final communications in relationships with other people while also, in a sense, not letting the destructive power of illness have the last word. Here the rhetoric of death draws jointly upon medicine and personal autonomy. In symbolic terms medicine is employed in a conquest of death by illness,

medicine is used against the enemy of medicine, which is nothing less than terminal illness.

Eastern destiny and death

Until very recently, most civilizations have speculated about a life after death, expressing discontent with the everyday world of mortality and describing alternative environments into which they believe people pass when they die. The idea of the soul, already explored in Chapter 1, has been the most constant explanation of how this transition occurs, whether in the Indian traditions, discussed in this chapter, or in other religions explored throughout this book (cf. Sullivan, 1987). The rituals surrounding death relate closely to these varied views of human destiny, especially to the link between the material body and some energizing spirit.

Middle Eastern religions with their prophetic traditions set humanity within a historical framework beginning with creation and ending in some future state after an act of supernatural judgement. The oldest continuing tradition of this kind belongs to the Parsees and will be sketched here before we move on to explore the great Eastern religions, rooted in India, that speak much more mythologically about time, preferring to emphasize human consciousness and various processes of meditation which can be the source of salvation. Similarly, the Christian idea of salvation provided by God on the basis of God's loving generosity and grace differs to a marked extent from most of the Eastern traditions, which locate salvation within a scheme of reincarnation operating under the system of karma by which individuals receive the precise outcome of their own personal actions (Sharpe and Hinnells, 1973). But even here it is hard to generalize because there are Eastern traditions, which emphasize the love

relationship between the divine and the devotee and give an opportunity for grace to flourish between them (McLeod, 1968: 204).

Despite these differences in content of belief, the underlying notion of a soul or life force passing on from a dead person remains very similar in both East and West and furnishes one of the most enduring of all human forms of self-understanding. Although there have been sceptics and rationalists in ancient and modern societies it is only since the emergence of the biological sciences in the mid-nineteenth century that serious disbelief in souls has become widespread. But, even having said that, many in contemporary societies still give some credence to a soul underlying human nature and destiny.

Zoroastrian-Parsee death rites

Zoroastrians constituted an ancient religion originating in Persia, now Iran, perhaps even before 1,500 bce, and migrated to India and beyond, where they came to be known as 'Parsees'. Its two basic ritual elements were fire and water, with daily plant and animal offerings made to the fire, which was itself perpetually maintained.

Zoroastrian belief in life after death focused on the idea of a spirit, believed in the ancient tradition to travel to an underground kingdom, aided by mortuary blood sacrifices. Daily rituals took place for thirty days and then less often until after some thirty years the soul was reckoned to be part of the ancestral fellowship of the dead commemorated on the last night of each year when souls were said to return to their old homes (Boyce, 1979: 12ff.).

With time the Zoroastrians developed a belief in a more joyous form of afterlife through the resurrection of the body; in fact, it is likely that this was the first religious tradition to arrive at this route to a realm of Paradise. The ancient sacred texts of Zoroastrianism are very clear on the destiny of the dead and tell the living not to 'put your trust in life, for at the last death must overtake you and dog and bird will rend your corpse and your bones will be tumbled on the earth. For three days and nights the soul sits beside the pillow of the body' (Zaehner, 1956: 133ff.). The texts describe the journey to the bridge of judgement and beyond, where a man is met by a beautiful girl who, though unrecognized, is the embodiment of his good

deeds. Finally he, or indeed she, for the texts give full weight to the salvation of women, experiences fragrant breezes from heaven until finally achieving the Endless Light, where he is fed on the 'butter of the early spring'. Similarly, the wicked person passes into an underworld of pain and torment, meeting an ugly woman and eating the vilest food, all until the final day of resurrection. What is interesting about this sacred text is that, in the most general sense, it resembles *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, to be considered below, in providing a description of the ways followed by the journeying soul.

It may be that the abandonment of burial and the emergence of the ritual of exposing bodies for vultures to devour the flesh before any remaining bones were buried was associated with this belief in the soul now departing to some heavenly realm prior to its being united with the body at a future date. The ancient form of burial was thus replaced by exposure of the body, and Zoroastrians became well known for this enclosed space or *dahkma* (a word which originally meant 'grave'), or Towers of Silence, as they became popularly called, where the body was left, on a floor-platform and not in touch with the good earth, for vultures to eat before remaining bones were located in a central pit. Cremation was never traditional because the dead body was regarded as an extremely ritually polluting object since much evil must have become focused on it to bring it to death. Indeed, Zoroastrianism possessed as a key belief the fundamental opposition of forces of good and evil between which people needed to choose. Accordingly, the sacred fire could not be contaminated by the polluted corpse.

In the twentieth century the migration of Parsees to urban centres in Persia, India and elsewhere inaugurated some major changes in death rites as it became increasingly difficult to sustain Towers of Silence within or close to cities. Accordingly a cemetery was established in Tehran in 1937 and in Mumbai some Parsees have even used cremation, though not without protest from more traditionalist devotees (Boyce, 1979: 222). While priests possessed a role in the mortuary ritual, as time went on, the actual conquest of death belonged more to the moral life lived by the individual, which would become apparent in the post-mortem judgement of the dead.

Adaptation to new circumstances has continued, for example, in the United States and in Great Britain. British Zoroastrians have come to use both burial and cremation as funeral rites, since exposure of the dead was culturally inappropriate. Neither practice is ideal, given what we have already said about the ritual purity of the natural elements. Still, adaptation is inevitable and, even though many say they would like to be taken to India for their bodies to be exposed, this is difficult to achieve and expensive to execute. John Hinnells (1996) has explored the thoughts of contemporary British Zoroastrians on these issues and has found that the great majority, some 90 per cent, ultimately preferred cremation to burial. The problem of corpses polluting the flame, so sacred to Zoroastrians, was approached by some who argued that this was acceptable because British cremation involved intense heat and not actual flame, especially in electric cremators (270). Extensive prayers cover the period of preparation of the body, its burial or cremation and subseq uent memorial days and there is some suggestion that these human acts of a person may benefit the *fravashi* or heavenly self of the deceased ancestor, enabling them to progress from lower to higher orders in the post-mortem world (Nigosian, 1993: 84).

The journey and the prayer

Although we have not dealt explicitly with the prayer texts associated with these rites of Indian and Persian origin, they all occur within a rhetoric of the journeying soul, a motif which is also well known in other religious traditions (Collins and Fishbane, 1995). Whether in terms of furnishing guidance through supernatural realms, with their perils, judgement and blessings, or providing sustenance through food rites, the living support the dead in their transition. The fact that death, most especially in the Zoroastrian case, is deemed ritually polluting emphasizes, all the more, the need for verbal ritual in ensuring that this phase of transitional pollution is safely completed to the advantage of the dead and the living. What is important is that death continues the journey experienced in life, so that the motif of travel is perfectly appropriate for what now takes place. The degree of fit between the rhetoric of spirituality in life and in death is an important issue which has particular consequences during periods of social change, whether for the Zoroastrians in England, for non-religious Britons engaging with traditional Christian ritual or within much wider world contexts (Garces-Foley, 2006). The degree of consonance or dissonance between the inner language of an individual and the public language of the rite remains of importance for the ultimate success or failure of mortuary rites.

Indian death rites

The broad traditions of Indian religion commonly hold belief in the transmigration of souls, where the life force passes through many existences in striving to obey universal moral principles yielding increased benefits and resulting in an improved form of transmigration at its next cycle. This process of reincarnation or transmigration is often called 'samsara', while the moral advantages or disadvantages accruing from the way life is lived is often called 'karma'. Samsara and karma provide the basic dynamics lying behind the traditional Indian caste system into which people are born and the rules of which should be followed during life so that in the next life a better state may be achieved. This general perspective lies behind Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, giving a distinctive perspective to human identity that has far-reaching consequences for death ritual, especially in cremation (cf. Holm with Bowker, 1991).

A general picture of Hindu death rites has been very well documented, for example, in Jonathan Parry's (1994) excellent study of death rituals at the revered city of Banaras on the sacred river Ganges. In simplest form the dying should be laid on the ground while chanted scriptures help them focus on the name of God. The body is washed, dressed and carried from the home to the funeral pyre during cremation, the skull is cracked by the eldest surviving son and afterwards the remains are thrown into the sacred river. Subsequent rites are performed to ensure that the spirit of the deceased passes on its proper journey.

Behind these direct and visible actions lies a complex tapestry of symbolic messages interpreting human nature, how individuals come into being and pass into other new identities after death. A person is composed of flesh, which is believed to come from the mother's menstrual blood, and of bones, which originate in the father's semen. The foetus grows in the womb nourished by the 'heat' coming from the mother and the food she eats. At about the fifth month of pregnancy the spirit or life force comes to the child, entering through the cranial suture of its head.

Those who attend the mother at birth, itself a ritually polluting process, are drawn from very low-caste groups. Death, symbolically speaking, parallels this pattern of birth, for just as the maternal heat helps produce the foetus, so the heat of the cremation fire destroys the flesh, leaving the bones

behind. It is as though the elements derived from the female are destroyed, along with the sin of the individual, which is symbolically associated with body hair, itself also destroyed by fire. The remaining bones are placed into the river, which is associated with the female principle of existence and thereby, in a symbolic sense, becomes a fertilizing agent. One of the popular interpretations of cremation cited by Parry (1994: 179) refers to the corpse as rising from the pyre as smoke, which becomes transformed into clouds and into rain, which, in turn, produces vegetables as food, which, in due course, becomes male semen.

Death thus becomes transformed into something positive. In addition, just as the spirit came to the baby in the womb through its skull, so now it departs through the skull, intentionally cracked during cremation. Parry (1994: 152) goes so far as to say that 'at death it is men who give birth', in the sense that they take charge of the ritual action which brings about the shift in identity of the deceased. Following cremation, offerings of rice balls and of food and gifts to particular funeral priests assist the transformation of the deceased from a ghost-like status into the status of an ancestor. This may appear strange, given the idea of reincarnation which is so often taken to be the key Hindu belief about life after death, but Parry describes the telling fact that several ideas are held together in Hindu attitudes towards life and death. The deceased is said to become an ancestor, to return to earth in the life of someone else, especially a grandchild, or even to assume some other form of life. Each belief serves its own purpose, with ideas of reincarnation and rebirth being used, perhaps, 'to explain the present and the idea of heaven, hell and salvation to visualise the future' (209). This quotation from Parry needs emphasis because, in crucial respects, it contradicts what is often written in formal textbooks on Hinduism which stresses only the belief in transmigration and reincarnation. Parry shows that in terms of practical religion people here engage in two, rather different, ways of thinking about life. On the one hand, when they talk about their own present existence they do so by using the idea of transmigration and see themselves as a reincarnation, but when talking about the future condition of those they cremate, they speak more in terms of a heaven and a hell. This is a reminder of the complexity of human beliefs and shows how different idioms or pictures of existence can be drawn upon for particular purposes.

Another aspect of this process of living and dying in Hinduism can be seen in Parry's description of the individual Indian as possessing two sorts of animating power. One concerns the obvious signs of life and the other the underlying existence of an individual. The first sort of breath or life force leaves the body at what might ordinarily be called the time of death. This is one reason why it is a good thing for the dying person to be placed in the open air, so that the breath might more easily take itself away. But the second, body-pervading, breath is not so easily released. In fact, it is only released at the point in the cremation ritual when the skull is cracked.

There are some interesting consequences assoc iated with this distinction between the two sorts of 'breath'. In the simplest terms, for example, a woman is not said to be a widow until the breaking of the skull; until then there is a sense in which her husband is still 'alive'. Once the final breath or spirit is released the corpse finally becomes a truly dead body as it is well into the process of cremation. To reinforce this point, the body is not seen as ritually polluting until that final part of the cremation process; until then it is more sacred than impure. One important reason for this status lies in another interpretation of death and cremation in Hinduism focused on the entire process as a kind of sacrifice.

Cremation as sacrifice

We have already seen how human cultures often desire to control death, making it appear to serve positive ends rather than be a negative terminal point of life. This theme is repeated in traditional Indian views where it is quite possible to interpret cremation as a kind of sacrifice, one connected with the distinction between a good and bad death. Indeed, Parry's (1994: 158ff.) description of good and bad deaths provides very fruitful information for illustrating the human control of death. The good death is one in which a person is prepared through fasting and drinking Ganges water; the body is weakened so that the spirit may leave more easily and so that faecal material will not spoil the final moments. In other words, the death is a kind of voluntary offering of the body to the deities. One should not cling to life. A bad death is one which snatches life away as in an accident, or when vomit or faeces stain the body. Those dying good deaths are said to burn easily, and in popular perception their body is viewed as almost self-igniting and glows with a divine radiance. Bad deaths, by contrast, yield bodies which turn black and are hard to burn.

The preparation for death is like the preparation of sacrificial offerings. The burning area is prepared as sacrificial sites are; the wood for cremation is like the wood used for offerings to the deities. The way the pyre is lit and the materials added both reflect the rites of a sacrificial offering: the cremation is even called the sacrament of fire, *dah sanskar*, or the last sacrifice, *antyeshti* (Parry, 1994: 178).

These traditional rites cannot always be strictly performed, not least when Indian populations migrate and settle in other countries. Such is the case in Britain, where Hindu groups have, to varying degrees, had to adapt to new situations, as ably demonstrated by Shirley Firth (1997). This means new forms of relating to the dying when in hospital and not at home, or employing cremation with less immediate contact with the dead, as well as the fact that ritual specialists who in Banaras would only be funeral priests now also have to serve at other rites of passage, with all that means for notions of ritual purity.

Conquering death

Parry (1994: 251ff.), again for traditional Banaras, furnishes another manifestation of human death-conquest in his description of the male ascetic Aghoris who frequent Banaras's burning ghats. Aghoris belong to a monastic order whose members go about naked or wearing shrouds taken from the dead. With matted hair, they sleep on biers used to carry the dead, eat ashes from the cremation pyres and carry bowls made from human skulls. Aggressive in manner and foul-mouthed to others, they reputedly eat dead bodies and engage in human sacrifice. Their religious devotions involve sex with prostitutes, preferably at the time of menstruation, when they are also said to practise coitus reservatus (they have orgasm without the ejaculation of semen). The symbolic significance of this behaviour becomes clearer in the light of their own death rites, for Aghoris are said not to die. Rather, they are believed to enter into a form of final meditation and their dead bodies are not cremated but buried in a meditative posture within the grounds of their monastery. Their skulls are not cracked and, in popular belief, their bodies are said not to decay. A shrine is set up over their grave and is marked with the phallic-shaped emblem of Shiva, who is

also the deity of the cremation ground. In recent decades significant development among some Aghori groups have led to more focused charitable works framed by modern conditions of management and public relations (Ron Barratt, 2008).

Together these features portray individuals transcending death through death-related asceticism. These break all the boundaries of normal life, ignore the distinctions between ritually pure and ritually impure things, and disregard the rules followed by other people. The Aghori is like Lord Shiva and embraces death in a kind of eternal meditation. In other words, these few individuals represent in their own life and behaviour that goal of transcending death which, in quite different ways, runs through the cremation and post-cremation rites of ordinary Indians. Accordingly, while still alive, they are regarded as possessing spiritual power from which their devotees hope to benefit. In some respects they resemble the leopard skin chief of the Dinka peoples of the Sudan described in Chapter 6. In both cases the funeral rites of potently symbolic individuals represent a conquest of death and furnish a channel of power for the living.

Buddhism

Buddhism favours cremation as the preferred means of disposing of human remains, not least because the body of the Buddha was cremated after his death in the sixth century bce. Tradition tells that his cremated remains were divided into eight parts and distributed to different regions within India. The pots containing these remains were placed inside mounds called 'stupas'. Later the Indian emperor Ashoka, who promoted a form of Buddhist revival in India, subdivided these remains and very many more stupas were constructed, further fostering piety among the faithful (Harvey, 1991: 82). While the religious significance of the stupa is grounded in the mortal remains of the Buddha or, as in subsequent stupas, in the remains of some famed spiritual leader, its architectural form has been increasingly elaborated so that each part of the architectural structure has been invested with significance.

The stupa is both a simple and an extremely complex structure. In simplicity it is a square within a circle, representing in three-dimensional architecture what a mandala represents in two-dimensional paintings. In one

sense a stupa is a mandala, a condensed set of symbols reflecting on the nature of the cosmos and of the life and nature of the Buddha. A hemispherical mound rising from the ground with a square structure near its top which terminates in a spire, in terms of symbolic interpretation and its capacity to stimulate meditative reflection the stupa is, as Snodgrass (1992: 5) explains in his magisterial study of stupa symbolism, 'ineffable: in the last analysis the meaning of the stupa cannot be expressed'. In a direct sense the stupa represents the physical remains of the Buddha and symbolically expresses his entry into nirvana at his death and his achieving real Buddha nature. One tradition of interpretation within the history of religions sees the stupa, centred on a vertical axis, as representing the axis mundi or the centre of the world. The abstract idea of the world tree, wh ich is often taken to symbolize this centrality, may well be associated with the Buddhist devotion to the Bodhi tree associated with the Buddha's enlightenment, which is symbolically represented at the top of the stupa (Harvey, 1991: 87; Irwin, 1991: 46ff.). Stupas serve as a focus of devotion and piety for many Buddhists whether in their architectural form or in art (Rhie and Thurman, 1991: 99).

This Buddhist approach to the structures containing cremated remains, or even other sorts of belongings of holy people, can be interpreted as an expression of conquest of death. These are not negative symbols of the triumph of death over humanity but of the fact that in particular individuals the bitterness of life has been overcome, which confers a sense of hope on others. The power in the symbolism is interesting precisely because it is the outcome of physical death, in the form of cremated remains, which becomes the focal point for devotion and for religious practice which sets itself to triumph over the material problems of existence. In this sense we might, perhaps, speak of the stupa as containing the ashes of and for enlightenment.

Tibetan Buddhism

The funeral rites of Buddhist Tibet were various and traditionally included cremation, placing corpses in water, burying them or cutting them up for wild animals to eat (Anuruddha, 1959: 167). The purchase of wood for cremation was costly for the poor, and burial was disliked lest the soul desire to remain with the body and produce a kind of vampire. This expense

helps explain why what has been called sky-burial or air-burial or the exposing of the chopped-up body to birds and animals was employed; even remaining bones might be hammered into powder and mixed with dough for the birds to eat. Finally, the bodies of celebrated religious leaders might be mummified and retained in temples where devotions could be made to them (Evans-Wentz, 1960: 26). Behind Tibetan Buddhism there lies the pre-Buddhist Bon tradition of Tibet which is said to have had its own extensive commitment to death rites but not to have engaged in dismemberment (Hoffmann, 1961: 23).

The reason why Tibetan practice has gained a degree of celebrity in Western societies lies less in these varied funerary rites of corpse disposal than in the verbal rituals used before, during and after physical death. When Evans-Wentz, himself much influenced by early twentieth-century anthropology at Oxford, especially in the person of his supportive teacher R. R. Marett, first published a version of what he called *The Tibetan Book* of the Dead in 1927 he introduced to an increasingly appreciative audience a text which described a set of relationships between the soul and the body of the deceased, and between that soul and an assisting priest. Called in Tibetan the Bardo Thodol, this text provides a kind of psychological and religious picture of the *bardo*, or state of being between the former life and the next incarnation. The priest or monk called to the dying person employs his personal spiritual power in verbal ritual to explain and describe to the dying person the experiences he or she is now undergoing to help the consciousness to separate itself from the body, allowing the body itself to die and to understand its transitory state. The dying person undergoes a form of liberation through hearing the verbal ritual and is enabled to pass through a threefold series of *bardo* states within the 49-day period before it reincarnates in another body. The use of words is important because of the emphasis placed upon the dying person's consciousness and on the need of being mindful and attentive to the very process of dying, just as the goal of life is to develop one's attention to the way things are and appear to be (David-Neel, 1970: 164). In other words, dying is not simply something that befalls people but is an active process in which the dying person is intimately involved and can positively assist in what happens next. This reflects the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of death and life as 'modifications of consciousness' (Evans-Wentz, 1954: 45).

Accordingly, the priest should speak clearly into the dying person's ear and, through the instruction given, tell the individual not to cling to this life but to set out on the journey into the next phase of existence. Here, in Tibetan Buddhism, the general idea of death as a journey sets the scene where 'cosmological regions are more aptly described as being different states of mind' (Colvin, 1991: 74). After the disposal of the corpse the rituals proceed for up to forty-nine days after death, using an image of the dead or by the priest mentally imagining the deceased person and the soul and engaging in the verbal ritual with them. There are accounts of the feelings and emotions the soul will undergo as it encounters various deities and even, for example, the mood encountered on coming to be conceived once more in the womb as male or as female. It suggests that those about to be conceived as male will feel a deep attraction to the mother and a hatred of the father while the girl embryo will feel a strong attachment to the father and a repulsion towards the mother (Evans-Wentz, 1960: 180).

This Tibetan Buddhist tradition, furnishing as it does one of the bestknown examples of a highly schematized approach to death, dying and the afterlife, has recently been reasserted in more contemporary terms in The *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1992) by the Tibetan-born teacher Sogyal Rinpoche. His book extends and applies the traditional Tibetan approach to death in Western contexts and has much to do with using the imagination to come to terms with various human attitudes to mortality. The novelty of his book lies in the completely explicit engagement with death, not only our own death but also the death of others. He gives advice on using the imagination within meditative practices to gain a balanced approach to death and to overcome fear of it, and also describes ways of helping others prepare for it. In doing this his approach is highly eclectic, as he quotes the work of medical professionals such as Cicely Saunders and encourages people of all religions to use the symbolism of their own perspective within the meditative practices he outlines. The attraction of this approach is that it, apparently, gives access to secret knowledge and allows the modern desire to conquer death to be met through a combination of traditional wisdom and contemporary psychology.

Ancestors, cemeteries and local identity

Every human society possesses death ritual and innumerable examples could be documented for groups the world over. The cases selected in this chapter demonstrate the ritual means of changing the status of the dead, especially in terms of ancestor and descendant; they indicate the variety of human action taken against death. Some reflect local variants drawn from contemporary world religions while others express indigenous beliefs of a locally more ethnic kind. Most focus on contemporary practices but ancient traditions of Egypt and Chile also provide a more historical perspective to funerary rites. Other examples are chosen to contrast cases where the dead are cherished and where they are hated. Each could be explored in much greater depth to show how the language associated with bereavement and the funerary rites expressed these attitudes. Words against death are often expressed as words for and against the dead and, in an evaluative sense, it is important to see that each society varies in the way it has come to terms with mortality. Local circumstances and style of life obviously influence this to a great degree so that, for example, the geographically static Egyptians cannot be expected to deal with death as did the nomadic Gypsies. As for the recent trend of woodland burial in the UK and elsewhere, we see something of how words against death can take a very positive formulation when driven by a sense of affinity with the earth.

Mummies East and West

One of the more dramatic forms of dealing with death and, in one sense, conquering it lies in mummification, when the body is preserved from its

ultimate decay. Although this practice is usually associated with the ancient Egyptians, one of the earliest cases known comes from the Chinchorro people of ancient Chile, who were preserving their dead from as early as 5,000 bc.

Chinchorro of Chile

The Chinchorro lived in settlements or on a fertile coastal strip between the Pacific Ocean and the Atacama Desert from about 7,000 bc. Their material needs were easily satisfied by these conditions and it seems that they invested a considerable amount of time and effort in preserving their dead, most especially their children and even foetuses. This is an interesting fact, since children are often found to receive minimal funerary attention in a majority of cultures. The Chinchorro may have derived the idea of artificial mummification from the natural mummification which occurs in the conditions of the Atacama Desert but other, more social factors would have been present, though these now lie beyond our access. Of the 282 mummies known, 47 per cent were natural and 53 per cent artificially mummified (Arriaza, 1995: 97). The mummies which Bernardo Arriaza has classified as 'black mummies' were subjected to complex processes in which the body was skinned, practically taken apart, the flesh removed, the bones dried and then the whole put together again, having been reinforced by sticks, twine, reeds and paste. Even facial skin seems to have been replaced on the filled-out skull after the brain had been removed. A scalp of hair was also placed on the mummy along with some sea-lion skin before the whole body was painted with a black manganese paint. Arriaza describes some of these mummies as complex works of art, more like an image or statue of death than a simple body (106). Other 'red mummies' were less complexly treated before being painted with an iron oxide paint. The mud-coated mummies were not eviscerated but they seem to have been cemented to the floor of their graves, unlike the other mummies.

The Chinchorro had no written language, so that, unlike the Egyptians who started mummifying some 2,000 years later, we have no means of interpreting the significance of their mummification. The fact that food and some fishing materials were buried with mummies might indicate a sense of a future world where such things would be of use. Much later practices of mummification in the Andes led to the dead being honoured, as among the Incas, who dressed and fed their mummified rulers; these were carried in procession, which suggests they still played a part in ongoing social life. In the absence of texts much belongs to speculation but Arriaza (1995: 140), whose work is very significant in this field, is happy to suggest that speaking 'symbolically, without artificial mummification their society would die ... Metaphorically, preserved ancestors can be equated with a dry fish in a maritime society', having the power to nourish others, albeit in a spiritual sense. This speculation reinforces the fact that without information we can say nothing about words against death in this case, but it is extremely unlikely that all this ritual of mummification and burial took place in silence or that it did not address itself to the fact of death. The facts that the Chinchorro lived in small groups and that the facial individuality of the dead seems to have been retained after mummification suggest that death was a personal issue as well as triggering a social response.

Egyptian mummies

From preliterate Chile to literate Egypt there is a significant step in time and space but a closer similarity as far as the treatment of the dead is concerned. Both practised mummification, even though the ancient Egyptians did not begin the practice until approximately 2,500 bc, the process reaching its peak about 1,000 bc but continuing in a lesser form until about the seventh century ad. The early Coptic or Egyptian Christian period sought to preserve bodies using chemical means.

This chemical base is reflected both in the word 'embalming', referring to the Latin phrase *in balsamum* or being placed in various aromatic oils, and in 'mummification', which is probably derived from *mumiya*, the Arabic word for bitumen, the black liquid in which corpses were sometimes soaked (Hamilton-Paterson and Andrews, 1978: 36). Another substance called natron, a mixture of sodium salts, was used to pack around the corpse and help draw off its moisture. For the more extensive form of mummification the brain was removed through the nose, while the internal organs were taken from the abdomen and chest, though the heart and kidneys were often left in place. The organs were themselves chemically treated and placed in special jars called canopic jars forming sets with specific organs being placed in separate jars within a distinctive chest. Not only that, but the four sons of the falcon god Horus were sometimes represented on the lids of these jars; those baboon-, human-, hawk- and jackal-headed individuals guarded the lungs, liver, intestines and stomach respectively (Hamilton-Paterson and Andrews, 1978: 91).

The corpse was finally carefully wrapped in bandages and placed in a case. All of these stages were associated with religious rituals which had the overall purpose of securing the body and the departed soul or life forces of the deceased for a future existence after death. In this, special groups of embalmers and priests collaborated in preventing the physical body and the more intangible spirit from being lost forever. Though the actual process of mummification probably took something like forty days, the total ritual period occupied some seventy days; this closely reflects the Old Testament account of the mummification of Jacob in the Book of Genesis (50.2, 3) which is explicitly said to have taken forty days within an overall funerary perio d of seventy days. Like his father, Joseph was also embalmed and mummified, 'and placed in a coffin in Egypt' (Gen. 50.26). It is interesting that the first book of the Bible should end with an account of two great figures in the history of Israel being embalmed and mummified.

The Egyptian practice was, as we have already mentioned, related to a system of religious belief concerning life after death. The life of a person was reckoned to be made up not just of the physical body but of three additional features. The *ka* was the life force which left the body and came to have an existence of its own at death, when it was thought to exist both in connection with the mummy and in a special chapel, often at ground level, where it could be supported with food offerings. The ba was a kind of manifestation of the dead as a kind of combination of the *ka* plus the dead body. It could take the form of a bird with a human face but needed to return to the tomb at night. Another dimension of the spirit was that of the *akh*, which introduces a rather complicated idea into the Egyptian answer to death. The *akh* was part of the individual which had its existence among the stars, far removed from earthly involvement; in this sense it reflected a distant part of eternity. Between the three elements of *ba*, *ka* and *akh* the dead Egyptian possessed a set of different spheres of post-mortem existence. The first two related to the former way of life while the latter was far more transcendent, with all three together providing a broad working set of beliefs which could help explain the dead as nearer and as more distant post-mortem beings.

The most famous popular aspect of Egyptian funerary rites, apart from mummification, concerns the pyramid structures built over burial chambers of the embalmed dead, notably of the rich and of royal houses in Egypt. These pyramids were a form of architectural protection of the rich dead, including the special grave presents and gifts for the dead to assist them in the next life. Many features were built into these elaborate tombs to prevent access by robbers (Spencer, 1982: 74ff.). There were, obviously, other kinds of tombs in Egypt which were not capped by a pyramid, but the pyramid form stands out in symbolic assertion of the human will to express the hope and belief that life continues after death. The tomb art depicts the religious beliefs of the Egyptians and constitutes a ritually impressive set of what we might describe as art against death. In pictorial form it displayed the powerful myths and invocations used by the priests in the various stages of embalming, constituting a fine example of words against death.

In Egypt these beliefs about life after death went hand in hand with a myth about the gods, especially of Osiris, which helped integrate the destiny of the Pharaoh with the destinies of ordinary Egyptians and showed how human beings wrestle with the fact of life and death and the hope of transcending the despair of mortality. Less well known than mummies or pyramids are the extensive funerary texts which described the relationships between the dead and the deities and probably were recited during the process of embalming and entombing the deceased. These funerary texts are represented, for example, in what has come to be called *The Eqyptian Book* of the Dead; they have been described as 'of great importance ... in the belief that their recital would secure for the dead an unhindered passage to God in the next world, would enable him to overcome the opposition of ghostly foes, would endow his body in the tomb with power to resist corruption, and would ensure him a new life in a glorified body in heaven' (Wallis Budge, 1967: xi). This Egyptian case brings together a series of oppositions to death: not only the hieroglyphic texts but also the process of embalming and the architectural realism of the pyramids and other tombs. Here, words against death are set very firmly in writing, in stone and upon the physical bodies of the dead. In fact, a great deal of cultural energy was devoted to this endeavour.

The Americas

In the history of religions much attention has been paid to literary traditions describing death and processes of consciousness believed to be associated with the soul after death as in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in Chapter 5, but many pre- or non-literate oral traditions have also addressed themselves to similar issues through their myths and beliefs creatively developed in the local cultures of the world. Here we consider but a few examples, beginning with the Americas.

Native North Americans

Often ultimate destiny is seen to depend upon human endeavour and ethical striving. One example, from the Winnebago, traditional Native North Americans, describes a path through various hazards which the individual must traverse after death. The dead encounter a steep ravine which they feel they could not possibly pass; it is then that they remember the advice of the ancestors that they must 'plunge right through'. Similarly when meeting an apparently impassable barrier of sticks, when being covered with evil and foul-smelling phlegm and when seeing the earth all afire, they know they must 'plunge right through'. Finally they are given sacred and sustaining food and reach the realm of ancestors who meet and welcome them (Beck and Walters, 1977: 206ff.).

The idea of the soul plays a major part in many Native American traditions and is often associated with belief in two souls, one being closely associated with bodily movement and the other with dreams. This latter dream or free soul ultimately becomes caught up in the world of the dead, which leads to the bodily soul leaving soon after, causing physical death (Hultkrantz, 1979: 131). The extensive tradition of Navajo mythology set the dynamic power of life and its absence in death within the overall theory of 'holy winds'. Such winds come to the growing foetus to give it life and to cause it to flourish, while at the end of earthly existence these vivifying winds are withdrawn from the human body, leaving it to die (McNeley, 1981: 56). Similarly, Cheyenne tradition saw death as resulting from the soul, *tasoom*, leaving the body and travelling on to its destiny, either with the Great Wise One or, for those few who had committed suicide, to extinction as they took the negative path from a fork in the Milky Way (Hoebel, 1978: 92). At death the Cheyenne rapidly set about their funeral

rites, which included binding the full-length body in cloth and placing it either in a tree or else on a platform above the earth, though it could also be covered with rocks. A man's horse was shot and left at the grave site, as were a woman's cooking utensils. The speed of the procedure was said to be because the deceased could not set out on the all-important journey to the next world until the funeral rites were completed. The practice of placing the dead on platforms or in trees, sometimes prior to interment, or above ground in cairns was widespread in North America, though some tribes did bury and a few did cremate, especially on the west coast (Hultkrantz, 1979: 138).

The idea of the dead taking a journey until they come to a division of the ways, whether to bliss or to terror, is extremely widespread in human history and is an interesting use of this-worldly human experience, that of travelling, as a model for viewing human destiny in the other world lying beyond death. Some have argued that these 'two paths' reflect human ideals to an even greater extent as when, for example, the Nordic myths of a warrior culture speak of the victorious dead passing the way of God into Valhalla while those dying of disease or old age pass along the Hel-way to the abode of the negatively viewed goddess Hel (Lincoln, 1991: 120).

Some scholars see this idea of the death journey of the soul as mirroring the very widespread practice of shamanism, of individuals who believe they have the spiritual power to undergo journeys to the realms of the gods to gain some benefit for members of their society (Hultkrantz, 1979: 133), the difference between the shaman and the ordinary person being that the shaman is able to come and go between these realms at will, while this is not given to others. Shamans often use a symbolic sacred tree as part of their journey to the other world; it forms the linking point as the axis mundi and was sometimes set up as such in the centre of ritual grounds or in the ceremonial lodge, and prayers to the spirits of the dead could be offered at this pole.

In some groups both traditional and more recent Christian rites were combined or complemented each other, as with the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, whose Christian burial rites might be conducted before or after more traditional rites, including potlatch rituals involving dances and giftgiving to guests. On such a potlatch occasion a son might, for example, not only dance in memory of his deceased father but might also be given special names that once belonged to his father (Rohner and Rohner, 1970: 54). This shows how shifts in identity which affect both the dead and their living survivors may be marked through funerary rites.

South America and Mexico

Not all funerals take a grand form, nor do they even require the services of religious experts. Much often depends upon circumstance and the status of the one who has died. The anthropologist Peter Rivière (1972) has described funeral rites in the cattle-ranching culture of Roraima in north Brazil. There the deceased is usually buried on the same day as the death. One interesting aspect of a funeral he described shows how ordinary people sometimes have to make decisions about ritual as the very ritual is going on. This is a worthwhile counterbalance to the idea, which is so easily formed in urban societies well served by professional ritual specialists, that ritual is a well-established set of practices. Riviere tells how, in the funeral of a young child, not only was there some discussion as to how deep the grave should be, but also a pause in the ceremony and several changes in direction before deciding which way the coffin should face (80). The rite was conducted without any priest, but at the annual Feast of All Souls on 2 November a special Mass was said by a priest in the cemetery; special candles would be lit and prayers said for this, as for other individuals who had died over the year. This particular ceremony known as *Dia de Finados*, or the Day of the Dead, is widespread in Catholic cultures and is sometimes associated with much festivity and joy. It is one of the rites in which life is asserted over and against death. In many such contexts money often plays a part in the organization of ritual and becomes profoundly significant in contexts of a 'culture of poverty'. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis, who coined that term, produced a classic account of a 1960s Mexican death and funeral within just such a poor family. In what reads as a hybrid of ethnographic and novel writing his A Death in the Sanchez Family (1972) poignantly pinpointed different family members' responses to the financial demands of priests and funeral directors.

Day of the Dead

The funeral documented by Lewis took place shortly after one of the most extensive Mexican festivities of the Day of the Dead, focused on 1 and 2 November, the church feasts of All Saints' and All Souls' Days, though it can extend from 18 October until 30 November, representing the feast days of St Luke and St Andrew respectively. Different days in this period are used to welcome particular categories of the dead, whether children or adult (Carmichael and Sayer, 1991: 16). Families clean and prepare graves, repainting and decorating them with flowers and lighting candles on them, and also build elaborate offerings for the dead within each home; the dead are even said to be nourished by the food and drink offerings made for them. Many pictures, paintings, collages and statues are constructed, bought and sold and used as caricatures of death: skeletons and corpses are depicted in a great variety of ways, many of them comic. Here death as a universal fate of people is combined with the particular loss of each individual family; the joys and sorrows of existence are brought into close proximity with each other. The general festivity parallels the Requiem Masses which are also held in a statement of the positive nature of life despite death, albeit in a much more solemn form. Here too the theme of transcendence and conquest becomes evident: life is worth living despite the fact of death, and it is accomplished both at the domestic social level and at the ecclesiastical level of social life.

Africa

African death rites obviously embrace thousands of local examples, many dealing with the shift in status of the dead into some category of ancestor. Here we begin with one case that illustrates the power of words in funerary rites and shows how personal identity is deeply influenced by death. This is drawn from Evans-Pritchard's (1956) classic ethnography of the Nuer of the Sudan.

The Nuer do not possess a cult of the dead; graves are unmarked and relatively quickly forgotten. As Evans-Pritchard (1956: 162) expresses it, 'A man's memorial is not in some monument but in his sons.' In other words, the perpetuation of identity lies in a this-worldly dimension and not in some other-worldly sphere. This is not simply a metaphorical statement; it also takes a formal shape through rules of kinship. Widows are not remarried, nor are they inherited by someone else; rather, they continue to produce and raise children to the name of their dead husband, with their husband's brothers serving as the biological fathers. Even if they bear children to some other man, these still carry the name of the dead partner. If a man dies without leaving a wife and without any surviving children, it is the duty of his living kin to marry a wife in his name and raise a child to the name of the deceased relative so that the dead man may always have a name within the ongoing lineage. As Evans-Pritchard expresses it, the Nuer 'are not interested in the survival of the individual as a ghost, but in the survival of the social personality in the name' (163). Accordingly, mortuary rituals do not speak of the end of a person's identity but of its continuation in the lineage. In other words, it is the lineage and the presence of the deceased's name within it which assumes significance, not least on occasions when a list of lineage members is recited on formal occasions. Here again the power of formal words is important in the face of physical death.

Another example from the Nuer will reinforce the significance of the precise social status of the deceased in relation to the death rites performed. Among the Nuer, twins were traditionally spoken of as being 'one person', as possessing a single identity despite the fact they were two separate individuals. Twins were also said to be 'birds', a symbolic statement associated with the idea that twins were a special manifestation of supernatural power; they belonged to the realm of the 'above', of 'spirit' or of God in a special sense. Accordingly, no formal funerary rites were performed for twins when they died, not even when the second and surviving twin died. When infant twins died, as they often did, the bodies would be placed in a reed basket and placed in the fork of a tree in a symbolic expression of their identity as 'birds'. When an adult twin died it was not placed in a tree but neither was it buried in the same way as ordinary Nuer; instead, a grave was dug in which a platform was erected on which the body was placed and covered with a hide before the grave was filled in with earth. In this sense the adult twin maintained an identity as distinct from other Nuer right into the grave, forever remaining 'of the above' even when placed beneath the earth. Twins are always 'children of God' and are simply not subject to the world 'of the below' as are other people.

A neighbouring tribe of the Nuer are the Dinka, and in turning to them we observe another symbolic form of conquering death, one which evokes the idea of self-sacrifice. This form of death rite expresses very clearly the idea of what we have called in this book 'death-transcendence'. This rite focuses on the death of the master of the fishing spear, an individual who occupied a deeply important place in Dinka society, as already mentioned in Chapter 4. The essence of this death is that the ritual specialist, in a sense, controlled his own death in deciding when he was to die. He chose death rather than have life wrenched from him; he remained in control and in that sense attained transcendence over death. When he was ill or sick and decided that the time for his death was drawing near he asked to be buried. A grave was made for him and he was placed in it on a kind of bed with a covering platform. After speaking words of blessing and strength to his family his grave was filled in with earth. In one sense, this was an example of being buried alive; in another, it is a voluntary sacrifice, a giving of life and not having one's life forcibly taken away.

One distinctive feature of this case lies in the verbal aspect of the whole proceeding and the way the words of blessing which come from the one who is to die reflect the significance accorded to words and the power of words found in the invocations made at Dinka animal sacrifices. Lienhardt argues in a most persuasive way that the verbal invocation of the one conducting the sacrifice of an ox increases in significance as the animal vitality of the beast is overwhelmed (1961). In symbolic terms, language reflects the realm of culture and of human existence while the life force of the sacrifice expresses the animal level of existence. In animal sacrifice the power of words triumphs over the cessation of the life force of the beast that dies. In a similar sense one might argue that the words of the master of the fishing spear as he literally lies upon his deathbed demonstrate the ongoing dominance of words and the realm of culture rather than the dominance of the death of individual bodies. This pattern of death reflects the death of the Aghoris of Banaras described in Chapter 5. Just as they were reckoned not to die but to end their human life in a state of final meditation and were buried accordingly, so, in a symbolic sense, the master of the fishing spear is buried at his own command.

Among the Lugbara of Uganda there is an extensive cult of the dead in which ancestors and ghosts receive extensive ritual attention but not to prepare them for some heavenly realm. In fact the Lugbara did not possess any traditional beliefs about any sort of heaven or hell, reward or punishment after life; rather, the concern reflected the ongoing life of the lineage (Middleton, 1960: 28ff.). God is said to be responsible for all deaths even though the more immediate cause is thought to be a sorcerer. The dead were buried and, like the Nuer, their graves were soon forgotten, except in the case of senior men and women, over whose graves trees might be planted which would carry their names. The dead are considered to possess *orindi*, a kind of soul, and may even be heard at night, but these are insignificant as far as the living are concerned.

In terms of the 'words against death' theme of this book, it is important to know that highly prized formal speeches are employed by the Lugbara in connection with both illness and death. These speeches are powerful not only in expressing human sincerity but also in helping to reconstitute the lineage of the sick or dead person. Middleton's very full account of the composition of Lugbara identity, composed of various life forces and supernatural elements, provides material enabling us to draw a very interesting difference between a society of this type and, for example, that of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

A dying Lugbara is likely to 'be aware of the cleavages within the lineage' and his last words are likely to seek to cause the least permanent harm to the kinship structure of his people (Middleton, 1960: 199). In fact, funerals are times when arguments may break out and lineages undergo some realignment; this is a period in which the dead person's status is changed from that of a living to that of a dead kinsman. In other words, while the Tibetan arena of death focuses on the individual consciousness of the dying person with maximum ritual effort directed to fostering full mindfulness as part of the ritual journey of the departing life force, the Lugbara environment is this-world focused. The lineage as the prime concern of life replaces private consciousness. In general terms we might say that in the one case salvation is social order while in the other it is consciousness.

Moving from those classical anthropological ethnographies there has, more recently, been an increasing number of studies of death in African societies. While noting variations and modernized forms of burial practice, these include cases of AIDS ravaged areas where cremation has become acceptable, a practice otherwise shunned by traditional-minded peoples for whom ancestral relationships carry a stronger affinity with burial and burial sites (Jindra and Noret, 2011: 24–5). Or again, for the Meru of Central Kenya, Lamont (2011), has shown that 'prior to the1930s, the Meru disposed of the dead and dving through surface exposure in uninhabited forest areas' where hyenas and vultures might remove what was deemed polluting flesh and which 'exuded an unseen miasma'. He also tells how some who, instead of being subject to capital punishment for some misdemeanour, occupied a kind of 'living-dead' category charged with the task of 'disposing of the dead and dying' (88, 94, 95). As for contemporary celebration of death in a party-like event, Jonathan Roberts (2011: 208) gives account of 'lavish events with food, drinks, DJs, and dancing' in modern Accra, activities driven by the reciprocity-like awareness of the need to attend the funerals of others so that one's own future funeral might be well-attended, a desire framed by the sense that 'one must be remembered by the living to exist in the aft erlife'. Of such attitudes is 'meaning' made of identity and destiny and, in some sense, offers its own 'salvation'

Asia and Oceania

Philippines: Killing grief

In the quite different world of the tribal Ilongot of the Philippines 'salvation' lay more in the realm of gaining a degree of psychological balance and inner calm after bereavement, and at least one way of achieving this would probably surprise members of many other cultures because it involved killing another person. This case of the Ilongot people, documented by the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1980: 32), not only offers an example of the way in which song and formal speaking serve to create certain moods but also furnishes one of the most distinctive examples of coping with grief.

The Ilongot, in their pre-Christian days before the 1970s, were headhunters. They believed that the death of a relative made one's heart 'heavy and distraught' and that through killing and the taking of a head of an enemy the men, at least, were able to 'cast off the weight of grief and pain' (Rosaldo, 1980: 157). This aspect of the process of grief and mourning shows just how variable human death rites, in the broadest sense, can be. After the 1960s many Ilongot were converted to a more fundamentalist form of Christianity; one of the reasons advanced for conversion lay in the fact that head-hunting was, politically, less possible and the grief of bereavement led them to this religion which was also said to be able to calm the grief-stricken heart. Ironically, Renato Rosaldo (1984) has discussed his own sense of rage in grief, which he interpreted through the Ilongot view of life, a scheme which Epstein (1992: 187) has interpreted as redirected aggression.

Melanesian sea-burial

For peoples living on relatively small islands and for whom the sea is an integral part of life the practice of sea-burial was traditionally quite common, as in numerous Melanesian islands. Here the status of the deceased often influenced the pattern of disposal. The bodies of people with relatively little status might simply be cast into the sea, while those with greater status were given a longer period of mourning before being placed in the water. Certain chiefs or individuals much esteemed by their family might not be given a water-burial but be kept in the home encased in wooden or other containers. Many myths are associated with death and the journey the soul takes afterwards. Ghosts are often deemed dangerous and powerful and, in symbolic terms, seem to represent the status of the dead person located between the living and the ancestral planes. It is said, for example, that the ghost is weak while the body is rotting but when the smell has ceased the ghost is strong because then it is no longer a man (Codrington, 1891: 260). Even in some cases of water-burial the bones were periodically removed from established sites and piled up on the land. Parts of the body, often of the skull, are retained as memorials of the deceased and are regarded as possessing a kind of positive power of advantage to the living. This, in its own way, is an example of death not ultimately conquering humanity but conferring a degree of benefit upon the ongoing kin group.

Ancestors, identity and death

It is that ongoing group that has constituted one of the most distinctive features of life in that, for the greatest part of humanity's history as it is known to us, men, women and children have belonged to families within identifiable communities. This fact of kinship underlies all known human societies and provides a foundation not only for individual and group identity embracing the living and the dead but also for coping with death. It is against this background of kinship duties, obligations and cultural expectations that death brings significant changes to bear. Close kin of the dead see that funeral ceremonies are properly carried out so that the desired post-mortem status may be attained. Concurrently, the identity of surviving kin also undergoes a change as the eldest child, probably already adult, now becomes the head of the family and may inherit the goods of the deceased, or as the surviving partner becomes a widow or widower and so on. Through the funerary rites not only are ancestors made but they reciprocate by benefiting their descendants.

This chapter considers a variety of such ancestral influence on descendants, whether in conferring a cultural identity, or in standing witness to that opposition to death which often marks the human response to mortality. This offsets the overemphasis on grief in relation to death in Western societies, as though bereavement involved only emotional states of grief whereas, in fact, most deaths involve changes in life-circumstances touching matters of money, inheritance and shifting social status.

India

In India the eldest surviving son owes a debt of obligation to his parents, especially his father, in conducting that part of the cremation ceremony when the skull is cracked to aid the release of the life force for its journey of transmigration, as described in Chapter 5. This act acknowledges the relationship between immediate generations but does not constitute any extensive sense of ancestors. While the power of older people over their younger offspring was considerable in traditional India, it tended not to be exerted after death. This was because of the deep influence of the idea of individual merit in the system of karma which underpinned belief in salvation. Merit was to be gained from individual actions, not from the ancestors through an ancestral blessing. This is an important point needing some emphasis, for it highlights the fact that the relationship between the

living individual and the dead often reflects the total scheme of salvation in a culture. Societies with strong ancestor cults often emphasize the blessing, curse or other benefit coming from the ancestors to corporate groups of descendants rather than any private and individualistic salvation.

In traditional India life was often described as ideally passing through four stages, those of a student, householder, semi-recluse and total recluse. These last two phases indicate that a man who has been a powerful head of a household now begins to withdraw from his social obligations. If he did go as far as entering the final stage, it involved performing a ceremony which symbolized his own funeral and marked a separation from ordinary life in preparation for actual death and the subsequent journey on the path of transmigration. Here the individual withdraws from those aspects of lifeinvolvement which would support and reinforce the status of being an ancestor. The whole realm of karma, the system of moral reciprocity in which the future state of the self is determined by acts performed in the former life, replaces the realm of social obligations. 'Karma' is sometimes described as a rather impersonal scheme of cause and effect; accepting that description, it is possible to see how it is an alternative to the highly personal pattern of obligations inherent in ancestor cults.

As outlined in Chapter 5, funerary rites constitute the prime arena within which the status of ancestor is conferred upon the dead, just as descendants have to use this period as a time w hen they begin to pay their dues to the dead who are now becoming ancestors. It is in the religions of East Asia and in some African tribal societies that such ancestral relationships became most highly developed.

China

Ancestors held a privileged place in traditional Chinese societies. After careful initial funeral ceremonies of burial the bones were exhumed and placed in containers which might be partially reburied before being finally placed in more permanent and elaborate tombs. The names of the dead were inscribed on ancestral tablets located in ancestral halls belonging to particular clan groups. These funeral rites have been described as 'converting the volatile spirit into a tamed domesticated ancestor' (Watson, 1988: 204). This was not a simple task nor was it done for everybody, an observation showing that death can involve many social consequences and political dimensions.

R. S. Watson's (1988: 208) account of contemporary funerary rites argues that in south-east China the dead possess not a single soul but three souls or aspects of soul. One is believed to reside in the grave, one in the ancestral tablet and one in the underworld. Very soon after death, perhaps the next day, the dead are rapidly buried in an unmarked spot in the neighbouring hills. Little care is taken over this spot, since it is temporary. Between seven and ten years later, the skeleton is disinterred, the bones cleaned by an expert and placed in a pottery urn which is, in turn, partially buried in the soil. This is the last resting place for many, since descendants may stop visiting and the place is simply forgotten. For important persons, however, the bones may ultimately be buried in a brick tomb some decades after the death, but only if descendants deem it worthwhile. Very few seem to achieve this last stage of the threefold process.

The names of the dead are added to ancestral lists in homes while those who are politically important for particular kinship groups may also be included on ancestral tablets in ancestor halls. As time goes on, these domestic lists change as new generations die and assume their place; for many, their names are lost from the list and the location of their bones forgotten: they disappear from the social world as from the realm of the ancestors. This shows how the remembrance or survival of the dead depends upon the interest shown by the living while the living, in turn, express interest depending upon the kind of benefit they derive from the ancestors. One distinctive aspect of this benefit lies in the political alliances and power-links created by groups associated with particular graves. Groups of people may even decide to focus their concern on a particular person and to merge their several economic interests in a focal ancestor who becomes the pivotal point for their new-found united action.

The rich are more likely than the poor to survive the course of time, since their descendants or uniting kin groups will probably place them in graves in auspicious locations. These sites are established by money derived either from the wealth of the dead or from estates established by one or more living individuals who now wish to be associated with the deceased. Examples exist of relatively loosely linked kinsfolk deciding to choose a long-dead ancestor as one they will corporately honour. By so doing they reinforce their bonds one with another through this common ancestor and use their new-found unity for economic and for local political purposes (Watson, 1988: 212).

The siting of ancestral graves is itself of great importance for Chinese descendants because of the ideology of *feng shui* (literally, 'wind and water'). The principles of *feng shui* involve divination to establish the direction and location of favoured sites. It is a practice still used in funerals but it also has been adopted for locating commercial and business premises.

In traditional times Chinese emperors occupied a significant place in society and in relating the people with heaven itself. Their death was marked with much ritual – including the burning of possessions the emperor might need in the afterlife – and mourning rites were adopted throughout the empire. The emperors were buried in tombs associated with a sacrificial hall housing their spirit tablets, and ritual, a form of worship, was performed twice a month in these halls and at other prescribed times throughout the year. One interesting aspect of death rites involved the choosing of a new name for the deceased, one that would be inscribed upon the ancestor tablet and by which he would be known to his descendants. Such necronyms, or names of the dead, are also known in other parts of the world and reflect the new identity obtained by the dead.

In modern China and some other East Asian societies, including North Korea and Taiwan, high political leaders have been accorded elaborate state funeral rites, as was the case when Chairman Mao Tse-tung died in September 1976. Public weeping and attendance at the rites, at which Communist Party officials played the central role, took precedence over his immediate family and their involvement. One theme that has been identified in the events following both Mao's death and also the death in April 1975 of his great political rival General Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Chinese in Taiwan, is that of transforming 'grief into strength' (Wakeman, 1988: 267).

Grief into strength as rebounding violence

'Grief into strength' may be interpreted not only in terms of the 'rebounding violence' themes explored in earlier chapters but also as a form of words against death. For its own survival society does not allow its members to linger in states of depressed grief but overcomes it with a sense of victory and triumph. The memorial hall built to house Chairman Mao's body, for example, was completed in six months, engaged 'more than 700,000 people from all over China' and was interpreted by the Chinese Communist leadership and many others as an act of devotion to Mao and of the continuing triumph of his ideals (Wakeman, 1988: 278).

When many Chinese left China they often retained these practices. Chinese immigrants to Hawaii established a cemetery in 1851 using the traditional method of *feng shui* to decide on an auspicious location (Purnell, 1993: 194). This was on a hill bounded on three sides by water, regarded as a particularly suitable place because water restricts the free movement of souls. A symbolic spirit-gate at the entrance to the cemetery also serves to prevent spirits from 'wandering'.

After some seven years the bones are exhumed and placed in ceramic pots which are located in a special bone-house. Initially this was done until a convenient time arose when they could be taken back to their ancestral town in China. But as time went on and it became clear that many Chinese would live permanently in Hawaii, the bone-house became the final destination of many of these remains. In April and May these Chinese families hold the Ching Ming festival of the dead in which they seek the blessing of these ancestral personages for themselves and for the fertility of nature. Food items and tea are offered and rites are performed at the tomb of the unknown Chinese soldier, at the tomb of the Earth Mother and also at the bone-house. Cremation was avoided by the Chinese, except for those who had transgressed particula r religious rules.

The Japanese, by contrast, preferred cremation but the cremated remains were carefully retained and placed in urns in vaults. The Hawaiian Japanese retained many of these customs and often set up pagoda-like memorial stones over sites of cremated remains; these layered structures symbolized earth, water, fire, wind and air. In all their rites respect for the ancestors is deemed important for the continued welfare of contemporary Japanese.

Madagascan death rites

In these Indian, Chinese and Japanese cases the fact of descent and inheritance is of great cultural significance, mirroring the deep respect in which the ancestors are held. A similar process of ancestral identity can be found in Madagascar, where the dead are transformed into ancestors bound to the living in an ongoing community of periodic contact as described in Maurice Bloch's (1971) detailed study, which can only be briefly sketched here. Immediately after death, bodies are buried in temporary earth-graves, and at some later date are transferred to a tomb maintained by the group to which the dead person belonged and had contributed financially during his or her life. These ancestral tombs were very elaborate structures part of which lay under the ground and part above. At set times these tombs had the soil dug out from a descending staircase and the locked door was opened to allow the living relatives to gain access to a chamber with shelves on which were laid the wrapped-up bodily remains of the family's dead. These would be taken out of the tomb, rewrapped in new bindings and manipulated in a form of dance in which these skeletal remains might be thrown in the air and fall on the floor. They are, as it were, 'crushed by the process of reburial in order to become an impersonal descent amalgam' (Bloch, 1989: 170). Afterwards they are returned to the tomb along with any bodies of the relatively recently dead who had been brought to the ancestral land and its tomb from other parts of the island. This ancestral territory is very important to the Merina, symbolizing their own focus of identity, which is all the more important when they live and work away from that location. In the most direct of ways, these people return to their ancestral grave and ancestral soil, for as their body decays and is moved from the top shelves to the bottom shelves of the tomb they return again to the dust and earth of that territory.

Gypsy death rites

This is very different from the case of the Gypsies whose traditional way of life was nomadic, with Gypsy identity embedded in movement from place to place, and with that movement contrasted with the sedentary way of life of non-Gypsies. In a metaphorical sense the death and burial of a Gypsy marks a strange change, for instead of the living Gypsy moving about the countryside the dead Gypsy comes to a fixed halt in the grave. The grave is the opposite of the moving caravan; it is much more like the fixed house of the non-Gypsy. Okely (1983) interprets Gypsy death rites by arguing that, in death, the Gypsy comes to be like a non-Gypsy, involving a kind of symbolic turnaround reflected in the way the corpse is dressed in clothes turned inside out. At death, Gypsy identity is similarly turned inside out.

This is quite the opposite of the Madagascan case where the dead body becomes more intimately connected with the home ground in death than ever it was in life. In death the migrant Madagascan comes home to the ancestral territory and to their true identity in which the dead come to be one with the very soil of the land of their kinsfolk; here death integrates the kinship group.

In sharp contrast, the British Gypsy attitude to death and burial is very negative in nature and divides between the living and the dead. Gypsies often classify the world into things that are ritually positive and things that are, in a symbolic sense, unclean. Death and funerals belong to this category of unclean or ritually impure things. They prefer death to take place in hospitals belonging to non-Gypsies, whom they call Gorgios, in the belief that the ritual impurity of death may be carried by the Gorgios. This mirrors the Gypsy attitude to birth, which they also regard as a ritually impure process and prefer to take place in hospital. The dead body is dressed in clothes that are turned inside out and taken on its last journey to a church where, after a Christian funeral service, it is buried. Family members engage in dramatic public expressions of grief depending on their degree of kinship relationship to the deceased person. The closer the relationship to the dead, the more dramatic is the performance. Ultimately a headstone is placed above the grave.

In the United States, Gypsies, who largely immigrated after 1865, hold funerals involving considerable expense of a conspicuous kind; even so, the English Rom Gypsies still utilize only 'relatively modest' gravestones which 'blend inconspicuously with' those of middle-class people (Erwin, 1993). This would reflect Okely's interpretation of British Gypsy death rites, which she thinks reflect a process in which a group distances itself from the dead who have lost their Gypsy identity and become more like Gorgio outsiders (1983). This offers a stark example of the living defining the dead as belonging to quite a different domain from the living in terms of kinship relation and the ethos of communal life. The living do not wish to have contact with the dead and seek to make the grave a place the dead remain in; hence the traditional custom of burning and destroying the belongings of the dead. This is matched by the Gypsy dislike of ghosts and of the continuing identity of the dead as entities which may wish to continue relationships with the living. What is interesting in terms of the formal funerary rite is the fact that a mainstream church is chosen for the service: in England the Church of England and in the United States usually Roman Catholic churches or even Greek Orthodox (Trigg, 1975: 198ff.). This suggests that the official words against death are thereby drawn from beyond the Gypsy community and reinforce the wish of the living to have the dead firmly kept in their place and at a distance.

Woodland burial

A rather different approach to the dead emerged in the UK in the mid-1990s in what has, variously, been called woodland, green, natural or ecological burial (Davies and Rumble, 2012; Clayden et al., 2015). Each of those terms pinpoints some aspects of a spectrum of what it means for those who choose to be buried in a site that stresses the environment of earth, plants and animals. Most usually devoid of formal stone memorials, though mapping the location of remains by various electronic means, these graves merge into a landscape quite unlike formal cemeteries with rows of stoneheaded graves. This approach was, at first, intended for whole body burial but, over time, these attractive sites often attract those wishing to have cremated remains placed in them. Several motifs have emerged to express the wishes of those seeking to return to, or to give something back to, the earth. This alliance with 'nature' as conceived in contemporary Britain can either coexist with ideas that death, burial and absorption into the soil constitutes one's destiny, or with beliefs in a soul or life force that passes into some other realm. What is not so obvious is the traditional Christian idiom of 'resting in peace' or in the 'resurrection of the dead'. This funeral scheme originated in the creative outlook of one individual, Mr Ken West, and grew from the mid-1990s in Carlisle in the north-west of England into a relatively familiar cultural pattern by 2016 in just about as many natural burial sites as there are crematoria (Ken West, 2010).

One comparative example of innovation lies with the practice of 'tree funeral' or *jumokuso* of Japan, starting in a Zen Temple in northern Japan in 1999. Under the motif of protecting the environment, trees were planted over corpses, thus avoiding some use of space and excessive stone memorials while engendering 'a new forest' (Duteil-Ogata, 2012: 61). Allied developments, catalysed by a Swedish example, led to an urban application of this essentially rural phenomenon, resulting in *sakuraso bochi* or cherry tree burial. This innovation, especially involving cremated remains, is reckoned to have been driven by people lacking descendants, individualism, by 'the twin attachment of women to their native family and family by marriage, and the trend of returning to nature' (Duteil-Ogata, 2012, citing Inoue, 2003).

Maoris

It is precisely in the rites used for the ancestors that 'words against death' find their ongoing power and give society its durability of significance. This is clear in New Zealand where traditional Maori rites phased funerary ritual, mirroring a belief in death merely as a process than as one rapid moment. Death was not viewed as complete until the actual body had become fully decomposed. This could involve a temporary burial until the flesh had largely gone from the bones. At that stage a second ceremony called hahunga took place, amid renewed vocal expressions of grief, when any remaining flesh was scraped from the bones before they were finally buried. Reflecting the process of death, the spirit of the deceased was believed to remain among the living until decomposition was complete, then mourners would address the dead and encourage them to go to Hawaiki, the place of ancestral abode (Schwimmer, 1966: 60). This approach to the fate of the dead helps explain why the living might have that widespread human sensation of experiencing the dead sometime after their death. Still, this Maori example offers a clear case of the fate of the body matching the transition in status of the dead from being one among many living in a family to being one of the ancestors whose domain was elsewhere.

Before the nineteenth century, the dying Maori was traditionally placed in a separate shelter, covered with ancestral objects and surrounded by close kin, until death came. Joan Metge (1976: 28, 261–4) describes this historic period. The corpse, surrounded by the kin who now maintained constant formal wailing for the first few days after death, was left unburied for up to three weeks so that all visiting kin could pay their respects. The corpse was finally wrapped in mats and hidden in a cave or tree or in the earth. Exhumation took place a year or two after death; the bones were scraped, painted in red ochre and exposed at the traditional meeting place before being buried in a secret burial ground. The spirits of the dead were believed to undertake a northwards journey before finally entering the underworld realm of the goddess of death and childbirth, where they finally met and became one of the ancestors.

The contemporary tradition retains elements of this former practice. Women raise a high-pitched wailing; the wider family organize the funeral, leaving the closer kin to grieve and to receive visitors coming to pay their respects. The formal wailing is resumed as each new visiting party approaches. This is a good example of the performance of grief which unites both social and psychological factors of death. Visitors address speeches to the dead, who are also directed towards and commanded to go and join the ancestors. Burial takes place three days after death and usually follows a Christian rite.

After the burial the mourners perform a rite of washing to remove the *tapu* ('taboo') from themselves. When the burial party return to the marae or community meeting place and the *tapu* is raised from it they set about the funeral feast, and with it trigger a shift in emotion with 'more cheerful themes' (Metge, 1976: 263). Alcohol and music take their effect as the gathered community helps the grieving family before leading them back to their home and to the place of death from which the *tapu* is also lifted. Over the next year occasional events occur, culminating in a final community meeting or *hui* which involves unveiling a memorial to the dead. Metge describes the Maori as people who believe in sharing rather than hiding their grief, and speaks of the way in which the formal wailing seems to give a natural outlet for the grief of many Maori women. Children are party to all these events, thus becoming familiar with death in a community context from a young age. The occasion of the funeral is also that at which many people in their twenties or thirties make their first formal speech at the *marae* and do so under the influence of the emotion of bereavement as they thank those who have supported them. This Maori case very clearly demonstrates, through the extensive practice of speech-making, the explicit power of 'words against death', whether spoken to the dead or to other members of the community. Verbal ritual asserts the significance of the ongoing life of society.

Identity, emigration and ancestors

Emigrant groups are very instructive as to the significance of death rites as a means of asserting the identity of a community through its own dialogue with death. A case in point is that of Italians in America who brought with them the custom of placing photographs of the dead on tombs, a practice which became possible from 1851 when a monumental form of daguerreotype was introduced (Meyer, 1993: 10). Though some American Catholic authorities went through a phase of objecting to this practice, which was alien to most North American cultures, it asserted itself, and now with increased technological processes the images of the dead become increasingly sophisticated.

It has been argued that for nearly a thousand years leading up to the twentieth century the Catholic tradition, with its doctrine of purgatory, kept the living and the dead in a kind of reciprocal relationship which has been called a 'mutual economy of salvation' (Davis, 1977: 93). Through the prayers and good deeds of the living, dead family members might reap the benefit of such merit. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Italian-Americans employed women to sing eulogies for the dead, and at the annual All Souls' Day the family set out a plate of spaghetti for the dead relatives (Matturri, 1993: 17).

This strong bond between the living and the dead found support in Catholicism's theology of purgatory as an intermediate state where the soul might be purged of sin assisted by the church-controlled merit of both the living and the saints. Thousands of monastic and other institutions helped ground this theology through the daily ritual of the Mass and its prayers. In the 1430s, for example, at a time of military losses in warfare, Archbishop Chichele of Canterbury along with King Henry VI established a college at Oxford that would not only engage in advanced scholarly activity but also furnish prayer for the military dead as well as for the souls of the faithful departed. A sculpture now above the front entrance to All Souls College depicts just such a theology as it moves from corpses to the dead rising before the divine judge (see Figure 2). It would only be just over a century later that a quite different theological stance would emerge through the Protestant Reformation when, for example, the Scottish reformers turned their backs on Catholic theology and ritual, ignoring all religious ritual at funerals. In the *First Book of Discipline* of 1560 the funeral was a silent and bare act not requiring the assistance of any minister of religion. However, in John Knox's *Book of Common Order* of 1562 wider scope was left for local choice (Gordon, 1984: 46). Here the doctrinal position of Reformed theology with its belief in God's grace in Christ and predestination meant that there could be no fruitful relationship between the living and the dead, as far as salvation was concerned.



Figure 2 All Souls College, Oxford

This is a crucial point, for it is in societies which believe that a beneficial relationship may exist between the living and the dead that kinship facts of descent are used to establish the ancestors as significant individuals. Often the relationship is believed to be reciprocal as the ancestors benefit in the afterlife from rites performed by the living while they, in tum, bless and foster the living. In the case of Christianity this led to distinctive patterns of church building and cemetery construction. The case of silence at funerals,

however, is also instructive because, at first glance, it permitted no words to be spoken against death. On reflection, however, this can be seen to be due to the belief that it was God who, through the divine decrees of predestination, had already spoken the definitive word against death in allocating individuals to groups of the saved or the damned. The silence of the funeral symbolized belief in the finality of that eternally proclaimed divine word.

Cemeteries and ethnic identity

Normal life usually rejects such silence to assert itself at the time of death. Links with forebears bear many meanings, whether directly existential in doubting death's finality or in rehearsing an identity gained through inheritance, succession and ethnic identity. For many groups their cultural identity is closely aligned with public funeral rites and patterns of memorialization. This was especially true in the United States, whose twentieth-century immigrants nineteenthand founded distinctive communities whose identities were marked through cemetery construction (Sloane, 1991). Two rather different processes underlay these new cemeteries. On the one hand, parts of cemeteries have reflected a definite ethnic identity as immigrant families from particular nations have been buried together and furnished memorials reflecting their national origin but, on the other hand, one of the major goals of cemeteries in America has been described as 'linking members of its culturally diverse population into a symbolic unity' (Matturri, 1993: 31).

An example of the first process, marked cultural distinction, can be found in a cemetery devoted to Ukrainian-Americans at New Brunswick in New Jersey where the 'spirit of being Ukrainian' is said to shine through the memorial stones (Graves, 1993: 55). This particular cemetery follows the custom of burying people according to their profession or walk of life so that, to cite a few cases, doctors, artists and priests are buried with those of their own vocation. Their headstones also reflect their professions with, for example, priests having a chalice and Holy Communion wafer on theirs. The main focus is upon the male occupations; wives are buried with their husbands. Even so, the second process of uniting diverse cultural groups is also achieved by many cemeteries with the boundary wall embracing various subgroups as a symbolic expression of the United States itself embracing diverse communities. Sometimes a particular cultural tradition comes to be shared by other groups. This was the case, for example, in New Orleans, where the descendants of French Catholics buried their dead in above-ground vaults, partly because the water table was very high and people did not like the idea of waterlogged graves. Over time, the Episcopalians also came to adopt this practice.

In such cemeteries architecture itself stands as a human creative response to death as well as a marker of historical identity. The inscribed messages on memorials express not only a human past but also a hope for the future, showing that particular ethnic groups, just as humanity in general, are committed to life. In such cases not only do 'words against death' appear as part of the total religious tradition of the group but they also bear a more local accent, whether Japanese or Ukrainian or any another group.

What is interesting is that burial remained the prime form of North American funeral throughout the twentieth century; cremation has been of minor significance, for many reasons (Prothero, 2001). Traditional religious opposition played some part (Welfle, 1935); cremation's pagan background also influenced others (Irion, 1968: 11; Phipps, 1989: 23). On a more economic base, some argue that funeral directors and trade journals associated with death professionals have, for their own reasons, emphasized the preference for burial (Jackson, 1993: 161). But the significance of group identity and of a sense of history focused on particular cemeteries ought not to be ignored for many parts of the United States. One distinctive example comes from Mormon cultural life, in which a sense of history is coupled with a unique doctrine of family, death and the afterlife.

Ancestral Mormonism

For Mormons family and kinship are of fundamental importance, with the dead being treated, in some respects, as ancestors. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was established in the United States in 1830 by its first prophet Joseph Smith, and after his death in 1844, the Mormons migrated west into what would become the state of Utah. In addition to ordinary chapels or places of worship they went on to build special temples which now exist all around the world, and which may be attended only by

Mormons in good standing in the church. Along with the temples there emerged new doctrines concerning special rituals which took place in temples and which guaranteed to faithful Mormons a special place, after death, in the future realms of eternity (Shipps, 1985).

Central to these rites are baptism on behalf of the dead followed by ordination to the Mormon priesthoods and other rites which seal husband, wife and children together not just for this lifetime but for all eternity; all of these rites can be performed vicariously, done by the living on behalf of the dead. Mormon belief sees the human family as progressing on the path to an ever greater degree of divine status, with these deceased people being able to enter into new benefits in the afterlife precisely because rituals have been performed on their behalf in earthly temples. The larger that family becomes, the greater its sense of achievement and, in a sense, of salvation.

The idea of the e xtended family lies behind all this ritual and deeply motivates an intense family loyalty and concern over family history. Mormonism is the only contemporary religion which has developed the idea of genealogy as a special kind of religious duty. So, many Mormons, especially older Mormons, spend a significant amount of time tracing their family tree to establish exactly who their ancestors were. As part of this search the church has actively recorded and computerized millions of records of birth, marriage, death and baptism throughout many countries of the world, especially in Great Britain and northern Europe, areas from which thousands of new converts migrated to the United States in the midand late nineteenth century to lay the foundation for the new state of Utah and its Mormon society.

As a family trace their ancestors, they set about undergoing a wide set of rituals on their behalf. So, for example, if the grandparents' names and facts of life are discovered their living descendants will undergo baptism on their behalf before being ordained, married and so on, in their stead in the temple. Mormon belief sees these rites as giving the ancestors a choice of entering into the fullness of Mormon religion in the eternal worlds beyond this life. This is a very interesting case where the living descendants clearly and distinctly alter, or at least provide the basis for altering, the status of the ancestors. But the living also benefit from this vicarious work for the ancestors in the sense that their whole family, earthly and in the heavenly afterlife, flourishes more fully as ever-larger numbers of ancestors come

into the group of those experiencing salvation, or an increase in glory as the Mormons describe it (Davies, 1987: 115).

The close link between temple and eternity is seen in the fact that after death the body is prepared by being washed and dressed in the special temple clothing otherwise used only in the temple. For men this includes a special apron-like garment which carries extensive symbolic meaning for Mormons and which some believe reflects the very garments made for Adam when God first drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. In centres of Mormon culture the funeral directors are likely to be Mormon and will carry out these preparations; in other parts of the world there are members of the church who will assist the bereaved by caring for the dead person themselves. There is a funeral service at the local Mormon church, not at the temple, and the body is buried. The Mormon Church does not forbid cremation but has a very strong preference for burial. In the United States this reflects a wider popular preference for burial than is the case in Britain, where cremation is now the dominant mode of funeral, but the Mormons also prefer burial because they have a strong belief in the resurrection from the dead and see burial as a natural prelude to the future resurrection; the grave is blessed as a resting place until that future date arrives (Cunningham, 1993: 183).

In this example we can see how an individual Mormon's sense of his or her own identity is very much caught up in the identity of their ancestors: not simply in a historical sense of knowing who their forebears were, or where they came from, but in a more dynamic sense of becoming bonded together in an actual family network extending increasingly further back in time as more genealogical work brings new family members to light.

In fact, the temple ritual of Mormons is the first major example in relatively modern Western societies of a preoccupation with ancestors and their salvation. We may even speak of the Mormon Church as consisting in 'soteriological lineages', a phenomenon that is quite novel in modern societies. I have analysed this idea and the entire scheme of Mormon culture as a prime example of a death-transcending project in a major study *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Davies, 2000). Latter-Day Saint death rites are set within the much wider framework of working on behalf of the dead and of the family. Unlike many modern religions, Mormonism has much to say and much to do when confronted by death; this may be one

major reason why its message possesses a relatively wide appeal in a world where family values are easily shattered and where ignorance about death is intense.

Mormons see death as a process through which the dead person passes to another world, just as they believe that birth is a process through which a preexisting spirit is given an opportunity to come and experience life in a body of flesh. Not only is the individual self given a past and a future eternal framework of existence, but it is also not left in isolated loneliness but set amid an extensive ancestral network of relations. The words against death spoken by Mormonism are uttered long before the funeral when the devotee undergoes temple rituals during life, rituals which give assurance that death can and will be conquered through the keeping of vows and the living of an ethical life. The funeral is simply the time when those powerful words begin to take effect.

This Mormon example draws heavily from the Christian tradition while also adding quite distinctive features of its own. Indeed, so many cultural developments are grounded in Christianity and its tremendous success as a religion of salvation from death, and the causes of death, that it is important to return to the early stages of that religion to see how it addressed death in ways that became appealing to entire civilizations, as is done in Chapter 8.

Myths of death

Though relatively little attention is paid in this book to mythical explanations of death given in human societies, it is worth mentioning the fact that it is relatively common in myths from most parts of the world to say that mankind was, originally, eternal. Some human decision led to death entering the scene of human life. So, for example, one common Melanesian myth spoke of humanity as living forever. Periodically the old would enter water and cast off their wrinkled skin to emerge as young people once more. One day, however, one old woman emerged from the water in her youthful mode only to find that her child refused to recognize her. The mother had noticed that her old, sloughed-off skin had caught on a branch in the river and she went back and put it on again. Ever since then people have grown old and died (Codrington, 1891: 264ff.). Other myths speak of similar skin stories, but all reflect the fact that death was not part of

humanity's original or real condition. In this sense, myths of the origin of death reinforce the rites which assert that life goes on after death, albeit in a transformed world. The myths express the power of words which are set against the force of nature which brings death to people. One of the most extensive accounts of myths of death was compiled by the once influential anthropologist Sir James Frazer (Davies, 2008).

In some of those myths, and elsewhere, death is not perceived as a solely negative phenomenon. Often it is associated with some positive feature of life. In the myth just mentioned, the cast-off skin enabled the mother to continue a relationship with her child. In the myths of the Dogon of the African Sudan the coming of death involved, for example, the emergence of art and human creativity (Griaule, 1965: 173). In many Christian interpretations of the Fall of Man in the biblical Book of Genesis human disobedience results in sexual activity and the production of children, which include positive features of pleasure.

Throug h the myths of death, society after society asserts its belief that human beings possess a depth which should not end in death (Dunne, 1965; Metzger, 1973). Once, they say, people did not die. Then some error, fault or act of disobedience brought a radical change which meant that mortality sealed the fate of the human body. Even so, the myth often goes on to trace a path of optimism or hope that some benefit in the restoration to life again will come to men and women. Such myths, in their entirety, furnish some of the clearest words against death. They reach into modernity and even into postmodernity from the archaic past of the human animal and still excite optimism or evoke hope in new dialogues with death.

Whether related to known myths or in their absence, many rites strongly suggest beliefs in an afterlife for which the dead were prepared through funerary gifts. In Viking burials, for example, the dead were provided with clothing, ornaments and utilitarian objects that might even include ships or, especially in Iceland, horses as the preferred mode of transport both on earth and, presumably, in the realm beyond (Jones, 1975: 332).

Competing and complementing rites

The way human cultures develop sometimes means that a society may possess more than one outlook on life. This may involve direct competition as well as collaboration between ideologies and ritual schemes, and may also be the outcome of merging of traditions over time. Four brief examples must suffice as far as death is concerned: the first in Japan, the second in Sikkim, the third in Romania and the fourth in England. The first two show case of mutual coexistence, while the third demonstrates a mixing of traditions and the fourth a more voluntary addition of a rite to traditional practice.

In contemporary Japan the traditional religion of Shinto coexists with a form of Buddhism and it is this Japanese Buddhism which provides people with death rites and underlies the common Japanese expression that people are 'born Shinto and die Buddhist' (Reader, 1994: 169). One anthropologist has described this situation as one in which 'for ordinary people Buddhism is, by and large, a system for the removal of the dead' (Bloch, 1992: 53). While the traditional Shinto pattern of ritual life studiously avoided anything to do with death, preferring to stress the strengthening of life, its fertility and flourishing, more recent trends have witnessed the rise of Shinto death-linked rites, and shrines related to death sites (Duteil-Ogata, 2012: 51–4).

In Sikkim, in the southern Himalayas, Buddhists, representing the form of Lamaism which initially flourished in Tibet, engage in one set of funerary rites for a deceased person inside the dwelling while another set of death rites is conducted outside the house by *Mun* priests who represent an ancient tradition of Sikkim. Geoffrey Gorer (1984) furnished a very full description of these complementary rites which he studied in the 1930s before Sikkim became largely closed to outside visitors. He not only described how bodies were disposed of by burial, cremation or by being thrown into a river, depending on the circumstances of death and the horoscopes cast by the lamas, but also the apparent contradiction between the Buddhist belief in transmigration and the Mun belief in a more permanent version of heaven or hell and engagement in animal sacrifice as well as spirit possession as a means of guiding the spirit on its way to the afterlife.

One important issue raised by Gorer's (1984) account is that of attitude towards the dead. In the case of Sikkim he speaks of both sets of elaborate ceremonies as 'performed to get rid of the dead; the dead are terrifying and should be feared, not loved. Death has no consolations' (362). It may be

possible to generalize from Gorer's observations to say that where the dead are feared, for whatever reason, their mortuary ritual will be extensive, whereas where they are not feared, mortuary rites will be considerably more brief. This will depend upon the extent of ideology concerning the state and capacity of the dead held by a society.

In the custom of recent rural Romania it was also the case that the dead must be appropriately mourned and honoured lest they engage in some form of retribution upon the living (Kligman, 1988: 159). This example reflects the dynamics of a close-knit community where the many obligations which living kin have to each other are extended into the post-mortem world. The Romanian context also reflects a situation in which elements of pre-Christian culture have become part and parcel of Christian rites in village death rites; for example, coins may be placed in the coffin 'to appease the gatekeepers' of hell so that the soul may be allowed to proceed on its journey to judgement day (162). While this example will be read by many as quite alien to formal Christian teaching on the afterlife, there are many other ideas which are widely accepted and yet which are almost equally foreign to theological thought. One example concerns the composition of the afterlife in terms of the family. In this Romanian study in Transylvania, for example, a widow is said to join her husband's family after death while an unmarried girl stays with her family of birth (163). There is nothing in formal Christian theology which justifies such opinions, yet many Christian cultures express beliefs in the human family continuing as a unit after death, despite the fact that, for example, a well-known element of the wedding rite in many Christian traditions says that marriage is 'till death us do part'. Another important feature of the Romanian study shows how, for historical reasons, villagers go on to combine elements of belief and practice drawn from the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox traditions but also adhere to what Kligman calls contradictory conceptions of death and the afterlife (160, 162). The conflict lies in the formal contradiction between a tripartite theological definition of the afterlife in terms of heaven, hell and purgatory and a more secular binary, or twofold, distinction between this world and that which frames the laments and popular discourses on death. There is, perhaps, no need for Kligman to describe these features as religious and secular respectively, since both express elements of practical faith, albeit in different contexts. The widow and the priest, for example, have different concerns and draw upon the varied sources to express them. In yet different cultural contexts, Peter Marshall (2002: 13) has shown how some categories of people, such as 'members of religious orders' could be categorized as being 'dead to the world', while lepers in the medieval period could even undergo a form of a 'mock burial service'.

Last we think of a small number of people in England, and probably in numerous other traditionally Christian societies, who also draw from different sources for short periods after the death of their kin, especially by attending Spiritualist meetings some time after the formal funerary rites conducted by established denominations which, especially in the Protestant tradition, possess relatively few means of focusing on the immediate state of the dead. Through funeral rites the dead are consigned to God's domain in a most general sense and are uncontactable. For some mourners this is insufficient; they want proof or some sort of evidence that the deceased is 'well'. Very little research exists to enable us to say whether these mourners fear these dead people or why they wish to contact them, but certainly it is likely to be the case that while a priest of a regular denomination will perform the initial funeral rites, it is a quite separate and unorthodox practitioner who will attempt to establish contact with the dead.

Jewish and Islamic Destinies

Judaism, Christianity and Islam represent the three great contemporary religions which emerged in the Near East, grounded in the power of divine words addressed against evil and death. Behind and alongside these were other traditions including ancient Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Egypt, each with distinctive beliefs about life, death and the afterworld, and probably also having some knowledge of the religious and philosophical ideas of India. Behind these perspectives lay the problem of death as timely or untimely, as just or unjust, as well as the desire to reconcile bodily decay with some inner sense of life as consisting in more than simple bodily existence. The most widespread solution to this problem lay in the distinction between the body and the soul, as, for example, in Plato's philosophy of the relationship between an immortal soul and a human body which imprisoned it during life. Though this view touched Judaism as well as deeply helping to fashion early Christianity, and the Western intellectual tradition in general, this chapter sketches briefly aspects of Judaism and Islam, and Christianity is considered in the following chapters. While Christianity has, to date, been the most successful community-focused adaptation to death known to humanity in terms of the number and variety of cultures in which it has come to operate, Islam shares in this capability and may yet increase its power in many local contexts. Judaism's belief in resurrection was transformed by early Christianity and made international, leaving little for Judaism to achieve beyond its own, relatively narrow cultural boundaries. The much earlier Zoroastrian notions of resurrection never became linked with a large and expanding world community, while

Hinduism's transmigration doctrines were so linked to the Indian caste system that world expansion was impossible.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the most ancient religions of the world, with a history extending a thousand years before the beginning of the Christian Era. Some of its key ideas have deeply influenced both Christianity and Islam. As might be expected from such an extended history, the beliefs of this faith have emerged and developed with time and circumstance, not least as far as death rites are concerned.

Though there are indications of some belief in a shadowy post-mortem existence in the earlier Hebrew biblical texts, a firmer belief in an afterlife does not take shape until the time of the Maccabees in the second century bce. That period, of strife and self-sacrifice in war, was one which placed a premium on a future life which followed after martyrdom in this world. By the time of Jesus there was a distinction between the Pharisees who did believe in a life in a world to come and the Sadducees who did not. The means of accessing the future life was one of dispute. The Wisdom of Solomon, the Jewish text that was probably written in the first century ce, places the 'souls of the righteous in the hands of God' where no torment can touch them (Wis. 3.1). Similarly, in the work of the Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria, who lived at approximately the same time as Jesus, a great emphasis is placed upon the immortality of the soul.

In the Talmud, a Jewish theological resource produced from approximately the fifth century ce, the major emphasis lies on the resurrection of the body and not upon an immortal soul. In his study of these doctrinal developments Louis Jacobs (1992) argues that Jews did not develop beliefs about life after death in any systematic way until the Middle Ages. Then, he argues, 'among medieval Jewish philosophers the doctrine of the resurrection was never abandoned but the emphasis was undoubtedly on the immortality of the soul' (97).

Jacobs (1992) goes on to discuss various modern Jewish attitudes to life after death. He shows, for example, how the Reform Movement in the nineteenth century 'did give up the belief in the resurrection of the dead', even removing references to the resurrection from their prayer books, stressing instead the idea of the immortality of the soul (102). Still, other more conservative Jews do believe in the resurrection of the body. This variation is reflected to some extent in the fact that in urban Britain the great majority of traditional Jews continue to practise burial and only relatively few adopt cremation. The marked nature of the Jewish approach to death, especially in terms of the mixed belief in resurrection and immortality of the soul, should alert Christian authors to the often mistaken assertion that the Hebrew view of death focuses on the resurrection of a unified body while the Greek conception lies squarely on the immortality of the soul. It is quite clear that no such clear-cut distinction is possible.

One of the clearest studies of death in Judaism, that of David Kraemer (2000), reinforces this point as he provides a detailed exposition of the beliefs of the Judaism of the rabbis from the second to about the sixth century. In this he argues that Jewish reflections on their sacred texts developed a tradition in which 'the dead are alive' (114), albeit in a form differing from the living. In a way that is slightly reminiscent of the Tibetan *bardo* tradition of the 'dead' being aware of their changing circumstance, Kraemer explains some Jewish funerary rites as grounded in the 'awareness' of the corpse.

This was why, Kraemer (2000: 21) argues, the corpse was visited three days after its death to be anointed with oils as a form of comfort to the dead in their new circumstances. So, too, mourners should not engage in activities that remind the dead of the loss they have incurred through 'dying'. The survivors were not to be 'mourners' until the deceased had been buried; before that, the needs of the dead were more important than the needs of the bereaved. It is interesting that the grave marker was called *nefesh*, also the Hebrew word for the soul, possibly indicating the belief that the soul remained near to the body for some time after death. The dead may even move about (109). Numerous rites of that early period associated with mourning included not washing, not wearing shoes, not having sex, turning chairs upside down and not working. While open to various interpretations, Kraemer argues that they were intended to bring the mourner into a sympathetic relationship with the dead whose own world had been disrupted and turned upside down.

Another and very significant part of Kraemer's (2000) analysis concerns sin and its removal. The underlying belief here is that sin can be removed through the suffering of an individual and that the process of death, lasting well after 'physical' death, is the most extreme form of suffering. Working from the Mishnah, a book of law and customs of the Jews compiled about 200 ce, he offers some evidence to suggest that with the decomposition of the flesh 'came final atonement', and the secondary burial of the bones was associated with the belief that 'the sins of the dead had been fully atoned' (34–5). Indeed, it is suffering in this life, especially in and through death, that 'brings life in the World to Come' (105).

In terms of burial practice Jews, especially those in Israel, prefer to bury the body on the same day as the death. The general emphasis is upon simplicity and speed, with the body washed, dressed in white and buried directly in the soil without a coffin. The earth is bel ieved to have a purifying effect upon the corpse, which otherwise is potentially polluting in a ritual sense. The actual funeral customs can vary to a marked extent not just between more traditional and more modern Jews but also between those who adhere to religious beliefs and those who are secular.

The Jewish anthropologist Henry Abramovitch (1986) has given an interesting account of some of these variations along with his study of a *hevra kadisha*, the Jewish name for a burial society or group of individuals who perform the funerary rites for the dead. He tells how the body is ritually washed by immersion in a ritual bath, how the eldest son places soil over the eyes before the corpse is wrapped in a white sheet. The eldest son recites the *kadish* prayer of praise to God and people make a tear in their clothes. In some traditions male lineal descendants of the dead were not allowed to attend the interment because of a belief, originating in the medieval mystical tradition of the Kabbalah, that if they followed the corpse they would encourage the presence of strange, demonic-like half-souls which had been created from any wasted semen of their dead father (128).

One way around this belief is for the bereaved to precede rather than follow the corpse. Some other kabbalistic traditions encourage circular dances to be performed around the corpse, but these are not common elsewhere. After the corpse is placed in the ground the mourners pass between rows of friends who encourage and support them. Small stones are placed on the grave after burial and on subsequent visits. To some orthodox Jews such stones are much preferable to flowers, since stones are symbols of permanence while flowers are so obviously ephemeral. After the funeral at the grave, people return home to begin the period of *shiva* or seven days of mourning. They sit on low seats and wear torn clothing; the men do not shave. Memorial candles are kept burning and prayers said, and neighbours come to comfort the bereaved. A 30-day period of lesser mourning follows, while some prayers are said by the son for eleven months after the death of the parent (Unterman, 1994: 134).

Secular Jews may also be much more involved as active rather than passive agents in the funeral process and may speak eulogistic words, not merely recite *kadish*. What is clear from several accounts of death in Judaism is that the religion's main focus is on life rather than on death and doctrines of death. Where the belief in an afterlife exists, the death rites are believed to aid the progress of the soul to its rest and peace in God, while for secular Jews the emphasis falls upon the memory of the dead and the comfort of the survivors. What is instructive in this case is that whether or not belief in an afterlife is important, the use of powerful words about the deceased remains important as part of the treatment of death by the survivors.

The mourner re-enters society and ordinary life only slowly and in stages. The period of *shiva*, of seven days, marks the mourner as being rather like the dead, apart from ordinary society. The following period of *shloshim* ends thirty days after burial and marks a further return to ordinary life. Torn clothing may be sewn and local business engaged in, but at the end of this period, for example, the hair may be cut and long-term business conducted (Kraemer, 2000: 92).

While these traditional customs have proved important in the development of Judaism there is one other issue that Kraemer, for example, felt he could not ignore: the fact of the Holocaust, something already referred to in Chapter 2. Kraemer (2000) sets the Holocaust within the long line of disasters and catastrophes that had beset Jews throughout their history, and asks why this one was perceived to be unique. He knows his answer is provocative, yet he argues that 'the Holocaust did not precipitate a crisis of faith. A prior crisis of faith made the Holocaust the theological watershed it had become' (148; original italics). Kraemer argued that prior to the Holocaust very many Jews had already given up belief in a life after death.

Many rabbis had given up belief in the idea of resurrection and had pressed, instead, the idea of an immortal soul, but all to an audience that believed little of it. This, Kraemer (2000: 149) says, was the first catastrophe to beset the Jews when they were not already armed with belief in an afterlife, and as a result, they 'found themselves frozen without faith-options'. This is an extremely interesting case as far as our 'words against death' thesis is concerned, for it suggests that words against death, in a secular context, have had to become words against evil. Those words took the forms of war trials and also, for example, of the memorials built to mark human memory with the human capacity for evil.

However, it is important to know that, for example, within Hassidic traditions, originating from the later-eighteenth-century Ukraine, there emerged practices that not only mark a year after the death of someone but also relate to ideas of an ongoing ascent of the soul after death. The notion that to mark such time with eating, drinking, appropriate study and prayer, in what is described as a *tikkun*, referring to a 'correction' or 'purification' of the progressing soul, is to live out one's family responsibilities. This is not only a good example of different views of the afterlife within Judaism but also presents an aspect of words against death that is transformed into words enhancing post-mortem existence in the divine domain (Ribner, 1998).

Islam

As with Judaism, so with Islam, as far as differences are concerned, and it is wise to bear Claudia Venhorst's (2012: 129) advice in mind on how crucial it is 'to distinguish between Islam and Muslims' for as she ably demonstrated for the Netherlands, 'Lived Islam shows that this religion with its supposedly clear and uniform rules results in diversified practice by a variety of Muslims in a variety of contexts.'

Islamic belief in the resurrection of the body is, by contrast, very firmly established to the point that the practice of cremation is firmly opposed. Allah it is who creates people from clay, who sustains, causes to die and finally calls them from their graves. Before death it is good for the dying Muslim to be in the company of those who can recite the shahada, the utterance of faith that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is His Prophet. In this way Muslims leave the world as they entered it, accompanied by texts proclaiming the reality of God and His revelation (Bennett, 1994: 107). At death the body is washed by people of the same sex, dressed in white and carried for prayer at the mosque prior to interment. The prayers are focused on the holiness and greatness of God with requests that God have mercy on the deceased as upon Abraham and his descendants.

One prayer shows very clearly how the Islamic rhetoric of death sets the single individual firmly into the total community of Islam, past and present.

O God, forgive our living ones and our deceased ones, and those of us who are present and those who are absent, and our young ones and our old ones, and our males and our females. O God, those of us whom Thou grantest life, keep them firm on Islam, and those of us whom Thou causest to die, cause them to die in the faith. Deprive us not, O God, of the benefits relating to the deceased and subject us not to trial after him. (Chaudhri, 1983: 60)

Other, more private, prayers are made for the individual who has died. At the burial various texts may be used including the Quranic verse 'from the earth we did create you and into it you shall return, and from it we shall bring you out again' (20.55). What is so obvious in this pattern of ritual is the deep influence of the scriptural texts of Islam over the prayers and actions, with the emphasis lying on God and the divine action rather than on the accomplishments of the individual. As far as humanity is concerned the focus falls on a people under God rather than upon the individual who now passes into an interim state, usually interpreted as sleep, prior to the afterlife of paradise or hell (Bennett, 1994: 110). Local variation in practice is great in a religion such as Islam which has penetrated so many cultural worlds, especially in the Middle East and South East Asia.

In Java, for example, the dead person is washed while being held on the laps of relatives; all get wet. It is as though the corpse is a baby again and is receiving loving attention. It is an act of strong will described as requiring the relatives to be *tegel*, 'resolved to do something odious, abominable and horrible without flinching ... despite inward fear and revulsion' (Geertz, 1960: 69). Geertz describes how the Islamic religious leader jumps into the grave to address the corpse on how it should respond to the two visiting

angels who, by Islamic tradition, visit the deceased shortly after the burial, and interrogate them as to their faith and witness to the Prophet. These informative words demonstrate that death is not the end but that much is to follow. Similarly, Geertz describes the Javanese Islamic response to death as one not grounded in hysteria, sobbing or expressions of grief but a 'calm, languid letting go, a brief ritualized relinquishment of a relationship no longer possible' (72). This he describes in terms of the indigenous concept of *iklas*, or 'willed affectlessness'. Here the overall rhetoric of death is set within the goal of an attitude of life which is sought as a general outlook, one in which an afterlife is given an important place.

One important contribution Geertz (1960) makes to the discussion of afterlife beliefs lies in his description of the fact that 'three separate notions of life after death' are 'often held concurrently by the same individual'. One is Islamic: the idea of death, resurrection and reward or punishment in heaven; another involves simple extinction at death; and the third embraces the notion of reincarnation (75). The popular ideas of reincarnation are often held to involve rebirth into the same family. This complexity of mixed beliefs is, perhaps, more widespread in many religions than systematic and official religion realizes or acknowledges. Certainly it presents a picture in which the individual may choose a perspective which answers to particular needs; in this sense local religion furnishes an extensive pool of potential orientations to overcome the idea of death in a variety of ways.

Judgement

Taking Islamic ideas back to ancient Arabia, Nerina Rustomji's study *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (2009: 4–5) takes up the centrality of judgement in early Islamic thought precisely because this notion of 'a future realm of existence in both time and space ... was an innovation' to peoples in Arabia. Promising 'a new life unencumbered by tribal affiliation' it offered ultimate unity with both ancestors and progeny. Her motifs of 'Garden' and 'Fire' highlight ideas of heavenly recompense and hellish punishment. The joyous life of the Garden is devoid of labour, with food and drink playing a significant role, served by young men and slave boys who are not 'sentient, sensitized being' but who 'serve the banquet' as a 'nameless, faceless workforce': 'One object serves another' (91). Though the landscape is filled with rivers of wine, the constantly

available drink is non-intoxicating, no drunks spoil divine worship as did people in Mecca and Medina on whose account alcohol came to be forbidden to the faithful.

By contrast the females in the Garden are companions for the men and not servants, yet their precise identity is complex – are they transformed wives or previously untouched, new companions? These *houri* figures with entrancing eyes and translucent flesh are devoid of earth-like bodily functions. Just as the key to the Garden lies in this companionship and that of these and the entire kinship network, so the nature of the Fire subsists in a deep 'lack of social interaction': hell is a lonely place. Indeed, Rustomji (2009: 98) stresses the developing role of hell and heaven in the growth of Islam as 'a religious culture of exhortation'. Expressed in different terms we might say that for centuries this cultural picture that combines religious advice and ethical demands furnishes its own form of rhetoric framing of lifestyle in relation to its way of death. This theme of exhortation and rhetoric also appears in Hirschkind's account of Muslim men in Cairo using recordings of sermons to encourage their faith. He speaks of how 'the sermon sets in motion a moral ... progression from fear, to regret, asking for forgiveness, repentance, and leading eventually to a sense of closeness with God, an experience described to me through terms' indicating 'opening of the heart or chest', tranquillity and stillness. Here we have an 'ethical sedimentation', couched in terms of embodied emotion. As he says, 'A Muslim sees hell close to him. ... He won't have peace until he asks for forgiveness for his errors, repents, and returns humbly and tearfully to God' (Hirschkind, 2008).

Prayers and merit

The part played by prayer in Islamic funerals has been provided in some detail by Matthew Yarrington (2011) based on his anthropological studies in Bangladesh. Here we focus on the nature of death, the afterlife and merit. Yarrington describes how graves were dug deep enough for the buried person to be able to sit upright soon after death when visited by the angels *Munkar* and *Nakir* to question the 'deceased' on matters of faith. In addition, many were concerned with the pains of dying as the soul is withdrawn from the body, part by part. The angel Azrael is traditionally associated with this fearsome task. The pains suffered then and afterwards

are the results of sins and this causes family and the community of the deceased, in Yarrington's account, to do their utmost to try and relieve these to some extent through the corporate recitation of sacred scripture and prayers which is considered to generate a form of merit that can be transferred to the dead. It is deemed fortunate if a person dies and can be buried on a Friday when very many people may be free to come to the funeral rite and aid in these prayers and thus in the generation of additional merit. He describes how, at points in the scripture-prayer meeting, the group is periodically called to silence as the merit is explicitly transferred to the account of the dead. One local preacher described the process as resem bling the way a person may help relatives by topping up their mobile phone accounts. Here we can see the commonality of ideas of merit with those in both Buddhism and Christianity, albeit depicted and 'managed' in different ways.

Yarrington describes how these pains do not apply to any who die as martyrs in Islam; they gain paradise in a more direct fashion – indeed the bodies of martyrs are buried as they die, without undergoing the normal washings and preparations. These accounts depict a sense of reality of the afterlife in relation to human emotions in a very sharp manner and unlike that of twenty-first-century Western Europe. This perhaps is an important fact when matters of religion and society are concerned, not least in terms of secularization. Perhaps the key issue of secularization concerns the absence of power of afterlife beliefs in the framing of this-life motivations. Instead of merit affecting identity, whether as martyrs or as a person undergoing post-mortem transmigration, it can be focused more on the self and its actions or on the supportive community; in this sense 'merit' touches the complexity of social life as something that is both individual and collective. One other distinctive feature that distinguishes one Islamic perspective from that of the secularized and postmodern West lies in the role of dreams in individual and community life. Ian Edgar (2011) has provided apt accounts of such dreams, exploring the imagination and dreams 'from Qur'anic tradition to Jihadist inspiration'.

Books and words

Judaism and Islam both represent religions of the book. This foundational source derives its power, very largely, from the belief that the sacred text was God-given and comprises divine revelation. The growth of traditions of biblical study, exegesis and preaching along with formal liturgies all gave to such words a power which enhanced humanity's commitment to language as its very partner in self-consciousness (Goody, 1977: 112ff.; 1986: 1ff.). Here the great traditions of official theologies often influence rituals which may become extremely durable and permeate the cultures of many societies. That very durability provides local communities with religious formulae which they may make their own through local practice and, as it were, the accent of their own world view. The words which ensue become all the more powerful as a rhetoric of death, and against death, for they are the very words of an ongoing and living community. In the case of Christianity and Islam, in particular, they are also words of communities which see themselves as expansionist and capable of transforming human nature and commitment into a higher order of service and submission to God. As such, they well express Bloch's idea of a rebounding conquest. It is the very human nature which has, symbolically, died to itself in order to be submitted to God which now dies, physically, so that it may be resurrected to a new reality with God.

Christianity and the death of Jesus

No death in the history of the world has been interpreted so extensively and variously as that of Jesus. It has influenced millions, motivated ethical life and underpinned traditional Christian cultures. Paradoxically, it is not only a model of and for death but also of and for life, not least because it is integral to core Christian ritual and belief. This chapter sketches some historical aspects of Christian death rites as well as several contemporary cultural examples. This material should also be linked with the distinctive idea of 'offending deaths' presented in Chapter 14.

Death, life and Jesus

Christians have traditionally set the death of Jesus, interpreted as a sacrifice for sin, at the heart of their religion, viewing his death and resurrection as representative of the death and future hope of all people (Young, 1975: 64–82). Death has occupied practically every theologian throughout Christian history. Below we mention St Augustine's extensive account of death and resurrection but we could also have considered St Anselm's eleventh-century argument on why God should become man (*Cur Deus Homo,* section XV) or James Denney's influential book *The Death of Christ* (1902) or John Bowker's (1991) theological account of death and transcendence. Indeed, any number of authors have explored the centrality of Christ's death as a means of understanding both the human predicament and human destiny, often starting with New Testament views of Jesus set in the light of the Jewish scriptural belief in sacrifices for sin. One strand of the tradition, especially the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of Jesus as a perfect form of

sacrifice which was prefigured in the animal sacrifices of the Jewish Temple. Though not usually spoken of as such, his death is a kind of sacrificial slaughter. Just as animals were killed in the Temple as sacrificial offerings to God, so the shedding of Jesus's blood through crucifixion is interpreted as a sacrifice for sin.

Theologians still argue about how Jesus might, himself, have perceived his own death but many lay great stress on the shedding of blood, even though crucifixion itself normally involved tying, not nailing, people to crosses: death was more likely to be through asphyxiation rather than loss of blood. The Gospel of St John works this theological interpretation into the gospel story telling how, after his death, a soldier is said to pierce Jesus's side, from which flowed blood and water (John 19.34). The image of Jesus as a sacrifice justifies the idea of his being the sacrificial 'lamb of God' (John 1.29; Rev. 19.7, 9). With time, the doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass came to be established at the very heart of Roman Catholicism, grounded in the doctrine of transubstantiation formulated in the thirteenth century, teaching that the true substance, the inner nature, of the bread and wine of the Mass was transformed into the true body and blood of Jesus even though no visible change took place in the outward and visible aspects of these elements. This doctrine triggered many pious rites associated with the symbols of the sacrament, all rooted in the death of Jesus ritually rehearsed or repeated at each Mass. The symbol of the crucifix, a cross holding the dying or dead body of Jesus, is universally known. In this way Christianity increasingly became a religion with a strong concern with death. Requiem Masses, in particular, closely associate Jesus's death with the death of particular individuals, highlighting the faith's transcendence of death. In the Mass the act of eating is closely related to the deep fact of death and the high hope of resurrection; the consummation of hope is integrally related to the consumption of sacramental food (Davies, 1990a; Bloch, 1992: 37).

Prayers for the dead, whether private or as part of a Mass, have also reinforced Christian attitudes to death (Ariès, 1991: 146). They afford a prime example of words against death, in a system that processes souls through intermediate states to their final heavenly glory. While Protestant traditions rejected this perspective, they stressed the belief that in his death Jesus was a substitute for sinners; his blood would cleanse their evil and bring them salvation. The preaching of this message constitutes the prime words against death and comes to sharpest focus in St Paul's exalted discourse on the resurrection of Christ and of Christian believers, including his rhetorical question, 'O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?' (1 Cor. 15.55). These words are often included in traditional funeral services and comprise one of the most direct Christian liturgical moments of 'words against death'.

Christianity links death to the world of morality through its idea of sin, especially in St Paul, whose doctrine of the Fall of humanity speaks of sin entering into God's perfect world through human disobedience, and of death emerging as a consequence of sin (Rom. 5.12–17). Jesus becomes the second Adam whose obedient life and willing death brings restoration of spiritual life to men and women as the sting of death is drawn through Christ's resurrection. In terms of practical symbolism, death and decay are viewed as the outcome of disobedience and sin. This is the origin of the phrase 'earth to earth, dust to dust', for the Book of Genesis describes God as informing Adam that his disobedience means that, henceforth, only hard work will earn bread from the very soil, for 'out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return' (Gen. 3.19). In this Genesis story lies the Christian equivalent of the myths of the origin of death that frequent the cultures of the world.

The dominant theme in Christian interpretations of the death of Jesus concerns atonement, the belief that this death restored a disrupted relationship between God and humanity, though just how his death accomplished that end has led to a series of theories of the atonement. These include viewing Jesus as a more perfect form of sacrifice than the animal sacrifices offered in the ancient Hebrew religion; as such, his blood becomes a ritual way of removing sin. This idea became intimately bound up with the practice of the Eucharist and its use of bread and wine, interpreted symbolically as being Christ's sacrificial body and blood. This tradition has produced a variety of different emphases: Christ's death as a propitiation, since as a substitute for sinners he appeases the wrath of an angered God; or as a satisfaction, offsetting the offence done to God by human disobedience and disregard. Or again, Christ is a ransom paid to Satan to redeem humanity that had fallen under satanic ownership. One version of this view sees his death and resurrection as a victorious conquest

of death and of the devil. A different outlook takes Christ to be more a representative than a substitute; as such, his death is part of a process by which humanity begins to share in a divine life. A slight shift in emphasis offers the more psychological theory that Jesus was an example and his death the final form of devoted service to humanity that expresses a love that should now become the inspiration for human life. What these, and other, theories of the atonement show is that the death of Christ is a polysemic symbol (bearing many meanings) that has proved attractive to the spirit of different ages, cultures and temperaments.

But as far as death itself is concerned, the significance of the traditional account of the death of Jesus lies in the paradoxical belief that his body did not return to dust through decay but was, divinely, transformed into a resurrection body. The link between sin a nd death was broken and a new bond forged between Jesus's resurrection and the future resurrection of believers. As Christianity took to entombment, and later to burial, as its preferred funerary modes it engaged in a form of dual symbolic replay of the death of Jesus and the hope of resurrection, all within a strong communal context.

Early Christianity and graves

Indeed, early Christianity extended ideas of family and kinship into the wider framework of a new community and this new church provided a kind of spiritual kinship grounded in beliefs that starkly confronted death. Despite the hope, held by many, that Christ's second coming would be so soon that not all of their first generation would 'sleep' in death, early Christians did, obviously, die. St Paul also thought that he would be among those who, at the last trumpet, 'would be changed' at the same time as those who had already died would be 'raised imperishable'. This suggestion in 1 Corinthians (15.52) is even more clearly spelt out in 1 Thessalonians (4.15): 'We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.' Indeed, precedence is to be given to the dead, to those of the early generations who have 'fallen asleep'. Only after they have experienced resurrection will living believers be 'caught up in the clouds' to meet the Lord.

This deeply held belief in the resurrection of the dead, itself a hallmark of early Christianity, probably helped burial become established as the preferred form of Christian funerary rite, though there is some debate over this (Nock, 1932). For early Christians who were Jews, this followed the long-established Jewish practice of burial, often double burial involving ossuary jars for the dry bones, which had come to be associated with beliefs in a resurrection even before the time of Jesus, as attested in the opposing views of Pharisees and Sadducees and discussed in the previous chapter. Early Christians who had, for example, been Roman ultimately replaced their traditional pattern of cremation with burial. 'At one Roman cemetery, for example, in the early second century only cremation is found, in the mid-century a mixture of cremation and inhumation, while by the end of the century inhumation was predominant' (Price, 1987: 96). For Christians, resurrection would be the mode of entry into a heavenly domain where salvation would be fully known. Though the belief that Jesus had been resurrected, leaving only an empty tomb behind him, was determinative of the choice of burial rather than cremation for subsequent generations of Christians for centuries, mixed practices occurred throughout Europe as some Christians continued former death rites, including cremation. Certainly, one should not draw too simplistically on the idea that the resurrection of Christ was a doctrinal issue which immediately caused cremation to give way to burial under some sort of doctrinal imperative, not least because of the influence of belief in the soul (Nock, 1932). By the time Augustine wrote his City of God in the fifth century it was easy for him to portray a Christian tradition firmly committed to a belief both in the immortal soul and in the resurrection of the body (XX: x, xx; XXII: v). For him the resurrection-body is important; even dead babies are considered, for a 'sudden and strange power of God shall give them a stature of full growth' (XXII: iv). While he is not so sure about abortions he is also open to the possibility that they too will be provided with bodies (XXII: xiii). He even discusses whether women will retain their female nature in heaven, and decides that they will do so (XXII: xvii). What Augustine does assume is that burial is now the norm for Christians.

In a tempting aside Jon Davies (J. Davies, 1999: 8), in his highly informative study on death in the religions of antiquity, alludes to John's Gospel (19.41) telling of a new tomb 'where no one had ever been laid' and

argues that 'the tomb marks territory, dynasty and tribe. Jesus's new and empty tomb marks the real beginning of a new religion'. This is not, of course, a major feature of John's Gospel, nor of the New Testament literature at large, which tends more to emphasize the new community rooted in the spiritual power associated with the resurrection of Jesus. Even so, though cremation had been widespread in the ancient classical world Christianity's emergence as the new religion of the Roman Empire witnessed pagan cremation giving way to Christian burial, certainly by the sixth to seventh century ad. Jon Davies (1999: 193) has shown just how early Christianity, especially as it gained in civic status, brought its dead into towns and cities, grouping them around and within churches. This involved a major symbolic transition from remains being placed outside the town in subterranean chambers to inside the town and above ground. As such, Christianity's concern for its dead became increasingly public and emphasized the positive affirmation of death and of the triumph of Jesus over death. The prized dead of Christianity expressed the power of the creative spirit more than the corruption of decay. The dead themselves became a sermon against death.

Apotheosis and imperial deities

One influential context in which Christian views of death and funeral rites came to establish themselves as a powerful means of addressing mortality concerned the emperor himself. In the world of imperial Rome and the funerary rites of the later emperors, following Julius Caesar and his official deification, the human identity of the deceased emperor was believed to be transformed and given a divine status (Price, 1987: 72). While the ancestors were also much in evidence, with their busts or representations being carried in the funeral procession, the verbal dimension was of particular significance through formal funeral orations.

The idea of apotheosis, the process by which a human becomes divine, had a Roman history extending to the second century bc, associated with the belief that a deceased person ascended to the realm of the gods, or at least the soul did so. Increasingly, the funeral emphasis for emperors focused on the funeral pyre and the cremation of the dead, with coins of the second century even depicting six-storeyed pyres (Price, 1987: 93). The lighting of the multi-structured pyre included the release of an eagle; this

magnificent bird was thought to conduct the soul of the emperor to its new divine realm. The impact of the emperor's cremation and apotheosis was all the greater when, in the second century, inhumation became increasingly common for the general population. Scholars debate this point, however, because it is not completely certain whether perhaps the actual body of the emperor was buried while a wax effigy was cremated.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that the Greek verb *kathaptein* could mean cremation or inhumation, while the Greek *soma* or Latin *corpus* could refer either to the dead body or to the cremated remains (Price, 1987: 96). However, it appears that when Emperor Constantine, who had converted to Christianity, died in 337 he was buried rather than cremated. Instead of the ritual of the pyre and of apotheosis there were Christian burial rites conducted by the clergy. This is a fine example of how a funeral rite that once asserted one kind of change in identity now affirmed another. It is also important in sh owing how the Christian view of death successfully penetrated a world culture and set out on a path that would greatly influence a great part of world civilization within a thousand years.

Martyrs, burial and buildings

In the early Christian period, then, not all pagans had engaged in cremation. Indeed, contemporary burial practices were followed by early Christians and, as already implied, it is wise not to assume too readily that it was a deep commitment to Christian beliefs in resurrection that led to burial replacing cremation in the ancient world. Funeral rites were not initially made to carry the heavy symbolic load they came to bear as Christianity developed.

As Howard Colvin has shown in *Architecture and the After-Life* (1991), Christians initially buried their dead alongside pagan neighbours before adopting separate cemeteries. Memorial banquets of Christians matched the preceding pagan form of commemoration, and the same craftsmen produced similar sarcophagi albeit with Christian motifs on them. The growth of Christian mausoleums as architectural markers of the dead also followed contemporary pagan patterns. When a mausoleum was built on the site of a martyr's grave it often came to serve as a place of religious pilgrimage and spiritual benefit. Colvin (1991: 105) presses the interesting argument that while the bodies of the dead were polluting to pagans, they served as sources of spiritual power in the case of Christian martyrs. He sees the rise of many local martyrs' graves as serving the end formerly achieved by local pagan deities, for from about the fifth century, it seems that baptisteries, built to cope with the large numbers being initiated into the increasingly official Christian religion, and mausoleums were built in very similar styles. St Ambrose, who died in 397, built a baptistery near his cathedral in Milan on a plan copied directly from a mausoleum recently built just outside the city. The octagonal nature of each fed the architectural symbolism that it was on the 'eighth day' that Christ was risen. Death was a motif both in baptism, where the faithful died with Christ and were born again into new life, and in the funeral rite of burial, where the dead were laid to sleep in the hope of the resurrection. And they were buried with a minimum of clothing and without grave goods.

Christianity and the death of Jesus

The practice of burying the dead outside the city was continued by Christians, who often developed two major church centres in a town, one inside the walls for the regular worship of the congregation, and one outside the walls as a funerary church, often including the *martyrium* or place of a martyr's relics which served as a sacred focus around which the Christian dead could beneficially be buried. If Christians enjoyed the fellowship of worship during their life, they also wanted to be in physical proximity to the fellowship of the dead when in their grave. It did not matter that the sites of the living church and of the 'dead' church differed, because the martyr's relics were a dynamic presence on their own account as 'the magnetic body of the holy man' (Colvin, 1991: 123). As time went on, the desire of Christians to be buried in churches presented increasingly difficult problems of space, with two resulting patterns emerging. One dropped the older Roman tradition of burying outside the town and developed cemeteries within town boundaries, and even buried people within the main church, especially eminent clergy and laity. Another, accounting for increased numbers of converts, built more parish churches either in association with preexisting cemeteries or on sites that soon came to house cemeteries. Either way, the dead were housed in church or near the church, reflecting the early Christian location of the dead.

Christian buildings and doctrine

Harold W. Turner indicates this pattern of development of churches in relation to the dead in his important phenomenological and theological study of places of worship From Temple to Meeting House (1979). Turner distinguished between two types of space for Christian worship, one being a house for God (domus dei) and the other a house for the people of God (domus ecclesiae). He takes the meeting-house style as the authentic form of the Christian tradition in that the people gathered for worship are more important than some building in which a divine presence may be housed. Though early Christians met for worship in houses of particular believers it was still the case that 'the construction of funerary buildings ... was the first architectural activity of the early Church'; so, for example, St Peter's in Rome began life as a covered cemetery (166). Turner sees the growth of Christian churches in close connection to the graves and remains of the dead as an unfortunate development, involving a regression to that theme of world religions where sacred places too readily exert an influence over the living. In fact, he thinks that the growth of martyr-churches as places of special spiritual power involved 'an explicit denial of the New Testament revolution' (168).

This pattern of burial near sacred spots has been strictly perpetuated to the present day in some Christian countries where the physical location of the dead after burial is itself an important symbolic assertion of their social identity in relation to the traditionally prevailing religious ideology. In their instructive study of death in Portugal, for example, Feijó, Martins and Pina-Cabral (1983: 24) make the point that those buried inside churches or in churchyards remain close to the social life of their village, unlike those buried in large city graveyards who are abandoned and left to their own devices. They also document the fact that church authorities have long objected to burial inside churches despite the fact that such practices have actually occurred.

In Britain this tradition was maintained throughout the medieval period, when the UK, along with the rest of Europe, was extensively and predominantly a rural society. Problems over space during the seventeenth century in larger towns and cities, especially London, necessitated new cemeteries, sometimes outside the town. Julian Litten's finely illustrated study of The English Way of Death (1991) has documented many of these changes and transformations in funerary practices and cultural representations in art from the mid-fifteenth century to the present. So, too, with Jupp and Gittings's (1999) edited collection of materials for England. It was the nineteenth century that made the major shift to new cemeteries because of astonishing population increase associated with Britain's entirely new experience of industrialization and its concomitant urbanization. In Mortal Remains (1989) Chris Brooks traced the impact of this social change on British cemeteries in connection with emergent groups such as merchants. More importantly, he also draws attention to the change from 1801, when less than 20 per cent of the inhabitants of England and Wales lived in towns, to 1901, when 75 per cent lived and worked in urban settings (1). This population change also involved an employment shift from agriculture to industry, a change which sociologists have often associated with the process of secularization. The later-eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century period has often be en regarded as the age of secularization, involving major changes in attitudes towards religion. These can be glossed by saying that as mankind gained mastery over nature, in terms of the means of production of wealth, so nature lost its mystery in the human mind and imagination.

The arguments for this view of secularization are well known, embracing as they do the rise of free thought and popular education in association with working-class culture and various political ideologies, and especially in connection with the new outlook on life engendered by newly discovered evolutionary theory. These are important issues for cremation and for the framework within which the identity of the dead makes sense. Among the most important changes inaugurated by the Industrial Revolution was the visible alteration of the environment, with new kinds of buildings transforming the face of rural and small-town England in the obvious form of terraced housing and its parent factories, structures that even became the subject of socially aware artists (Dixon and Muthesius, 1978: 59ff.). Bridges, aqueducts, viaducts, railways, hundreds of new urban churches and new civic cemeteries arose then, beginning at the end of the nineteenth and increasing throughout the twentieth century. Julie Rugg's (2013) study of cemeteries and churchyards in the very extensive English county of Yorkshire has provided a finely detailed account of many aspects of such change as well as of continuity in funeral use of land. With the later nineteenth century came the new institution of the crematorium became increasingly visible. Through it the identity of the dead could be rapidly manipulated through ash remains that could either be given permanence in traditional burial with fixed monuments or else, as ephemera, be blown away by the wind.

Beliefs, traditions and funeral practice

While the secularization of Christian cultures is one significant background aspect of cremation in Europe and English-speaking countries, it must also be complemented by active doctrinal and other cultural factors. Greek and Russian Orthodoxy, along with some conservative Protestant groups, adopted a negative view of cremation from the outset because of their double emphasis upon the resurrection of Christ in the process of salvation and upon the future resurrection of believers. Even though, in the strictest of senses, they would agree that God could resurrect people, whatever had happened to their body parts, an imaginative weight remained upon the earthly body and its grave, fostered by funeral liturgies and hymns. Christian 'words against death' were grave-related and resurrectionorientated, framed by a view of Jesus as buried and resurrected. It did not matter, for example, that Jesus is recorded as having received a tomb burial and not an earth-interment. Resurrection, as a root metaphor of Christian salvation, played a powerful part in sacralizing the practice of burial, and Greek Orthodox theology reinforces this through its Easter liturgy and social celebrations. Even so, this high view of resurrection among Orthodox Christians in the Mediterranean world did not contradict their traditional practice of exhuming bones from actual graves and placing them in ossuaries. In the past, northern European Christians, including Protestants, also cleared bones from graves in order to bury new bodies but did not find that problematic as far as ideas of the ultimate destiny of the dead were concerned. In all these issues it is the interpretation given to symbolic acts that counts more than logically systematic formulations.

For the greater length of its history, then, Christianity has employed burial as its key mode of human disposal. In an obvious way this reflects the death of Jesus, especially in an echo of the creedal words that he was crucified, dead and buried. As far as we have access to the facts, Jesus was buried in a tomb, probably a tomb cut in the rocks and resembling a cave, placed there until the process of decay was over when the bones would be placed in an ossuary, a kind of small stone box. This is a typical form of the process of double burial outlined in Chapter 2.

Historical cameos

Just as with any feature of a culture's life, death rites are seldom static and death possesses a history within each society, with archaeological evidence providing more extensive collections of material on this single feature of society than on any other human institution, not least as far as Christianity is concerned. With the passage of time it is not always easy to interpret the precise significance of remains from former eras, and a great degree of caution is needed lest too much be read into ancient burials and cremations. One of the most informative historical studies of death rites, already mentioned earlier, was that of A. D. Nock (1932), which illustrates this need for caution in showing how vague cultural fashions, rather than specific ideological drives, could influence changing practices. Nock focused on the Roman Empire and on the fact that its extensive use of cremation gave way to burial over a period of some 300 years. He shows that while the rise of Christianity, and even the influence of the mystery religions, had been used to explain the change of practice, neither seemed to fit the facts.

By sketching some of Nock's (1932) observations we can see just how important it is not to fall into easy generalizations or guesses about why certain practices rise or fall in popularity. He shows how both burial and cremation coexisted in Greece and the Near East during the Roman Empire. Even in Egypt cremation was adopted as a passing phase. Sometimes burial and cremation occur together as 'buried and burned remains were placed in the same grave' (328). Yet by the first century bc burial was the more common in Egypt. Even in the second century ad cremation and burial coexisted. The rite of cremation remained significant for the Roman emperors, probably up until the time of the newly Christian emperor Constantine. The rite seemed to express part of the transformation by which the human emperor became deified. Even so, Nock shows that, whether through burial or through the burial of cremated remains, the tomb could continue to be a place of some significance for the living. Nock's conclusion, as already intimated, was that the change from cremation to burial in Rome in the second century of the Christian era cannot be explained as anything other than 'a change of fashion' (338). By this he means the habits of the rich, which steadily became adopted as the habits of the poor. Burial, he says, 'seems to have made its appeal ... because it presented itself in the form of the use of the sarcophagus. This was expensive and gratified the instinct for ostentation' (338). Doubtless, as time went on, the slowly Christianized societies of Europe saw in burial real theological opportunities to reflect the death and resurrection of Christ, but it must not be assumed that these theological ideas were the prime factors in effecting the change of custom. This is an important point to be held in mind when considering the change from burial to cremation, effected in close collaboration with the Christian churches, in Britain throughout the twentieth century.

Folk beliefs in Christian cultures

While many books on Christian belief focus on the ideas of established theologians, presented as systematic and rationally interlocking sets of beliefs, very little attention is usually paid to the more unsystematic beliefs of ordinary devotees unless insightful historians fill that gap (Duffy, 1992). But, as far as death is concerned, there is a great deal of popular belief associated with the idea of the soul and its departure from the body on its way to God or in purgatory (Vulliamy, 1926; Christian, 1989: 84; Clark, 1982: 130). As many examples could be provided as there are Christian communities, but a few will give a sense of their diversity, as in Finland where, traditionally, the soul was believed to stay in the room with the dead for several days after death. A hole might be made in the wall for it to leave. As late as 1965, accounts speak of a family taking it for granted that a butterfly that flew into the house and landed on the face of a young girl was the soul of her younger brother who had recently died and who had loved his sister very much (Achte, 1980: 3). Though the dead might be encouraged to return home on All Saints' Day such return visits were normally discouraged by lopping off branches and writing the name of the dead on the exposed trunk of a tree on the way to the cemetery or, in an account from Lincolnshire, by tying the feet of the corpse in the coffin (Obelkevich, 1976: 297). In Eastern Europe we find Catholic villagers in Romania maintaining extensive funerary rites which are not obviously derived from Christian ideology, as in not accepting cremation because of the idea that it burns the soul as well as the body, or believing that if tears of grief should fall upon the dead they would disturb the resting soul (Kligman, 1988: 165, 197). In more directly mythical form that region of Transylvania also contributed much to the literary genre of Dracula, the one who existed between life and death and drew sustenance from the life-blood of others. Similar myths of the living dead not only exist in many societies but have also been extensively developed in European literature, furnishing ways of reflecting on the nature of death and life (Twitchell, 1981).

Double burial in contemporary Greece

In more traditional Christian terms the Eastern Orthodox Church stands out through its strong focus on the resurrection of Jesus and of the life of the Christian in relation to that resurrection. With this in mind it is worth exploring an example of Greek Orthodoxy as it operates at the local and domestic level of life; this will also serve as a concrete example of the process of double burial mentioned in Chapter 2.

In a study of a village near Mount Olympus in modern Greece the anthropologist L. M. Danforth (1982) gives a profoundly humane account of the place of the cemetery and of double burial in the life of the villagers, most especially of the women. His book is not only well illustrated with photographs by Alexander Tsiaras depicting what people do at times of death and exhumation of bones, but the sensitive text also cites the songs people sing at the funeral rites, texts which express human reaction to death.

When a person is very ill and thought to be near death the Orthodox priest is called to administer Unction, that is, the Anointing of the Sick. Prayers are involved for the body's healing and for the purification of the soul through forgiveness of sins. Here the body and the soul are distinguished liturgically, in a distinction which plays an important part in subsequent funerary rites. Popular belief describes the soul as leaving the body at death. As Danforth (1982: 38) describes it, 'Many people believe that at the moment of death a person's soul, which is described as a breath of air located in the area of the heart, leaves the body through the mouth.' An easy death indicates a relatively healthy soul while a slow death reflects bad relationships between the dying and the survivors, who are not permitted displays of grief lest they hinder the passing of the dying person.

Once dead, the body is washed and dressed in new clothes and laid out in the house by neighbours or kin who are not very close to the deceased person. This is so as to leave the close kin free to express their grief. The church bell is tolled slowly and the priest comes to the house. After he has recited some of the funeral prayers the body is removed outside and placed in a coffin. Within twenty-four hours a procession takes the body to the church for the funeral service, which includes a rite where relatives kiss the body for the last time; this is followed by burial. The stress of the prayers is on the separation of the soul and its journey into rest, and on the entombed body. The body is placed in the grave, its hands, feet and lower jaw, which were earlier tied up, are now untied and the priest pours a bottle of wine over the body in the form of a cross.

The liturgy concludes with words from the Psalms and the Book of Genesis:

You shall sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be clean,

You shall wash me

and I shall be whiter than snow.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein,

You are dust and to dust you will return. (Danforth, 1982: 42)

The coffin is closed and the grave filled in. As people leave, they throw in a handful of soil saying, 'May God forgive him.' Food is eaten by many at the cemetery, though not by the closest family. They all return to the house, wash their hands and touch a tray of burning charcoal before entering the house. So it is that an element of the pollution of death is removed. The priest blesses some bread and wine and gives this food, which is described as *makario* or blessed, to the close relatives. The clothes of the dead are now given away or burnt to aid the departure of the dead. All these rites mark the social change of identity of the dead as a person belonging to the household. It is as though the home of the dead is now in the cemetery, for the grave is likely to be visited practically every day by some of the women.

This is kept up for a long period of time, but usually less than five years, before the rite of exhumation finally takes place.

Again following Danforth's account of a particular case, when the time came for exhumation, family and neighbours went to the cemetery. The brothers of the deceased first started to dig and when their emotion increased the task was taken over by young women. When they came close to the corpse an older widow took over the task of uncovering the skeleton. On finding it she made the sign of the cross on herself, wiped the skull and placed it in a white cloth. It was passed to the bereaved mother, who kissed and cradled the skull as though it were the body of her dead daughter. Later it passed around those present, who all greeted it. After all the bones were recovered they were placed in a metal box. Throughout these proceedings cries of anguish were made by close relatives and laments sung by others. Soon the village priest arrived with candles and incense. He recited part of the funeral liturgy already mentioned at the first burial of the body while pouring wine over the bones three times in the form of the cross. Later everyone returned to the family house for food, drink and general conversation. Here the popular laments which include personal references and the formal liturgy of the church which is more universal combine to form words against death which bind together the individual and the wider community of faith in a transcending of death.

One important aspect of death for these local Greeks concerned the state of the exhumed bones. In terms of popular thought the state of decay was seen to reflect moral judgements on the life of the deceased. Good clean white bones indicate a sure separation of soul and body and a good moral life, while partial decomposition or dark bones may well indicate sin of some sort, whether in the deceased or in a former relation. Danforth (1982) argues that this is only one view present in traditional rural communities of Greece; others are more pragmatic and talk about the site of the grave or an earlier illness that affected decomposition. Even so, he mentions part of the official theology of the liturgy which tends to reflect this popular attitude. The priest refers to the possibility of great sin in the deceased: 'let his body indeed dissolve into its elements, but his soul do You appoint to dwell in the tentings of the Saints' (51). Throughout Greece there is a wide variation in these rites. After the exhumation the bones are often placed in ossuaries, but they may also be reburied for the final time. In urban areas these traditional processes have become more organized by professional agencies and not carried out by neighbours and kin, while graves and places in ossuaries may be rented for limited periods only.

This total process of burial, exhumation and final placing of the bones reflects a period of change in the identity of the dead as they pass from the active world of the living to the middle phase of what we might call passive waiting in the grave before finally being viewed as belonging to the world beyond this one. This period also reflects one in which the bereaved undergo a process of change as they come to accept and live with their bereavement. The five-year period between burial and exhumation is a period in which the survivors, especially the women, carry on a kind of 'conversation with the dead' which marks a relationship which draws to a close with exhumation.

This brief account ignores many significant features of death which in themselves are important in grasping the social, psychological and economic aspects of Greek life. It is important, for example, to know that it is the youngest son, and probably his wife, who is responsible for the funerary rites, not the eldest as among Jews or as in India. For it is the youngest son who looks after the aged parents and finally inherits the family home. So, too, with the songs which provide a broad popular grasp of life, death and grief. The fact that these are sung together by women who have all, in their turn, experienced grief is likely to be important in helping them to live with the fact of death, as discussed in Chapter 3, which exemplifies the motif of 'words against death' so central to this book. Perhaps they even maintain a culture of death rather than a culture of the forgetting of death which has often been criticized in late-twentieth-century England. That Greek case is reinforced in, for example, a well-documented study of a Greek portion of a London cemetery whose interpretation pinpoints 'visiting the grave' as an action 'that animates and validates it to perpetuate the memory of the deceased', with any unvisited and, therefore, 'unremembered dead' being a 'a rebuke' within the community concerned (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou, 2005: 126).

Sweden, France and England

Cremation has made a distinctive inroad into Christian thinking, with each of the major traditions reacting differently on a spectrum from Orthodoxy's

continued rejection through Roman Catholicism's change of mind from rejection to acceptance and Anglicanism's longer acceptance. Greek Orthodoxy, then, continues to reject cremation while Catholicism reacted against it for a considerable period of time, not least because in Italy pressure groups sponsoring the idea of cremation included some strong anticlerical opinion, often related to Freemasonry. It was not until the mid-1960s that the Vatican changed its attitude and permitted the faithful to be cremated. It may well be that the example of British Roman Catholics may have had some influence on this change, for in Britain cremation had not been made a vehicle of anticlericalism and possessed no similar tradition of Freemasonic opposition to Christianity as in Italy. Anglicanism was, in broad terms, much more accepting of cremation as the twentieth century developed, and was followed in this by most major Protestant denominations. These developed slight changes to burial rites to accommodate cremation but without any major change of doctrine. In Europe at large, cremation has tended to follow a line of demarcation between traditionally Protestant and traditionally Catholic cultures, and cremation rates provide as good an index as any of a Catholic or Protestant heritage. Three examples will reflect something of this picture: Sweden, France and England. Each reflects a differing predominant Christian cultural tradition being, respectively, Lutheran, Catholic and Anglican.

As a background to the Swedish context, surveys show that funerals conducted by the Lutheran clergy stand at a high 92 per cent for a population where 5 per cent attend church on Sundays, 45 per cent reckon to believe in God and 38 per cent say they believe in life after death (Bäckstrom, 1992). Swedish crematoria are most frequently owned by the Lutheran Church, which was, until the year 2000, the established church of Sweden and is now the disestablished folk-church. Even so, ordinary taxpayers usually continue to pay a church tax that covers the cost of their own funeral service at the crematorium.

Swedish crematoria differ from those in England in the very significant fact that they usually contain a cold room for the storage of bodies. It is not unusual for the whole period from death to the final interment of ashes to take from two to three weeks, more than double the time likely in Britain. This is partly because there are proportionately fewer crematoria than in England, but also because many Swedish families wish to gather together from various parts of the country, which is better done on Fridays with the following weekend than on other weekdays when work and wages may be lost. This necessarily means that Fridays become crowded at crematoria. It is also increasingly common for families to hold the funeral service at the local parish church rather than at the crematorium. This means that the coffin, which may well have been kept at the crematorium cold room, is brought to the parish church for the funeral rite and afterwards taken back to the cold room to await cremation at some future date. So the act of cremation is distanced from the funeral service itself, in terms not only of time but also of place. In terms of church ritual both the form and content of the cremation service are identical to those of the burial service as far as what takes place within the church is concerned. Though there is a variety of options in words of committal there is no indication that one body is to be buried while another is to be cremated. Even the idea that a funeral – by burial or cremation – finally results in a body returning to the earth and to dust is retained, both verbally and ritually. It is customary during the Swedish Lutheran rite for priests to make the pattern of a cross three times on the top of the coffin in fine earth while saying, 'You gave him life. Receive him into your peace. For the sake of Jesus Christ give him a joyful resurrection.' Though these words offer clear affirmations of standard Christian 'words against death', the use of earth in a rite des igned as a cremation service might appear contradictory to those whose liturgy, however minimally, includes some direct reference to cremation. In practical terms this symbolism becomes more appropriate once it is understood that many of these cremation ceremonies are conducted in churches at a considerable distance from the crematorium, and that the cremation will not even take place that day. In Sweden the cremated remains are interred in graveyards with very little opportunity for the practice of private location of remains in places of personal choice, since cremation and burial have become very closely aligned in symbolic terms. This is particularly apparent within the cremation service, where a rite that formerly took place in the graveyard has now been brought within the church. Towards the close of the service the family of the deceased, followed by other relatives, friends and members of the community, leave their seats and come to the front of the church where the coffin stands on its bier. They walk around the coffin, stop for a moment at its head and stand in honour and memory of the dead; many will place a flower on it before making a slight bow or, in the case of women in traditional villages and towns, a curtsey before returning to their seats. In a burial service this practice takes place in the cemetery, where family and friends walk around the grave and throw in their flower. In other words, a custom originating, and still used, in burial has been transferred to cremation.

In terms of ritual time the speed of Swedish cremation is slow in that the period between death and final interring of ashes takes a long time. The bereaved are separated from the dead for a considerable period. Quite the opposite is the case in some French crematoria as, for example, the Bordeaux Crematorium, which is typical of a crematorium at a large town which also serves an extensive rural community. Here it is very likely that a funeral service will have taken place at a local parish church, which will be Catholic. The formal rite in the chapel of the crematorium is brief and simply commits the body for cremation, but it is the next phase of the process which presents a complete inversion of the Swedish situation. The coffin is immediately removed from the chapel and is cremated there and then. The family and mourners retire to a waiting room where they may listen to music or otherwise occupy themselves for the period of one and a half to two hours while the body is cremated, the ashes reduced to the customary granular state, placed in a container and given back to the family. The family then return to their home area with the cremated remains, which may well be buried in the family grave at the local cemetery. Here the speed of the overall rite is fast. The family arrived with the dead body in its coffin, they depart with its ashes in an urn. Instead of the process taking many days or a couple of weeks, it is accomplished within a few hours. This practice will not be possible as cremation grows in popularity in France and as pressure increases on each crematorium's capacity.

England stands between the French and Swedish cases with most of its cremations (70 per cent or more of all funerals) taking place in crematoria chapels, cremation taking place the same day but the relatives receiving cremated remains some days later.

Retrospective fulfilment of identity

In the British case it is quite likely that these remains will be placed in locations of individual significance, echoing the relationship of the dead with their living kin, a practice that assumed increasing significance from the mid-1970s. In theological terms this is a significant development because, historically speaking, Christian churches have tended to provide funeral rites within a doctrinal framework that sees human identity as coming to fulfilment only in the life after death. The Christian sacraments took human identity under control and, starting with baptism, gave a name and a specific Christian identity to people. This developed throughout life, often involving marriage and other forms of church service that related people to God, but always on the understanding that life would be perfected only in the world to come. In technical theological terms we could speak of this as the eschatological fulfilment of identity, where 'eschatology' refers to the last days of divine judgement and the afterlife. In the traditional world of Christian theology human identity would fully flourish only in the eternal presence of God. Burial and the idea that the faithful might 'rest in peace' until that final time reinforced this broad picture.

Cremation, however, allowed another option to develop at a time when traditional patterns of belief were, for many, giving way to a this-worldly fulfilment of life through human relationships, rewarding work and leisure. Accordingly we might speak of a drive for a contemporary fulfilment of identity for the living; when a partner dies, the survivor may take the remains to a place where the deceased had most enjoyed life or where they had enjoyed themselves together. In that sense it may even be more appropriate to talk of a retrospective fulfilment of identity of the dead. The ashes become a form of physical memories when placed in a spot of personalized significance. It is an act that does not require or utilize formal ecclesiastical liturgies; in fact, people report simply scattering the ashes in silence or perhaps using a few words which come to them or which they considered beforehand as a favourite poem or song of the deceased. These locations are very seldom 'memorialized' in any concrete sense of inscribed markers or the like. All this is very different from the traditional Christian liturgy with its use of ashes as a kind of substitute corpse, symbolizing the body of the deceased in a rather direct way and with a preference for burying them; as such; it has been said that the Roman Catholic burial practice 'provides the imagination with a picture of permanence' (Dorsett, 1962: 21).

Postmodern identities

By adopting Hertz's notion of cremation and cremated remains as comprising a twofold process of identity transformation we have shown how privatized rites reflect personal worlds of individualized meaning for couples, families or friends. This kind of world can easily be interpreted as 'postmodern', referring to a way of life where there is little by way of extensively shared beliefs or ideologies and where identity is derived from a small number of personal relationships that can be made part of memory through the private ritual act of placing ashes in significant places (Davies and Shaw, 1995: 102ff.). This contrasts with the traditional scheme in which dead individuals become part of an anticipated eternal heavenly cosmos through formal liturgical acts. Technological society produces crematoria which render the body into a ritually manipulable form which reinforces memory and can be set in a symbolic context of past events especially appropriate to a couple-companionate society. The identity of the dead is symbolically made to participate in a micro-history of small-scale sets of relationships by being located in places of past significance and not in a macro-history involving eternal dimensions through an ecclesiastical liturgy.

Through these ecclesiastical and private cremation rites, as in the cemeteries of ethnic groups and the martyr-graves of early Christianity, we see a variety of ways in which the dead are made to symbolize the past and allowed to influence the present. Social change is reflected through these rites and, in particular, we see how the dead may be increasingly used or abandoned as sources of benefit to the present. In the Mormon case of Chapter 6 ancestors are actively 'made' and are expected to be a source of blessing for the present and future. In many cases of modern cremation the dead may be dramatically marginalized. In historical terms it may be that the decrease of kinship as a driving force in social life is accompanied by a dependence on other forms of life-conquest than that of death rites provided by traditional religions. The Yanomamo of Venezuela and Brazil (Chagnon, 1968: 50) demonstrate an intimacy with their dead, by crushing their cremated bones and eating them in a plantain soup, which is far removed

from some contemporary Britons who even seem to forget the remains of their dead, simply leaving them at the crematorium. The difference may have much to do with the way certain kin may or may not be marginalized during life and also have a part to play in the ongoing symbolic life of the community after death. This raises a major issue of the degree to which death remains a confronting phenomenon for different societies. It may be that for increasing numbers of contemporary Britons, for example, there is a growing forgetfulness associated with death. Rather like retirement, it is an issue for another time and not part of the consciousness of everyday life.

Theological concern

Even mainstream religions paid relatively little attention to death and dying throughout the twentieth century, perhaps because it was all too great a practical problem throughout two world wars. But perhaps not. Ariès (1991: 559–61) calls the final part of his great study of death 'The invisible death' and in suggestive phrases sees 'the beginning of the lie' in 'death denied' with roots in the second half of the nineteenth century. Theologically speaking, and preceding Ariès, we find an illuminating case in the great European philosopher, musician and theologian Albert Schweitzer. In 1907, he described the 'conspiracy of silence' that had descended over death and the need to counteract it. Over seventy years later Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1974: 49) too told how those she, along with some theology students, interviewed about their situation of terminal illness were 'bitter about the "conspiracy of silence", the lack of open and honest discussions and their resulting inability to "put their house in order". Research in contemporary United States still indicates the pervasive presence of silence (Steinhauser et al., 2000: 829). Schweitzer told how 'We all pretend towards our neighbour that the possibility of his death could never happen. No other rule of behaviour is more scrupulously observed than this. The last favour we offer a man on his death-bed is the pretension that his sickness could not possibly be terminal' (Schweitzer, 1974: 70–1). In this conspiratorial silence 'death asserts its rule over modern man' and this Schweitzer found profoundly sad and, from his Christian perspective, quite unnecessary. For him, 'the spirit of Christ really overcomes death, the last enemy, by helping us to take a calm and natural attitude towards it. This view of death differs

greatly from one in which men close their eyes and look away in horror' (72). He even argues that 'the natural contemplation of death can be comforting' as we realize how it saves us from all sorts of unendurable problems, how it enables us to treasure each day and how it produces a true 'love for life'. All these he sees as truly Christian, for to talk about immortality simply to comfort people in the face of death is worthless: 'immortality believed in for the sake of comfort is not genuine immortality' (75). And all this is contained within a frame that does not, in the traditional sense, root itself in the belief in an immortal soul. For Schweitzer the real and true words against death express an inward sense of an immediate, thisworldly, awareness of freedom from the fear of death. It was the duty of Christians, those in whom the last enemy had been vanquished, to 'save someone or other from this bondage', from the fear of not mentioning 'death's name' and of refusing to think about it. 'When the opportunity arises to say a word that might show him the way, don't hesitate' (76).

For much of the twentieth century the major Christian churches in Europe did little to 'show the way' as heaven followed the nineteenth-century case of hell and largely fell from the theological repertoire. Theologians argued over their preferences for an immortal soul or for the resurrection of the body as the better form of Christian approach to any future human identity. In an incisively brief essay, and rather like Schweitzer, the Catholic theologian Nicholas Lash (1979) also stressed the 'eternal' dimension of this life.

But the final decades of the twentieth century witnessed a rise of interest in death and bereavement both inside religions and in secular society. One significant sign of this lay in the 1997 publication of a book entitled *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice*. This was edited by Peter Jupp, himself a United Reformed Christian minister and a leading historian of death in Britain, and Tony Rogers, a Catholic priest much concerned with liturgical matters. The book itself was promoted by the interdenominational Churches' Group on Funeral Services at Cemeteries and Crematoria, itself the most official British Christian body concerned with liturgy, and marks a renewed concern for mortality within contemporary British society. It draws its inspiration from the historic Christian belief in the conquest of death in Christ but also explores how that might operate through liturgy and acts of community support (see Quartier [2007] for liturgy, ritual and funerals). It would seem that death becomes, once more, a more visible frame for life, or at least a matter to engage theologians (cf. Cohn-Sherbok and Lewis, 1995).

Near-death, symbolic death and rebirth

Physical death is such a powerful force in human experience that it has been extensively employed as a symbol for other cultural events, especially where one phase of existence is reckoned to end and another established in its stead as with initiation rituals. Other rites of passage are sometimes also likened to death and rebirth when a person is removed from one social status and remains apart from ordinary life before being readmitted into a new status, as was argued by Arnold van Gennep in his classic study *Rites* of Passage (1960), originally published in 1909 and discussed in Chapter 1. So it is that initiation rituals, for example, may speak of the symbolic death of a boy and the birth of a man, or the death of a girl and the birth of a woman (Myerhoff, 1982: 109ff.). While this comparison has often been drawn, it is important to ask whether the power of the imagery lies less in death as a negative end than in its holding out the hope of transcending death. Here the power of metaphor is very great and shows how language may be used against actual death by applying images of death to those dynamic processes in life which involve overcoming it.

Even when it comes to funeral rites the power of metaphor and symbol may operate at many levels. Clifford Geertz described a Balinese funeral as consisting 'of a host of detailed little busy work routines' which 'submerge in a bustling ritualism ... whatever concern with first and last things death may stimulate' (1964:282–302). Yet his implied criticism that some real problem of death was avoided through this bustle was itself questioned by Barbara Myerhoff (1982: 118), who wondered whether 'on another, deeper, level, less verbal, less cognitive ... we understand something about our own

death in contemplating and enacting ritual involving a corpse'. I suspect this may be true in many contexts in which death as a dominant symbol influences attitudes through lesser and more mundane activities.

Symbolic power of death

This universal experience of encountering death has provided a powerful image of dramatic change adopted by many cultures as a symbol of many lesser changes befalling people during their lives. In this sense death is a powerful natural symbol, so that when a culture wishes to express the belief that some major change is coming about in a person's life and identity, this image of death is found to lie close at hand. Here, of course, we are not talking about those afterlife beliefs holding that someone may die to earthly life and be reborn into a new heavenly existence. Such views have been common, as we have seen throughout earlier chapters. Here, by contrast, our main focus is not on life after death but on certain forms of changes of life in this world. Some of the best-known examples concern the shift of identity from childhood to adulthood or from one level of awareness to a new form of spiritual knowledge; these shifts often take the ritual form of initiation and may be interpreted through the idea of rites of passage discussed in Chapter 1.

Here we draw, once more, on Bloch's important theory of rebounding conquest to interpret certain crucial human practices which are described by participants in terms of death and rebirth. The key feature of Bloch's idea is that certain rituals add an additional level of meaning and significance to the mere biological facts of life. It is as though men and women become more than merely human through the rituals they construct, especially rites in which ordinary life is said to die before being replaced by another, higher, level of existence.

Imagination, hope and survival

It is as though human imagination utilizes both the drive for survival and a propensity for hopeful optimism to contradict the visible facts of life. To direct view, death brings people to a decaying end, yet, against this cold fact, and in the very face of death, most human societies have asserted that life continues in another world, in a spiritual dimension or among the ancestral powers. But not only in an afterlife is death transcended. In this life, too, rites make it possible to lift the individual above the realm of death and decay. The human being may live as one who has died and, through contact with some higher power, now possess some of that higher power to ensure that ordinary life is ordinary no longer. The words of the rites are powerful in establishing all these issues.

The highly influential sociologist Emile Durkheim provided one of the most forceful arguments for seeing religion as a set of rites which not only took individuals and bonded them together but also provided them with a sense of transcendence over the ordinariness of things. Durkheim (1915: 209) describes this sense of power very directly: 'The man who ... believes his god is with him approaches the world with confidence and with the feeling of an increased energy.' In fact, one of the most radical distinctions this great sociologist makes in his work is between what he calls the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. He defines these 'two distinct and separate mental states in our consciousness' according to whether or not they are able to 'raise us out of ourselves' (212). In the same context Durkheim speaks of the 'religious imagination' and of the way it is able to 'metamorphose' certain experiences into this sacred category. Durkheim had been very much influenced by the Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith (1846–94) and his famous study The Religion of the Semites (1894). Although his ideas were largely speculative, Smith had also emphasized the significance of both fear and love in the development of human civilization and saw the emergence of a sense of unity with the deity as giving a confidence and boost to 'social progress and moral order' (154).

In Chapter 1 we mentioned A. M. Hocart (1883–1939) for his view of ritual as a way of 'securing life', of fostering and encouraging life within human societies (1973: 51). It is now time to emphasize, even more, that 'quest for life' which he believed lay at the heart of much ritual as an extension of the general human preoccupation to 'keep alive'. Ritual was a search for a 'full life', not for mere existence (137). He saw that funerals were important in doing just that for those who survived. He speaks of many of his contemporaries as taking death ritual to be 'the very last occasion on which to seek life'. In this he thinks they are wrong: as he expresses it, 'that our theorists have found every kind of reason for funerals except life' (49).

With this strong emphasis on life and energy in mind we return to Bloch's contemporary contribution to ritual studies expressed in his theory of rebounding conquest. Bloch adds an additional dimension to these theories of fostering life and helps us understand even more clearly the way in which the image of death has been adopted as a most attractive and powerful symbol for use in other life contexts dealing with moments and events through which life is clearly fostered, confidence grows and a sense of the transcendence of ordinariness comes about. In these rites some power is believed to have conquered the individual's old and mortal self to produce a new identity and some sort of new existential awareness, and in the power of this newness these transformed individuals go out to bring this power to others who still live at the lower level of the old existence.

Initiation rituals

Transition from the old to the new is o ften accomplished through rites of initiation of various kinds. Throughout the world most traditional societies have possessed rituals which marked the sexual development of boys and girls into men and women, along with rites which marked their marriage and often the birth of their children. The motif of the death of childhood and the birth of adulthood has been used in some of these rites to exemplify the changes taking place. Also widespread are rites through which individuals come to be specialists in religious or supernatural practices; these events often make use of the image of death to symbolize the end of one phase of life. But they add to this death motif the further idea of rebirth as the commencement of the new phase of life as a religious expert.

Many secret societies have, in their more restricted worlds, also employed the motif of death and rebirth to interpret their own initiation ritual. In Freemasonry, for example, the initiate undergoes a symbolic death within a ritual grave prior to being granted a form of new life and understanding as a Mason. Death is understood as a 'figurative death' and sets the scene for the subsequent interpretation of the new pattern of life as a Freemason (Waite, 1994: 174).

Spiritual rebirth in Christianity

A more traditional example of death used as an image of life-transformation is found in initiation into Christian status with the motif of death and rebirth underlying the doctrine and practice of baptism. This most important Christian rite marks membership of the Christian Church itself and, in doctrinal terms symbolizes how each Christian dies with Christ; the death of Christ and the baptism of the believer mirror each other. As Christ died and was buried, so the believer enters the waters of baptism, death and water becoming symbolic equivalents. Then, just as Christ is believed to have risen from the dead, so the believer rises out of the water. Accordingly, believers symbolically die and rise with Christ and may be said to have been reborn. Christian spirituality has the capacity to encourage believers, whose lives may often seem to be too busy for anything, to have time both for living and for learning how to die, while also bearing the capacity to see in Christ's death what it also means to 'die a banal, accidental and senseless sudden death' (Greshake, 1974: 98).

Generally, however, there are two different kinds of emphasis given to the general idea of death and rebirth within Christian traditions. The sacramental tradition places great stress upon the ritual traditions of the church and on the authority of the clergy. It speaks of death and rebirth as a sacramental process, one which is not dependent upon the psychology or feelings of those involved. By contrast, many within the Protestant tradition, especially in evangelical groups, see the idea of death and rebirth as something which happens in the actual experience of the believer. First there is a sense of sin and an awareness of being in a negative state, then the individual encounters a sense of newness, just as though the person had died to the old way of life and been born again into a new reality. Such believers see this as due to God's direct action in bringing a new spiritual nature into their lives.

These two perspectives have been so clear that the psychologist William James (1902) long ago defined the sacramental approach to Christianity as the religion of the once-born, while he called the evangelical Protestant stress on conversion the religion of the twice-born. Similarly, the sociologist B. R. Wilson (1970: 41) used the experience of an inner rebirth as a key attribute in describing and defining the classification of the 'conversionist' type of sectarian movement. This 'type' of experience is not restricted to groups which might be defined as sects but also embraces some

who have come to be major leaders in mainstream churches. From the conversion experience of St Paul, through that of St Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley and many other Christians, this awareness of the death of the old self and the birth of new awareness has fired enthusiasm, as well as triggered revival and reformation.

What is especially important in these Christian cases is that this personal experience is linked to a belief in the resurrection of Jesus interpreted as a triumph over death (Aulén, 1970). In other words, a personal experience is combined with what is believed to be a historical moment of unique conquest, through one who is believed to be God incarnate. When this experience was shared in a fellowship of like-minded people there emerged a powerful community addressing death as an enemy that has been defeated in a divine battle. The institution of the Eucharist as a repeated and frequent ritual, grounded in the memory and recall of that death and triumphant resurrection, has been one reason for Christianity's historic success as a religion of world conquest. In the light of Bloch's theory of rebounding conquest we can understand the power felt by converts – those owning a sense of having died and been reborn – that they now wish to convert others to their own state of transcendence. The 'old' nature must be replaced in everyone.

The words against death which such Christians speak in funeral liturgies are symbolic expressions of their own psychological experience within their own spiritual development. This is a fundamentally important point in the history and development of Christianity, most especially among the evangelical groups, because it shifts the impact of death-related phenomena from any realm of spirits to the inner experience of the individual. This type of person knows that death is conquered not because of some sense of awareness of deceased kin, but from a sense of awareness of the risen Christ marked in their own religious conversion. They have the proof within themselves and therefore they speak against death – and often against Spiritualism.

Though it is too stark to think only in terms of sharp classifications we may, for the sake of argument, see the other 'type' of Christian spirituality, that grounded in sacramental worship, as deriving its sense of transcendent power from the Eucharistic focus on Christ's death and resurrection along with the religious experience gained from that. This stance may also derive some real impact from the sense of experience of the faithful departed, who are regularly mentioned in prayers.

Shamanism

As we can expect from such universal phenomena, we also encounter the motif of death and rebirth beyond its Christian use, not least in association with shamanism. Shamans are individuals who use trance states as the context in which they take a kind of journey into some supernatural world where they engage with spirits or deities on behalf of other people who lie in need of some help, often in the form of healing. The great Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907–86), was one of the earliest scholars to describe shamanism: referring to the use of rhythmic music, often drumming, along with the use of narcotic substances, he described shamanism as a 'technique of ecstasy' (1951: 4). The word 'shaman' itself originated with the Tungu people of Siberia but the phenomenon has been encountered in very many parts of the world among traditional peoples, not least among native North and South American groups, in India (Führer-Haimendorf, 1967: 215) and in South East Asia. As a term, 'shamanism' has been regularly used by historians and phenomenologists of religion, though there has been something of a trend among s ocial anthropologists to speak more of spirit possession.

Whatever term is used, shamanism presents one of the foundational types of religious experience found in human societies and, apart from the ecstatic journey into a kind of supernatural geography (Collins and Fishbane, 1995), there lies at its heart the sense of a call or vocation, often rooted in an experience of serious illness through which the shaman gains a sense of having died and been reborn. Eliade describes rituals associated with the vocation of the shaman in which the individual is, as it were, reduced to a mere skeleton before regaining a new power of life. The facts that some shamans are people who have been struck with illness but have recovered, and that the motif of death is also often associated with their transformation are important in seeing the link drawn between illness and death and the power to heal. It is because they have gone through the negative state, which is basic to life, and have in a real sense of survival triumphed over the negativity that they now exist in a state of power ready to assist others. Here, then, we not only have one more application of Bloch's theory of rebounding conquest but can also see how the special formulae, including 'spirit languages', used by shamans serve as words opposed to negative powers. Indeed the power of positive words in the form of blessings, as of negative words in curses, could be studied at some length to reinforce the significance of verbal parts of rites in which ordinary existence, including death, was experienced as having been transcended (Crawley, 1934).

Wounded healers

One dimension to shamanism lies in another phrase, which brings this phenomenon of shamanism much closer to contemporary urban society and to some Christian contexts: that of the 'wounded healer'. This image of a wounded healer was used by the Christian theologian Henri Nouwen (1972: 83) to describe Christian ministers in relation to those they serve. It is especially applicable to those who have suffered in some way and who are able to bring the experience of their personal suffering to bear upon the help they seek to bring to others. I have argued that this kind of Christian discussion of wounded healers places them within the broad classification of shamans (Davies, 1990b: 55).

One aspect of contemporary life related to death that might, perhaps, be related to this category of wounded healer concerns increasingly large numbers of people who establish or help lead self-help groups of bereaved people. Although not wounded healers in the fuller sense of the phrase, they do represent that aspect of life in which people who have suffered some considerable personal trauma come to a point where they gain the strength to help others. The fact of enduring a similar type of bereavement helps forge a supportive bond that fosters a degree of resilience and hope.

Near-death experience

In very recent times one of the clearest examples of a very similar category occurs in those people who have experienced what are called 'near-death experiences' (Bailey and Yates, 1996). This very phrase, often abbreviated to NDE, has passed into common currency from Raymond Moody's book *Life After Life* (1975). An ideal-type description of this state is useful,

always bearing in mind that some individuals will experience only some of its features while others say the experience lies beyond description. The picture portrays the 'dead' individual hearing others talking about their death while they themselves felt peaceful, quiet and heard some kind of sound. They move along a dark tunnel in what seems to be an 'out of the body' experience (itself often described technically as an OBE) and meet people already dead. They encounter a non-judgemental 'being of light' who imparts a sense of love and care. They review their past life in a motif that reflects the popular image of the drowning person whose 'life flashes past them'. Then, coming to some border or boundary, they are told that they cannot pass, perhaps because their time has not yet come. They must go back to their former life and, perhaps, tell others about their experience. Once they have recovered, they are told what happened around them while 'they were dead' and this matches their own experience of the event. They now reckon to have a changed attitude to life and have no fear of death.

Here, then, we find people who, in perhaps a more literal sense, have been dead and, because of medical technology and skill, have been resuscitated. They now possess a sense of purpose in the comforting awareness that death is no longer a fearful thing. Having triumphed over ordinary life-experiences, including the margins of death, they have not only survived but now live to tell a positive tale of triumph which can encourage many others. Here, once more, we have a set of experiences which can be interpreted in terms of the rebounding conquest motif.

This experience of having been close to death is not an especially modem phenomenon, for accounts of related experience also occur in historical texts (Stewart, 1998: 64), even though modem medical techniques of resuscitation may now make it more likely. Among the traditional Cheyenne, one of many tribes of the Great Plains of North America, it was believed that some people might fall into a state, rather like a coma, during which their spirit would go to visit the villages of the dead, from which they were sent back to earth full of stories of their experiences (Hoebel, 1978: 92). A similar situation obtained among the Berens River Saulteaux, but what is particularly interesting about them is the way the influential anthropologist Irving Hallowell accounted for their views of death. Writing in the late 1930s, Hallowell (1967) notes how the Saulteaux distinguished between different sorts of relations with death including dreams and journeys to the land of the dead by those deemed dead at the time of their experience. One of the accounts he gives contains most of the features that, fifty years later, would certainly be viewed as part of a near-death experience including a road, a point beyond which one could not pass, a distinctive brightness and a message to return to human life and prepare for the real, final, journey (153).

Returning to contemporary writers, what is particularly interesting about near-death experiences is the way in which they have been used by some as a proof of life after death. Moody, who coined the term 'near-death experience', has also encouraged a cautious attitude to those who want to use the idea for such ideological ends. In his book *The Last Laugh* (1999) he criticizes certain types of parapsychologists, sceptical scientists and fundamentalist Christians. He takes the provocative line of suggesting that perhaps the best way of seeking to understand near-death experiences is by comparing them with 'entertainment'. He thinks that some become preoccupied by the paranormal precisely because they are entertained by it. They may not see it as entertainment in the normal sense, but that is what is going on, as the law suggests when it classifies certain fortune-tellers and the like as entertainers. Second, however, we have entertainment in the sense of play, that kind of creative play that marks both the child and the adult thinker, whether scientist or philosopher, whose mental agility is a kind of play a nd leads to discovery.

It is to this second perspective that Moody draws attention. It is here that he finds some parapsychologists, sceptical scientists and fundamentalist Christians at fault. The problems come because they want to use certain phenomena, including NDEs, to further their own ideological ends. In other words, they are ideologically or theologically political in wanting to interpret NDEs to prove their own view of the world. While this may satisfy them and 'prove' or at least deeply substantiate the presence of a mysterious or supernatural world, or in the case of sceptical scientists its non-existence, the debate ends in their respective certainties.

Moody (1999) wants to take his reader beyond those politicized certainties and invites them to become 'playful paranormalists'. As such, they will understand that the 'paranormal is a variety of literal nonsense' (75). Here there is an important point of method to be made concerning the perspective of the reader; it is a version of the very proper sociological

process of reductionism in which the scholar offers a theory that gives a privileged interpretation over the ordinary behaviour of others. While they may explain what they do in one way, the scholar possesses another and more abstract view of affairs. This is what Moody means in terms of entertainment and playfulness. His implication is that the average parapsychologist, sceptical scientist and fundamentalist Christian is devoid of humour and does not see the entertainment element in NDEs, neither in the more popular nor in the abstract sense. For Moody, however, these events may help stimulate discoveries as one excitement leads to another, as between alchemy and mainstream science in earlier generations.

Still, opinion is divided over all these experiences. Michael Sabom's *Light and Death* (1998) is an account of an originally sceptical medical doctor who, while coming to accept NDEs as reflecting a real spiritual world, nevertheless concludes that 'modern day descriptions of NDEs are not accounts of life after death' but are 'after-life-like' (198). His basic theology dictates his interpretation of NDEs, which he regards as true spiritual experiences even though they are not of the afterlife. He takes the example of St Paul's account of his 'out of the body' experience (2 Cor. 12.1–6) not only as related to Paul's possible near-death experience when he was left for dead (Acts 14.19) but as a guiding model for interpreting current experiences. For Sabom the beings encountered in NDEs are, primarily, angels, and since they can adopt different forms they are likely to be the familiar persons encountered in NDEs. So it is that he not only sees NDEs as some kind of evidence to support supernatural verities but also wishes to invoke a biblical explanation to ensure they are not deceptive.

Such survivors' description and reflections upon their experience constitute a significant form of words against death, one that has gained considerable publicity, not least, perhaps, because it is not aligned with any specific type of formal religious tradition. This is an advocacy of an afterlife that is potentially appealing to some within secular forms of society or to those with a belief in the mystery of human existence and destiny.

What is interesting is that Moody himself advocates great caution over interpreting near-death experiences and criticizes groups such as overly keen parapsychologists or excessively critical scientists as well as fundamentalist Christians because each uses the near-death phenomenon for their own ends. He prefers to see this phenomenon not as some proof of an afterlife or the justification of any religious doctrine but as something to excite and challenge real scientific and philosophical reflections. It is relatively easy to slip 'near-death experiences' into some preexisting religious category of afterlife or to see it as the simple outcome of electrical-chemical activity in the brain, but it is more difficult to see it as an opportunity to think about aspects of human consciousness in new ways. Moody tells, for example, of his experiment in designing an apparition chamber – a psychomanteion as he calls it – and getting volunteers to attempt to see their deceased family or friends while in it; in practically every case out of 100, subjects said they came to be in 'mind-to-mind' contact with their dead.

One interesting aspect of Moody's cautious reflections concerns groups of people interested in near-death experience and the way they give the impression of creating a kind of religious sect of their own. This he dislikes, even referring to them as 'thanatothespians'. Obviously his commitment to the scientific and exploratory possibilities opened up by NDEs veers away from the religious overtones that can easily accompany the certainties born in the revived and resuscitated individual. But Moody does see some potential advantage emerging from the sense of love that seems to pervade many accounts of NDEs. Now that something resembling a near-death experience can be recreated in his psychomanteion, he hopes that a sense of love, indeed of agape, may begin to flow to increasing numbers of people.

Another influential author, Kenneth Ring, also echoes the idea of benefits to be gained by reflecting upon NDEs in his *Lessons from the Light* (1998), but he is less critical and wants to make some of the benefits of NDEs increasingly available to those who have never received one for themselves. His discussion reflects a kind of privileged and esoteric process of development as he describes an increasingly complex dimension of near-death experiences involving the 'existence of a second light' experienced by some who have taken their journey into the 'afterdeath' realm. Crucially, this is an encounter with God and a revelation from God (294). Here we seem to arrive at the idea of a religious group for while Ring disavows 'any effort to make a cult out of the NDE', he thinks it fair to say that 'there is in a sense an emerging "culture of the NDE" which is represented' in those who have had or are interested in such an experience. He even likens this group to the Buddhist Sangha (303). The book ends with a kind of blessing:

'May the Light guide your every step and lead you to enlightened action in the world.' Ring's allusion to an emerging culture associated with neardeath experience brings this chapter to its final section on the complex relationship between death and world religions.

What is evident is that the very status of 'experiences' of death or neardeath or the like is highly contested. This is an issue we will briefly touch upon in the following chapter in respect of defining death, for a major feature of contemporary cultures lies in seeking to relate human identity and life in some binding way. Issues of brain death, of people recovering in the morgue when already stated to be dead, as well as issues of body transplants giving 'life' to people who otherwise would die, all highlight the fact that the boundary between life and death is never simple. The differences between ghosts and spirits on the one hand, and people on life-support machines or with heart transplants on the other indicate how different grammars of discourse, different frames of reference, deal with the profound human engagement with death.

Somewhere to die

Places are profoundly important for human beings, not least places of death and of memorials to the dead. Ariès (1991: 594) in his important reflection on the denial of death in contemporary society speaks of the 'geography of the invisible death' as he details the way death has been removed from the public gaze. In this chapter we pursue this issue further to ask how the locations where people die relate to the values associated with human identity. How, too, can we see the actual place of death or of preparation for death as part of the human conquest of mortality? Here we sketch the significance of death at home, hospital or hospice alongside accidental death and death in war. This very question of where people die also raises the fundamental question of the definition of 'death'.

Home deathbed

A traditional image of death, well known from the nineteenth century and 'the age of the beautiful death', as Ariès (1991: 409ff.) calls it, is that of the deathbed: it continued into the early twentieth century. The family gathers around the member who lies in the last moments of life. In earlier ages still, the picture might even have contained a priest. The domestic setting shows death as part of life with family members ranging in age from the ancient who have seen it all before to curious children. Sometimes there is a simple sense of the naturalness of death, sometimes a sense of the deep sadness of a younger death; occasionally, the tale told is fraught with psychological trauma and the loves and hates of different family members. Pat Jalland's (1996: 244ff.) study of Victorian death offers two examples in contrasting

pictures: one the death of a young woman from tuberculosis and the other of an aged parent. In the first, a dying girl sits propped up near an open window, watched by her elderly mother and sister while her elderly father looks out of the window. No one looks directly at anyone. Large curtains are sufficiently open to flood the dying woman with light, curtains soon to close. The second picture shows an old dying woman looking straight into the eyes of a younger, their hands clasped. Both pictures convey the sense of the passage of time; the mood is one of waiting, of awaiting the imminent end.

Moving to Norway, one of Edvard Munch's paintings shows a family scene of domestic death. An old woman sits propped in a chair, already dead. The viewer sees only the back of her chair, but distinctly sees the empty bed with its bedclothes open and dishevelled, and the facial expressions of each survivor: the aged widower, the older and younger adult children and their spouses. Anxiety, tension and relief variously strain their faces. There is a desolation about the picture and no sense of natural fulfilment of a person on their domestic deathbed. Certainly there is no idealizing of a death at home. The location simply echoes the home as the location of many life-events, not least those of tension, stress and conflict, a theme that haunts many of his paintings and best known in *The Scream*. The home as a place of pain would not have been so unfamiliar in the past, not least because, until the later twentieth century, many births would also have taken place at home and, not infrequently, would have involved death, whether of baby or of mother.

Hospital bed

As with birth, so with death, as it became increasingly common in modem urban societies for people not only to give birth but also to die in hospital. Some see this as part of the medicalization of death, a process in which the medical establishment of doctors and nurses come to control aspects of life that previously lay within the domain of families and individuals. Such death was, of course, closely related to illness and to the idea of the control of illness, which ultimately came to mean the 'control' of death. In this context 'control' is an odd word, for it really applies to issues such as pain and other aspects of human body functioning as terminal illness passes into death. The use of painkilling drugs often also involves the 'unintended consequence' of death, for the drugs that control pain also reduce a patient's life-functions. Here, some would argue, the deathbed is no longer the site of 'natural' death coming at its own time and in its own way but is a medicalized death. For some this is a perfectly appropriate way for one's relatives to die but some others see it as 'unnatural' and less dignified.

Indeed, the very concept of 'dignity' has come, increasingly, to the fore as religious beliefs about the afterlife decrease. It is as though the religious idea of an individual as an eternal identity served well to invest the domestic deathbed with a degree of sanctity, one reflected in the biblical text used in traditional Christian funerals: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord.' Those very words were used by the biblical character Job (1.21) on hearing that his sons and daughters had been killed when a great wind struck their home. The very idea of any human being 'taking a life' was viewed as a sin since that power belonged to God alone, and contemporary debates about both suicide and euthanasia are linked with the acceptance, rejection, qualification and secularization of that assumption. Above all else, euthanasia reflects the growing sense of personal freedom, individual and human rights and the sense of choice that has come to be an expression of all these things. So it is that the place of death, whether in home or at hospital, reflects the complex situation where personal choice, family choices and the advantages and disadvantages of medical provisions all intersect; yet these debates need to be contextualized in a consumerist society where choice is of the essence of identity. And it is a debate focused not simply on the dying person but also on the surviving kin who have their own ideas about what might or might not be good for them in the long term. It is also an issue related to the valuing of privacy that goes along with individual rights and individualism.

Hospice

The one major location of care of the dying to have emerged over the second half of the twentieth century is that of the hospice. It is, of course, a revival of earlier religious institutions in which the dying were cared for. One fine example of the fifteenth century is that of the great Hotel-Dieu at Beaune, in the Burgundy region of France. This Catholic locale no longer

functions as such but is centred upon a very large and airy hall along the walls of which are compartments with beds for the sick and dying and at the end of which stands an altar. This is one of the finest examples in the world of a sacred context for death. Above the altar stands Van der Weyden's masterpiece depicting the final resurrection and the last judgement: an apt scene to keep before the eyes of those who were sick and likely to die.

Modern hospices, many taking their cue from St Christopher's in London, as a place for the terminally ill were developed in the mid-twentieth century not simply as a means of caring for those who were dying but to address the dual issue of the physical control of pain and the mental preparation for death (David Clark, 1998). In the broad sense this had to do with the spiritual well-being of the sick, in which the physical and psychological aspects of life combine within an overall framework of the meaning of life and its many relationships. In this sense the idea of dignity returns to describe the proper status of people and reflects the quality of relationsh ips between people, between those who are dying, those caring for them and their family and friends. For dignity is a quality of relationship.

Hospices have been developed in many countries and are expressions of the growing sense of awareness that death can be a creative period in which people can, to some extent, complete or enhance their relationships with others just as they can come to terms with themselves, their illness and their life-circumstances. What is interesting about modern hospices is that they are not negative places in which people 'wait for' death but, as far as is possible, they affirm the positive values of life for as long as is practically possible. In this sense hospices are an institutional form of 'words against death': they take individuals who might, by some, be regarded as having lost the battle of life and allow them to see that much can be achieved in the face of mortality. This is a very positive function, one that was rather ignored by Ariès (1991: 585) in his brief and rather negative evaluation of the modern hospice with his excessive concern to emphasize the way doctors can control the timing of death through the use of medical technology.

Roadside deaths

But death does not always come in places prepared for it. In contemporary societies many thousands of people die in road and traffic accidents as well as in their place of employment. Such deaths bring momentary depth to places that are otherwise quite insignificant. A stretch of featureless road becomes the place where an individual dies. One increasingly popular response to such an event has been the creation of temporary memorials to the dead in the form of floral wreaths, written cards or the like that are placed at the site of an accident in many parts of the world, whether in the Czech Republic and Romania (Neŝporová and Stahl, 2014), or in the United States where this phenomenon has been explored in terms of local authority policies over them (Dickinson and Hoffman, 2010). Sometimes these tributes are replenished so that the memorial remains active for weeks or even for some months and may parallel the actual final resting place of the deceased and its more permanent memorial. Similar floral responses occur in public areas outside private homes in which people have been killed either by murder or by accident, with the public response to the death of Diana, princess of Wales, witnessing the largest ever of these public acts. In all of these contexts individuals create significance and dignify neutral places. They bring personal value to bear upon a particular site, announcing their own opposition to the random insignificance of an arbitrary place of mortality as with the case of a memorial mounted on a lamp post on a relatively minor road in the north-east of England where a child lost a father as so intimately expressed as 'No. 1 Dad' (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 'No. 1 Dad', roadside memorial, north-east England.

Battlefield memorials

Another form of dignifying death is associated with warfare and the death of soldiers. Twentieth-century warfare has resulted in immense cemeteries of the war dead across Europe as well as in some of the countries once part of European empires. Millions of graves, set out in uniform rows of equally marked plots, under the same style of headstone – for all are equal in death – reflect the massed slaughter of the youth and young manhood of nations. It was a debate in the British Parliament on 4 May 1920 that decided to establish cemeteries for the war dead as 'an abiding and supreme memorial to the efforts and the glory of the British Army and the sacrifices made in that great cause' (War Graves, 1928: 25). The Imperial War Graves Commission was established by Royal Charter in 1917 to ensure, whenever possible, the recording of the burial of every soldier and to provide a grave that was as well tended as any in a home churchyard. The identity of each person should be sought at all costs as a 'matter of honour' so as not to 'give up the fight against oblivion' (7). And this was to cover a million dead men and women laid to rest; to be precise, some 1,081,925. Of these, approximately half (582,783) were identified and buried in known graves, with some 173,213 being unidentified but also buried, and the rest recorded as 'missing'. There were, for example, some 2,000 cemeteries in France and 500 in Belgium; in these and many other countries a major feature of the larger cemeteries was to be the construction of monumental memorials to the dead.

These cemeteries, along with the war memorials set up in the armies' homelands, furnish their own form of rhetoric of mortality. The language of these sites, as alluded to in Chapter 4, praises the laying down of life for the preservation of the homeland and its various symbols. Death becomes the publically expressed vehicle of prized values that alone are thought to make life worth living, with historians also depicting the negative impact of military death on families and, indeed, on generations of women (Gregory, 2008). On the public front, Jon Davies (1999: 217) has persuasively argued that this view of death in a militaristic heroic martyr actually generated a form of 'Euro-Christianity' grounded in an ethic of duty and self-sacrifice and marked internationally in war memorials. Davies (1995: 136–7) has also explored in a telling way the issue of the 'sacrificial theology of war memorials' as a 'path between both pacifism and facile jingoism or nationalism'.

It is a characteristic feature of warfare to ascribe high status to one's own soldiers, treating the dead as heroic, while placing low value on the enemy whose bodies may be mutilated or simply abandoned. The emergence and development of war memorials after the First and Second World Wars in Great Britain demonstrate the significance invested in the war dead (Jon Davies, 1993). These memorials often exist at both local and national levels, with perhaps only a few names on a village commemorative cross or plaque while the national memorial may list thousands or else provide a statement concerning the greatness of the sacrifice made by the dead. In fact this is an interesting example of the use of sacrifice as a means of making sense of the countless deaths involved in twentieth-century warfare. Texts like that from St John's Gospel (15.13), 'Greater love hath no man for his friend than that he lay down his life for his brother', are common.

There may well be resonances in that text that are not always given publicity but which echo Max Weber's (1991: 335) significant sociological account of soldiers and warfare when arguing that 'war does something to a warrior', it 'makes him experience a consecrated meaning of death'. This may partly explain why today some bereaved families say that their dead son died doing what he loved. It may also contrast sharply with many deaths in society that are apparently pointless or meaningless.

Many countries continue to give formal commemoration to their military dead as they rehearse these ideals of personal sacrifice. This can involve large-scale events, as in Remembrance Day in November of each year in Great Britai n when the monarch along with the prime minister and senior politicians engage in a ceremony at the Cenotaph in London to lay wreaths commemorating the dead. As these rites are televised, they reach many millions of people. So too, for example, in the United States when the president and other senior people attend formal rites at places such as the Arlington National Cemetery, which is even administered by the Army. On Memorial Day, in May, many people in the United States visit their local cemeteries to place flowers on graves of their own dead, whether they belonged to the military or not. Another distinctive form of memorialization in the United States, one that relates to our discussion of violence and the Holocaust in Chapter 2, is the United States Holocaust Museum. Edward Linenthal (1995) tells how a revival of interest in the Holocaust took place in the late 1970s after a slow start in the 1960s. The president, Jimmy Carter, established a commission in 1978 to report on the Holocaust and to advise on an appropriate memorial. This led to debates as to whether it should be located in New York, where most American Jews live, or at the nation's symbolic centre of Washington, DC. Washington was chosen. Many aspects of design, location and 'ownership' preceded the completion of the building and these centred on the prime issue of identity and memory, including how to incorporate elements of 'Europe' into an 'American' space (220–61). Here, then, was a symbolic expression of a place where many died, created far from where any had died but so located at the heart of the most powerful nation upon earth as to guarantee as firm a rhetoric against useless death as is possible. And this is, perhaps, particularly important in the light of our earlier discussion in Chapter 7 concerning the decline in belief in an afterlife among many Jews. When words against death do not involve a world beyond this one, it becomes all the more important to address the significance of life in this world. Given that the Nazi-driven Holocaust sought to eliminate Jews, it has now become all the more important to affirm them, whether in memorials or in the state of Israel itself.

National Memorial Arboretum

Memorials are theoretically interesting because they exemplify our previous argument on how certain ideas attract emotion to form values, and how those values take the form of beliefs when they contribute to a person or group's sense of identity, and perhaps even of religious beliefs if they help frame an awareness of destiny. Some such value-laden ideas sometimes have the habit of migrating, or prompting responses for different contexts. A prime case comes from Arlington National Cemetery, for it was after a visit there and to Washington, DC's National Arboretum that an individual, David Childs (2008) of the British Royal Navy, quite literally had a dream that led him, through many practical and institutional difficulties, to establish The National Memorial Arboretum in the UK. This site has developed from the early 2000s to include over 200 memorials marking a great variety of military and other national organizations, including the construction of an artificial mound holding a very large monument to the dead of the British Armed Forces. The cultural diversity captured in these symbolic forms moves from large monuments such as the one to the Parachute Regiment that sets the factually lifelike soldier gathering his parachute below the mythological winged horse (see Figure 4) to the austerely concrete and blindfolded 'deserter' being 'Shot at Dawn' (see Figure 5). The pathos of the young soldier lies not simply in the target marker on his chest that might easily be misidentified as a medal, but in the many posts ranged behind him, each bearing the name of another young man. Due to family and wider political pressure the UK government, in November 2006, granted a posthumous pardon to all those 'executed for military offences' as indicated on a plaque accompanying this monument. This stark reminder of psychological hazards of military engagement is important as a complement to what has already been said about military bonding, and finding meaning through self-sacrifice. Some of the Arboretum's memorials prompt quite different emotions as with the horse taken from a Fairground Carousel to mark circus and other show-folk killed in the war (see Figure 6).



Figure 4 Parachute Regiment, National Memorial Arboretum.

These and hundreds of other memorials capture something of British culture and necessitate space for their appropriate distinctiveness and display. So it is that all this is centred not in London but in the more geographical centre of the UK at Lichfield. It is a place not only of fixed memorials but also of a great deal of ritual activity throughout the year and nearly every day of the year. In many ways it offers a classic expression of the combination of death, ritual and belief within a national framework despite the fact that, unlike Arlington, no single person is actually buried there (Douglas Davies, 2015b: 364–9). In symbolic terms it is unlike the memorial to the unknown-soldier in London's Westminster Abbey, for it carries the names of many thousands of 'known' soldiers on its major Armed Forces' memorial while being devoid of any single body.



Figure 5 Shot at Dawn, National Memorial Arboretum.



Figure 6 Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, National Memorial Arboretum.

Locating death

These various places of death carry with them strong social values and preferences which, in turn, express the sense of identity inherent in a culture. Hospitals, for example, are places where large numbers of abortions take place each year, a practice that the majority in many countries accept as an unfortunate necessity of life. Yet there remains a significant group that opposes abortion and classifies it as a kind of murder. What is to some a medical procedure, an operation, is to others a criminal act, a murder and the hospital is the arena of each. In a similar way, some favour the possibility of euthanasia and of assisted suicide while others deem both to be totally unacceptable. And this is the case within many single societies in the world today. In other words, death is no simple phenomenon. It is a vehicle for many people's moral values.

If we compare different cultures we find even greater differences. In Japan, for example, not only do many have abortions but there is some considerable concern shown by the 'mothers' for the foetuses involved and they are prepared to pay for special Buddhist rites to be performed to help appease the souls of those aborted (LaFleur, 1992). Since many Japanese believe that the place of birth and death a re rooted in destiny, the issue of shortening or extending life becomes a lively issue as is the case, for example, in organ transplants, and indeed in defining death. Margaret Lock (1997: 207ff.) has shown how the Western notion of 'brain death', with all the medical terminology and hospital technology involved, has not been accepted by very many Japanese, for whom the 'self behind the brain is a matter of importance'.

Yet hospitals can, of course, carry positive values as with the dissection rooms of medical schools and the moral choice of some who desire to offer their body for medical science after their death. Sophie Bolt's (2012) study of such donations in the Netherlands demonstrates how the hospital can come to form part of a life-routine of elderly and infirm people and be seen as almost a natural venue for their corpse as a valued and not valueless entity. Moreover, ritual events marking the use of these bodies have emerged in connection with many medical schools (Tinker, 1998).

Age and place

So it is that where people live, work or receive society's care can enhance or detract from their sense of well-being and identity. When they consider where they might also die they invest places with the kind of value that frames their own 'dignity'. In part this is a question related to issues of retirement towns and also of old people's homes, both being ambiguous places. Many joke about old people's homes, perhaps because they themselves fear them as possible future places of residence. Although this present book has not taken up the theme of humour and death it is obvious that 'words against death' can be uttered maliciously as well as with philosophical or religious seriousness. When, for example, young men refer to older members of their health club as 'coffin-dodgers' they not only disparage an older group while expressing their own youthfulness but also hide the sure knowledge that they, too, will age and die.

Respect for the aged is likely to be related to respect towards the dead, and in societies where consumerism has tended to foster the lifestyle of younger people it is almost inevitable that death will not assume high priority. But one of the growing distinctions between different societies now lies in the percentage of elderly people in their populations. In the majority of the wealthier nations, dramatically increasing numbers of old people make economic and commercial concerns take their interests seriously. The 'grey' vote, as the political power of old people has come to be called, is increasingly valued. In commercial terms this has led to insurance companies and some charities encouraging people not only to take out special policies to pay for their funerals in advance but also to consider what form of funeral service they might like. To consider one's funeral before one's death involves a very basic kind of consumerist choice. Governments, too, are increasingly concerned over issues of death, as witnessed by the British government, which in 2001 reported through a select committee of the Environmental, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee investigations on the possible reuse of graves in response to the fact that many urban cemeteries were becoming full. That report brings together the single most extensive and varied set of opinions and values on the nature of cemeteries and memorials that probably exists in Britain (House of Commons, 2001) and shows the deep importance of death rites and funerary sites in a modern society.

11

Souls and the presence of the dead

Ideas of soul or spirit have helped many different societies to express the conviction that life does not end with physical death and earlier chapters have shown how these beliefs are also expressed in rites reflecting different shades of meaning in each culture. This chapter focuses largely, though not exclusively, on British attitudes towards the idea of souls, embracing the related ideas of Spiritualism, reincarnation and various experiences associated with the presence of the dead as well as an introduction to the study of the soul in nineteenth-century anthropology.

The nineteenth century

It was in the later nineteenth century that scholars began to think more systematically about popular beliefs in souls and the powers reckoned to animate nature. They began a scholarly discipline reflected in the anthropological studies drawn upon in most of our previous chapters. Theirs, too, was a period when Eastern and Western ideas began to penetrate each other as far as religious notions of self were concerned.

A key figure in the rise of the study of the anthropology of religion was Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917). His interpretation of religion was grounded in a theory of how he believed primitives thought about the life force animating people. His was a rational gaze of nineteenth-century intellectualism which saw itself as penetrating what had hitherto been the protected territory of religious mystique (1958, vol. 2: 535). To shed some light on what Tylor was doing, it is worth setting him alongside his contemporary Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, best known for his fictitious detective Sherlock Holmes. In one sense the fictional Holmes was like Tylor's rational anthropologist, subjecting behaviour, no matter how apparently odd or weird, to a logical analysis. Yet, unlike Tylor, Conan Doyle the man was personally dedicated to the idea of Spiritualism. While, figuratively speaking, it would be possible to describe Conan Doyle by saying that Sherlock Holmes marked the rational side of his life while Spiritualism defined another and more mysterious domain, it is probably more correct to see his interest in Spiritualism as a kind of logical investigation into the mystery of death and the destiny of individuals shared by many of his day.

Tylor, animism and souls

Tylor, then, did much to clarify ideas about the soul and its role in beliefs about life after death. An Englishman born in 1832 and brought up as a Quaker, he felt unable to go to Oxford or Cambridge Universities, which until 1854 expected allegiance to Church of England principles. As a young man, financially well-off but in poor health, he decided to travel and while in Cuba made a friend of a fellow Quaker at whose encouragement he engaged in some archaeological work in Mexico. This led to a growing and life-long interest in anthropology, resulting in some of the earliest books on anthropology including *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871. It has even been suggested that the discipline of social anthropology was 'born ... in a Cuban omnibus' (Lienhardt, 1969: 87)! In several studies he explored many aspects of human life with an emphasis on the importance of evolution and on the fact that the human animal was always 'trying to get at the meaning of life' through the evidence of the senses and by reasoning out the significance of events (1958, vol. 1: 22).

At the heart of this kind of primitive philosophy lay what Tylor called 'animism'. In fact he is now probably best known for this word, which became increasingly popular, especially as a way of describing the religions of tribal peoples and those not classified as world religions. Tylor certainly pinpointed the issue of souls and life force, a topic others would explore at length, not least Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1965: 341), whose extensive volume on 'The "Soul" of the Primitive' aptly illustrated his view of the 'symbiosis of the living and the dead', with the individual not being 'wholly himself

except by virtue of the ancestors who live once more in his personality' (cf. Crawley, 1909).

Animism is, primarily, a theory about souls, about powers lying at the centre not only of human but also of animal and plant life. Features of the natural environment could also be so animated. As a theory about forces which make things happen, it was a theory of causation. Tylor arrived at it by putting himself in the place of primitive man and trying to work out, from first principles, how people reasoned about life and death. Death was particularly important to him, and he wanted some idea of why notions of immortality had emerged in relation to it. Tylor thought himself into the position which argued that man's body must be under the influence of some power. At night, for example, individuals go to sleep and appear virtually dead, yet while they sleep they dream and in their dreams wander far and wide, visiting and meeting other people. If the body has been in one place all this time then, so the argument runs, something must have gone elsewhere and that something is the soul. Then, at death, when the body never wakes again it must be because the soul has gone and not returned. This kind of reasoning led Tylor to argue that the soul lay at the basis of life and served as a foundation for religion, which itself is the way of dealing with the soul after death.

Tylor believed he could show that this sort of argument did in fact occur among primitive people, and he provided many examples drawn from a wide variety of travellers and missionaries. He is now often criticized for this speculative guesswork, and for placing too great an emphasis upon logic and reasoning in the evolution of ideas of the soul (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 24ff.). He thought that evolution applied to human understanding itself so that, for example, the early ideas of animism not only developed to become the basis for religion, which he defined as 'belief in spiritual beings', but also served as a kind of 'groundwork for the philosophy of religion' (1958, vol. 2: 8, 10). Tylor also stressed his conviction that primitive man did not sit around all day engaged in primitive philosophy; indeed, he emphasized the importance of ritual as 'the gesture-language of theology', 'expressive and symbolic performances' through which men and women had sought to interact with supernatural beings and to influence them (448).

Tylor's writing followed a rationalist stance, not one of personal religious belief. He assumed that all religion occurred naturally, with no such thing as revelation. He recognized that many still believed in deities and souls, even in British society of the late nineteenth century. While it is quite obvious that Tylor regarded belief as a form of survival of earlier attitudes, indeed he developed a whole theory of 'survivals', he was no campaigner against religion like, for example, the psychologist Sigmund Freud. For Tylor, religion had emerged through an original belief in powers and souls associated with death and with trying to make sense of the living and the dead. This primitive philosophy, misguided as it was, was a real attempt at self-understanding on the part of humanity. Anthropology could now help educated generations understand these early patterns of thought and ensure that they did not make the same mistake; so, for example, Spiritualism could not be a worthwhile path to self-understanding once it was realized that animism was an early stage of reflection that was now far superseded by anthropological knowledge. As Ann Taves (1999) has shown clearly in her wonderful book on religious experience in the United States, Spiritualism was influential on Tylor's theories of animism because he researched Spiritualist groups and decided to use the word 'animism' only because 'spiritualism' had already gained some popular currency through those groups. She thought that Tylor's reflections on Spiritualism deeply affected what was to emerge as the discipline of anthropology within the intellectually creative decades closing the nineteenth century (181, 199).

Spiritualism

It was precisely in a society in which new knowledge, derived from biology and from anthropology, was making its impact, and traditional religion was under serious criticism, that several groups also became increasingly fascinated both by the wisdom of the East and by Spiritualism in the West, though, as a definite movement, Spiritualism emerged in the United States in 1848 as a result of experiences gained by the Fox family (Nelson, 1969). Thereafter it was taken up in Europe and underwent periods of fluctuation, not least after the First World War when many who had lost husbands, sons and lovers turned to Spiritualism for advice and comfort in trying to contact the dead. It is likely that most Spiritualist meetings will attract a few recently bereaved people to attend in the hope of receiving a message from their dead relative (Martin, 1970: 153).

In this sense Spiritualism is one way, albeit partial, of coping with bereavement as part of a total pattern of death rites complementing the formal ritual of the churches. Within Spiritualism the power of words is, once more, reflected in the way the medium gives a message believed to come from beyond this world. This not only applies to messages concerning death but also addresses the spiritual healing of the living. Vieda Skultans's (1974) study of Spiritualist séances in South Wales affords a clear example of the power of words spoken by mediums and believed to originate in spirits which guarantee that death is not the end of life. In this case the issue of death rites and the power to go on living are closely related; the power of the words comes from the fact that there is another world beyond the present one.

Reincarnation

The broad theme of reincarnation extends far beyond the issue of contacting the dead and continues to be of interest because, while alien to Christian theology, it appears as a belief held by small groups of people across British society today. Amy Simes (1995: 372), one of my own former research students, has shown that practically all who belonged to the contemporary British Pagan groups she studied in the 1990s said they believed in reincarnation, a stance which seems to echo their wider empathy with wider forces of nature. Here reincarnation is not part of a karmic, merit-focused scheme of ethics but more a dynamics of nature and life forces and it is likely that similar ideas motivate other Westerners who find reincarnation attractive, though much more research needs to be done on exactly what people think and feel about reincarnation beliefs. It is very doubtful whether the idea of reincarnation plays the same role within the Western world as it did, and does, in Indian religion as a doctrine of the destiny of the dead holding a central place in the religious traditions, especially of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Reincarnation ran counter to Christian belief in a divinely furnished salvation and also played little part in African and other cultures, where the dead are believed to become ancestors with a realm of their own but also contributing to the continuing communal life of society rather than pursuing their own individual existence after death.

In the East the fundamental significance of reincarnation derived from ideas of merit, evil and salvation. It was because individuals did evil and were thereby unable to attain enlightenment, release or salvation that they were required to live through many existences in order to improve their karma so as ultimately to attain the state of release or salvation. In this sense reincarnation is a negative necessity which offers positive hope for a long-term future. In the West reincarnation seems to provide a wide framework against which this one particular lifetime takes its significance. Its connotations seem to lie less with the negative ideas of evil and morality badly enacted than with a positive sense of depth for the inner life force. Reincarnation becomes a framework for experience rather than an extended path leading to salvation.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Eastern ideas and interest in esotericism led to a growth of concern with reincarnation among some Western elites. The commitment of Theosophy to reincarnation is one example; a much less well-known influence is that of Freemasonry, which does not make the idea a formal part of its world view, for in many ways it is a non-dogmatic movement, but has provided an arena within which some members have been able to speculate on reincarnation (Head and Cranston, 1967: 167). The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or the Bardo Thodol, already discussed more fully in Chapter 5, had been translated into English in 1927 and was influential, not least on the much-read psychologist Carl Jung. It had a rejuvenating influence over the 1960s as a 'guide to altered states of consciousness' (Chidester, 1990: 162), and continues to be regularly published and widely distributed in bookshops. The 1960s heralded a period of interest in Eastern religion in Western Europe and North America, heightening the profit of reincarnation and leading to psychological and other scientific attempts at analysing individuals reckoning to have previous existences. It is a concept that has also been seen to be of use in subsequent debates about feminism (Cranston and Williams, 1984: 296).

Surveying afterlife beliefs

The rest of this chapter is largely concerned with British society rather than specialist esoteric groups and presents the results of several empirical studies of beliefs in life after death, particularly insofar as they deal with reincarnation. The major source of information is the Rural Church Project (Davies et al., 1990). It was assumed when interviewing people or when using questionnaires that the idea of reincarnation as such might not be the best to use. In fact there are grave problems in employing that word because of the point we have already made as to its precise meaning. It may be that those who use the word do so by placing their own meaning upon it to a great extent, certainly not using it in terms of its Indian significance. In terms of our present level of understanding we decided that the expression 'coming back as something or someone else' would be meaningful to people, and in that sense it was assumed that a popular notion of reincarnation existed.

It is worth stressing that reincarnation beliefs, as with beliefs on other topics, can be held speculatively or very firmly; this is why in my own surveys people were asked whether they agreed with a statement about 'coming back as someone or something else', or whether they were unsure, disagreed or did not know about the topic. It is also important to consider the pattern of belief actually held by people, to see how reincarnation beliefs fit in with other attitudes. Beliefs can be he ld, and probably usually are held, in cluster-form rather than in a systematic scheme. My use of the word 'cluster' aims to convey that various beliefs which may have no immediate logical or theological connection with each other are brought together to give the individual a working basis for life. Such beliefs, held in bundles together, may even appear contradictory if spelt out and analysed logically (Davies, 1996a: 23).

The fact that people sometimes seem to hold apparently contradictory beliefs without any sense of dissonance or conflict is worth emphasizing because logical contradiction need not necessarily worry individuals whose varied views are drawn on for different purposes, and in different contexts. The profound significance of context for beliefs cannot be overemphasized, and here I agree with the anthropologist Ioan Lewis (1986: 21) and his exploration of the theme that 'detachment of beliefs from their ambient circumstances produces gross distortion and misunderstanding'. In other words, if we listed the beliefs held by individuals we might well find that they form an odd collection when viewed critically, but within the context of that person's own life history and contemporary life-circumstance they find their natural home and work well. Rory Williams (1990: 131) in his splendid theoretical and empirical study of death among older people in

Aberdeen has shown just how varied, for example, people's attitudes are even to their own dead relatives and their funerary remains, with some being focused on a grave while others prefer to deal with the living.

It is wise to underline this variability because one of the temptations and problems of statistical studies is that the sheer volume of figures can easily give the impression of an absolute or at least of a very fixed pattern of belief among people. People often accumulate their religious view of life under the influence of a wide variety of circumstances, not through formal religious education. This can easily lead to apparent contradictions in what people say, since they may well never have sat down to organize their thought. An awareness of this somewhat arbitrary acquisition of religious dispositions is important for social researchers, whose temptation is to oversimplify in establishing a small number of categories into which to fit the responses people make to questions.

One individual interviewed as part of the Nottinghamshire sample of the Cremation Research Project replied to the question of belief about an afterlife by saying that she had two solutions. On the one hand she thought that a 'soul essence' left the body, but on the other hand she thought that death was simply the end. She was not too sure about things. She 'would love to think your essence goes on', but either way she would be happy. In a final reflection she returned to the idea of the soul-essence going on after death, saying that she thought perhaps she did believe in reincarnation and that she could have been Chinese in an earlier life. This was because she was very keen on Oriental art and life, and hated the Japanese.

This example hints at the probability that while many people simply have no worked-out system of belief concerning the afterlife they may find themselves putting some bits and pieces together when formally interviewed. There are several situations in life when people are pressed into formulating their ideas. Throughout this chapter we have underlined the fact that beliefs often exist as varied clusters of ideas in an individual's life; we have also emphasized the importance of context as drawing upon one aspect of this cluster rather than another. What should, finally, be drawn from these phases of response is the third possibility, namely, that certain contexts help particular configurations of belief to emerge or to become established in people's minds. Being asked to talk about a belief, or feeling it necessary to express a belief, may cause beliefs to become explicit for a person for the first time. This is especially important in a society where religious beliefs are not often discussed in public or even in private, and is even more likely to be the case for people who do not normally attend church and for whom there's no easily available grammar of discourse, or pattern of words, to give voice to what is felt.

Popular British views on reincarnation

Using the phrase 'coming back as something else' rather than the word 'reincarnation', we have found some 12 per cent of the general public in rural areas of Britain claiming some sort of belief in this mode of post-mortem existence (Davies, Watkins and Winter, 1991: 257), while an even more extensive study, in which 1,603 persons were interviewed in their homes in urban areas, also found a 12 per cent agreement with this perspective on death (Davies and Shaw, 1995: 92).

These groups were drawn from random samples of people within a historical culture where there has been no formal support of such ideas and which, in fact, has positive reinforcement from quite a different model of afterlife in the traditional Christian attitude to death. Although it is only speculation, it may be that the term 'reincarnation' and the catch-all phrase 'come back as something else' cover much more than a single concept. For some it may be a perfectly indigenous notion resonating with the cyclical processes of apparent death and rebirth in nature while, for others, it is much more explicitly tinged by Eastern religious ideology.

Other research on this topic presents additional material which helps provide a historical background to these contemporary views. Geoffrey Gorer (1965) carried out two famous studies on aspects of religion in Britain involving surveys conducted in 1950 and 1963. In the 1950 survey less than 1 per cent mentioned reincarnation while in 1963 just over 2 per cent did so (167). These very low levels of explicit belief indicate no more than a variety of outlook that could be expected in a society where some members would inevitably be familiar with beliefs from other parts of the world. Greatly increased familiarity with Indian beliefs took place during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the United States, which probably helps account for reports of a Gallup survey in the United States in 1981 which reflects a group of 23 per cent reckoning to believe in reincarnation; a more recent poll still, in Canada, registered 29 per cent (Harpur, 1991: 74). In the light of the research underlying this book, these levels of belief in North America would not seem to be reflected in Britain. Care is always needed in this kind of survey work to distinguish between those who hold firm beliefs and those who are unsure or do not know. It is sometimes the case that large groups of 'uncertain' responses indicate a degree of change coming about in social attitudes.

One final piece of evidence reinforces this point because it is drawn from the study considered more extensively in Chapter 12 dealing with animal death. There we see a survey of an unrepresentative sample of the public drawn from readers of a specialist dog owners' magazine who were selfmotivated enough to complete a questionnaire published in *Dog World* in June 1992. When asked if they thought that 'people can come back as animals after death' some 14 per cent replied in the affirmative, 49 per cent in the negative, with 35 per cent not knowing and 2 per cent not answering. While the 14 per cent of those who thought this was possible resemble the 12 per cent who agreed with reincarnation in the general public survey of the Rural Church Project already discussed, what makes the pet owners distinctive is that 35 per cent of them were unsure about this compared with 20 per cent uncertainty in the Rural Church survey. This suggests more of an openness to this idea among the pet owners.

The presence of the dead

If some ideas about immortality are derived from the media, popular literature or information from more distant cultures, others come much more directly from people's own experience, not least from those moments when the dead are recalled, remembered or more directly experienced.

In one interview a woman recounted a story told her by her brother. At their grandmother's funeral, while standing at the graveside during the service he actually saw his son who had been torpedoed in 1942 during the war. He 'saw him as real as anybody else'. He subsequently became a medium and a Spiritualist, and the woman interviewed has also come to be firmly convinced in life after death. Numerous other first-hand accounts have also been given of people who have seen relatives either before they die or after death. Quite often people do not know what to make of these moments and have very little formal framework of belief or experience through which to interpret what has happened. Sometimes they think they may be odd or abnormal until they tell of the event to another who may echo a similar experience of their own.

The research of Hay and Heald in 1987 portrays 18 per cent of a general population sample reckoning to have had an awareness of the presence of the dead (Hay, 1990: 83). In my own research focused on 1,603 interviews in 1995 we found that nearly 14 per cent spoke of an occasional experience of the dead, while nearly 9 per cent said they often experienced such contact and 7 per cent had the experience only once (Davies and Shaw, 1995: 96). This means that approximately 35 per cent of this sample of the general public had gained some such sense of the presence of the dead.

One of the most interesting 'literary' cases of a dead person reckoned to have visited a living individual is that of the lay and professional theologians C. S. Lewis and J. B. Phillips. These two individuals are probably among the best-known names of all twentieth-century religious writers as far as the general Christian public is concerned: C. S. Lewis for his extensive fiction and popular theology, and J. B. Phillip for his one-man interpretation of the New Testament. In his book *The Ring of Truth J.* B. Phillips suggests that many who believe in the Communion of Saints must have experienced the sense of nearness of those they love shortly after they have died, if only for a brief moment. This, he says, had happened to him several times. He gives a vivid description of two moments when C. S. Lewis appeared to him. He did not know Lewis well and had only met him once, though they had engaged in a fair amount of correspondence. This is how Phillips (1967: 89–90) described his experience:

A few days after his death, while I was watching television, he 'appeared' sitting in a chair within a few feet of me and spoke a few words ... particularly relevant to the difficult circumstances through which I was passing. ... I had not been thinking of him at all. I was neither alarmed nor surprised ... He was just there. A week later when I was in bed he appeared again ... and repeated the same message which was very important to me at the time.

When Phillips told these experiences to a retired bishop his reply was, 'My dear J. this sort of thing is happening all the time.'

When people reckon to see the dead it is usually within the domestic circle, normally in their own home and in contexts where they were used to seeing the deceased when alive; so in my research, for example, a man whose wife had died two years previously spoke of having 'seen' her twice since her death. On the first occasion he went into his sitting room carrying a piece of toast, something his very organized wife never used to allow, and he saw her 'just sitting in the chair'. It was 'only a flash', but he was very frightened and actually telephoned a friend because 'I didn't think I was normal'. The second occasion of seeing his wife came when he was ill with an infection, and told to stay in bed and take lots of fluid. A neighbour had been bringing him drinks; on one occasion, he heard the sound of a cup and saucer. He turned over in bed and saw his wife standing there in the bedroom with him. Since then he reckons to hear sounds in the house every couple of months and, as he said, he does not mind being watched, so he accepts it. At the time of the funeral he believed that his wife was going from being in his care to being in God's care. Since his wife's death he now believes in ghosts, which he did not before, and is a little puzzled as to what happens to people after death. This is a good example of how personal experience can lead to a reorientation of former belief.

Another individual, a woman this time, whose husband died nearly two years ago, has not experienced him in terms of a presence but she imagines him being there, and sometimes engages in a kind of argument with him 'which is almost real'. He had clear opinions about certain things and she still finds, for example, that 'his preferences in buying biscuits still win'. This individual does not believe in God and sees death as 'like going to sleep'. Her example shows the power of imagination in the post-mortem relations of the living and the dead and is probably closely related to the way in which people talk to the dead when they go to cemeteries to place flowers on graves. A rather different perspective comes in an adult woman whose mother's body had been donated for medical research. The daughter felt that her mother was 'still around' because her body 'wasn't at rest' since it was still with the medical profession and had not yet received a funeral.

Another woman, whose husband had died several years previous to her interview, said that she could still feel him sometimes touch her head. She could smell his cigarettes, could feel him near and could communicate with him. This person was of firm Roman Catholic convictions with a belief in an actual resurrection and a dislike of cremation.

These few cases illustrate how people's beliefs exist in clusters rather than in systematic forms and show how these beliefs are influenced to some degree by the experience of bereavement. They can be complemented by the complex nature of grave decoration that offer both their own private concealment and yet public disclosure of sentiment and significance, as with the example of white marble hands that seem to reach up out of the grave (see Figure 7). To some casual observer this might seem gruesome, yet, unseen in this photograph, close inspection would show the palms of the hands to cup a small statue of a person, perhaps symbolic of the Blessed Virgin, or even of the deceased.



Figure 7 Marble hands, a county Durham Cemetery

Ghosts and near-death experience

Slightly related to the issue of sensing and depicting the dead is the question of ghosts and of near-death experiences with ghosts relating to 'other selves' while near-death experiences focus on oneself in a state apart from its body. It is worth emphasizing that most people who have some sense of the presence of their dead do not seem to interpret the experience in terms of ghosts. It may be that the very idea of a ghost enshrines a degree of impersonality and distance, whereas a sense of the presence of a dead relative is most often interpreted in a distinctly personal way. There is an immediacy and a degree of intimacy about this experience which is absent in the popular notion of ghosts; it is a field meriting considerably more research than has been done to date. Here I think researchers like Rosenblatt (1976) need to appreciate more clearly this distinction between ghosts as relatively impersonal phenomena and the sense of the presence of the familiar dead. While they may be correct in interpreting all such phenomena as 'normal psychological residues that remain after a close social relationship is terminated', they need to be more careful in describing how things appear to people, because it is through that sort of clarity that explanations may be more forthcoming (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson, 1976: 65).

We already know, for example, that rural populations in England display a difference in ghost-belief between the general public at large (29 per cent) and those who are more active members of the Church of England (19 per cent). The same research found the remarkably significant fact that there appeared to be no difference between men and women when it came to belief in ghosts (Davies, Watkins and Winter, 1991: 250). Definite shifts in cultural ideas can lead to different outcomes in belief and practice, as, for example, in contemporary rural Spain, where the anthropologist William Christian (1989: 183) sees changes in attitudes to the soul and death in that 'money in the alms box that used to go for masses to the souls in purgatory ... now goes to the diocesan charity fund'. In contemporary Britain competing interpretations of death are likely to come from both the media and professional experts. The contemporary problem with the realm of grief, ghosts and the presence of the dead is that it occupies a domain torn between film, psychology, religion and the power of personal experience itself.

Many people probably gain their ideas of the afterlife as much from ghost films or science fiction as from the New Testament with, perhaps, the paramedical world linking the two through the two new categories of 'neardeath experience' and 'out of the body experience'. These descriptions of patients' experiences associated with accidents and medical operations have gained wide public attention since the late 1970s and some see them as a real basis for interpreting ideas of the soul and life after death.

While some traditional societies provided their members with categories for interpreting such strange experiences, modem life, by contrast, is often caught in a period of change and uncertainty. Some research suggests that where a cultural interpretation of near-death experience does exist certain individuals may still experience a degree of confusion if their experience differs in some respect from the cultural pattern, as Henry Abramovitch (1988) has suggested within a contemporary Jewish context. Some other research, in America, indicates that people who have undergone such experiences have a subsequent reduced sense of threat from death (Greyson, 1992).

The Christian theologian Paul Badham has placed much weight on the claim that 'if it is possible to present good grounds for believing that consciousness can function apart from the body before death, then it is intelligible to argue that consciousness might function apart from the body' after death' (Badham and Badham, 1984: 14). 'Out of that body' experiences provide him with just such grounds for arguing personal identity continuing apart from embodiment. Badham devotes a chapter to disagreeing with numerous modem theologians including Bultmann, Moltmann, Hartshorne and Pittinger, who, as far as he is concerned, reduce the doctrine of eternal life either to some kind of transformed existence in this world or else to a place within the divine memory. For Badham there needs to be a centre of self-knowledge and awareness continuing from this life to whatever God has planned for the future. Such theological views lie beyond the scope of this book and its comparative framework.

The dead in living memory

Our concern lies more with the distinction between physical and social death, and here, most especially with the part played by memories of the dead within the thought of the living. Physical death is a relatively obvious phenomenon: people die and are declared to be dead by the medical profession, while the legal registration of death marks officialdom's recognition of the change that has occurred in society. Those few painful

cases where victims of accident or illness lie comatose and even 'brain dead' raise crucial issues over death and identity which most people never have to face. If the relationship between brain death and the final death of the rest of the body raises both ethical and existential problems for a few unfortunate families, the undoubted physical death of someone in relation to their death in the memory of the living raises several emotional, psychological and theological issues for perhaps a majority of bereaved families in the country.

Those who are physically dead can still play a part in the conversation and history of a family as of their place of work or leisure; it may take some time for a physically dead person to 'die' in a sociological sense. While a few belong to influential groups in society and continue to live 'in history' for a very long time indeed, most ordinary citizens are unlikely to influence more than one or two generations after their death. Still, the two categories of physical and social death are slightly inadequate for dealing with the spectrum of relationships between the dead and the living. To compensate for this, a third category, that of 'death in memory', might be a useful addition to the analysis. Physical death is followed by social death which, in turn, is subsequently followed by death in the memory of the survivors. This last phase may take a considerable time and may never actually take place at all as far as certain surviving partners are concerned. This is perfectly intelligible if the identity of the living is partly composed of experiences and memories of the dead. With this in mind we return to the Nottinghamshire survey, which included questions exploring the identity of the dead within the identity of the survivors (Davies et al., 1990).

Reminders of the dead

The first question concerned things reminding the bereaved of their dead. The majority, 58 per cent, felt that physical objects and situations stimulated memory, while another important group, 17 per cent, found that spontaneous memories served as reminders; 13 per cent found that particular people reminded them of the dead relative; for a surprisingly small 5 per cent it was the occurrence of anniversaries which served that purpose. A final 7 per cent did not respond to this question. There is, as might be expected, and as these responses show, a great variety among bereaved people as to what calls back m emories and images of the dead.

Much depends on the closeness of the prior relationship, most especially whether, as in the case of spouses, people shared the same living accommodation.

Though very little is known in detail about this complex area it is likely that two people bereaved of a third individual will have very different patterns of reminders. The spouse continuing in the family home has the constant environment of remembrance around her or him, while the party living elsewhere, say an adult child married and with their own family, may have quite a different set of memories either in the mind or, for example, in the appearance of one of the children who is a reminder of the dead grandmother. Some cross-cultural research has shown that these links with the dead can be broken to the advantage of some people. Such 'tie-breaking' as it has been called, has been seen, in North America, to foster new patterns of behaviour after bereavement, especially helping someone thinking of remarriage (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson, 1976: 67–85).

Cremation and memory

Given the fact that there is a popular attitude in Britain which sees cremation as making it harder to have a concrete memorial to the dead in contrast to the fixity of a grave, we asked people if they felt that cremation had affected their memory of the dead in a way that burial would not have done. A large percentage of respondents, 86 per cent in all, thought that there was no difference between burial and cremation as far as their memory of the deceased was concerned. This is perhaps a surprising result and may hint at the part played by memory and the domestic realm of remembrance quite aside from any formal memorial to the dead. A small 7 per cent thought cremation did affect the memory, while a final 8 per cent did not know. It seems that the role of the dead in the life of the living is complex and many-layered. When asked more specifically what part the dead play in their present lives some 66 per cent of survivors said it involved an occasional memory, while 18 per cent said they played no part and 7 per cent thought that their children somehow expressed the life of the dead relative. A final 10 per cent had nothing to say on this aspect of life.

Dreams of the dead

Dreams are one significant means of survivors relating to their dead. When asked if they remembered dreaming of the dead, 63 per cent said they could not, while 37 per cent said they could remember such dreams. There was no indecision on this question: people were able to answer yes or no fairly directly. The majority of dreamers had seen the dead in a positive or pleasing way, and for a few, the dreams were thought of as therapeutic. For only two individuals (3.2 per cent) were the dreams bad. By and large the dead appeared to be 'alive and well' in these dreams according to 23 per cent of the total group interviewed, but most people had no comment on this topic (Franz, 1986).

Very few were able to suggest reasons for their dream. About 8 per cent felt it might have been particular places or situations which had triggered them, and 3 per cent thought it might have been due to talking to specific people. Nobody thought that it was the occurrence of an anniversary that had triggered their dreams. One woman had not dreamed of her mother for a very long time but had started dreaming of her just before she had been contacted for this research. These recent dreams had made her think it was time for her to die herself, not least because her dead mother seemed to be calling to her. 'She is coming to fetch me' said the daughter, who was not in the least frightened by these thoughts: 'These are pleasant dreams and I look forward to them.'

Another woman, forty-four years of age, saw one dream in particular linking with her belief that 'death is not the end'. She is not sure whether to interpret her experience as a dream as such, as her account makes clear. Her 'dream' could be reproduced for several other people. 'Before my father died I had several dreams relating to his dying and after it was all over I had a pleasant one telling me not to worry any more. They are like dreams, but I can still remember it now some 15 years later, whereas ordinary dreams you can't always remember once you are awake.'

Visitations by the dead

It is for want of a better phrase that we now go on to speak of visitations by the dead in the phenomenon of sensing the presence of the dead apart from dreams. Anecdote and informal conversations with people suggested the idea of a survey question, the actual format of which may be open to criticism in that it might seem to foster the idea of such occurrences. The question posed was, 'Some people say that they have experienced the presence of a dead loved one shortly after their death. Has this ever happened to you?' Individuals did not seem to be pressed by the question into giving a positive answer, nor did they find the question odd. Just over a half of those interviewed had never experienced a sense of encounter with the dead but the rest had gained some sort of experience which they believed involved an encounter or communication with a dead person. As far as the individual is concerned, these visitations, as I have called them, are quite different from dreams. This is an important point and is one reason why we deal with visitations as a different category from dreams. The major basis of the distinction lies in the fact that visitations take place during the waking state and not during sleep. By and large they involve a sense of the presence of the other person, but for a significant minority the visitation is visual and they see the person concerned; on some rare occasions a voice is heard or some sort of communication is felt to take place.

Cleiren's (1991: 129) Leiden study showed that fourteen months after a death about a third of the bereaved people studied felt a sense of the presence of the dead and also 'talked' to the dead either vocally or in a silent inner 'conversation'. Finucane's (1982: 223) interesting historical analysis of the way in which the ghostly dead appear to the living illustrates the point that up to the eighteenth century ghosts adopted an ordinary vocal quality while by the twentieth century they tend to be mute. Still, since relatively little systematic work has been done on post-mortem visitations, it is worth recording here what people said about their own experience in the Nottinghamshire research.

The simplest form of this sensation is expressed by the person who said of her mother 'I feel the home is full of her presence, not in an apparition sense.' Similarly, a widow said she often felt her husband's presence alongside her, especially when something was on her mind. A relatively similar picture came from a person who said that every now and again she felt that someone was behind her; this she felt was a comforting presence but not of anyone in particular. It would be interesting to know how widespread an experience this is in society at large, quite apart from periods of bereavement, and how it might come to be associated with a particular person at the time of a death. As far as context is concerned it seems to be very largely that of the family house. These are almost exclusively domestic experiences; they are experiences of persons in a familiar place. The precise time and situation vary, as with one person whose stepmother was 'sensed' a couple of months after her death while the respondent was cleaning her teeth. One respondent contacted during the pilot stage of this research was keenly interested in Spiritualism and said he often felt the presence of dead people and, because of his Spiritualist interests, was able to give names to the states and conditions they inhabited.

Seeing the dead

Sometimes sensing the presence of the dead is associated with other sensations. One person said she often felt the presence of her dead mother and often thinks that she both has 'a fleeting glimpse' of her and hears her voice. This case presents only a slight and almost indirect sense of sight. Another woman had a clear sense both of the presence of her dead grandfather and of then seeing him sitting in a chair. Yet another person 'experienced an apparition of mother years after her death. Feel she came to tell me something but don't know what. Don't feel it's finished yet, I expect to "see" her again.'

The word 'apparition' seemed to be used by people discussing this subject, and without any implicit negative connotation. It is interesting that people practically never used the word 'ghost' when they referred to sensing their own relations. There might be many reasons for this, including the fact that fear only occasionally or initially enters into the experience. For example, one woman had both experienced the presence of her father and seen him sitting in a chair. She said she was not at all frightened and actually had been comforted by it. But the interview situation may differ from ways of talking in public. There are no established formulae for talking about visitations. This was brought out very well in one particular case already cited – that of the man who walked into his sitting room carrying a piece of toast and saw his wife sitting in a chair. The second time he saw his wife was in the bedroom. He was frightened after the first sighting, but after talking about it with a friend who believed in ghosts, he found the courage not to mind the experience the second time.

Another woman said she had regular apparitions of her grandfather, sometimes at times of stress. She never felt they were a threat; instead, they

gave strength and support.

These experiences resemble those discussed in Chapter 12 on pet death, where some animal owners report an occasional sense of the presence of their dead pets. It is interesting that animals may also fall into the category of 'significant others' whose loss is much grieved but whose presence is occasionally felt by the bereaved.

Talking to the dead

Talking to the dead can perhaps be best considered by linking it with the two different contexts of the memorial site and the domestic world. The crematorium garden of remembrance and the family home are two key memory-rich environments, while visits to graves and locations of cremated remains also permit 'conversations' with the dead associated with grave-tidying and flower-arranging. By contrast, many of the encounters with the dead already described in this chapter took place within the domestic sphere of home and its daily life.

In Britain crematoria gardens of remembrance and cemeteries possess obvious formal cues to memory and, though very public, they facilitate private remembering. These are recognized places where people may be alone with their thoughts. But the dead are not simply recalled on entering the garden of remembrance and forgotten on leaving it. The domestic sphere is, if anything, an even more evocative environment for the bereaved. One typical person had initially sensed the dead father's presence 'not in a supernatural way' and had often 'talked' to him. These moments had been comforting but after a period of time they ceased because 'dependence had faded'. Another individual was sure that she had spoken to her dead husband once, and once only. She stressed that it was to him and to no one else that she had spoken; the sense of active communication was strong.

Physical and auditory awareness

It is quite rare for people to experience being physically touched by someone who has died. One woman, already mentioned, said she sometimes feels her deceased husband touching her head. She can smell his cigarettes and feels she can communicate with him. This individual had, in fact, practised a six-month or so period of mourning moving from the wearing of black, through greys, to normal clothing. The period of social mourning did not seem to lead to a decline in her sense of her husband's presence. She stressed that he loved him now as much as or even more than before his death.

A couple of individuals linked the idea of speaking to the dead with the notion of hearing the voice of a living person who was still alive but far from the hearer. One person heard her mother-in-law call out twice just before she suffered a heart attack. Another individual 'had a premonition' of her grandmother's death and then had a 'vision' of her the night she died, but has seen nothing since.

In general people who have had experiences of the dead, whether by sense, sight, sound or dream, tend to find the experience comforting and supportive. A couple of cases reported an initial fear, but this seemed to change into an acceptance of a more positive kind if the experience was repeated. One individual, on the contrary, did experience a dead father's presence and felt that he had wanted to 'get in touch' with the living; the survivor was distressed by this and tried not to encourage the contact in any way. By contrast, another married woman said she had never had this experience and was disappointed. Both at the time of her mother's death and subsequently on its anniversary she had 'tried to experience' her mother's presence. This indicates the positive value which many have found through visitations and which this person felt she was missing.

A rather different set of motives was found in a case of a woman who had never experienced a sense of contact but who related the fact that her dead mother had threatened to come back to haunt her. This, she added, was a very cruel thing for someone to say, but despite the promise, no visitation had occurred. Another individual, a nurse and familiar with death, said she had, in a light-hearted way, visited a clairvoyant after the death of her father but was surprised at the degree of knowledge of family relationships which seemed to emerge. A different case emerged with a woman who said she had not felt the presence of anyone in this way but she did feel that her aunt was 'still around' in some sense because that aunt had given her body for medical research. The decision about the donation had caused some family disagreement. One man similarly reported that he felt a fellow soldier who had been killed was 'still around'. While these varied reports of encounters with the dead in Britain touch on numerous emotions, fear seems, generally, not to be one of them. Though there may be a sense of surprise and astonishment, and also of concern as to the significance of an encounter, people do not seem to live in fear of reprisal or punishment from the dead. Through these many forms of contact, individuals may often gain an impression of the reality of an afterlife, albeit vague. The occasions when they occur may often elicit some verbal comment or gain significance when reported to another. In these various ways experiences engender words against death which may become tremendously important for the individual or family concerned. While they may not be part of public memorials or formal systems of belief they remain powerful in their effect.

Grief and belief

One final aspect of the sense of the presence of the dead develops the topic of those who reckon to 'see' or sense the deceased in ways that persuade them that the 'dead' still actually exist in some way or other. More than that, this view also asks what the wider, social, consequences of such an experience might be, especially as far as religion is concerned.

One such perspective comes to sharp focus in Jack Kent's book *The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth* (1999). Drawing on a relatively limited amount of empirical information, he argues that the resurrection appearances detailed in the New Testament are, in fact, examples of grief hallucinations. Ideas of the resurrection of Jesus, on Kent's evaluation, are the outcome of grief-laden disciples whose anxieties lead them to an experience which they believe to be the real and actual presence of Christ but which is, essentially, a product of their own emotional and mental states. Over time these experiences come to gain the status of doctrines and serve as the basis of the religion. In effect Kent is arguing for the power of memories and of creative imagination in the earliest Christian group that then take more formal shape over time. For him anxiety over mortality is a problem that each person has to solve and he sees this resolution, whatever its content, as a form of faith (115).

Doubtless it is a matter of faith as to how people react to such a theory, but what is certain is that the central rites of Christianity give considerable emphasis to memory and seek to participate in the history of the community. The past is of great significance for the present and for the motivation of life for the future.

Pet and animal death

Pet and This chapter presents some new information on the death of pets and extends our earlier discussions of human identity in relation to funeral rites to show how, in cultures such as that of Great Britain, certain animals are drawn into circles of human association to such an extent that when they die the human response is to provide a funeral rite analogous to that following a human death. This is not only because of the bonds that are severed when a pet dies but also because pets contribute towards the sense of identity of their owners. The death and funerals of pets can, to some degree, trigger some of the words against death which human death provokes. Surprisingly, perhaps, this chapter will conclude by also considering what loosely might be called 'robotic death'.

While we may guess that animals have been the companions of mankind for much of our racial history, we know that certain beasts have been singled out for special treatment, as with the sacred cow in India to this very day. In ancient Egypt there was a cult of sacred bulls, which were mummified and given elaborate burial in underground tombs, as were certain other animals, including hawks, ibises and baboons, all reckoned to have some relationship with deities (Spencer, 1982: 195ff.).

In more recent centuries particular animals have been favoured and brought into an even closer relationship with human beings. The historian Keith Thomas (1983) gave three features to European pets in terms of the way people treat them. First, they are allowed into the house and often live in very close proximity to their owners. As part of this relationship they are, second, very often given an individual personal name, and third, they are placed in a group of animals which are usually not eaten (112). He even outlines a theological discussion of whether animals possess souls or might share in a future life, a question debated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and to which we return below. He suggests that these issues 'made more headway in England than anywhere else at this period' (140).

It is the case today that, in the closeness of relationship between people and animals, pets are often treated as though they were substitute persons, living in the same social space as their owners, eating specially prepared food and answering to their personal names. It is telling that a serious newspaper article on how middle-aged Britons might consider their social usefulness for their older decades should begin thus: 'With hefty veterinary bills, worries at work, and boomerang children ... people in their sixth decade may feel they have enough to fret about without reinventing themselves' (Oliver Moody, 2016: 3). That 'hefty veterinary bills' should begin that article marks the reality of economic costs involved in pet owning during what is an increasingly veterinarized society. Yet, this marks a contemporary level of contact, intimacy and concern. It is not surprising, then, that when pets die, owners are affected both in their private lives and in their more public sense of identity, as daily life now lacks the pattern of feeding, walking, stroking or talking to the pet.

This makes it clear why many owners want to treat their dead pet with a degree of care and not like some wild animal whose dead body is worthless. It also suggests that the provision of a pet funeral might be added to Keith Thomas's list of the ways in which pets are treated. It would even be possible to create a scale measuring the degree of identity owners confer upon their pets by ranking the number of different attitudes held towards the animal, including whether a funeral was provided for the pet and how its subsequent grave or remains were treated.

For many young people living in modem urban contexts the death of a pet is also likely to be the first experience of any sort of death they have encountered, apart from images in film or television (Nieburg and Fischer, 1982). This is true not only for young children and teenagers but also for many young adults, and some have suggested that the experience of pet death can be used to encourage young children to think about death in general, though there are real ethical problems of disturbing children with what can be seen as premature thoughts on this topic (Leaman, 1995: 90). Caution is proper in this area because many people aged under forty or so in modem Western societies have not experienced personal bereavement and may feel incompetent on the topic of death. In an idealistic way, their wish to discuss death with children may reflect their own curiosity. Still, that is not to say that there will not be perfectly proper contexts in which some discussion of dead pets with children would be a valuable part of lifeexperience, especially if it is not pressed into some formal and systematic account of death and dying. Many people experience and make sense of death, whether of animals or persons, in ways that are appropriate to them and not by means of some systematic psychological, religious or philosophical belief.

Certainly, some younger people do draw on their experience of pet death until their first experience of intimate human loss. One example of several I have recorded involved a young person sympathizing with an older man on the loss of his aged parent by saying that he had lost his pet dog and knew how sad the bereaved person must now feel. Though extremely well intentioned, it is perfectly understandable that the bereaved individual felt the comparison slightly ill drawn. Still, individuals can only speak in terms of their own experience, and sympathy is valuable even if, at times, potentially inappropriate. Just how sympathies may be best expressed is no easy issue in complex and changing social worlds, even more academically speaking, the 'sociology of condolence' remains in its infancy (Tony Walter, 1998: 85).

Indeed, there is no guarantee that the death of a pet will not mean a great deal to some people, just as the loss of a human relative might involve relatively little emotional disturbance for others. Pet death and human loss can be interlinked, one echoing the other, as when an elderly woman's husband died, leaving her to live alone except for the family dog which had been part of the close relationship between her and her husband. In some sense, her husband's identity was continued in the pet relationship the surviving spouse possessed with the dog. Indeed, the dog was a major element in supporting her in her bereavement. When that dog then died just a couple of years later, the women was deeply distressed and, in one sense, lost not only her pet dog but also an important link with her husband. This kind of pet death causes a form of what we might call 'echoing grief' from a previous human death. In such a case it is perfectly understandable that the owner would want some sort of funeral for her dog. This kind of significance of a pet for an elderly person living alone was briefly mentioned by the psychologist James Averill (1968: 726) some time ago. Such cases will probably be familiar to many people, and underlie the growth of pet cemeteries and crematoria in many urban areas. It is with these emotions in mind that we turn to consider an empirical study focusing on the death of pet dogs and cats as the pets which seem to enter into closer relationships with people in Western societies.

The death of dogs and cats

From these broad generalizations we turn to more empirical information on human responses to the death of pets by drawing on a survey of dog and cat owners carried out in 1990 by Laura and Martyn Lee and published in the book *Absent Friend: Coping with the Loss of a Treasured Pet* (1992). I was involved in analysing much of the data used, which were drawn from over 900 questionnaires and outlined in the final part of that book (132ff.). Though the material is not in any true sense representative of the British public, because the responses came from readers of the specialist magazine *Dog World* of June 1990, it was the first large study of pet death carried out in the UK.

With due caution we stress that those taking part possessed a deep interest in animals, particularly dogs and cats, and we expect their responses to reflect this strong commitment. The results showed that 36 per cent of dog owners and 25 per cent of those owning cats had engaged in some sort of animal funerary rite, cremation being most common, with 34 per cent of their dogs and 22 per cent of their cats being cremated. In about a third of all these pet deaths owners sought an individual cremation with the ashes being returned to them, reflecting the trend of treating dead animals like dead humans. Throughout the early twenty-first century the number of pet crematoria has grown considerably in the UK and beyond, matching the 'funeral' style of animals with those of many humans.

Pet cemeteries are also increasingly common. One early case may be found in Northumberland Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, established by the local town council in 1949 after a prompt by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA). Many of its headstones express the emotional attachment of human to companion animal as the following show so clearly. One is dedicated to 'Our Darling Cat Snooky' who had given '10 years of love and happiness' (see Figure 8), another stands 'In Fondest Memory' of Toodles Leake who had reached the age of twelve and a half (see Figure 9), while yet another marker is dedicated to Pat Pells, 'Our Loving and Faithful Pet', whose dates, 1946–59, are given much as a deceased relative's would be (see Figure 10). Sometimes the identity of the pet as either dog or cat is given and sometimes not, sometimes the family name of the owners is appended thus including the pet as a family member. It would take some local knowledge, however, to discern that the memorial for Bambi (see Figure 11), 'A beautiful lady' who died just after Christmas in 1957, was, in fact, for a deer fawn that had been looked after locally before it died.

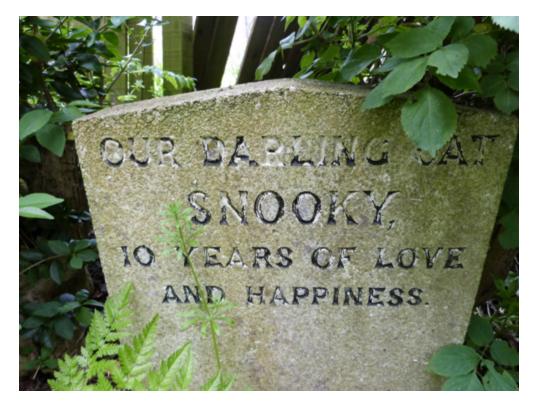


Figure 8 'Our Darling Cat Snooky', Northumberland Park



Figure 9 'In Fondest Memory' of Toodles Leake, Northumberland Park



Figure 10 'Our Loving and Faithful Pet' Pat Pells, Northumberland Park

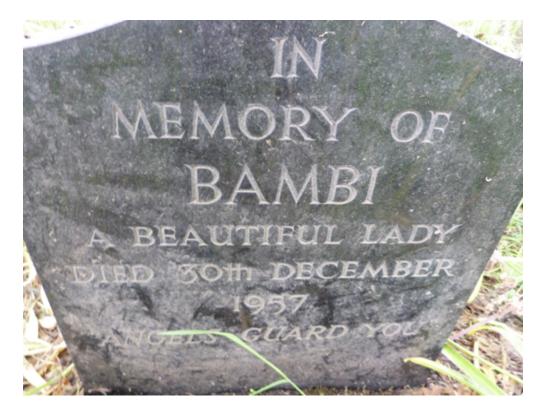


Figure 11 Bambi, 'A beautiful lady', Northumberland Park

These headstones bring pet deaths within the orbit of family loss and, in terms of the survey material already discussed, some three-quarters of the respondents felt that the death of their pet revived memories of previous bereavements not only of pets but also of human loss. Indeed, a small group of 13 per cent of dog owners and 18 per cent of cat owners said they had taken time off work as a result of their pet's death with 10 per cent saying they had consulted a doctor as a result of the death. Practically 75 per cent of dog and cat owners said they felt devastated when their pet died.

These results led to a further questionnaire, in collaboration with Laura and Martyn Lee, which resulted in responses from 234 pet-owning readers of *Dog World* in 1992. Pursuing the theme of funerary rites, just over half, 55 per cent, of the respondents said they would use a pet cemetery if there was one near to their home, nearly 30 per cent said they would not use such a place and about 15 per cent did not know what they would do. What is interesting, in relation to Keith Thomas's earlier historical information, was that 77 per cent of these animal lovers reckoned that animals did have souls. There was a relatively close relationship between what people thought about life after death for humans and life after death for animals. Although this evidence is drawn from a very self-selected sample of people it probably does reflect a growing link between humans and animals in modern urban society, and certainly in Great Britain. It also puts down an 'animal-human' marker for the later 1990s, prior to the increasingly popular academic focus on an 'animal-turn' of interest in the early twenty-first century. As people become increasingly concerned with the natural environment and, for example, oppose factory-farming methods of raising animals for human consumption, they increasingly treat animals as humans, with death rites providing a convenient index of this aroused consciousness.

Human and animal remains

The fact that both humans and animals can be easily cremated results in some pet owners requesting that their pet's cremated remains be kept and either buried or placed with their own remains at some future date. The similarity between human and animal ashes facilitates this symbolic unity of owner and pet after death. The merging of ashes reflects a kind of merging of identity between owner and pet, something made possible by cremation in a way that could never be achieved by burial.

Symbolic animals

While animals can help form the network of relationships underlying daily existence, they can, in more abstract ways, also help people reflect on their own human life (Cusack and Smith, 1984). The anthropologist Claude-Lévi-Strauss (1962: 89) once argued that certain natural objects, places and animals were, as he put it, 'good to think'. So, for example, gardens are not just peaceful places but they may also help some people reflect on the idea of peace, of order, of paradise and heaven. In this way physical realities help people come to grips with abstract ideas. From what we have already said, it is obvious that pet death furnishes such opportunity for reflecting on human death. But animal deaths extend beyond those of pets, to include the killing and preservation of rare species, the hunting of animals as sport or killing them for meat or sacrifice. Each employs death rites of various kinds which reflect human attitudes to both life and death, and now, perhaps for the first time in human history, tremendous differences are emerging between groups over these very issues. In Europe, for example, there are

those who oppose bullfighting, foxhunting, bird-shooting and the killing of animals for food, while others accept all these pursuits and might even use animals in various festivals in ways others regard as cruel. If we extended examples across the world we would find a very great deal to say about contrasting attitudes to animal welfare as well as to human self-reflection o n death and the rhetoric of death in the broader sense.

In terms of religious belief Hindus have long venerated the cow, while the Parsees have an almost complete rule against harming any living thing except for a category of animals regarded as an expression of evil, such as frogs. Christian theology, by contrast, is only just getting to grips with the issues of stewardship for the world of nature and the ethics of vegetarianism (Moltmann, 1985; Deane-Drummond, 1993). Pet death, having remained a relatively untouched topic, is now increasingly being researched especially in the United States and Japan (Archer and Winchester, 1994; McNicholas et al., 2005).

Pet death is a theme that increasingly appears in the media as part of a wider publicity of death and bereavement in modern society. Several pet cemeteries and crematoria in Britain have hit the headlines with their newsworthy combination of meeting a real need and a sentimentalizing of animal death. The Cambridge Pet Crematorium and Cemetery has featured as a major story in the Radio Times (27 April 1991) along with an extensive documentary. The owner not only cremates pets but allows owners to watch the cremation and to take the cremated remains away with them in specially made boxes closely resembling small coffins. Among a growing number of other examples it is worth citing the Tokyo-based Jippo pet funeral service, which provides the facility of special vans 'decorated with a fairy-tale scene of green pastures and blue skies'. The entire service, from the placing of the body in its casket, its cremation within the van furnished with cremation facilities, a memorial service for the eulogized pet, to the return of its ashes, takes about an hour (Funeralis, April 1990). Among the less well-used services, so far at least, are those of the American Summum Company, which specializes in mummification and the provision of decorated sarcophagi whether for animals or humans (*Economist*, 23 February 1991). Because the way people think of animals and of pet death in particular may well reflect their deeper concerns on human death, we will devote most of the rest of this chapter to presenting more detail from our 1992 survey with some additional material drawn from the earlier work as appropriate.

Surveying pet death, 1992

Returning to our 1992 survey, we have a group of some 234 people of whom the great majority, 91 per cent, were women. Just over half of all respondents, 56 per cent, were married, a small group of 6 per cent were widowed, 8 per cent were divorced, while a large 30 per cent were single. A total of 30 per cent reckoned to belong to a religious group and 60 per cent said they believed in life after death; only 15 per cent said they did not so believe, while 25 per cent remained uncertain. These responses are not surprising, given that women usually believe in life after death more frequently than do men.

The distinctive feature of this survey concerned views on animals, their nature and destiny, and owners' responses to their pets' death. As already emphasized, this is no random sample of the population, not least from being very largely composed of pet-keeping women. It is also, very obviously, restricted to those who buy and read the magazine *Dog World*, and further to those who felt suitably motivated to complete and return the questionnaire. The one major advantage of these attributes is that this is as strong a group of animal lovers as one might expect to find in the general population; the disadvantage is that their responses cannot be ascribed to the general public at large or to people outside England.

Animal souls

The idea of the soul is one of the longest-standing philosophical notions still existing in modern life, as detailed in Chapters 5, 8 and 11. From Plato and the classical thought of ancient Greece and Rome, through mixed references in the New Testament and the debates of the early Church Fathers, to the high point of Thomas Aquinas, the soul has been identified as a locus of life and individuality, and as an arena of divine influence. Despite the high profile of resurrection belief in connection with a new 'body', as taught in early Christianity, the idea of the soul has not only held its place but has increased in significance over the past thousand years. Indeed, contemporary Christians give much more emphasis to the soul as the vehicle of immortality than they do to the body and the doctrine of the resurrection.

It is against this background that we consider the idea of souls in relation to animals. Despite the intrinsic vagueness of the idea of the soul and the complexity of its use in the human setting, we decided to ask pet owners if they thought that animals possessed souls. By implication this referred more to their own pets than to the realm of the animal kingdom at large. Keith Thomas (1983: 139) has showed that even in 'the later seventeenth century many otherwise orthodox clergy regarded the issue of animal immortality as entirely open'. He regards centuries of pet-keeping in Great Britain as an important experiential background to the popular view that animals are more than mere brutes, but even scripture, especially the Psalms, played a part in ascribing to the beasts a sense of praise towards God.

Returning to the 1990s, it is not entirely clear just what the word 'soul' means to people, as two particular questions showed rather clearly. To explore these two questions is to see the subtlety which any research needs when teasing out the emotional and philosophical dimensions embraced by this word of many meanings. So, for example, in response to the question 'Do you think animals have souls?', 77 per cent said yes, they did, 6 per cent said no, while 15 per cent said they did not know. This seems to be a very clear response with a very high level of support for the idea that animals have souls: relatively few were undecided on the issue, and fewer still disagreed with it. But we should not infer from this that animal souls are assumed to confer immortality upon pets, for when asked directly if they believed in an afterlife for animals, 56 per cent said they did, 15 per cent said they did not, while 28 per cent were unsure or did not know. The table below schematizes these results, and includes a final row showing what these people thought about belief in human afterlife.

	Yes	No	Don't know	Missing	Total (%)
Souls in animals	77	6	15	2	100
Animal afterlife	56	15	28	2	100
Human afterlife	60	15	24	1	100

These results suggest that the idea of the soul serves more than one purpose in these individuals' reflection on animal life. The discrepancy between the 77 per cent who said they thought animals possessed souls and the 56 per cent who thought that life after death was open to animals suggests that possession of a soul is not always equated with belief in an immortal soul, certainly as far as animals are concerned. So it would seem that to say something has a soul is different from saying that it will have an afterlife. At one level, the idea of a soul may simply be a shorthand way of ascribing a sense of depth to life, whether it be animal or human. In this sense 'soul' resembles the use of the word 'spiritual' when applied to express aesthetic, humane or profoundly artistic values. 'Soul' refers to the depth of relationship which some people have with their pets and should not be underestimated in its significance for people. One good example of the depth of quality of a person and pet lies in Lesley Winton's (2013) account of her life with her Labrador, Holly. Her book is nothing less than a combination of human autobiography and animal biography, accounting for what we might almost describe as a 'pet-self', an identity in which two interacting 'animals' forge a relationship. The human partner speaks of Holly as possessing 'an understanding and a quiet wisdom. An ability to change lives without even realising she was doing it' (ix).

Such life-stories highlight ordinary experience to teach that some people have profound relationships with their pets and are deeply affected by their death. When a pet has to be 'put to sleep' the owners may feel a sense of guilt (Patricia Morris, 2012a), and emotional tensions arising from the process itself (Patricia Morris, 2012b). One may also wonder at how the experience of having one's companion animal 'put down' might prompt a person's reflection on the increasingly prevalent cultural engagement with human euthanasia.

As for many children the death of a much-loved pet may lay the foundation for some small grasp of the nature of grief. Research simply reinforces and gives a sense of additional perspective to this fact of life. These relationships with pets are obvious if we sketch from the earlier 1990 survey the facts that 55 per cent of dog owners and 44 per cent of cat owners celebrated their pets' birthdays, that 77 per cent reckoned their cats slept on owners' beds, as did 48 per cent of dog owners. Approximately 80 per cent of these pet owners were aware of the anniversary of the death of their pet. Practically all talked to their pets and also reckoned that their pets

were members of the family; it was possible to break down this sense of membership so that dogs and cats (in brackets below) were said to be:

- equal adult members of the family: 19 per cent (23 per cent);
- junior members of family: 25 per cent: (25 per cent);
- animal members of family: 54 per cent (51 per cent).

It is within this context of perceived relationship with pets that we can understand both the sense of grief on the pet's death and the way in which pets were reckoned to have souls. We have already seen that the word 'soul' can also carry a belief in life after death for animals, but there is another dimension to belief in life after death which emerges from the 1992 survey and the question 'Do you think people can come back again as animals after death?' Some 14 per cent said yes, 49 per cent said no, 37 per cent didn't know and 2 per cent made no reply. Given that this sample is so highly biased to pet owners, to those believing in life after death, to those affirming an extensive belief in animal souls and to women, who often report higher incidence of religious belief than men, we can be fairly sure that this 14 per cent belief in the possibility of human reincarnation as animals is about as high as one might expect it to be in contemporary British society.

The following brief list of some comments made on the questionnaire returns will give a sense of the variety of beliefs about animals' afterlife and the sense of loss at their death:

- 'Animals go to heaven of Francis of Assisi and then return to earth later.'
- 'Spirits or souls rest where they were happiest in life.'
- 'Their spirit carries on to a further plane where they are reunited with their family.'
- 'I like to think life continues the same in a perfect world free from pain and evil, a duplicate perfect world so no one knows they've died.'
- 'The dog's spirit leaves the body as energy and links up with the universal pool of energy of other souls.'
- 'They become wild flowers and trees. To become the beauty that they once were.'

- 'Death is the end, but memories keep the love-feelings alive.'
- As in the case of human bereavement, explored in Chapter 11, some individuals also talk of having sensed the presence of their dead pet, as these quotations indicate.
- 'Their spirit is still with us.'
- 'They keep with their owner have seen two of my dogs after they have died.'
- 'Hear and feel their presence.'
- 'Heard some sounds letting me know he wanted to go out feet pattering etc. the day after he died.'

There is little doubt that these acts of memory closely resemble reported experiences of the human dead and reflect the power of an environment to trigger imagination rendered sensitive through bereavement. The way in which the death of pets fits into the overall scheme of human bereavement should not be ignored, for it affords a window into the significance of relationships for particular individuals. And, as already suggested, attitudes to the death of pets are also one way of reflecting on wider attitudes to human life and death.

Bereavement and pet death

Three questions in the 1992 questionnaire directly addressed the subject of bereavement in a section headed 'Bereavement Support'. The first asked if people thought bereavement support necessary when someone's pet died, the second inquired whether support would be used if available, while the third asked if people would be prepared to pay for professional support. The results showed that a high 74 per cent thought that support is necessary; 63 per cent felt they would use it themselves, while precisely 50 per cent said they would be prepared to pay for bereavement support. There is a natural progression here from half of all the respondents who felt they would be prepared to pay for support through to practically three-quarters of the whole group who felt that support was necessary. People obviously hope that their family and friends would provide the succour needed, but it is interesting that as many as 50 per cent felt that it would be worth paying for professional bereavement support. More recent research has shown the

importance of vets in relation to owners' grief at pet loss (Patricia Morris, 2012a; Fernandez-Mehler et al., 2013).

Echoing grief

It is very likely that the experience of bereavement shares in the nature of many other deep experiences acquired throughout life. Some anthropologists have emphasized the importance of memories and of the moods which are deposited, as it were, around those memories in our grasp of the past. This kind of mood-memory is part and parcel of the way symbols operate within our experience, influencing future encounters and, in turn, being influenced by them (Sperber, 1975).

Theoretically speaking, grief may be said to lie closer to symbolic knowledge in human beings than it does to our encyclopaedic knowledge. Each experience of grief influences earlier experiences, and in turn is influenced by them. The death of a long-loved spouse or a mother's loss of a child expresses some of the profoundest kinds of grief; the loss of a child's goldfish, by contrast, would probably mean nothing to a friend of the family, but to the child whose goldfish has died the loss might be considerable. This becomes all the more obvious when we consider an elderly person living alone whose dog is now her only constant companion. In terms of relationships this dog is the one whose presence is most constant, and whose needs in terms of food, grooming and exercise are a significant component in the life of the woman concerned. But of even greater significance is the fact that her dog has actively shared in the life of its owner, so that when it dies it is no surprise to find her with a deep sense of loss, given that her daily social world has involved, if not actually centred on, her canine companion.

The place of pets in Britain, especially in urban and suburban life, is reflected in the 1990 survey, which showed that some 68 per cent of dog and 61 per cent of cat owners said they had received emotional support in general on the death of their pet. At the family level, 74 per cent of both dog and cat owners said they had felt supported by other members of the family when the animal had died. It is, perhaps, of sociological interest to note that on this and other questions the dog is always slightly more a 'social' animal than the cat. A dog's death is likely to have more social consequence than the death of a cat, not least because it lives a more directly social life in terms of being taken for walks and performing as a house-dog. Its death may be more obviously visible than the death of a cat.

As we have already mentioned, pet death is significant in that it provides an occasion for 'echoing grief'. Grief is doubtless a complex phenomenon, but it certainly involves memories grounded in emotion. Moods are, in one sense, the present tense of such emotion-grounded memories. Adaptation to bereavement involves movement from one set of grief-pervaded moods to moods of other more optimistic kind that are open to the future. But people sometimes speak of the moments when the mood of grief, the memory of bereavement, is triggered, recalled and experienced anew.

The death of a pet is an event with potential for eliciting former experience of death, as shown in the 1990 survey. When asked if the pet's death had revived memories of earlier deaths, two sorts of response emerged. As might be expected, for a considerable minority, the death was a reminder of earlier pets who had died. Accordingly, some 34 per cent of dog and 41 per cent of cat owners were reminded of earlier pet deaths. But for some, represented in a small group of approximately 15 per cent of both dog and cat owners, the death of their pet reminded them of the death of a human being. This suggests that for a small minority the kind of relationship held with pets was strong enough to echo a human relationship. But there was another group, represented by 20 per cent of both dog and cat owners, who found that the death of their pet reminded them of the death both of an earlier pet and of a human being. So in terms of pet deaths echoing human deaths, we found that approximately a third of the responding pet owners felt that the death of a pet also had consequences in terms of an earlier human bereavement (see Isaacs, 1984).

This particular group showed that both married and divorced people actually felt that bereavement support was necessary more often than did either single people or widows. Contrary to what popular opinion might guess, people's opinion on this topic did not depend on whether they lived alone or not. In fact the trend was marginally in the unexpected direction, suggesting that it was people not living on their own who perhaps felt that bereavement support was the more necessary. It may be that single people are more used to having to cope on their own while people living in families are used to gaining sympathy from others.

Cremating pets

From what has already been said, as from many examples which could be drawn from personal experience, it is obvious that many people treat their pets as honorary persons. This involves a sense of respect towards animals which is extended to them in death. Of the 1992 sample, for example, as many as 31 per cent had had their pets individually cremated with their ashes being returned to them. Some 25 per cent had buried their dead pets at home, 21 per cent had their animals disposed of by the vet without being sure of the details of disposal, while 17 per cent had gone for mass cremation through the services of their vet. Burial at a pet cemetery was the lowest of all responses, with only 4 per cent involved in it.

What is interesting is that pet cremation was reported more often than pet burial and in this the animals followed the contemporary British human path to physical extinction. When asked what they would do in the case of future pet deaths an even higher rate, some 44 per cent, said they would opt for individual cremation and 10 per cent for mass cremation. The same number of 25 per cent said they would choose burial at home, but 19 per cent said they would like their pets buried at a pet cemetery. This probably indicates that as pet cemeteries and crematoria become increasingly available they will be increasingly used. In fact, 55 per cent said they would use a pet cemetery if one was conveniently available.

Pet and human ashes

The relatively small group of ninety or so individuals whose pets were cremated and the ashes returned to them were asked what they did with the cremated remains. Some twenty-six individuals simply kept the ashes but twenty-one ticked the response box 'Kept them, to be buried with you'. This idea of keeping the ashes of a pet to be buried along with the ashes of their owner is a most striking example of a relationship between human and animal, as already discussed. It also exemplifies the idea that cremation is a rite that sets people free to do what they like with the ultimate remains of a body, be it animal or human. Cremated remains, by their very nature as a simple granular substance, are easy to handle. As a substance, it is open to varied use. It has potential in a way a dead body does not. Just as human ashes produced by modern methods of combustion permit a degree of

freedom never before experienced by Western civilization, so now with the ashes of pets. It would have been culturally impossible to bury a dead pet with a dead owner in any appropriate fashion, but a joint disposal is now both technically possible and, perhaps, much more socially acceptable if friends and family are prepared to undertake the task. It may be that cremated remains make this placing of owner and pet together much easier to accept for two closely similar reasons.

First, because cremated remains are physically very similar, irrespective of their source of origin. Light-coloured, dry, granular substances are the outcome of any cremation. It has often been said that death is the great leveller, but this has never been more true than with cremation. Dead bodies are still the obvious remains of a particular individual. A dead person is still identifiable as the body of the person known in life. This is true even though, as many mourners say, the body they see before them 'is not the person' they knew and loved. The sense that a corpse is not a person is a profound experience of life for many and is probably closely linked to the belief that the real self is somehow related to a soul that has now departed the body. To look at a corpse and to feel that it does not bear any relationship to the actual relationship once existing between the mourners and the dead is likely to reinforce either a belief in a soul or the view that death really is the end of life. When, occasionally, people speak of dead bodies in the neuter gender saying 'It was not my father lying there' or similar words, they are expressing their perception of a radical distinction between body and identity. It seems that some sort of liveliness in an 'other' is a fundamental trigger for perceiving personality and engaging in a relationship. The stillness of death comes as such an unfamiliar and unrecognizable posture that it leads onlookers to assume the other 'person' to be absent. Here the language of the soul comes in as one of the most convenient ways of handling this experience and trying to make sense of it. In this situation ashes are more symbolic of the person's body as it once was than of that person who now continues as a soul.

The second reason why some people might find it relatively easy to place pets' and owners' ashes together is because cremated remains are one step removed from the original body. This idea is closely related to the point just made about the body-soul distinction but differs from it in an important way. Here the ashes are seen as something different from the body that once existed. Bodies easily function as a trigger to memory, being immediate and direct. One reason why a significant minority of people prefer burial is because the buried body still functions, through the survivor's imagination, as a trigger for memory and as one basis for a continuing relationship perpetuated through visiting the grave and often engaging in conversation with the dead. Ashes, by contrast, are one step removed from the body. The physical corpse still bears some likeness to the living individual, even the buried corpse can be creatively imagined, but ashes offer no clue to the former person; they present the imagination with relatively less scope for creativity. This may be one reason why people prefer to locate them in situations which already come replete with past memories.

Ashes and technology

It is in this sense that cremated remains take the dead a further step away from the living. This reflects Robert Hertz's anthropological argument that the first stage of funerary rites deals with the body, which incarnates life activities, while the second stage deals with the new status and identity of the dead (1960).

Ashes are symbolically less powerful than a corpse. They present fewer triggers for grief; they represent a distancing from the dead. To say this is to generalize, because there are always some individuals for whom the cremated remains of their dead are extremely powerful points of contact in memory and contemporary experience. But, in general, ashes are symbolically different from bodies.

In this context the crematorium itself should not be forgotten as a mechanical process. We have already seen the significance of crematoria in relation to the rise of industrialized society in Britain; here I want to propose the idea that, in one sense, ashes are symbolic of this technology which cremates bodies, be they animal or human bodies. The process itself is neutral or technological, committed to an efficient means of combustion. The cremators at a crematorium are increasingly sophisticated pieces of machinery designed to maximize the reduction of bodies to a minimum amount of remains with the barest possible emission of toxic or unsightly gases and smoke. Extensive British and European Union regulations cover these processes of combustion which make the cremation of a human body analogous to the cremation of animal remains or of any other form of

'waste'. This is quite a different picture, for example, from the Indian process of cremation, which is intrinsically a religious rite governed by theological interpretation, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Animal grief

One final question concerns animals themselves and whether they experience grief, a question difficult to answer because of the degree of anthropomorphism involved in our perception of animal behaviour. It is reported, for example, that some higher primates express a form of distress that is not a learned response when confronted by 'dead or mutilated members' of their own species (Frijda, 1986: 274). Some animals that spend long periods of their lives together, including elephants, dolphins and chimpanzees, do appear occasionally to display behaviour that humans may interpret as a sense of loss. Here, however, we need to bear in mind the point well made for animals, namely, that to spend much time in a depressed state would hardly foster their own survival, especially if they belonged to species often predated by others (Masson and McCarthy, 1994: 120–36). Still, even though there are familiar accounts of elephants trying to rouse a dying herd member, staying with the corpse for a while after death before turning from it and covering it with vegetation, this does not mean that they experience grief as do humans possessing self-consciousness as well as a form of group consciousness (Moss, 1988: 273).

Here a great deal depends upon ideas of empathy, and of how our views of our existence echo our own sense that others have an existence of a similar kind (Hauser, 2000: 224). There is some evidence to suggest that human children have a very early sense of the difference between living things and artefacts (Boyer, 1994: 101), and that while they are able to distinguish between living and dead things this distinction also develops into a different kind of awareness of death when they are about ten years of age (Carey, 1985, quoted in Hauser, 2000: 225). This raises the topic of how social values and customs come increasingly to influence children's attitudes to death, whether the death of their pets or of other human beings. It also takes us to the complex interface of living and 'nonliving' things presented by robots, and this will be the first issue taken up in the next chapter.

Robots, books, films and buildings

It is not, however, only with animals that humans interact and through which their sense of identity comes to find some interactive expression. The later twentieth and the twenty-first centuries prompted extensive interaction with computers, with online cyberworlds, personal avatars as well as numerous forms of social media, including many sites devoted to memorializing the dead (Hutchings, 2013). Research on robots that have been engineered to possess a human appearance has, inevitably perhaps, meant that scientists and engineers find themselves having emotions in respect of these androids. Moreover, if and when they become defunct, they also seem to evoke emotional responses as Masahiro Mori (1970) observed, and for which he coined the term the 'uncanny valley' response. The question concerned how a human corpse and nonfunctional android triggered responses in living human beings. Later work suggested that human responses to 'dead' androids might provide opportunity for a deeper knowledge of grief responses among humans too, especially in terms of human alertness to movement or lack of it in 'bodies' (MacDorman and Ishiguro, 2006). The creativity of human imagination has not left death to itself, uncommented upon, unaddressed. Through literature, film, art and architecture, death has been framed so as not to leave the last word with mortality. The following sketches of these fields seek only to illuminate this underlying venture of life-affirmation. In a sense the sacred books of world religions also resemble the popular media of film and television in providing an objective focus for reflection on the fact of death. While there are obvious differences between the tradition of supernatural authority vested in sacred texts and the much more transient nature of modern media and popular culture, both foster public discussion of human worth in the face of death (Kearl, 1989: 379ff.).

Literature in the broadest sense has, certainly, addressed death both indirectly through novels and directly through criticisms of modern approaches to death (Scott, 1967; Weir, 1980). Evelyn Waugh's classic critique of the emerging American pattern of a cosmetic presentation of the dead as though they were simply asleep in *The Loved One*, written as early as 1948, and Jessica Mitford's later The American Way of Death (1963) both serve, in their own way, as a call to ensure that human responses to death may be more, rather than less, authentic. In the late 1990s even an American funeral director, Thomas Lynch (1997), could become a relatively popular author with his 'life studies from the dismal trade'. As the earlier titles demonstrate, some books may possess a degree of durability, but still, it is in buildings that the most lasting statement is made about death, not least because such edifices attract depths of meaning and convey them from one generation to another. Needless to say, sacred buildings also gain a great deal of their power in the face of death from the very use of sacred texts recited within their walls (Jones, 1993; Davies, 1996b).

Religious sources

The distinctive feature of world religions is that death becomes associated with their supernatural forces and with guidance on death and dying, provided as part of a total theory of life, especially of the moral life. While the deity may be thought to have overall control over life and death, some specific manifestation of deity or of a messenger is often particularly associated with death. So, in Hinduism, Kali, the great mother and consort of the god Shiva, both destroyer as well as creator, is the symbolic expression both of judgement and of death. In Buddhism the figure of Mara plays a similar part. In the mystical tradition of Judaism the Book of Splendour, or Zohar in Hebrew, which originated in medieval Spain, dealt with matters of death. One tradition argued that Adam, the first man of all and the first sinner, appeared to those about to die, while other traditions argued that it was deceased relatives who appeared to the dying (Abramovitch, 1988: 182). The Tibetan Buddhist traditions of death have

become particularly well known through *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, discussed in Chapter 5. Many branches of Christian theology also conceived of post-mortem worlds even though they did not end, as in Buddhism, with a belief in reincarnation but with a final entry into heaven. In some Christian folk-traditions there is a belief in the dead welcoming those who are dying and even taking messages to them from the living (Kligman, 1988: 152ff.).

Media sources

This idea of the dead being welcomed by people in the other world has become increasingly familiar in the late twentieth century not from specifically religious sources, not even from a folk-religion as such, but through television and newspaper and magazine articles on near-death experience. Indeed, this very phrase 'near-death experience' has come to be an established category with an increasing literature of both popular and more scholarly forms (Gallup, 1982; Greyson and Flynn, 1984). As discussed in Chapter 9, many tell of a sense of passing down a tunnel towards its brightly illuminated end where a welcoming person stands awaiting the newcomer, perhaps telling the new arrival to return to earthly life once more. These are very largely, though not entirely, positive experiences and often foster a more intense spiritual outlook in the survivors (Basford, 1990). While the experience itself owes more to the basic technology of medical resuscitation than to religious practices, such as prayer or meditation, it is often told in ways which invest the memory with profound significance bordering on the religious. In fact they afford a very significant form of 'words against death' not only because of the medical context in which the death was, as it were, certain and the recovery a form of scientific achievement but because of the deep sincerity and conviction with which this person now speaks.

These reports gain tremendous public coverage and are not insignificant because, in most contemporary societies, radio, television, films, plays, newspapers, magazines and books all contribute background information to daily life, and what is produced in them can be quite uncritically accepted as true. These media have become increasingly important since about the 1950s in giving a public focus to many aspects of life, including death. This is true not only of television news pictures of important funeral rites but also of documentaries and other features.

Although death makes its impact on individual lives in very private ways the more public images of death, regularly represented by artistic media, provide a rich spectrum of resources for responding to bereavement and loss. While the more temporary forms of music or film may only last a moment, compared with the long duration of grave monuments or the immense time span of the pyramids, this makes them none the less powerful for particular individuals and it is very likely that, in actual experience, both ephemeral and durable forms may feed upon each other as death becomes a pervasive cultural preoccupation.

Television

Television has been perhaps the most significant medium for presenting issues of death to an extremely large number of viewers as both fictional and factual material has come to reach into millions of people's homes. There have been deaths presented on soap operas and in films, as well as in news items and documentaries covering wars, natural disasters and epidemics. The most dramatic single example of actual death must be that of President Kennedy. His death and the subsequent funerary rites reached extensively into the lives of millions in the United States with over half the population having wept, four out of five reporting that they felt the loss of someone dear to them and nine out of ten saying they suffered some sense of physical discomfort (Manchester, 1967: 189). It has been argued that the funerary ritual did a great deal to 're-establish and reassure the national community' after the whole tragedy (Ochs, 1993: 26). Even so, there is no guarantee that a televised rite will achieve a totally positive end, as in the case of the funeral of Martin Luther King, which was thought by some to have been something of a failure (Lewis, 1978).

Music

Music is one of the profoundest means of expressing emotion between people and within the experience of each individual, not least in terms of death. It extends from localized folk music to the concert repertoire of 'operas, ballets and musicals' (Piotrowska, 2014: 271; Kim, 2012). Cultures

inevitably differ in their emphasis upon music and the place of songs, chants and laments at the time of death. Chapter 8, for example, relates to traditional Greek Orthodox society where music abounds in the form of the sung liturgy of the Orthodox Church, centred as it is on the human voice, not least in a wide variety of popular laments. These put into words the general human experience of grief and make it even more specific in terms of particular deaths. The words of many of these laments are locally well known and are constructed in such a way that some details of each particular death can be inserted into them to personalize them. With contemporary social change many modern and urban Greeks are said to find such laments old-fashioned and expect them to die out in the atmosphere of contemporary life; and it may well be that such songs require a relatively close-knit traditional community in which to survive. Neighbours and friends sang these songs, not the inner circle of bereaved people; in urban contexts it is unlikely that such a background community will exist. Still, such songs reflect the importance of music in many communities over many centuries, if not millennia, in helping people cope with death: examples could be drawn from hundreds of traditional societies, such as that of village Transylvania (Kligman, 1988), to illustrate this point. Singing is fundamentally a community activity which sets group hopes and power over those of the individual. It is as though the strength and insight of others help the bereaved when at their weakest.

Hymns and music

In the Christian tradition numerous streams of music relate to death, including the Requiem Mass, popular hymns, laments and instrumental music. In Catholicism the major form relates to the music accompanying the ritual of the Requiem Mass: especially since the sixteenth century, an entire musical form developed, to which practically every major composer added another theme, for example, Mozart, Verdi and the contemporary Andrew Lloyd Webber (Marx, 2012). These, and many more, have greatly added to the cultural life of many nations extending well beyond their European home.

In Protestantism, where the very idea of a requiem, along with prayers for the dead, is traditionally rejected, great music concerning death has come to be associated with the passion and death of Jesus Christ (Minear, 1987). Bach's St Matthew Passion is one of the finest examples of a musical reflection on death while Handel's Messiah with its focus on the passion and resurrection of Jesus is widely known. At a much more widespread and popular level, many Protestant congregational hymns on death have embraced both the death of Christ and also the death of individuals, with a considerable emphasis on the journey to the heavenly city. The hymn 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide' has come to be widely sung at a great variety of events, including football matches, and has enabled the public sharing of emotion at times of death and tragedy within Great Britain. The eighteenth-century Methodist revival in Britain marked a vitally important change, as hymns, alongside sermons, came to be the central means of expressing doctrine and faith, as in the first book, *Hymns* and Sacred Poems, published by John and Charles Wesley in 1739. Developing from metrical psalm-singing, hymns expressed the doctrines of new religious outlooks in language that could be deeply biblical but could also use non-biblical expressions to great effect. The freedom to use ordinary language to mirror and echo biblical turns of phrase was a powerful means of stimulating piety, not least in attitudes to death. It was in the Protestant tradition that hymn singing came to be a central and vitally important aspect of worship during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century with the publication, for example, of Hymns Ancient and Modern in 1861. This tradition of hymn singing passed into the realm of football, both rugby and soccer, with the hymn 'Abide with me' and the secular anthem 'You'll never walk alone', for example, becoming hallmarks of large games and clubs and also being perfectly adapted for singing at memorial events within football stadiums.

Another important folk tradition, that of the lament, saw Christian forms develop from even older funeral rites in which the dead were addressed while the deep emotion of the mourner was also given free expression (Alexiou, 1974; Kligman, 1988: 285ff.).

Through the world of modern musical communication many other forms of musical response to death occur as in Nigel Osborne's opera Hell's Angels or John Corrigliano's First Symphony, both of which were specifically directed at death through AIDS (Davies, 1996a: 18). In such works, the international stage replaces the village to demonstrate with even greater force the human need not to remain silent in the face of death.

Sculpture

Though music may last but a moment, sculpture lasts for ages. At the grandest level, the pyramids and other mausoleums reflect memorials to the dead long after the words of death-songs are forgotten. Still, grave decoration provides a medium expressing attitudes to death as with the cross and crucifix linking the death of Jesus with the death of Christian believers. In countless churches, as well as in graveyards, there are works of art representing the dead, especially those who were influential when alive.

From the thousands of sculptures which depict death we choose here to describe only one, that of Orpheus and Eurydice by Auguste Rodin (1840– 1917). This remarkable work, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum, was sculpted about 1895 and depicts the youthfully virile Orpheus coming from the underworld with his lover Eurydice just behind him, almost as his shadow. He h as been leading her out from her captivity in the underworld but has broken the golden rule and looked back; she must now return there, to death as it were, while Orpheus is left bereft. This dramatic depiction of human grief touches the heart of bereavement, not least as a representation of the close of the nineteenth century when disbelief in an afterlife began to assume new proportions for many Europeans. Orpheus is sculpted with great clarity and precision; he is a picture of clear individuality bearing the weight of human loss of love: he cannot and must not look back upon what he has lost. While they both seem to emerge from the marble, she is caught up in it and returns into its formlessness. Her face lacks precise definition, her eyes closed and lost. Her left hand, clasped in a grip, is no longer open to touch or embrace. So too her right hand. His right hand holds his brow in grief, his left hand is open but does not reach back to touch her. His limbs are strongly toned while hers are already becoming flaccid. She loses her identity while his is powerful in bearing the consequence of consciousness in the pain of separation and grief.

The Orpheus myth has attracted the attention of several scholars from some quite varied academic fields interested in death. The Swedish historian of religion Åke Hultkranz has rehearsed similar themes from North American Indian cultures in stones where a husband brings his wife back from the land of the dead but accidentally strikes her, against a warning that such an action would lead to her having to return to the dead. Hultkrantz (1957: 310) explains these myths as having their origin in 'the narrative of a shaman's ecstatic journey' which has become transformed by tradition. The anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt (1980: 35) has also referred to 'the ancient symbol of Orpheus' and its taboo against looking back, to express 'the fear of evil inherent in death' rather than the fear of the deceased. He also cites the biblical theme of not looking back, which he links with Job but presumably means to refer to Lot, whose wife becomes a pillar of salt when she looks back during the family's escape from Sodom as detailed in Gen. 19.26.

The Lot story is explicitly explored from a historical and theological point of view by Breitwieser (1990: 72), who argued that the great Protestant Reformer John Calvin used the Lot episode to expose 'grief's phenomenological movement' and to establish it as a model for grief in the Protestant tradition. The argument is that grief exhibits two contradictory tendencies, on the one hand involving a speedy sense of things sliding away, while on the other hand it marks a lagging behind in a static experience.

Exhibition and art

Art of various sorts has long furnished not only a major vehicle for human reflection on death but also an opposition to it, as human creativity engages with mortality through paint and sculpture. From the medieval portrayal of life as a dance with Death in the background, to more modern existential depictions of death through a wide variety of symbols of desolation, artists speak against death for many (Holbein, 1538, *Dance of Death*; Gottlieb, 1959; Camille, 1996; Clarke, 1976). One 1996 exhibition, for example, was organized in Amsterdam by Harry Heyink and Walter Carpay (Carpay and Heyink, 1996) around the theme 'In the midst of life we are in death', bringing together a wide variety of material from some sixty artists all dealing with facets of death. The five rooms of the exhibition began with modem costumes which could be used as clothes in which the dead might be dressed; one included a shroud with wings embroidered on the back. The

second major room brought together a collection of coffins beginning with a simple fabric one which would soon disintegrate after burial. This ideal cloth answers to contemporary ecological attitudes, as did the neighbouring wickerwork coffin and another very lightweight coffin furnished with strapping to enable it to be carried on an individual's back. Other coffins carried brightly coloured messages or were very natural in the sense that one was carved out of a tree trunk.

The next room was extremely unusual, containing a dining table set for a meal. Thrown onto the white tablecloth was a shadowy outline of a human body, its head at one end of the table and its feet at the other. The significance of this shadow-presence was clarified through the extensive menu, which set out a wide variety of dishes that might be produced from a human body. This reflection on a form of cannibalism was, perhaps, the most dramatic example of contemporary consideration of death and death rites. It was complemented in the next part of the exhibition, where a video documented the possibility of destroying the human body by exploding it in a special chamber. The diagrams and plans presented for this method of disposing of bodies, stark and innovative as it seems, resemble the laternineteenth-century designs for crematoria, showing how an idea which seems nearly absurd in one era can become completely acceptable in another.

The largest room of the Heyink and Carpay exhibition was filled with an extremely wide variety of artefacts and designs for commemorating the dead. A bright metallic hearse with large wheels, shafts to enable it to be pulled by people and a central rugby-football-shaped container to carry a coffin took pride of place. Other objects included an hour glass filled with cremated remains, and highly creative grave memorials, one featuring a metallic framework with gravestones hung from it rather like coats on coathangers and hinting at death as, perhaps, a change of clothing. Another memorial consisted of an automatic piano-accordion within a birdcage.

A final room housed special headwear for mourners, extensive black structures of immense proportion, one of which stood on wheels. An aspidistra plant had words of remembrance written upon its leaves, while some computer software made it possible to access information about dead persons. This entire exhibition dealt, artistically, with the seriousness and the humour often associated with death in contemporary societies, addressing death, as it were, but without the voice of traditional religion. The fact that very many people visited the exhibition, not least large numbers of younger adults, shows that death continues to be not only a topic of curious interest but one which people still wish to be creatively addressed. Many deathfocused exhibitions have followed in succeeding decades.

The scope for demonstrating the power of art to address death is immense. To take but one example, we can see the variety of views of death in the Victorian era in Lee MacCormick Edwards's (1999) splendid volume on Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914), from which I draw some of the following information. Son of poor Bavarian immigrants, Herkomer gained celebrity in England and was asked by Edward VII to paint Queen Victoria on her deathbed on 24 January 1901. It is a watercolour in which the brightness of a flowing and translucent shroud seems already to be transporting the queen into another world. All that can be seen is a side view of her face and her right hand, holding a cross. She is lightly framed with several lilies and other flowers (95). Another of Herkomer's paintings - perhaps one of the most famous British paintings on death of the later nineteenth century – also expresses death as a fulfilment of a life long lived: The Las t Muster: Sunday in the Royal Hospital Chelsea of 1875, which among general applause also received a medal of honour at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878. A large number of Chelsea Pensioners, all old and retired soldiers, sit in their chapel during divine service. Each attends to their own thoughts except for one whose head is turned to the equally ancient individual on his left, whose pulse is felt to be still. The dead man is seated but slightly hunched. While others have their eyes closed in prayer, his are closed in death. Here again there is fulfilment. A similar fulfilment appears in At Death's Door of 1876. This is set in his native Bavaria: a peasant family kneels in prayer with lighted candles as the priest comes in procession from the church below, preceded by a boy ringing his bell and bearing Extreme Unction for a person dying within the house, almost certainly the wife of the grandfather figure kneeling amid his children and grandchild. All three of these examples show death as part of life and of a living tradition of faith which itself affords a wider framing of death.

Poetic words against death

As with paintings so with words, with poets in particular being first among those using words of self-awareness to express human emotions, not least those of love and death, and to refine the effect of memory upon experience (Simpson, 1977). This includes the secular message which emphasizes death as the end of life while endeavouring to place a strong value on the life lived (Lamont, 1952). Here, once more, we are able only to point out this capacity of poetry to be in the vanguard of words against death rather than document the mass of poems which have set life against its mortal negation. Two poems must suffice, one by Dylan Thomas (1914–53) and the other by Stevie Smith (1902–71): the first expresses one of the most powerful sets of words against death ever voiced in an English-language poem while the second lies at the opposite end of the spectrum, where words have failed and futility strives to be heard.

The very title and first line of Thomas's (1987) poem 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' command his dead father, and through him all the dead, not to accept death as a passive inevitability. 'Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light.' His poem combines those lines 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' with his titular line 'Do not go gentle into that good night' to produce a powerful poetic barrage of opposition to death for those he addresses, successively, as 'wise, good, wild' and 'grave men near death' (432).

Stevie Smith (1987: 370), by contrast, in her extremely popular poem 'Not Waving but Drowning', tells of a man at sea, thought by those on land to be waving a greeting while really he was indicating his distress as he drowned.

It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way, They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always (Still the dead one lay moaning)

I was much too far out all my life

And not waving but drowning.

This stanza is particularly important, indicating as it does the opposite of words against death. Here words are reduced to the manual sign of a wave, a communication from a distance and one misunderstood as its opposite.

The individual man, the poem's subject and object, is socially distanced from others, an irrelevance: 'I was much too far out all my life,' he said. So when it came to his death the insignificant others with their feet firmly on the ground could not differentiate between a wave of despair and one of greeting. This reflects the importance of a social network as the bastion against death, whether religious or secular, and demonstrates a sense of individualistic futility as far as both life and death are concerned.

How readers respond to these poems will depend much upon their own life-experience and sense of group and community involvement. George Steiner (1989: 141), one of the most insightful intellectuals of the late twentieth century, represents one such poignant stream of response when he says, 'However inspired, no poem, no painting, no musical piece – though music comes closest – can make us at home with death, let alone "weep it from its purpose".'

In this he probably speaks for many precisely because it is the active and creative mind, so much given to self-reflection, which finds the idea of the thoughtlessness of death so inconceivable and takes refuge in descriptive words. We cannot be at home in such a strange country.

Still, despite such intellectual reflections, the power of poetry to console and to elevate in funerary rites remains strong. One very clear and interesting example lies in a substantial and, perhaps, historically significant volume of 'Readings, Prayers and Music chosen for Memorial Services' entitled Remembrance, introduced by Ned Sherrin (1996), the popular media presenter, and with a foreword by the archbishop of Canterbury. Interestingly, neither of the above poems is included though Dylan Thomas's 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion' is there as one of many which could be regarded as secular poetry (59). This collection was produced for the charity Cruse Bereavement Care and reflects the fact that death elicited collaboration from both secular and religious segments of society as the twentieth century drew to a close. The book sets biblical readings and traditional hymns alongside excerpts from novels and established classics, and set out not only the actual form of former memorial services for some distinguished people but also forms of services that some of the well-known living have devised for themselves. A list of suitable musical pieces is also included. The eclecticism in the face of death is reflected by the poems on one page where T. S. Eliot is followed successively by the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, the popular entertainer Joyce Grenfell and the Anglican mystical priest George Herbert (Sherrin, 1996: 40–1). What Sherrin's volume shows is that individuals increasingly wish to shape their own final words on their own life and their death, and not necessarily accept those provided by traditional religion.

What is obviously true is that words and music remain profoundly powerful and significant when it comes to planning a reflection upon a deceased life. Indirectly this collection also speaks of the importance of the locations within which some of the memorial services have taken place. Even the most secular of words against death have found themselves spoken within the confines of ancient religious walls.

Indeed, it is interesting to see that numerous studies devoted to aspects of grief often include some poetic words, as though clinical prose demands them before justice is done to the topic (Hill, 1986: 189). One of the sharpest examples is Kübler-Ross's deeply influential book *On Death and Dying*, where each chapter begins with the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore (1970 (Ist ed. 1968): 247). Her final section, 'The silence that goes beyond words', deals with the ultimate calm before death and also ends with another stanza from that most evocative of all Rabindranath Tagore's volumes *Stray Birds* (CLXXVI):

The water in a vessel is sparkling: the water in the sea is dark.

The small truth has words that are clear,

the great truth has great silence.

Humane words against death

It is not easy to locate poems by Tagore, nor indeed by many other poets, within the strict classification of sacred or secular. Even if we are certain about the specific religion of the author, we can never know the way the poem is read and accepted by individuals. That profound problem of hermeneutics lies beyond the goal of this book. What must be said, however, is that the very form of poetry, especially when it addresses what many would perceive as the depth of life, speaks to the situation of death and to the condition of mortality. For this reason I speak here of humane words, not least because even words which are not explicitly religious may

be accepted in a sentiment of emotion which would be hard to distinguish from some explicitly religious views.

This brief comment introduces the relatively new phenomenon, in Britain at least, of using popular songs at funerals as a distinctive way of framing mortuary ritual. The term 'popular' may be entirely accurate or may, occasionally, need to be extended to embrace classical music which is simply not explicitly part of the repertoire of sacred music. Be that as it may, increasing numbers of people are requesting that popular songs or tunes be played, usually in crematoria at the time of the funeral rite, as an appropriate way of recalling the deceased person's life and of bidding farewell. A list of the top ten funeral songs, published by the *Funeral Service Journal*, provides an extremely clear picture of nontraditionally religious sentiments chosen by significantly large groups of Britons in the 1990s (*Guardian*, 23 August 1996).

Whitney Houston singing 'I Will Always Love You' came first, followed by Frank Sinatra singing 'My Way', 'Unchained Melody' by the Righteous Brothers and 'Wind Beneath My Wings' by Bette Midler. Fifth came Barbra Streisand singing 'Memory' followed by John Lennon with 'Imagine', Glenn Miller's version of 'In the Mood', Aled Jones singing 'Walking in the Air', Louis Armstrong's 'Wonderful World' and finally The Platters' version of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. In these popular items evocative words and music reflect something of life shared together and of the personality of the deceased. The very fact that they are used at all shows how accustomed most Britons are to having powerful words involved in funerals. Kearl (1989: 390) has shown in a similar way how some popular music has come to have associations with death in the United States.

Even if a funeral is specifically secular, the use of music and favourite readings by friends and members of the family, rather than by a priest, brings a felt sense of significance to the rite. In my opinion this demonstrates the efficacy of 'words against death' and the historical success of Christianity in establishing death rites as the occasion when the human genius to oppose negativity and to seek to overcome adversity is manifested.

Architecture of death

The human genius has, traditionally, even cast such sentiments in stone. Indeed, building against death has been one of the most expressive of all human endeavours, so obviously manifest in the great burial chambers of prehistory, in Egypt's pyramids and in memorial buildings across the entire globe. They may speak of future realms in which the dead now live, as in ancient Egypt, or of the cultural contribution made by musicians, poets or scholars, as in the tombs of the famous at Westminster Abbey in London or Pere Lachaise in Paris, or they may comprise that kind of memorial space that Richard Etlin (1993: 595–9) has called 'the space of absence'. It is perhaps particularly appropriate that he should cite Gunnar Asplund's crematorium at Stockholm, built in the late 1930s, as an example of this type, its appropriateness lying in the fact that cremation does, most effectively, create a literal absence of the body while leaving the need for a memorial site. Others have explored many aspects of the history of the architecture of death (Curl, 1972) as well as providing detailed accounts of, for example, particular cemeteries, as in Nicol's (1994) study of Adelaide's famous Centennial Park Cemetery or California's even better-known Forest Lawn Cemetery, where its founder Hubert Eaton sought to realize the dream of a park filled with beautiful plants, statues and art. On New Year's Day 1917 Eaton wrote 'The Builder's Creed', which combined Christian affirmations with statements of managerial practice:

I believe in a happy eternal life.

I believe ... in a Christ that smiles and loves you and me.

I therefore know the cemeteries of today are wrong because they depict an end, not a beginning ... unsightly stone-yards full of in-artistic symbols and depressing customs ...

I shall try to build at Forest Lawn a great park devoid of misshapen monuments

and other customary signs of earthly death, but filled with towering trees, splashing fountains, singing birds, beautiful statuary ... redolent of the world's best history and romances.

Sculptured marble and pictorial glass shall be encouraged but controlled by

acknowledged artists.

A place ... protected by an immense endowment care fund. (Rubin, Carlton and Rubin, 1979: 24)

Given the criticism so often levelled against the Forest Lawn style of cemetery, it is worth acknowledging the success of Hubert Eaton in taking over in 1913 what had been the arid Tropicano cemetery and not only bringing to it a new water supply, making the lawns possible, but also setting about a cultural creation. After visiting the San Francisco Exposition of 1915 he was inspired by the ideal of a non-denominational Christianity as an essential foundation for the great American civilization. He then sought to ensure that, as he saw it, key elements of the wider European Christian-inspired culture should take their place in Forest Lawn. So it was that he visited Europe and purchased copies and replicas of established works of art and enshrined them in churches and buildings on his site in which people might be married, as they were from 1920, or, as subsequently was the case, could be baptized. As his biographers expressed his genius, he enabled middle-class Americans 'to buy minuscule shares in a version of the Memorial Impulse' (Rubin, Carlton and Rubin, 1979: 63).

This famous attempt at constructing an earthly paradise may be seen as setting the stage for the American treatment of corpses as sleeping relatives, both acts serving an artistic framing of death in a dramatically hopeful way, despite the European criticism so often levelled against it. The extent to which individuals find their community given to building and maintaining monuments to the dead is a measure of the extent to which any particular society addresses itself to death. Words against death have, traditionally, been shared by individual and society but, as individualization expands, so they become increasingly private. Michel Vovelle (1993), an eminent historian of death, has also written on th e impact of contemporary funeral rites on cemeteries grounded in economic standardization which nevertheless runs along with a new sense of individualism.

It remains to be seen whether private words against death, symbolized perhaps by an ink-written message on a bunch of flowers placed over a small pile of cremated remains, will serve as well as the shared inscriptions on public memorials in addressing death and asserting life. What is interesting is that even private memorials often stand in public cemeteries where a kind of impersonal publicity is gained through a memorial. Written memorials afford the capacity to share with others who themselves are unknown. In so doing, people acknowledge the communal fact that death comes to all and that all may respond verbally to it. Few gravestones stand bare and silent.

Death studies

Finally we should not ignore the fact that complementing this architectural, literary and artistic creativity associated with death we find an increase of interest in death since about the 1950s in the academic fields of anthropology, history and sociology, with a considerable development in the therapeutic and pastoral professions, as explored in several of the chapters in this book. All these fields constitute a cultural response to death, not least in the light of a decreased sense of broad religious certainty about the postmortem realms of hell and heaven. Historians, in particular, saw death not only as a fact of life in need of documentation but as a cultural motif enabling them to compare different eras (Vovelle, 1993; Ariès, 1976, 1991;McManners, 1981).

Medical doctors, psychiatrists and therapists all came to devote increasing attention to the issues of grief and mourning. Their writings paralleled the growth both of the hospice movement and of self-help groups of individuals who had been bereaved in particular ways. The impact of individuals such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1970) with her early stage theory of grief and Colin Murray Parkes (1972) in his study of bereaved people in their reaction to bereavement was particularly influential. American journals such as *Death Studies* and *Omega* and the new British-based interdisciplinary journal *Mortality* (published from 1996), all attest to the explicit interest in death grounded in the broadly secular context of postmodernity. Courses in schools and colleges have also begun to address the issue of death.

Contemporary adaptation

Together these sources show that death is no longer left within the domain of official religious institutions and to be interpreted theologically. 'Words against death' are only just now passing from the realm of the sacred to that of the secular. While many traditional words against death may still be theological, they are now equally likely to be poetic or explicitly therapeutic. Still, through them all the process of adaptation and social evolution continues through expanding patterns of the rhetoric of death. Once, the pool of potential orientations to death was very deep in terms of traditional religion and came to formal expression in many forms of inscription and epitaph, as Armando Petrucci (1998) has shown in his excellent study *Writing the Dead*, a study that also indicates the radical contemporary demise of such public accounts of the deceased. While religious persons may well regret the increased loss of committed religious interpretations of death, it is also possible to see the emergence of other approaches as providing a greater good for a greater number of persons.

Adaptability of response can be a characteristic feature of successful groups and individuals. The mix of traditional and innovative, of religious and secular, of artistic and idiosyncratic approaches to funerals which is now emerging in many contemporary developed societies can be interpreted as indicative not only of secularization but also of the human drive for significance. But, more than this, these innovative forms may well contribute to that sense of conquest which has been characteristic of the best of traditional funeral rites. In societies of traditional Christian culture, for example, it would be unwise only to think of funerary rites as representing some antiquarian human endeavour grounded in the past and slowly weakening in effect. Just as ritual has come to be adopted as a powerful tool by many groups, whether for therapy or drama, its possibilities in terms of secular ritual have not been ignored. The popularizing and secularizing of funerary rites is likely to be one of the major arenas of ritual development in the coming decade. Some will prove successful and others will fail, for rites, too, are subject to the survival of the fittest. If our argument is correct, then the rites which flourish will be those which cause the bereaved to flourish as they enhance the quest for life.

Offending death, grief and religions

Not all deaths are the same, nor are their interpretations. This chapter explores three very different perspectives that show the power of deathrelated concepts within human cultures. First I explain my own theory of what I have called 'offending death' before considering selected dynamics of death, grief and charisma in leading symbolic figures and concluding with an exploration of the relationship between death and world religions. This last topic highlights a potentially important hypothesis on the relationship between grief and the founders of religious groups.

Theory of offending death

So far in this book we have largely focused on what might be called 'ordinary death', the sort that comes to every individual and which leaves bereaved family and friends with a degree of loss. We have also considered aspects of sacrifice in Chapters 4 and 8. Now we turn to deaths that affect large numbers of people in a society; I call these 'offending deaths' because they occur in circumstances that offend public attitudes. Here I will describe this idea only briefly, because it has been fully described elsewhere (Davies, 2001: 404–17).

Offending deaths occur when one or more people die in circumstances that cause a massive public response in demonstration against people in authority who are blamed for causing the death of these innocent victims and from whom some form of response and reparation is sought. The death of Diana, princess of Wales, in 1997, the great 'White March' against paedophile murders in Belgium in 1996 and the international Live Aid concert organized by Bob Geldof in 1985 on behalf of famine victims in Ethiopia all furnish different sorts of examples. What these and other events show is that the death of particular individuals can serve as a powerful symbol of the prime values of society, and indeed of humanity, that should be cherished and not cast aside. The deaths that occurred in Auschwitz or in the Omagh bombing in Northern Ireland in 1998 also furnish examples, though with Auschwitz engendering a universal public response as time went on. The point is that offending deaths trigger mass protests that are, fundamentally, 'words against death'. The fact that the deaths are deemed unnecessary and even gratuitous adds further stimulus to the popular protests that, at heart, wish to express the value of human life and to oppose any cheapening of it.

One of the starkest examples of death that reveals something of theory of offending death took place in Norway in 2011 when Anders Breivik, dressed as a policemen, killed some sixty teenagers at a young people's camp on Utǿya Island as well as a dozen adults in Oslo itself. His was its own kind of protest against 'foreigners' and integrated society. At his trial in 2012 he was found guilty and committed to a long prison sentence. As I have argued elsewhere, the process of his trial not only involved the judicial pronouncement of his guilt, but also a mass public gathering of people in Oslo who sang a song about mixed community integration known to be hated by Breivik. Using the anthropological theory of dual sovereignty to enhance the theory of offending death I have suggested that the court's guilty verdict represented what has been called jural or legal authority while the people's singing marked what has been called 'mystical authority' (Davies, 2015b). Breivik provides an example of cultural betrayal with death as its medium.

Sacrificial reversal

Another benefit of this theme of offending death lies in the contrasts that are possible between phenomena, not least between offending deaths and some forms of sacrifice, for instance, the death of Christ as described in Chapter 8. Accordingly, sacrifices are ritualized and planned and do not occur spontaneously; rather than affront social values, they announce and enhance them. Instead of disturbing the moral balance of society, they often restore it. The victim is intentionally chosen and removes negative values such as guilt rather than bringing guilt to those in authority. Whereas a popular response to offending death demands reparation from public authorities, formal sacrifices are part of the process of bringing about redress for some earlier wrong.

Both offending deaths and sacrificial deaths demonstrate the power of living bodies to be both the means of expressing social values and the vehicles for changing the way people feel about situations. It is the very fact of the life that is taken from people, animals or plants in either offending or sacrificial deaths that achieves this purpose. It is not a circular argument to say that life is the vehicle for asserting the worth of life. The life wrongly taken from a victim in offending death carries the opposite message from the life that is intentionally taken from a sacrificial victim. The former weakens while the latter strengthens a group, community or nation.

Enforced deaths

This raises the issue of enforced social death, for the very fact that funerary rites show how highly most societies value life highlights the penalty exacted through capital punishment when someone's life is taken away by legitimate force. The value of life, in a general way, is challenged by serious crime and explains why many societies see the death penalty as perfectly appropriate, especially for the crime of murder, on the rule of 'an eye for an eye'. In a similar way, many cultures have viewed suicide as a crime or a sin because it may be seen as robbing society of one of its members, or because it seems to challenge the religious belief that God alone is the source of life, and alone has the responsibility to give it and to take it.

Enforced social deaths have taken many forms, whether in the ancient forms of administering poison by mouth, stoning, burning at the stake and impaling, or modern methods of hypodermic injection, beheading, hanging, the electric chair or the gas chamber. In all of these, death is administered in a calculated and intentional way. Often the bodies of those killed officially have been treated with little formal ceremony or respect, whether by burial in unmarked graves or exposure to wild animals and so on. The death and disposal display society's power over individuals and over their bodies. Their end is not generally attended by proud words against death; rather, their death is the way in which society speaks its own words for life. One challenging historical example was the 1830s change in the law in England to permit the bodies of those dying in publicly funded poorhouses to be taken away for dissection by medical personnel (Richardson, 1987). This classed the poor along with criminals, whose bodies had long been given for dissection, and was one reason that helped foster the Victorian emphasis upon having a decent funeral.

In modern times some sympathetic thought ought to be given to those on death row, some three thousand or more in the United States as 'the only democratic society that executes its citizens', and whose lives fall under regimes hard for any outsider to grasp as the 'insider' Richard Michael Rossi (2008: xv) has amply demonstrated. Moreover, their families and friends also have their lives transformed by this kind of incarceration. Even some whose kin have been murdered have expressed their strong antipathy towards the death penalty showing that the eye for an eye idiom is far from universally accepted, and where one death by execution simply perpetuates anguish in the murderer's own family. Here the 'words against death' motif takes on added and intensified significance as personal narratives describe emotional responses that ponder 'restorative justice' and move 'beyond retribution' (Rachel King, 2003: 221–49).

Death in religion

The fact that traditional religions have often served to focus on such matters of justice, retribution and forgiveness, as well as grief, mourning and the afterlife is often taken for granted, but the prior question of why religions might be so death-related is hardly ever posed. Though several nineteenthcentury anthropologists did consider this topic it fell out of fashion in the twentieth century. The time may now be right, however, to raise the theme once more, albeit with rather different emphases and for more contemporary reasons, and not forgetting that secular process may also share in or replace the traditional religious schemes as in some forms of restorative justice.

Secularization is one background factor that makes this relationship between death and established forms of religion of compelling interest, for if death and religions have become inextricably associated within the majority of cultures, what is to be said about contexts in which secularization influences increasing numbers of individuals? Since all die and encounter bereavement, what do secular contexts imply for the performance of emotion-laden rites? Can funeral rites be just as effective when set in non-religious contexts? To pose this question is to raise the higher-order question of the very definition of 'religion'. When individuals who deem themselves secular or non-religious engage in rites focused on central aspects of human existence, should their activity be defined as 'religious'? This is an interesting question, for instance, as far as movements such as the British Humanist Association is concerned. If requested, this group will provide families with a person to conduct a funeral. In 1999–2000, for example, there were approximately some 150 such officiants conducting over 4,000 rites. After appropriate contact and consultation with the bereaved, the officiant will arrive at a form of ritual that expresses aspects of the deceased person's life and see to it that the burial or cremation is respectfully completed with an overall ethos of a celebration of life. The explicit assumption of the British Humanist Association is that there is no such thing as life after death in any sense of a continuing soul or personality of the dead but only in the sense of a memory living on in the thoughts of the survivors.

The very fact that the British Humanist Association happily furnishes ritual performers is of profound significance for the study of death, ritual and belief. At a political level of ideology it could be argued that the association is in competition with churches, but more relevant here, it shows that death is something that cannot be left without comment and attention, irrespective of whether people adhere to religious views of the world or not. Words against death need to be spoken, and they can be secular words just as easily as they may be religious words. But, and this is the interesting question, do secular words become 'religious' words when they are spoken 'against death'? This raises the fundamental issue of the meaning of religion as such. At least one partial answer to this question needs to be in the affirmative, though it would probably not be acceptable to secular groups as such. But here caution is demanded over the meaning of words, for people are deeply aware of a depth of significance that surrounds their lives, their relationships and their place in the world. In traditional religions this depth involves the divine, and at death this human depth comes to be explicitly recognized, both in the deceased and in relatives, framed by the divine. Religious words spoken against death acknowledge the significance of life and frame it within the divine realm.

For people who do not hold to traditional religious views of the world, human life is still seen to possess a deep significance but it is framed within the boundaries of family, friendship, humanity, society or perhaps of the world itself. Death remains a time when this depth, too, becomes explicit and that is where secular words of ritual become powerful. The power of ritual words draws from the emotional depths inherent in contexts of death, and not necessarily in any specific tradition. A secular funeral can be as powerful in its effect as any religious rite if the words spoken and the music played reflect the life of the deceased and the relationships of the living. Indeed, it is as perfectly possible for traditional religious ritual language to appear inadequate and irrelevant when unrelated to the actual individuals at a funeral as it is for totally 'secular' words to be powerful when appropriately chosen and employed. In societies in which the individuality of people becomes increasingly important, the power of words is increasingly at stake, depending upon their appropriateness of reference.

The issue underlying these considerations relates directly to the definition of 'religion', or to what 'religious' means in the context of death. The question raised here is complex but focuses on the link between religion and death. Much depends on the perspective of the one creating the definition and on the awareness that some people may not wish to be defined in a particular way. Religion is usually defined in terms of beliefs and doctrines related to God, to the divine or to some ultimate power. Similarly, an atheist or Humanist perspective tends to take its stand in opposition to those beliefs. In that sense Christianity and atheism, for example, are mirror images of each other, and it is also necessary to consider the kind of atheism that opposes Christianity or the kind of atheism that opposes Hinduism.

For the purpose of this chapter I offer a different approach to this question, suggesting that when human beings engage in their 'words against death', irrespective of whether those words come from established religions or are drawn from 'secular' sources, they are performing a 'religious' function. These words are 'performative utterances', as discussed in Chapter 1: they change human relationships, marking the departure of the

dead and the end of their social life, and expressing the depth and significance of human existence. There is a naturalness about this process that is confused by the political opposition of religious and secular debates. What we currently witness in increasing numbers of contemporary societies is a growth in personalized rites, drawing sometimes on traditionally religious and sometimes on secular literature and music, as described in the previous chapter.

Death and the birth of religion

It is against this background of rites that mark the depth of human life that we now turn to the dynamic part played by death rites in established religions. We do so because it is all too common for social scientists, historians and other scholars to accept uncritically the religious provision of funerary rites. We have already described in Chapter 11 how Tylor developed a theory on the origin of religion grounded in the idea of animism. Subsequent changes in social-scientific thought condemned this form of speculative evolutionism as 'intellectualist' meaning that it was preoccupied with ideas as abstract systems devoid of life contexts. While that is true, the place of death in the dynamics of religions remains a challenge to the easy acceptance of the apparently inevitable bond between religion and death. Was Tylor essentially correct in arguing that religion is rooted in experiences of death and bereavement? Here we cannot answer that question in any depth but we can sketch its significance through a series of individual cases and by alluding to some potentially useful psychological ideas that clearly show there is a question to be answered. The one major issue focuses on how experiences of grief may have influenced religious founders and leaders: it is an issue that has barely been discussed in any twentieth-century study of religion.

Buddhism

The role of death in the birth of Buddhism is fairly obvious. Traditionally speaking, Gautama was led to renounce settled domestic life to pursue a release from the bitterness of experience, having encountered a sick man, an old man and a corpse. This engagement with human ageing, decay and death set the agenda for his pursuit of enlightenment and liberation from the

ties that bind desire and existence. Michael Carrithers (1983: 22, 65), who writes of one central feature of Buddhism as 'the optimism, the prospect of attaining the "deathless", also casually yet significantly observes the way death can become relatively invisible in Western society, thereby removing the link in ordinary perception between what we might call death and the religious quest. In Buddhism death is part of a complex process of existence deeply embedded in the life of daily desire, not simply some end-event. One reason why Buddhism expanded and gained success in a variety of cultures is likely to lie both in this concern with death as one of the central pains of life and in its capacity to address the issue of that death-complex embracing sickness, ageing and the end of mortal life, all within the much wider field of the transmigration of the soul already discussed in Chapter 5. These preoccupations of the self-obsessed individual are obstacles to fruitful living and take their focus in that abstract entity of negative desire that symbolizes all the problems and hazards of life. In one sense this perspective was reflected 2,500 years later when Freud's argument in his book The Future of an Illusion (1927) spoke of religion as existing to 'exorcise the terrors of nature', not least those associated with death. Freud's medically framed mythology has been developed in a variety of ways, but underlying it is the death-instinct. Whether or not we agree with Freud's schematization, we can see his view as being similar to that of Buddha in identifying the discomfort of death and the saving responsive solution. Each in their way also possessed a means of engaging with the problem. For Buddha this lay in the attitude of 'skilfulness' by which one approaches the ethical and ritual life. Indeed, one might provide a shorthand and say that the Buddhist response is the Sangha and the Freudian is psychoanalysis. Sangha and psychoanalysis typify what might be called an interactive ideal-type response to death that, sociologically speaking, reflects a manipulationist approach: one can do something about death by knowing the dynamics of its operation. Buddhism would probably not exist had Gautama not seen a corpse and perceived within it the root problem of life.

Christianity

Christianity also reflects the influence of death upon religion, although its focus is upon the impact of the death of one man rather than upon one

man's reflection upon death. The death of Jesus has probably attracted more human comment, writing, theorizing and emotional attachment through acts of devotion than that of any other single human being. One dramatically important aspect of Christianity lies in the descriptive reflections upon his sufferings, commonly called his Passion, and in the way believers identify with it, especially in the rituals associated with the weeks preceding Easter. Christianity has deeply influenced European and many other cultures with its notion of the conquest of death and the hope of an eternal life, following, as was believed, the resurrection of Christ, themes much expressed in many forms of art for more than a millennium. Indeed Christian art, architecture and iconography present one of the most extensive sets of 'words against death' in the history of the world. The crucifix and the bare cross represent the two symbolic expressions of the depth of the pain of death on the one hand and the transcendence of death on the other that evolved over Christian history. This took time, for early artistic depictions of Jesus were more often of a good shepherd carrying a sheep, while motifs of Jonah delivered from a great fish's belly also symbolized deliverance, especially from death.

The simple point is that Christianity would be inconceivable as a world religion apart from the death of Jesus and the interpretation given to that death as sacrificial, salvation-engendering and death-conquering. One of the reasons why Christianity became such a successful world religion is because of the universality of death and the corresponding elective affinity of Christianity's message of post-mortem salvation for all believers. One theoretical task that ought to be more thoroughly pursued in future research lies in relating theories of the death of Christ to the cultural context of their generation. In other words, the death of Jesus is no simple fact to be described theologically but a topic that reflects a particular cultural group to a marked extent.

This serves as a reminder that Christianity is not uniform, whether in time or in space. I say this to draw attention to Peter van Rooden's (1996) significant analysis of late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Christianity in Europe and North America, most especially its missionary activity. He argues that this period inaugurated a new type of Christianity as a truly missionary-based religion, unlike much of what had preceded it. His detailed analysis reveals the fascination with death that has characterized Christian mission. He suggests that the significance of the deaths of Catholic missionaries and of Protestant missionaries and their families, to which much attention was drawn at the time, lay in the fact that while those were shattering experiences within the private domain of life, they could be overcome by the faith of the individual (71). Death allowed Christianity to display its power in the life of individual missionaries just as it would play its powerful part in the conversion of otherwise benighted souls. The conquest of death lay firmly at the heart of this newly invigorated Christianity: whether bodily death or spiritual death, both must fall before the power of Christ.

An earlier and rather different form of Christianity's coping with death lay in the core ritual of the Mass or Eucharist, not least in its developing sacramental form from the beginning of the second millennium. Not only in Requiem Masses but in every Mass, in every Eucharist, the death of Christ was and is rehearsed and the death of the faithful departed is also brought to mind. The ceremonial eating of Christ's symbolic flesh and the drinking of his blood offer a blunt ritual encounter with death for the living, which at some times and places in Christian history has led to dramatic artistic and iconographic portrayals of the death of Christ, all centuries before the eighteenth-century missionary revival.

Leaders and charisma

From what has been said throughout this book it is obvious that death plays an important part in most religion; indeed, it is possible to formalize this generalization as I have done elsewhere, and to define world religions in terms of their distinctive conquest of death (Davies, 2000: 214). Here, however, I want to move to a still more interpretative account by drawing attention to a psychological issue associated with religious groups, one that I derive from David Aberbach, especially from his books *Surviving Trauma* (1989) and *Charisma in Politics, Religion and the Media* (1996). Put starkly, his central argument is that loss through bereavement is one significant factor in the emergence of charismatic personalities in adulthood. The survivor wishes to replace the deceased by others, others who are, in effect, followers. The charismatic character is a character in need of a following, of individuals who give support and succour to one in need of it. Indeed, the very notion of charisma, on this perspective and indeed even from a wider sociological perspective, is one that looks at a leader not simply as an isolated individual but as one focal point within a network. In other words, it is wiser to speak of a charismatic relationship than of a charismatic individual, since without followers the leader would be nothing.

The conquest of death that takes place in the life of a charismatic religious leader can also be interpreted by integrating Maurice Bloch's notion of rebounding violence with Aberbach's theory of charisma-generating grief. While rebounding conquest is, primarily, a sociological concept and the grief-charisma hypothesis is more psychological, there is everything to be said for utilizing these perspectives in a complementary fashion. On this basis, charisma is the outcome of the rebounding violence of grief. Other theories might complement or contradict this perspective and require further research. But for the moment I simply wish to indicate the need for pursuing these and similar issues: to advance this view, let me now give several examples of groups in which death has proved charismatically fruitful. Most of these examples are set against the background of the centrality of the death of Christ in mainstream Christianity, but one example is more obviously secular and returns us to the case of the death of Diana, princess of Wales, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in relation to the theory of offending death.

The Princess of Wales and Prince William

While the massed popular response to the death of Diana sets the event within the ideal type of 'offending death', showing it to be far from unique (Davies, 1999: 3–18), it can also be approached through the idea that grief may be related to charisma. If grief can foster charisma, then the dramatic public context of bereavement on the part of Prince William could furnish the basis for a high degree of charisma in the mutual relation between a king and the British public in the future. There may also be a sense in which the rebounding conquest motif might be applicable here, allowing the suggestion that the extreme sense of hierarchy between royalty and commoners was overcome; if so the rebound in the possible coronation of William would produce a new sense of unity between monarch and people. The combination of this with the sense of charisma might, in this

speculative thought, yield a particularly strong sense of king and people. Perhaps there might even be an echo in it of the way in which the young Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne on the death of her father, even though that was on a quite different level of public response. What was met with considerable public response was the wedding of Prince William with Kate Middleton on 29 April 2011 at Westminster Abbey. This much broadcast event, seen by millions across the world, and a public holiday in the UK, offered its own manifestation of a bereaved child now become a man, a marriage transcends a funeral, a dead princess-mother culturally transformed into a princess-wife.

Some Christian movements

From that broad social example which does not involve specifically religious values we move to a series of sketches of leaders of religious groups who do seem to have been influenced by grief or by associated aspects of death during formative periods of their lives.

The Quakers, or Society of Friends, furnish a prime example of death and religious motivation in the case of George Fox, their founder. In 1647 he fell into a trance for fourteen days and this was 'so like death that his friends really thought he was dead' (Bickley, 1884: 23). On his recovery he is said to have possessed such a change of appearance that he had become 'another individual', to have been 'made over again' in his own words. This kind of transformative death echoes the symbolic death and rebirth of numerous shamanic traditions. What is even more interesting, from my perspective, is that this trance was occasioned by the death of one named Brown who had received revelations concerning the future life and witness of George Fox.

The Shakers offer a different case, one that more closely reflects a fear of death in that this movement has been interpreted as gaining much of its power from the fact that its founder Ann Lee, or Mother Ann Lee as she is often and tellingly called, organized the movement on a basis of 'celibacy as a sexual solution to the problem of death' (Hansen, 1981, cited in Palmer, 1994: 242). This is thought to have appealed to many at a time when death rates at childbirth were high. She offered both religious salvation and a way of escaping a deep social problem.

Christian Science's founder Mary Baker Eddy was born in 1821; she, too, was deeply affected by bereavement and grief. When aged between twenty-two and twenty-four, as one author puts it, 'four bereavements within a few short years separated Mary Baker from brother, mother, husband and son' as she sank into an invalidism that would result in her forming a new religion (Wilbur, 1907: 48).

A much more recent group that called itself IAM provides some data for this theory of grief, but this time related to its membership. One study of IAM (otherwise known as the Institute of Applied Metaphysics, founded by a British emigrant to Canada, Winnifred Barton, in 1963) showed that 35 per cent of them had lost a parent before they were twenty years old. There was some evidence to suggest that the continuous appeal of the group lay in belonging to a large group that provided support but without demanding extensive intimacy among many members. In other words, support without commitment seemed to answer the need of people who feared loss after intimacy in their future life (Palmer, 1994: 128).

Bahai religion

Space does not allow any detailed consideration of other religions but let us not forget that, in Islam, Muhammad, according to some traditions, lost his father shortly after birth and his mother by age six. Similarly, the originator of the Bahai faith, Mirza Ali Muhammad (born 1819), lost his father soon after his birth and in turn also lost his only son as an infant (Esslemont, 1974: 13). He was martyred in 1850. His successor, Mirza Husayn Ali, who became the major figure in the rise of the Bahai movement, was born in 1817 and suffered the loss of his father when he was twenty-two. He is described as possessing an extraordinary power of attraction that easily reads sociologically as possessing charisma (23).

Mormonism

My final case, that of Mormonism, is one that I have fully documented in my study *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (2000). Here I will outline the barest points involving a double death. The first case is directly related to Aberbach's hypothesis on grief and charisma and concerns the death of Alvin Smith, the elder brother of Joseph Smith Jr (the founding prophet of Mormonism, and a man possessed of a high degree of charismatic power over his following). Alvin died in November 1823 when Joseph was eighteen years of age. Some two years after this Joseph told his parents that he had been so lonely since Alvin's death that he had decided to marry. This he did. But his dead brother still lay in Joseph's memory. The minister who buried Alvin said that it was likely that he had gone to hell, while his corpse was said to have been disinterred by aggressive neighbours. The father, Joseph Smith Sr, even went off to dig and see if that was true. Here was a brother's death that was entirely out of the ordinary and deeply traumatic for Joseph. Indeed, trauma is precisely the right word, for some thirteen years after the death Joseph received a profoundly influential vision of his brother. This was in 1836, six years after the founding of Mormonism and at the newly built Kirtland Temple. As part of the religious enthusiasm of this dramatic period of temple building and ritual activity, the dead brother returned to Joseph's mind. Religious enthusiasm and death stand shoulder to shoulder. The event sparked in Joseph a desire to cope with the death of his brother and of others in a formal way. The outcome was a scheme of ritual performed vicariously for the dead that would allow them access to salvation in the afterlife. This was the origin of what would become Mormonism's commitment to its now well-known scheme of genealogical research followed by ritual baptism on behalf of the dead.

But this was only the first influential death in Mormonism. The second lies in Joseph Smith's own death in 1844, a death by martyrdom, as many saints see it. His death contributed in a significant way to the development of the Mormon movement, bringing further power to its second prophet and leader Brigham Young. For, as I have shown in *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, this death brought added impetus to Mormonism, symbolized in the growth of a myth that on the occasion when Brigham Young established his authority over a rival for the leadership, he, Brigham Young, was said to have spoken with the voice of the dead Joseph and even to have assumed his physical features. There could be no greater 'words against death' than those spoken by a dead charismatic prophet through the lips of his potential successor.

New religious movements and death

Having pressed the case for grief, charisma and religious development, it is judicious to end this chapter with the caveat that not all religious groups need be so triggered. These established religious traditions marked by significant deaths surrounding their founders are significantly different from many contemporary groups emerging in the New Age arena of the past forty or so years in many of which death has played a minimal if nonexistent part. While these self-focused and personality development movements may utilize notions of symbolic death, echoing notions of shamanic death and spiritual rebirth or of near-death experiences, it is questionable whether they are grounded in actual deaths or in the grief of founders. This might suggest the emergence either of a different form of religiosity or of groups that will prove to be short-lived.

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Interpreting death rites

Just over a century ago one Christian author pondered *The Place of Death* in Evolution (Smyth, 1897) and concluded it was that of sorrow transmuted into joy. Many religious interpretations have done the same. If we assume that funerary rites represent one successful human adaptation to death, what is to be said about rites set more squarely within secular society? Throughout this book I have speculated that as the human animal gained self-consciousness it found death to be a major problem: not just in severed psychological attachments to those held dear, nor in the breaking of ties which are of sociological significance for group-based persons, but because of the more philosophical paradox of self-awareness failing to grasp its future non-existence – a point which does not necessarily and immediately involve fear of death. I have suggested that one major feature of the success of world religions lay not only in their capacity to cope with these precise issues but also in their capacity to turn grief to advantage. In particular I have drawn attention to what I have called 'words against death', a form of positive rhetoric of death, grounded in theologies and liturgies, through which death, bereavement and afterlife beliefs are formulated and expressed. The extent to which a religion is capable of giving both individuals and communities a sense of transcending mortality is the extent to which that religion will flourish. Here, Maurice Bloch's idea of rebounding conquest was used earlier to help show how funeral rites may give this sense of power to the bereaved, providing a ritual arena within which verbal rites gain their force. We have seen how world religions formulate some of the problems and how ethnic religions have coped with

death at their local level: how, for example, Indian traditions have been remarkably successful within their own cultural confines, and Christianity developed a theory and practice of death which came to transcend particular cultural boundaries. But, times change, and the future lies open as to how people will deal with death as times change.

Dataism

One study that is likely to attract a considerable readership in this context carries the provocative Homo Deus (Man God) and, despite its extensive text, is subtitled, 'A Brief History of Tomorrow'. In some ways it echoes our earlier description of Tylor on death and the origin of religion when Harari (2015) rhetorically asks us to 'just try to imagine Christianity, Islam or Hinduism in a world without death - which is also a world without heaven, hell, or reincarnation'. His point is to argue the irrelevance of these notions that have commanded the high ground of immortality for millennia. He now points to 'The New Human Agenda' and to 'death as a technical problem that we can and should solve' (22). He documents many examples of people and companies, such as Google Ventures, that place immense sums of money into researching and 'trying to win the game' against ageing and mortality (22–5). Harari recognizes the influence of religions in many parts of the world but, unlike many sociologists who see this as a nail in the coffin of secularization theory, he stoutly asserts that 'God is dead – it just takes a while to get rid of the body' (268). He knows that 'religion and technology always dance a delicate tango', but seems sure that traditional religions have little to offer compared with science and technology. His many-branched arguments include the significance of 'Dataism' or the 'Data Religion' and embrace discussions of the internet, cyberspace, a kind of anthropomorphizing of 'information' that 'wants to be free' and the idea that 'organisms are algorithms, and life is data-processing': still, his concluding reflections focus on human consciousness and 'self' as an 'imaginary story', versus 'highly intelligent algorithms' (374, 382, 304, 396–7, respectively). In other words, the human pursuit of meaning-making remains, and, with it, death as a boundary catalyst of human self-reflection, just how 'Dataism' may engage with 'death' remains a question for discussion, not least in relation to the mass of information that lives and, we

might say, dies or simply perishes from inattention. If each human being is regarded as a complex collection of information, and even if that information might be transferable to computers, the question of how to deal with the dead body that once processed so much information would remain. A ritual of 'information transfer' might occur prior to death with all appropriate images of that information being stored in 'the cloud', and that might well engender its own ceremonial satisfaction.

How many?

Before moving from such speculation to some actual non-religious funerary contexts, it is worth observing one aspect of 'data' aligned with death that is something of a constant within the media reporting of death in disaster or tragedy. This is captured in the question – 'How many?' Whether in an aeroplane crash, landslide or terrorist bombing, this issue of numbers of casualties leads the headlines. In one sense this might be expected and simply taken for granted, but I suspect it is also symbolic, not only of the generic drive for meaning but also of the way 'numbers' present their own realm of significance. It is as though the 'numbering' of the dead offers some frame of significance. Numbers confer 'meaning' even when no moral, existential or philosophical-theological sense can be made of what has happened. The power of 'number' that is vital in many aspects of empirical life is transposed to a situation that is, in other respects, meaningless or at least deeply dissonant within human reflection.

Be that as it may, we can now sketch the significance of three selected cases which explicitly deny an afterlife. I take these from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalists, nineteenth- and twentieth-century communists and twentieth-century humanists.

Secular French rites

One clear example from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France is set in the context of the French Revolution and the attempt at restructuring society which accompanied it. Anticlerical and anti-Christian groups of freethinkers set out to replace religious acts and explanations of life with secular alternatives. For example, Joseph Fouche, a leading Revolutionary, required local French cemeteries to display a notice asserting that 'death is an eternal sleep'. Robespierre did not think such acts would be widely acceptable to the population at large, as described by Kselman (1993: 125) in the excellent account *Death and Afterlife in Modern France*. Kselman also shows how Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825) seriously criticized Christianity because of its concern with, and emphasis upon, happiness in the next life rather than in this world.

Saint-Simon's associate the social philosopher Auguste Comte, who had a great influence on later sociologists, presented a philosophical scheme of developmental stages of human thought, beginning at a theological level before passing through a metaphysical stage and ending in a scientific perspective. Comte called these stages by other names which indicate the value he placed on each: the theological he called 'fictitious', the metaphysical he designated as 'abstract', while the final scientific stage he called 'positive'. This last term helps explain why Comte's sociology is sometimes called positivist sociology. But, later in life and under the influence of a love affair, Comte adopted a kind of spiritual approach to life and formulated a kind of secular religion with feasts and priesthoods and with initiation rituals which even included a rite to incorporate deceased people into his expanded community grounded in love some seven years after their death.

As to the afterlife, he thought in terms of 'objective' bodily life ending at death and being replaced by a 'subjective' existence, in the 'hearts and minds of others' (Charlton, 1963: 89–91). Here, once more, we do not find silence in relation to death. Churches, if that is the correct word, were set up, for example, in London, Leicester and elsewhere, and hymns were written and sung, up until the end of the Second World War as far as the Liverpool Temple of Humanity was concerned. One hymn, dedicated to Auguste Comte, spoke of him as 'Great prophet and revealer, First of the holy Dead' (92). Though this social experiment in secular religion ultimately failed to evolve into a world church, it still shows the human capacity to engage in ritual directed at death and framed by corporate optimism.

Soviet ceremonial

In two seminal articles Chris Binns (1979: 585ff.; 1980: 170ff.) detailed the emergence of what he preferred to call ceremonial in the Soviet Union of post-Revolutionary Russia (cf. Lane, 1981). Communist Party propaganda of October 1923 advocated a wide variety of secular rites, including that of funerals. In the early years secular funerals were provided only for heroes of the Revolution or for senior Party leaders, with bands, processions and speeches at the graveside ensuring a dramatic event. Though cremation became increasingly popular as the mode of disposal for these significant social individuals (Binns, 1979: 595), perhaps the most significant opposition to mortality came after Lenin's death in January 1924. His wife asked that no memorials should be made to him, except that of following his practical example of life. Binns comments that 'no urging could have been more cruelly ignored', as towns and streets were named after him, with 21 January set aside as an annual day of mourning his death. But, in particular, there followed a lying-in-state prior to the grand funeral and, unintentionally perhaps, the body was embalmed. Binns even uses the word 'mummification' for this act, which seems to have emerged as a result of public demand for thousands to come and see the body and pay their respects. He suggests that at a time when many religious relics were being proved fake, some a result of natural mummification, it was ideologically useful to demonstrate that science could achieve the same goal for the atheist leader. He adds that Lenin's 'miraculous preservation' might, for the masses, 'give him the aura of a saint'. The idea of the revolution and the new political reality could now be focused in the dead (yet preserved) leader, in his mausoleum at the very centre of the capital of communism. Here an ideological and ceremonial statement about death as subject to the new ideology was made in as dramatic terms as possible.

As time went on, war memorials came to enshrine the names of the patriotic war dead and were even used as the arena for youth initiation ceremonies, a clear example of the death-transcendence motif. Similarly, remembrance ceremonies were held annually and, as Binns (1980) expressed it, 'Death is transcended by immortal deeds.' For ordinary people a formal funeral procedure was evolved including processions, music, paying respects to the body and some statement from an official to the effect. 'A citizen of the USSR has completed his life's journey. The motherland says farewell to its son. May fond memories of him remain

eternally in your hearts' (180). Here death is set within the context not simply of family memory but also of the overarching purpose of the political regime. The ultimate words against death set the individual within the wider corporate ideology. Certainly, both the Soviet Union and other European countries such as Hungary during their communist period built large funerary areas where ceremonies could be conducted. Death was not relegated to some margin.

Shared secularity

In the communist reference to 'the motherland', in the traditional Christian affirmation of a 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection', in the contemporary Muslim description of the death of a fellow believer as 'He responded to the call of his Lord', for example, we find testimony to shared worlds of meaning and ultimate significance, whether this-worldly or otherworldly, as well as of a degree of authoritarianism. It is obvious from this that while 'secular' refers to an elimination of the influence of traditional religious ideas, it can still embrace a collective philosophy and a collective ritual, both enforced by established leaders, as in the case of communism. A similar situation exists in Britain, for example, where the British Humanist Association is prepared to send an official to conduct funeral services for those who do not wish to have religious mortuary rites. In 1995–6, for example, approximately 3,000 such ceremonies were conducted in the British Isles over a period of a year. It appears to be a trend that is on the increase: as noted in Chapter 14, some 4,000 rites were managed in 1999-2000.

Humanist funerals are, of course, not silent. The life of the deceased is firmly acknowledged and, in the sense appropriate to death, is celebrated. Above all else, the individuality of the dead comes to the fore as their life is detailed in its achievement. Significant relationships are detailed through the various circles of significance which have grown around the person while alive. These may be few, as in terms of the close and more distant family, or they may be extensive as additional circles of friends, work colleagues, guild associates, members of leisure and hobby clubs are all included. One Humanist memorial service provided by the American Humanist Association (Reyka, 1996) begins 'Let us be honest with death. Let us not pretend it is less than it is ... separation ... sorrow ... grief. But let us neither pretend death is more than it is. It is not annihilation. As long as memory endures ... it is not an end to love ... to joy ... and laughter.' The rite, using the symbolism of a lighted candle, involves an address including the words 'By remembering the best of this person, by recalling her finest qualities, by honouring the principle, values and dreams which guided her life, some of Jane's nobility flows into us, that we ourselves may be more noble in the days ahead.' The readings include Seneca's words, 'In the presence of death, we must continue to sing the song of life', while the final 'Benediction' includes the words, 'May we also on this day rekindle in our hearts an appreciation for the gifts of life and other persons. ... As you return to the routine of your lives, go in love, and may an abiding peace go with you.'

This is a forceful example of the way in which a secular approach to the worth of the individual as part of a community comes to be the basis for turning death to advantage. The use of words against death, in the sense of benefiting from the moral principles reflected in the deceased, is very extensive. In some parts of the world this is emphasized through the use of eulogies, which has increased in specific ways. Australia, for example, has witnessed the recent and rapid growth of what are often called life-centred funerals, which employ a person trained in public speaking, drama or the like to talk about the deceased and produce a ritual in which that life is rehearsed. These person-focused funerals reverse the attitude, strong in some Christian traditions, which viewed the identity and individuality of the dead as of minimal importance in funerary rites. The traditional Christian emphasis upon sin, divine mercy and an afterlife in heaven tended to devalue earthly life, probably on the basis that it had been the arena of sin rather than a sphere of pleasure. Forgiveness for the past rather than thanks for its enjoyment took ritual precedence. The telling phrase 'life-focused funerals' reflects the idea of the retrospective fulfilment of identity which was explained in Chapter 2 and which better fits many in contemporary 'safe' society than it does the traditional world of the great religions explored in earlier chapters.

Here, then, we have an answer to the opening question of this chapter. Secular patterns of funeral ritual can achieve much in helping people gain a sense of the significance of the life that is ended and, just as important, of life in the broader sense. In anthropological terms the eulogy or variety of speeches and comments made by family and friends at life-centred events fall into a version of what has been called 'definitional ceremonies' or 'strategies that provide opportunities for being seen in one's own terms, garnering witnesses to one's worth, vitality, and being' (Myerhoff, 1986: 267). Here the 'vitality' motif is significant, rooted as it is in the deceased person's former life as now presented to the imaginative memory of mourners, rather than in some theological assertion of a divine conquest of death.

Postmodern individuals and death

A different issue emerges when we speak of postmodernity, since it need not be devoid of religious sentiment. Postmodernism is not necessarily atheistic, it is eclectic and selective of bits of beliefs. Still, this muchdebated word is generally used to refer to individual interpretations of life devoid of shared commitment to overarching ideologies. Though I have serious doubts over the extent and significance of 'post-modernism' as far as the great majority of people are concerned, it is important to outline the attitude of mind which a small group of thinkers identify as typifying an era. It depicts an individualistic world shaken free from lifestyles grounded in tradition or voluntary commitment to collective creeds and ideologies; aloof from any accepted way of thinking and acting, the individual stands alone in a world of fragmented images, sounds and smells.

More fundamentally still, it has been argued that this lone person now experiences time and space in quite new ways (Harvey, 1989: vii). In terms of time, rapidity of consumption or pleasure replaces a slower pace, fast food replaces long meals, a workout in the gymnasium replaces a long country walk. Then, in terms of space, we find a growing uniformity across the world, with any one shopping mall or High Street reflecting any other. Hotels across the world can be all so similar. Fashions and music rapidly pass from place to place; it is as though time is collapsing and everywhere is the same place, 'objectivity is dissipated' (Bauman, 1992b: 35).

Negotiating individuality

While the significance of postmodernity on human identity has been widely discussed, relatively few have felt the need to extend their analysis to embrace death. Tony Walter (1996a: 195) has done so in his threefold classification of types of death into Traditional, Modern and Postmodern. Earlier chapters in this book, dealing with ethnic religions, exemplify his Traditional type, while the Modern type is covered by both Christian and communist rites. While Walter emphasizes the element of individual choice over planning one's own funeral, and even one's approach to death, he judiciously pinpoints the fact that even the most individualist of individuals still needs the collaboration of others in bringing about desired ends. His stress falls on the idea of 'negotiation'. 'The new authority in death and dying is not, therefore, the authority of the autonomous individual or of the post-modern consumer but the authority of persons who negotiate with each other and are influenced by what they see, hear and read' (202). In this, Walter is correct; death rites necessitate collaboration. But, in one important sense, they also require people to collude with each other. While atheists might interpret such collusion in its full negative sense of involving fraud, there is, I suspect, a more positive dimension of collusion in some ritual, especially when it involves a newly created symbolic event. One agrees to do something for someone, despite the fact it may appear unusual or odd. Be that as it may, the ritual remains social, with agreement on the fact that a symbolic event of some sort is to take place.

Body-philosophy

My own early and brief analysis of postmodernism and death took a different direction from Walter's to argue that the body itself has become a prime object of concern, whether in terms of its physical health or of its social image (Davies and Shaw, 1995: 104). Attention to the inner environment of the body, through health food and health clubs, or to its exterior environment of fashion dressing or fashionable holidays, serves to emphasize the fact that the body is a real and unavoidable reality worthy of attention. Here I agreed with Zygmunt Bauman's view that the human body is 'the only visible aspect of continuity' in the postmodern world or, in

David Harvey's (2000: 97) understanding, the loss of confidence in former categories has led to 'a return to the body as the irreducible basis for understanding'. Instead of shared commitments to some abstract philosophy, many share a sense of the importance of personal well-being which is, often, set within a wider framework of ecological concern. This is one major reason why I have doubts about postmodernism with its overemphasis on individualistic isolation of opinion. The media and various political and social movements serve to recruit many people, in their attitudes if not in actual group membership, to particular ideals about life and the world. Very many people do agree on issues of the body, they buy products reckoned to foster it and they acknowledge the importance of keeping the world pollution-free.

In many respects the contemporary upsurge of groups, often labelled as New Age groups, resembles the birth of many sectarian religious groups from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (Armytage, 1961). The difference is that while the latter were usually based on abstract theological ideas, the New Age groups are more materialistic, with various theories about gaining wholeness of body and mind through specific practices. In shorthand terms, theology has been replaced by ecology, the soul by the body, heaven by earth, churches by leisure centres. And, though we need to recall much from earlier chapters to qualify the comparison, we might extend these parallels to say that the churchyard has been replaced by the crematorium. But even this observation now needs some qualification.

Postmodernity and mortuary rites

The point of this comparison concerns the issue of space and time singled out by David Harvey (1989: viii) in his analysis of postmodernity. The crematorium, as a postmodern structure, colla pses both space and time. The body is not laid to rest 'forever' in the churchyard of a particular community surrounded by the familiar dead. Instead, it is rapidly destroyed and the remains scattered, perhaps an excellent example of Bauman's 'dissipation of objectivity' mentioned above.

One very telling example of such dissipation where space certainly takes on a different meaning lies with the Celestis Corporation of Florida, which offers the possibility of sending a small amount of cremated remains into outer space. Remains are to be placed in small containers, of differing quality depending on cost, which will be delivered by rocket and dispersed in such a way that each container will take its own journey in space for a very long time indeed (Phipps, 1989: 70).

This example emphasizes the issue of cremation within postmodernity.

While we have already seen in Chapters 2 and 5 that cremation has been widely employed as a religious vehicle for transporting the dead into the next phase of existence, here we stress the fact that cremation can also serve an important part in fostering postmodern as well as secular attitudes to death.

New mortuary techniques can trigger or foster ideological innovation. Cremation has done this, and something similar may take place with cryogenics, for example, which involves freezing the body as soon as possible after death and keeping it in a deeply frozen state until some future date when medical knowledge will be able to cope with the illness from which the person died. This process has been highly developed in some parts of the United States and involves teams of specially trained persons who will attend to a dead person as soon as is practically possibly after death has been medically confirmed (Spellman, 2014: 193). They take the body away to a treatment centre and prepare it for long-term deep-freezing; this involves replacing the blood system and administering special drugs to attempt to offset brain damage. One company located in California, Alcor, has led the way in this approach to death; it is possible for individuals to take out membership prior to their decease so that the most rapid response may occur when they die (Wowk and Darwin, 1991).

A much publicized case in the UK concerned a fourteen-year-old girl who was terminally ill and came upon cryogenics online and expressed her desire for it. This wish had to be taken before a court of law because her father disagreed with the mother and others of her family in supporting the girl's wishes. In a whole page covering this issue in a much-read daily newspaper the judgement of Mr Justice Peter Jackson sitting in the Family Division of the High Court was reported in terms of granting the girl's request while also expressing 'concern about the wholly unregulated area of cryogenics'. While the stress in this account lay on the strong desire of the girl for this mode of treatment and on the mother's being 'completely devoted' to her daughter, it also alluded to the difficulties felt by the family in not having had a funeral and the kind of 'reality' that such an event fosters (Greenhill, 2016: 11).

More widely speaking, many question the medical feasibility of restoring deeply frozen dead people to life again, while others touch on the social problems that might face anyone who is restored to life at some future date. For critics it is easy to interpret acceptance of cryogenics as acceptance of science fiction rather than of science as such, but for the small number who give themselves to the cryogenics programme, it is a question of belief in the power of science to triumph over death as a physical process and, perhaps, of the emotional thinking surrounding a terminal illness and the spark of hope amid emotional darkness. In a slightly indirect way we may compare cryogenics with the ancient Egyptian mummification, in that both prepare the body for a future life even though the Egyptians saw the future in a heavenly realm while cryogenics firmly locates it on earth. But cryogenics also resembles the beliefs of many other religions in expressing a profound optimism that death is not the end of human life. This hope in surviving and survival stands as a distinctive feature of some human beings at all periods of history; this case simply invokes an apparently scientific procedure as the basis for that hope.

Cremation, modernity and postmodernity

Still, while cryogenics and the transportation of ashes into space represent extraordinarily marginal interests, the place of cremation lies much more central both to late-nineteenth-century ideas of science and technology and to twentieth-century professionalization of death rites. In this, cremation marks the ideological world of modernity, where commitment to explicit ideals was matched by corporate ventures to build and manage crematoria. Against the millennium and a half of Christian burial practice, the adoption of cremation in the late nineteenth century marked a major social change.

Much detailed research remains to be done on the reasons lying behind the change, especially in terms of each particular country and cultural area. What is obvious is that cremation was adopted much more readily in countries with a tradition of Protestant religion while Catholic countries were more devoted to burial. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to cremation until the mid-1960s. One reason for this lay in the fact that in some European Catholic countries Freemasons had favoured cremation and opposed the Catholic Church, which had, in turn, set the Catholics against cremation. No such problem existed in more Protestant regions.

But there is another set of issues lying behind the adoption of cremation, especially in the industrialized cities of England. The first concerns the growth in the numbers of those dying in one restricted area and in the provision of graves for them. From the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century many British towns had grown considerably as large populations migrated to them to provide the workforce in the new industries. The small graveyards of old parish churches were soon overfull, often leading to insanitary conditions of hygiene and public health. From the 1820s to the 1850s in Britain there emerged many small companies which created their own cemeteries. New laws were passed for London in 1852 and for the rest of the country a year later enabling local authorities to prohibit further burials in existing graveyards. New burial boards came into existence, and from the 1890s the newly established local authorities were given the right to provide new cemeteries (Dunk and Rugg, 1994: 10).

At the same time there were others who saw the future in different terms. Instead of ever-extending cemeteries, whether hygienic or not, why not cremate the dead? The year 1874 witnessed the establishment of the Cremation Society of Great Britain with Sir Henry Thompson as its president; this group worked for a change in legislation to enable cremation to be carried out lawfully. The history of the 1870s to the turn of the century is complex as far as the establishment of cremation is concerned and is not the purpose of this book (Jupp, 1990, 1993). Suffice it to say that cremation was declared legal and the first official crematorium was opened at Woking in Surrey in 1885. It should not be forgotten that this was a period when industrial societies were using technology for ever-broader purposes. Engin eers were constantly pioneering all sorts of new machines; so it is not surprising that the idea of building cremation machines sat happily with wider cultural interests. Intellectually, too, there were many freethinkers who did not consider novelty and change from traditional customs to be inappropriate.

Even so, cremation was only adopted very slowly at first. The following table shows the growth in number of crematoria in Britain over the next

century or so (Davies, 1995a: 4):

Period	Number	Cumulative
1885–99	4	4
1900–09	9	13
1910–19	1	14
1920–29	6	20
1930–39	34	54
1940–49	4	58
1950–59	73	131
1960–69	73	204
1970–79	15	219
1980–89	4	223
1990–93	2	225
1990–2000	18	241
2000–14	36	277

Crematoria in Britain

This table shows how the 1930s witnessed the beginning of real growth in numbers, a process dramatically halted by the Second World War. By the mid-1960s more than 50 per cent of those dying in Britain were cremated. By then practically all the major Christian denominations, except the Orthodox, had accepted cremation. By 2014 this had reached 76 per cent.

Because Britain was the first Western society to reach a high level of cremation among its general population it is of particular interest, especially in terms of religious belief. In a very large study of people in Britain which I conducted in 1995 a kind of family funeral history was constructed to see which kind of funeral the grandparents, parents and spouses of more than 1,600 people had received. It was found that nearly half (49 per cent) of those who defined themselves as atheist or agnostic (47 per cent) said that, of their more recently dead relatives, most had been cremated. This compared with 38 per cent of those calling themselves members of the Church of England and 16 per cent of the Roman Catholics (Davies and Shaw, 1995: 89). This is an important finding because it suggests that during the period 1950–90 those with an atheist background were much more likely to have relatives cremated than buried. There are several

assumptions built into this suggestion, including the idea that those who are currently atheist probably belonged to families with a similar outlook.

While I have argued earlier that cremation came to take on an appeal for those who were Christian in Britain, it is now perhaps even more important to stress that it was probably of even greater significance for those without religious belief. In fact, the tremendous appeal of cremation in the population at large, so that by 1996 in Britain some 70 per cent of those dying were being cremated, probably comes from this dual acceptance by both religious and non-religious individuals. For those, then, who were actively atheist or agnostic, modern cremation possessed an intrinsic appeal. Several reasons combined to make this so. Of real significance is the fact that in Britain the crematorium is a building owned and run by the local authority or by a private company but not by any church. This differs, for example, from Sweden (see Chapter 8) where the crematoria are organized by the Church of Sweden as part of the religious provision made for the population who, until the late 1990s, paid a church tax to the state church.

In Britain, however, crematoria offer an increasingly more neutral ideological territory. Historically speaking, the crematorium is unique in providing an arena in which people of any Christian denomination as well as any Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jew or any atheist or agnostic can freely perform their own particular rites. Occasionally there is a problem, for example, if Christian symbols of the cross or some stained glass window are permanent fixtures. But, the ritual-symbolic repertoire of today's British crematoria, as in many Western European contexts, is now increasingly open so as to serve the purpose of many different groups. This makes the modern crematorium one of the clearest expressions of contemporary social spaces open to selective behaviour expressing diverse beliefs and attitudes. This is of importance when we observe the continued increase in number of some thirty-six new crematoria in the UK over the period 2000–14.

This rate can only be part of trends in design, management and ceremonial options in which secular individuals are free to use cremation quite independent of any religious practitioner or religious ritual. They may choose to have no ritual at all or else to compose or utilize a secular pattern of activity, perhaps drawing upon the British Humanist Association to provide the ritual leader. Shortly after the cremation they are, in Britain at least, free to take the cremated remains and do with them as they will. In a ritual sense there is a much greater degree of freedom from religious ritual than was possible even when someone might have been buried without religious rites but was still located in a cemetery surrounded by other people's religious symbolism.

Two cases of ash-scattering

Against the background of these statistics, two individual cases will illustrate several important points. These are not unusual and show how secular social contexts can leave either a family or an individual with rites to perform for themselves, apart from any wider religious interpretation. The first case is drawn from a conversation with a recently bereaved younger man and illustrates the need for creative activity in an area of grief and private action. On the death of his father the family opted for cremation and decided to place the ashes in an area of outstanding natural beauty in one of the British National Parks, in a valley that the father had loved as an amateur ornithologist.

On the day when they decided to take the cremated remains for placing in the valley the wife and son walked for some time to try and find a location with a good view. They felt this was somehow important for the deceased as well as for themselves; they also wanted a place which they would themselves recognize on future visits. One large rock stood out among other smaller rocks and attracted their attention. The suitability of this spot was then doubly confirmed for them, not only because there were birddroppings on the rock, which suggested that birds frequented the place, a fact that matched the father's ornithological interests, but also because they heard Royal Air Force jets fly overhead, coming as it were out of nowhere and rapidly passing by; this was also taken as a kind of confirmation of the right place, because the father had worked in an industry connected with aviation.

After depositing the man's remains near to this rock the wife placed on them a rose which she had brought with her, and they stood in silence for some time, estimated at perhaps ten minutes or so. They then left and, as they walked on, the mother suggested putting the empty container of the ashes into a public refuse bin because 'she wanted to get rid of it'. The son was uncertain about this and felt in some ways that he wanted to retain it. But he agreed with her; so they threw it away.

The second case can be related much more briefly and involves a highly educated Catholic woman whose task it was to disperse her father's cremated remains on a lake which had been a site he had enjoyed during his later life. The experience of placing these remains on the water had an effect upon this older, adult daughter which was greater than she had expected. As she watched the remains of her father first floating and then disappearing, she found that a sense of disbelief in life after death, which had been forming in her mind for some considerable time, came sharply to a focus. She now knew that she did not believe in life after death.

Many similar cases could be cited to illustrate the complexity of these private rites of locating ashes in appropriate places; these two have been mentioned only to show that the way cremation emerged in Britain resulted in the possibility of this private world of cremated remains, far removed from the single and public act of the burial of a body. In some respects this privatization can involve a removal of words against death, replaced only by a memorial silence. Whether this might involve a deleterious effect upon the will to live or accommodation to grief it is hard to say at this early stage of the practice. Even so, many people find ways of setting words against death as, for example, in the relatively recent form of the written memorial published in newspapers or elsewhere. These, typically, express the sense of loss of the deceased and a continuing love for them in short poems. The great majority of local newspapers in England carry these messages every week. They can be set within any sort of ideological framework or none, and often express direct sentiment in simple rhyme. These represent a true folk response to death in linguistic form.

Social optimism and pessimism

A. M. Hocart (1973: 157) speaks in his 1937 essay 'Baptism by Fire' of cremation as 'life-giving by means of fire'. He saw cremation a part of the 'process of life-giving' which lies at the heart of his vision of religious ritual as a 'technique for securing life' (51). Here Hocart reflects the underlying assumption of Chapter 1 of this book where we stressed the adaptive significance of death rites; he also echoes the anthropologist

Robert Hertz, discussed in Chapter 2, and presages Maurice Bloch by representing this group of anthropologists who manifest a kind of optimism in the view that society does not ultimately allow negativity to overwhelm its members. This differs significantly from the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's (1992a) argument, discussed in Chapter 1, that social institutions exist to hide the fact of death from members of society lest they be numbed into inactivity by the thought of death itself.

Euthanasia

Modern trends in euthanasia offer a clear example of the desire for deathtranscendence. Many people seem to share the idea that life is worth living when it possesses a certain quality of experience but feel that if a time comes when, through sickness and disease, they no longer have that degree of dignity and pleasure they feel is basic to life, then they would prefer to be killed painlessly. This idea of euthanasia or a good death depicts people wishing to be in control of their life at that future date rather than being subjected to the vagaries of illness and a drawn-out death. One of the reasons why there seems to be such a strong moral debate over this issue lies in the fact that many Christians, especially Roman Catholics, consider that it is God alone who has the ultimate control of life and of death and that it is improper for human beings to assume responsibility for the moment of death. In a very similar way this is also a reflection of the belief which opposes abortion.

Death, life and world communities

In concluding this book we must say something about the common fact of death. As the world becomes increasingly more familiar with the thousands of societies that have composed the broad spectrum of humanity and with the rituals they have generated to help them cope with death and to turn their face to life, so the potential for new rites grows. There are some contexts where an increased knowledge of human variety can lead to a rather negative or defensive attitude grounded in relativism. So, for example, some people might argue that because there are many religious beliefs, or several different sets of sacred scriptures, in the world no one of them is true. The study of comparative religion is sometimes said to make

people comparatively religious and to draw them away from believing in the absolute truthfulness of any one religion, and there is some truth in this observation.

But this does not seem to be the case with death ritual. The fact that practically all societies possess death rites does not mean that once people are familiarized with this variety, they wish to abandon death rites as irrelevant to their own needs. Indeed, knowledge of the varied options and possibilities seems only to provide greater scope for ritual action, as we see in Chapter 13 with its account of an exhibition in which numerous artists creatively reflected on funerals and memorials for the dead in contemporary society. The secular nature of some societies presents no bar to ritual. Ritual has come to be seen as something which can stand alone, apart from traditional religion, as a part of basic human and social behaviour with power to support and encourage individuals during difficult periods of life. In this sense, death rites are continuing to provide both men and women as well as boys and girls with an opportunity to reflect upon themselves and upon the nature of life itself.

Rhetoric of mortuary rites

I end this book by re-emphasizing the issue of rhetoric, that verbal arena where one person persuades others by an eloquence appropriate to the theme in hand, and no arena has challenged the human ability to frame its creativity in language more than death. The outcome has engaged the great issues of salvation, of enlightenment and of the meaning of the past and future. Most especially, it has demanded that humanity consider the nature of its own sense of identity. This is as true in societies with a strong religi ous framework as for groups or individuals possessing a more secular outlook, precisely because death draws attention to the depth of existence which is focused in particular human beings.

In traditional societies, religion gives meaning to life by framing death within a much broader picture of eternity and destiny through the rhetoric of salvation. In secular societies, that frame changes and may take numerous forms. In Chapter 13 we briefly touch on the nature of various media as they present facts of death and ideas of life, and much more could be said about the creative arts as means of dealing with death. For people whose self-identity is associated with the imagination and its flourishing through literature or artefact, it is to be expected that novel vehicles will be drawn upon to deal with death in a non-religious world. In societies where personal beliefs take the form of clusters of significance, drawn from many quarters, it is unlikely that any systematic belief in death and afterlife will emerge. Despite that, it is unlikely that human beings will simply see death as negating life. By engaging with death through ritual, the identity of the dead will be turned to some positive effect in the ongoing memory of the living.

One individual vision is provided at the close of David Harvey's *Spaces of* Hope (2000) in an odd appendix in the form of a dream of the world in 2020, a reverie on the future inspired by Thomas More's vision of utopia. It not only describes the economic and ecological catastrophes that brought about a new world order but, among other things, it gives an account of death. In Harvey's utopia, death rites vary from 'the relatively private and quiet to the very social and even boisterous' (278). People do not fear death but accept it as a normal part of life; death is a time of both sadness and celebration, 'the moment of the eternal return of the human spirit to its origins and the moment of transmission of all that has been accomplished through a life to another generation'. It helps people take stock of their own life, 'and to recommit themselves to activities and relationships that will be worthy of transmission to future generations' (278). Unlike the rest of Harvey's prophetic dream, the theme of death reflects, more or less, our current and contemporary world; it is the least creative of his visions; at least, it is so once we are aware of the contemporary variety of approaches to death present especially in Western Europe, which perhaps currently offers more scope for individualized lifestyle funerals and responses to death than Harvey is familiar with in Seattle. Another expression of individualism appears in books like the *Natural Death Handbook* (Albery, Elliot and Elliot, 1997) providing inventories of all sorts of issues associated with death and funerals for a consumerist society where lifestyle choices extend into what might be called 'lifestyle funerals'.

Much more traditional is the preface to the second edition of the classic treatise *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* where Evans-Wentz (1960: xv) raised a question which still carries power in the light of the diverse treatments of death we have covered in this book. He spoke of an unwillingness to die in

the West which seemed to go hand in hand with a general ignorance about death. That preface was written in 1948, shortly after the Second World War, and much has happened since. Even so, the issue of unwillingness to die must be set in the broad context of knowledge and schemes of understanding of death.

Willingness and knowledge may run very closely together. It may be, for example, that one reason why death is not discussed widely in Western societies is precisely because of a lack of a framework for its discussion; there is no basis for the rhetoric. This differs so tremendously from the kind of picture painted by Vitebsky's (1993) insightful and evocative study of the Sora of eastern India where 'dialogues with the dead' constitute an extensive basis for thinking about death and engaging in grief. 'Dialogues with the dead', he says, 'are not about death, but about life: it is only by having a vision of what it is to be dead, that one can have an understanding of what it is to be alive' (259). His rich ethnographic material provides one kind of model for exploring the rhetoric of 'words against death' in an exemplary fashion.

Many contemporary urban societies may well be developing their own patterns of verbal response, not least in terms of the medical condition of the deceased, a topic that is much easier to discuss than that of any presumed spiritual state. Perhaps one reason why the hospice movement is so positively perceived is because it relates humane questions to a broad medical frame but without reducing them to it. It is precisely when a clear philosophy emerges as, for example, with atheism or with a more New Age approach to ecology or nature that people may talk again about their death and their preparation for it. Much contemporary talk of death focuses on personal fulfilment and upon its negative aspect, the fear of an old age lived in illness or decrepitude. Individuals may yet have to become increasingly inventive in the way they view death, especially in relation to their intimate family and friends. For example, Michael Lesy (1987), in his haunting exploration through arenas of death in modern life, tells how his now aged father had encountered all sorts of difficulty when, as a young man and speaking no English, he sought to migrate to the United States. Now old, dispirited and sick, he looked only to die until his son rehearsed his lifestory with all its hardships over which he had triumphed to become a successful doctor. Now he comes to the point where he must 'find a way to live through all this until you die' (194). Regardless of religion or of a secular value system, there is need of courage to live.

It was only through telling that story of courage that Lesy felt he had moved from cliché to poignant words of power. In that, he touches the underlying theme of this book: the power of words within the power of ritual broadly conceived. We have not engaged in any extensive analysis of the rhetoric of particular societies or of their rites; that is a complex task which needs detailed study for each culture (Oliver, 1971). Indeed, it is that daunting necessity that brings me to end this book by borrowing from one of the fathers of comparative religion, the great Max Muller (1898). In concluding his famous Hibbert Lectures on the origin and growth of religion he expresses his, and my, thought well: 'Here I should have much liked to have had some more lectures at my disposal, if only to show the influence which the first conscious contact with death exercised upon the mind of man' (382).

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