

If which it is dealt with
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If there is one constant in this world, it would surely be death. Dying is an unavoidable part of life.

Indeed, everything that lives will at sometime die. The fear of death is held by everyone. Perhaps it is the correlation of death with pain or the unknown state of the human consciousness after death, maybe a combination of both, that creates this fear.

The fear felt is undoubtedly universal, however, the ways in which it is dealt with are varied and diverse. The concept of human mortality and how it is dealt with is dependent upon ones society or culture. For it is the society that has great impact on the individuals beliefs. Hence, it is also possible for other cultures to influence the people of a different culture on such comprehensions. The primary and traditional way men and women have made dying a less depressing and disturbing idea is through religion. Various religions offer the comforting conception of death as a beginning for another life or perhaps a continuation for the former.

Christians, for example, believe that souls that have lived by the words of their God will exist eternally in heaven as divine beings themselves. This conception of an afterlife is generally what we people who are residents of the United States hold to be true. For American culture has its roots in Europe and European culture was and is still influenced by Christian faiths. Similar to Christianity, the Hinduism also eases the fear of death by presenting a life after death. Disimilarities present themselves in the two faiths concerning exactly what kind of afterlife is lived. Believers of the Hindu faith expect to be reincarnated after their demise, either as an animal or

human being depending on the manner in which their lives were carried out. These ideals have influenced our culture through our use of language and thought. The implications are apparent in the common references to one's past lives.

For instance, if someone has a natural talent for music one may refer to the person as being once a talented musician in a past life. A religion which describes death as a continuation of existence is held by the Crow tribe of middle America. They viewed death as a journey with the final destination as a place where all their ancestors have gone before them. This notion of an afterlife eased the tribes' assimilation into Christian culture when colonists came in contact with the Native Americans during the colonial expansion period. Examining further into the past, myths were first used to explain the conclusion to one's life. Looking at what little literature that has been found which has been written by the Sumerians, a picture of an afterlife is formed. Their idea of an afterlife is illustrated through the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The death of the protagonist's friend, Enkidu, allows the reader a glimpse into this existence. Enkidu describes the afterlife as being spent underground for all time, doing exactly nothing that is either enjoyable or exciting. The concept from the Ancient Sumerians has definitely influenced the Ancient Greeks. The Greeks believed in an underworld in which they spent eternity in. The realm was a shadow of their former lives.

Happiness was not conceivable in their afterlife. In turn, the Roman culture was greatly influenced by the Greek concepts of death. The Romans incorporated the Greek gods into their religion and also their notions of the

afterlife. These notions were then expanded to include different levels of the underworld where certain types of people resided.

Take for example in Virgil's Aeneid, Aeneas the main character journeys into the underworld to visit his father. He initially arrives in a place for lost souls and then reaches the Elysian Fields (Elysium) where great heroes, warriors, and people of talent dwell. The Roman culture, in turn, influenced the various cultures of Europe during the middle ages slightly before the enlightenment. The pagan religion the Romans believed in were replaced with Christian concepts of an afterlife, however, the notion of the underworld was kept and modified.

Once again the incorporators made the underworld more elaborate and redefined it as Hell. In Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, the first book, The Inferno, describes the underworld with significantly more levels each of which descended to lower levels that contained increasingly ironic and torturous punishments. These levels corresponded to the Christian concepts of sin and those who had committed such sins in life would be forced to spend time being punished for them. Dante's second and third books show that human existence is revolved around God and that good deeds will bring people closer to perfection. One can see through the progression of time that each culture is in some way impacted by other cultures either directly or indirectly. Recently, a method of dealing with the concept of death without religion or myth has come about. Starting from Ancient Greece and continuing through the Renaissance then accelerating and accumulating momentum to the present, it is logical and rational thought that has eased human fear of death.

Philosophers and critical thinkers have deduced that death is a biological necessity. Without death the process of renewal can not be complete. A realization of this inevitability and necessity has in itself brought comfort for those who chose logic rather than faith. This culmination began in European culture then transcended to American culture. Thus, one can extrapolate from the growing numbers of people who lack religious background, that the future holds to be one without faiths. Cultural influence though religion and concepts of the death or afterlife will become in a sense obsolete.

Death is dealt with differently by people of different cultures, but these cultures were in some way influenced by others of the past and present. Judging from the current trend, the classical methods of dealing with death such as religion and myth are becoming subsequently less and less useful to the people of today. People who desire a definite answer. Hence, the world of tomorrow will not be one which is dependent on preconceived notions and limits set by the past. Such a future is boundless and exciting and at the same time frightening. The world is in a sense shedding its old skin to make way for the new skin.

Old skin being traditional ways of thought based on faith and the new skin being a mixture of ancient and new arising thought based on logic and science.