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estudosdepsicologia@puc-  
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## Death over time: Brief notes about death and dying in the West

### *A morte inscrita no tempo: breves apontamentos sobre a morte e o morrer no Ocidente*

Rosangela **WERLANG**<sup>1</sup>  
Jussara Maria Rosa **MENDES**<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

This literature review deals with death and the changes in its concept and meanings over time, aiming to relate this to the different social organizations and issues that involve individuality and human finitude. It intends to arouse the reflection about this theme respected by all of us, and related to our own contingency. In this sense, the article provides several perspectives through different authors' voices, seeking to understand how we arrived at this contemporary stage where death must be forgotten at any cost. It is a forbidden subject even inevitably being part of our daily lives, and its guardians must increasingly insure the non-participation and non-involvement of the people. Therefore, understanding the past stages of death, from its proximity to its banishment from the social life, is a necessary condition to analyzing our own end, and the end of our own individuality.

**Keywords:** Death; Finitude; History of death.

#### Resumo

*Esta revisão de literatura trata da morte e das transformações em seu conteúdo e significado ao longo dos tempos, e tem como objetivo relacioná-la às diferentes organizações sociais e às questões que envolvem a individualidade e a finitude humanas. Incita à reflexão acerca de um tema tão caro a todos nós, qual seja, a nossa própria contingência. Nesse sentido, traz perspectivas na voz de diferentes autores, buscando compreender como chegamos à condição contemporânea em que a morte deve ser olvidada a qualquer preço. É assunto interdito, mesmo que inevitavelmente presente na vida cotidiana, cuja blindagem deve assegurar, cada vez mais, a não participação dos indivíduos, o não envolvimento. Destarte, compreender os caminhos percorridos pela morte, da proximidade ao seu banimento da vida social, é condição necessária à análise de nosso próprio fim, de nossa própria individualidade.*

**Palavras-chave:** Morte; Finitude; História da morte.

One of, if not the greatest human concern, is related to death. As presented by Matta (1997),

to know if death can be overcome, to know its meaning, and to suffer with the paradoxical fact

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<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Psicologia, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia Social e Institucional. R. Ramiro Barcelos, 2600, 3º andar, 90035-003, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil. *Correspondência para/Correspondence to:* J.M.R. MENDES. E-mail: <jussara.mendes@ufrgs.br>.

that this is the only social experience that cannot be transmitted, are contemporary issues and are strongly related to individualism, ethics and to our social institutions. The concern about death is not modern, however, it currently has a different meaning, as there is a type of awareness related to human individuality, which solidified in this period. To a certain extent, modernity is confused with the image of the individual, a new human image, unrelated to a lot of ties that used to bind them to traditional society (Roman, 1996). However, the contemporary meaning of death can only be understood if the different attitudes towards this constant presence are reviewed. The awareness of one's own death is a constitutive achievement of the human which, in turn, is determined by an objective consciousness of one's mortality and also by a subjectivity that pursues immortality at all times (Kovács, 1992). Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the different representations of death in different social organizations, in order to understand the relationship between them and the constitution of individuality and human finitude.

Ariés (1989), on the analysis he makes regarding death in Western societies, highlighted some aspects related to human attitudes towards death. For this author, there are three important death dimensions: The tamed death; the death of the self; and the death of the other. These three dimensions are also historical dimensions, which have gone through time based on types of human relationship with death and the undeniable fact of finitude. In relation to the tamed death, the idea of advice, a warning, was a basic characteristic, which means that people "did not die without having had time to realize that they were about to die" (Ariés, 1989, p.18).

In this sense, there was the possibility of prevention and advice could be given through natural signs, or even an inner conviction of those whose lives were threatened. When a dying person realized they would not live much longer, they took the necessary precautions, with complaints regarding the decadence of life and the likely forgetfulness of the world. Death was expected on the deathbed, in silence and without complaint. As

a part of this ritual, there was a public ceremony organized by the dying person, who presided and coordinated the protocol to be followed. Children and relatives gathered for the last recommendations, the last good-byes and, after that, the soul was commended. The familiar simplicity was, therefore, one of the remarkable characteristics of the tamed death.

Concurrently, another feature was its counterpoint and its contradiction: How public it was. People knew the individual would die. There was a warning and everybody, even people who were not known by the family, could enter the dying person's house and bedroom. This was the concept of the tamed death: The familiar death, resigned, patient, organized. The person died in the deathbed and the pain was felt by all those present, although silently, without the marked dramatic character. This was not the same as keeping or repressing unbearable and intolerable pain: The pain was there, however, not in an unbearable and intolerable way. Everyone helped the dying person in the death ritual and, from a young age, children could help the parents in this process, staying silent and keeping doors and windows open, to make the entrance of death easier (Rodrigues, 2006).

The truth about death was necessary, and an unprepared death was unfortunate. This was the origin of the fear of death, however, it was not connected to all kinds of death, but to: The treacherous, wily, unexpected and, for this reason, dreadful death. This configuration prevented the farewell, the organization, and the preparation ritual. This attitude was specific for a certain, very well defined, historical period: It appeared clearly in the fifth century A.D. and disappeared without a trace by the end of the eighteenth century. The genesis of this familiar attitude and the fact that life and death were getting closer was connected to the penetration of cemeteries into cities or villages and its end was set when this promiscuity became intolerable. Rather than close coexistence with the dead, during Antiquity cemeteries were "always out of town, along the roads, as in *Via Appia*, in Rome" (Rodrigues, 2006, p.107). Graves were far from the cities and the diversity of pagan

funerary inscriptions shows a society poor in common opinions related to death and eternity.

The grave or tomb was a private and privileged place and the dead person was, in a certain way, compelled to explain the meaning of his death, highlighting it in the inscriptions on the tomb. The tombs and mausoleums were used to make public the announcements of the dead and, in this sense, would transform the everyday landscape, with the desires and impressions of those who had passed away. Later, with the rise of Christianity, the church was placed among the people, the family and the city, becoming a unique institution that would work on the preservation of the memories of the dead. These individuals were, up to then, alone. From this moment, a new perspective of death was created: the rituals, which until this point were performed in cemeteries, became insufficient. The dead would start being remembered in ceremonies and in several religious-Christian performances. The Church would, then, replace the city in the celebration and worship of the dead.

In Antiquity, eternity and even immortality of the soul seemed to be missing as a concern. The widespread opinion was that death was nothingness, an eternal slumber and the disseminated idea was that an aimless life in the shadows was no more than a tale. There was some speculation regarding the survival of the soul, however, this was restricted to small sects. Besides the body, the corpse, nothing else existed.

Nevertheless, the funeral rituals and art displayed in the tombs indicate the existence of some anxiety that needed to, somehow, be appeased. "The moribund did not fear the mythological punishments in the imagined hells that nobody ever believed in; they feared the Gods though" (Rodrigues, 2006, p.212), authoritarian and vindictive, without necessarily having ever asked themselves how they would really act. Elias (2001) argues, to some extent, the position held by Ariés (1989) that death was a pacific event in the past. He believes in the idea that, in the civilizing process, the attitudes regarding death and the way people die, changed. However, the situation is more related

to medieval society, when life was shorter, dangers less expected, death more painful, and punishment after death the official doctrine. However, there was no sense of proximity in this perspective. Death was certainly more public, as people lived closer and their houses provided fewer choices for events related to births or involving deaths.

Conversely, the cover-up and repression of death, even being always present, changed in a specific way as time passed. In this manner, the fear of transitoriness was lightened by the shared fantasy of a life in another place (Ariés, 1989). The authors both highlight the rise in the degree of individualization that surrounded the death and dying process. The death ritual is, thereby, primarily related to the place where people created a specific world dedicated to this event: The cemeteries. These were "at the time of Merovingians always placed far from cities and inhabited places" (Rouche, 1989, p.486). This relationship can also be noticed among the Romans, specialists in lining the roads with tombs.

In contrast, the Germans developed rural cemeteries. All these practices would eventually lead to the establishment of a separate world for the dead. There was a gap that could be understood as a fear of contact, taking into consideration that many groups even incinerated the corpses, fearing their return, or planted thorny species of vegetation around the tombs, trying to avoid the return of a nostalgic soul. Many times the corpse was buried along with the person's belongings or objects that could, possibly, be used in another life. The body was placed on a kind of a stretcher and taken from the village to the cemetery in a procession (Rouche, 1989). Sometimes, banquets were held in the cemeteries, among the tombs. These events were designed to appease the dead and strengthen the family ties, and it was not uncommon for people to dance and sing to conjure up the dead.

It is possible to say death is and was, without a doubt, a social phenomenon and the knowledge of this fact is one of the characteristics of humanity. In this scenario, graves fall into a setting where man leaves his mark as he can be recognized over time because of it (Rodrigues, 2006). Through

the rituals elaborated by man along with his humanization process", it is possible to notice an attempt to try to disassociate the dead from one place in order to establish them in another place later. The burial, the procession, the tombs and the funeral practices are the material and non-material expressions of a society that aimed to ensure its members that the dead were going to a specific place in a controlled and organized way. The people maintained the certainty that the ones who passed away left us safely; a necessary feeling to be reproduced by their own group.

It can be said that the rites and rituals related to death had (and still have) this function, that is, to make possible the entrance of the dead into their new destination. Tombs would be a type of passport of humanity at the border of no-man's-land (Morin, 1988) and would effect the transition from the so called "nature state" to the "man state".

Since prehistory, concerns regarding immortality may be found in this border. These concerns started with a pile of stones over the corpse, with the aim of ensuring its integrity and, slowly, expanded to include the dead person's belongings in the same funerary space. For this reason, weapons, bones and food were left with the dead person as useful instruments for the next dimension of life (Morin, 1988), also the conservation of the body was important, as it implied the possibility of the extension of life. Furthermore, it is possible to say that death implicitly carried the expectation of life being extended into another dimension. Caring for the dead, in this sense, made people think about guaranteeing the success of this action.

Little remains of the graves of the Middle Ages. The passing of time brought important changes and innovations related to the dying process. The dead, in the Middle Ages, started to coexist with the living. What can be understood from this new stage is that there was a new attitude regarding the dead and this attitude had at its core the confidence in the resurrection of the body and the devotion of the Saints or religious martyrs. In fact, some graves that were far from the villages or cities were moved closer to the saint's or martyr's

tombs, and "...the basilica became the center of a new cemetery *ad sanctos*..." (Ariés, 2000).

The dead no longer seemed strange to the people and there was quite a scene related to the opening of the tomb and the removal of the corpses. The increasingly unbearable smells revealed a situation in which it was possible to notice a very close relationship between the living and the dead (Ariés, 1989). In this scenario, exposed bones could be seen emerging from the soil. This did not cause any surprise or discomfort and was not seen with repugnance. The coexistence became so natural that, at a certain point, there was no difference between the outskirts, where the dead were always buried, and the city. This fact shows the abandonment of any aversion to death, in exchange for a kind of intimacy. This transformation can be analyzed through the "*Book of Life*" in which some deep associations between individual life and death can be seen. It would be the moment of settlement of accounts for everybody, the "settlement of accounts to show at the heaven's door" (Ariés, 1989, p.32) that would, from then on, make people responsible for their attitudes on earth.

These attitudes represented their passport for a new life and determined the place where each one would be sent, and the destiny they would have. This is the second dimension analyzed by Ariés (1989), the acknowledgment of the death of the self. The death scene also changed: The dying person's bedroom, a place used for public and family gathering, suddenly became full of supernatural presences gathered on the bed of the dying person, expressed by the *artes moriendi* present from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century (Ariés, 1989).

These works also show the speculation regarding the battle between good and evil for the dying person's body and soul, which means that there was no longer a guarantee of a good life in the next dimension. Slowly a narrow relationship between death and the biography of each of us started to be established: The things that had been done in life would represent a license for the new life after death. In addition, we can say that it is in art where the representation of a corpse can be noticed, for the first time. This would usually be

represented in decomposition, embodying human misery, degeneration and the ruin of life.

The repugnance toward decomposition has at its core the concept of contamination by death, which, in turn, leads to the idea of the decline of individuality. The macabre theme started to emerge at this time, in art as well as in literature. The *transi*, as the corpse was also called, initially shown in decomposition started to be shown as a skeleton or even as bones. This last proposal represents the dry death.

Physical death, presented in a decomposed way, can be considered an expression of finitude and shows that immortality was being questioned. It may be said that there was an awareness about death, that "death became the place where men started getting to know more about themselves" (Ariés, 2000, p.47), it is the pain caused by death that grows, directly related to the dead person's uniqueness, as does being loved and respected. Morin (1988) named this horror of death, with its close link to individuality, the death trauma. In this sense, for the author, individuality's affirmation rules the death awareness, the death trauma and, even, the belief in immortality. It means that when there is a human awareness about his individuality, an increasing worry about death complementarily emerges. Thus, perhaps the greatest human concern, death, is not only with the death *per se*, but also related to the affirmation of human individuality and certainty about death.

Gradually, a close link between the death of each person and the awareness of individuality becomes clearer. From resignation to death, there comes a stage where death has a continuously more individual aspect, the death of the self, the links of which articulate with the attitudes in life. At this time, four important parts composed the funerals, these being: The expression of pain; the forgiveness of the dying person by the priest; the funeral procession; and the burial.

The expression of pain took on a dramatic form, announcing the loss of a loved one, different to the resignation scene, a trace of which was left from the tamed death. This does not mean that death was not intensely felt, but that it was

accepted, somehow, as the destiny. The forgiveness, in Western terms, provided the religious connection that exists at the center of the dying process. The priest would forgive the dying person's sins and, subsequently, the funeral procession would take charge of the transportation of his corpse, taking him to the burial place. The procession and the burial were still performed by laypeople, as the priests did not participate in these two steps. They were carried out by the closest friends and relatives and the priest's contribution would be concluded with the forgiveness given prior to the procession. Finally, the burial was quick and without solemnity.

At this time, in addition to the understanding that the process of dying was increasingly connected to the process of living, the correlation with the idea of last judgment can be noticed, with the image of hell and its torments reflected in representative death scenes. The notion of the last judgment is conceived through the image of a court where "Christ surrounded by angels carrying pennons, sits on the throne of the judge; the oval aureole that isolated Him has disappeared. His group surrounds him: Rarely were the twelve apostles represented exactly by His side..." (Morin, 1988, p.124). Each person, at the end of the trial, would be sent to heaven or hell. An important presence in this picture is Saint Michael, whose scales indicate the division between the chosen and the convicted that would, once again, be separated by the sword of the archangel Gabriel, the distinction being doubled. The "*Book of Life*" or "*Liber Vitae*", as previously mentioned, would show ostentatious images regarding death at this time. In it, it would be possible to see the human concerns of individuality and the life history of each person. It would be organized into columns, where the individual actions taken during life were transcribed and identified. It was "a kind of a passport, a criminal record that was necessary to show at heaven's door" (Morin, 2000, p.128).

As mentioned by Ariés (2000), the book is written over the entire life in order to be used only once: at the moment when the account is settled, where the active and the passive are compared, where the review leads to an end. From a time



characterized by the near absence of a private biography that would disappear in the community, the life judgment is presented here in its most unique form. The certainty about the continuity of life in another dimension, previously almost considered indubitable, was shaken. The extension of life after death would only be ensured after the last judgment: The weighing of the soul. This is the idea of good and evil battling for the human soul, a pendulum like spectacle without choice.

As previously stated, the concepts related to death and immortality started to be based on the presence of an awareness of the self. Feuerbach (1993), conducting some studies, distinguished three elementary stages that define the doctrine or the concepts regarding mortality/immortality in Western society. These are as follows: The Greco-Roman time, the Catholic Christian time during the Middle Ages, and the Modern time (Feuerbach, 1993). For the author, the Greeks and Romans neither believed in nor were aware of any kind of immortality in the way that it is seen in modern times. The Romans, according to Feuerbach, used to live only in Rome, and for this reason they had limited space and a limited view: They did not know any life different from the life in Rome. Because of this, the pursuit of Roman glory and the expansion of their domain relied on the ambitions of each person in a particular way.

For this reason, the person was a part of their community, being neither out of nor above the real and concrete life. "The Roman was the soul, the 'I' of the Roman; he was something and was aware that he was something, not on his own, but only in union with his people, only in and through them" (Feuerbach, 1993, p.59). This implies that that the Romans did not see a division between reality and its possibility. Also, they did not know about their survival or immortality. The same was the case for the Greeks that, even considering life in another dimension, would see themselves as a group, never as individuals. Because of this, the belief in immortality with an individual character started to be imagined from the Middle Ages, in a relationship with faith and dogma.

During the Catholic Christian time, the belief in immortality was related to faith in the existence

of God, a divine grace directed toward the content of the Christian religion. In the beginning, the individual human had not yet attained the desolate and empty consciousness of his individuality, of his isolated autonomy, he had not yet abandoned himself to himself and taken his stand on himself (Feuerbach, 1993). This means that the spirit of community still existed, however, it was a spirit of a specific community: Those who believed and had faith in the existence of life after death, with divine characteristics; life in a sacred community.

The church represented this possibility and immortality itself would be related to a decision that had not yet been taken. It did not depend on individual effort, but on a divine decision. Little by little, as mentioned previously, life and individual attitudes started delineating death and the way people would die. Consequently, an image arose of heaven and hell as places where the person would be able to spend, along with other people, everlasting life. Evil follows evil and good follows good, therefore, life would not cease with death, because death could lead to eternal salvation and happiness or to endless misery. This misery is masterfully described in Alighieri's work (Alighieri, 2007).

Hell, comprised of nine circles arranged in a conical shape in the direction of the center of the earth, is the original place of Lucifer's fall, the rebellious angel who lives in the darkness. The first circle is the selection place: Here people wait for the *verdict* of *Minus*, the judge. He decides which of the subsequent circles will be the final place. The second circle is for the lustful, the third for the gluttonous, the fourth for the hoarders and spendthrifts, the fifth and the sixth for the envious and heretics. The seventh circle is for the ones who are violent against God, nature and the self. The eighth is for the panderers and flatterers. And, finally, the ninth is where Lucifer is. This last circle is dense and deep, and this is the final dimension. It is set in a huge ice block where the inhabitants, in addition to Lucifer, are all traitors. "That soul up there which has the greatest pain / the Master said, is Judas Iscariot/he inclines his head to the devouring

mouth" (Alighieri, 2007, p.185). In fact, it is Lucifer who chews the head with one of his three mouths: The other two are for Cassius and Brutus, Roman Emperor traitors. All the circles are divided into smaller parts, where there is enough space for all the human sins.

To this extend, in the Middle Ages, the increasingly strong presence of the Christian idea of resurrection is noticeable, that is, the capability of returning from the world of death. This fact demonstrates the concept of an immortal individual, and the resurrection, in this case, is the symbol of the eternity created in this period. Subsequently, the third stage analyzed by Feuerbach is related to the modern times, essential for the individual's settlement. "The characteristic of the modern times is that now man is seen as a man, the person is seen as a person, and with this, the human himself is recognized by himself in his individuality as divine and endless" (Feuerbach, 1993, p.65).

In this sense, the church, as a unit, was replaced by principles and foundations of faith that play an essential role. In this context, Protestantism can be considered as one of the strong expressions of the human individuality, as Christ was considered a God-man. Complementarily, a study made by Weber (2000) can be mentioned, which discussed the possible links between religion and economical rationality, i.e., the combination of the economic and social dimensions with religious convictions or principles. Weber introduced the idea of a connection between specific orientations, in terms of religious attitude, in this case, Protestantism, with the development of a typical rational attitude in the economical level of the human life, typical of Capitalism.

Man, in the Calvinist view, would be individually saved or condemned by God. Conversely, the earthly obligation of everyone would be to work toward His glory. The anxiety generated by the uncertainty of salvation would be the final motivation for this work. Accordingly, personal behavior became a route to eternal grace and the resignation of human things, the flesh and the sin, alone would not be enough to guide people to salvation. Resignation would still be necessary.

However, it would be strongly related to work, and this work would generate wealth that should never be wasted or used in an irresponsible way. Wealth was the measure of the recognition achieved, the final benediction. This complex intertwining generated a lifestyle, an *ethos*, which, in turn, would influence and propitiate capitalist development. This characteristic spirit or

...the peculiarity of this philosophy of avarice appears to be the ideal of the honest man of recognized credit, and above all the idea of duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end itself. Truly, what is here preached is not simply a technique to make one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. The infraction of its rules is treated not as foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty. That is the essence of the matter. It is not mere business astuteness, that sort of thing is common enough, it is an *ethos* (Weber, 2000, p.31).

Then, for the work to become the goal of God's glory, profit should be made from the work, as an investment. Thus, from Weber's perspective, capital accumulation became encouraged. In this context, Protestantism would have been one of the causes of capitalist expansion in the West. In fact, it can be said that this contributed to the beginning of a specific type of modern rationality that organized individual behavior and, as a consequence, behavior in the economical dimension (Aron, 1999). Considering what has been previously mentioned, there is one element that causes curiosity: The will. It is the material expression of the concerns pertaining to the salvation of the soul, raising the idea of an agreement that allows the person to save his soul without, necessarily, giving up his goods, the accumulation of wealth that would stay in the earthly dimension.

The will is, initially, a contract established between a man and the church, the representative of God on earth (Silva, 2000). This was the religious way to link wealth to the personal path to salvation (Ariés, 1988), demonstrating the contradictory idea of an attachment to earthly and non-earthly things to those of the sacred and the profane. A great



part of the dead person's estate would be given to the church, to ensure the salvation of the soul. Another part, a greatly small proportion, would be given to the inheritors and sometimes the dying person would distribute a part of his property to the poor, who, along with the priests from the churches, would turn the funeral procession into a grand event: instead of a family event, it would become an event where the reverence for the dead and the grandiosity would show the greatness of the compensation.

The relationship between death and individuality was denominated by Becker (2007) as the individuality within finitude, an existential paradox of the human condition, therefore, the knowledge of and about death would be reflexive and conceptual. Man would be aware of his temporary situation, while, at the same time, standing out in nature due to his abilities and competencies, it is in and by nature that he will come to an end. The animal, because of this, would be spared as they "live and disappear with the same lack of reflection: A few minutes of fear, a few seconds of anxiety, and everything is gone" (Becker, 2007, p.50).

However, things happen differently with man. Man starts dying on the same day he is born and the dying process continues day after day, minute after minute, time being one of the measures of this conclusion. Awareness about his individuality is one of the remarkable characteristics that emerged in modernity and "this is the context of individualism as a basic principle of the social life that made death look like a problem" (Matta, 1997, p.135). That will be discussed next.

### **Modernity and the secularization process of death**

Since the start of Modernity death has been dramatized, impressive and overbearing. The death of the other increasingly becomes the center of attention; this means that the other should mourn, cry and suffer because of it. Death started to be considered a transgression, a break that takes man

from his normal life, from the everyday dimension of being and living. Death gradually started to include emotion and mourning and the expression of pain by those who remained in this world became extreme. The intolerance to separation was an important piece in this new scenario that was being constructed. "Until the eighteenth century death was a concern only of the one who was threatened by it, nobody else" (Ariés, 1989, p.46) now this had changed.

The worship of the dead was a necessary activity and death itself became shameful and interdiction attempts were made, as a way to spare the person, hiding his real situation. From then on, it became necessary to avoid, as much as possible, the discomfort of the pain and loss from society as well as the family.

The twentieth century introduced hidden death, as well as shameful death, as happened with sex in the Victorian Era. Death did not belong to the people anymore: the responsibility was taken away from them and, later, the same happened to the awareness about this issue (Kovács, 1992). This was the genesis of the process of avoiding death, when, among the characteristics, it is possible to notice a change in the place where people die. They did not die at home anymore, together with their close ones, but at the hospital: One era ended and a new one, impressively rich in the development of science and technology, started. This was the time of Bacon (2000) and Descartes (Scruton, 1995), the time of doubt and, paradoxically, certainty, of the belief in scientific possibilities and the progress and development provided by science. It is the domination of scientific knowledge over the others. This was the time of the separation between knowledge and ways of knowing. In this context, boundaries were set between the natural world and the human world and, as stated by Capra (2003), the holistic view of man and nature moved to an essentially mechanical view, in which nature would be used and exploited. This was when the modern state was constructed and death started to become perverse. This is the death of Ivan Ilyich Golovin, described by Tolstoy (2007): With pain, sorrow, anguish and loneliness. The unbearable pain is

mixed with the feeling of emptiness, and this emptiness is caused by a whole life in conflict between the meaning of existence and the questions raised by the advance of science.

The doctor went into the drawing room and told Praskóvia Fiódorovna that the case was very serious and that the only resource left was opium to allay her husband's suffering, which must be terrible. It was true as the doctor said that Ivan Ilyich's physical sufferings were terrible, but worse than the physical sufferings were his mental sufferings which were his chief torture. His mental sufferings were due to the fact that that night, as he looked at Guerassim's sleepy, good-natured face with its prominent cheekbones, the question suddenly occurred to him: What if my whole life, my conscious life, has been wrong? (Tolstoy, 2007, p.76).

Ivan Ilyich's death is an example. He died alone and with an overwhelming sense of relief. Everything was gone. Slowly, death progressively became dirty: Ivan Ilyich's illness was long and the smells and the nature of the care he needed made death inconvenient. Asepsis, hygiene and cleaning were necessary as was dealing with the body fluids and avoiding dirtiness. In conclusion, it was necessary to overcome the repugnancy caused by the closeness of death at any cost. Consequently, a process of expurgating started to hide the ugliness brought by death in its different expressions. It is in this context that the dying person has a specific place to be sheltered, hidden, interdicted: the hospital. This became the characteristic place for sick people and illness, which left the house and the world of the family to move to this orderly and sanitized place.

This setting, filled with medical techniques and people that, little by little, became specialized in taking care of others, was almost secret, when compared to the dying person's bedroom. The bedroom used to be crowded by relatives and people from the community that lived nearby. In the hospital, there was only the patient and one or two family members, if allowed. There were rules, discipline (Foucault, 1979) and the patient was

barely seen at their death: He was protected from extreme publicity. In this place, the idea of immortality gained new energy with the knowledge provided by the scientific community: The dying person would be preserved until the end.

Serum bags, antibiotics, and oxygen, among other interventions, would provide the necessary chance: Life would be maintained with difficulty and death would be postponed for as long as possible. However, it was necessary to change the order of things, extending life and, in this sense, a scientifist ideology and a biological philosophy would ensure a system that moved towards a specific immortality: Amortality (Morin, 1988). This was also when big death ceremonies were organized, which usually guaranteed the order and the social hierarchy. (Vovelle, 1996). The crisis of the feudal society ultimately, determined a general instability where the representation of death was only one of the expressions of the social, political and economical change that was adopted.

It was time of changes, when the modern State was a State that must serve capitalism "as a model of economical and social development in which the capital is the main instrument for the material production" (Wolkmer, 2001, p.29). It also had to serve the interests of the new social groups, represented by the bourgeoisie that were, side by side with the working class, the protagonists of the new order. The capitalist model that emerged was characterized by the concentration of the means of production and, from the beginning, this characteristic caused many people to be excluded, who had nothing more than the possibility of selling their labor. In this sense, the contradictions experienced because of this new model were the source of several battles and revolutions by the lower classes, notably the working class, who at this time suffered significantly due to "groups of people who got richer because of trade and commercial practices" (Wolkmer, 2002, p.37). In this context of transformation death and the view of the dead changed.

... the person ceases to exist after death: at this point, the legal status of man ends, in which he was the subject of legal relations,

that is, owner of rights and recipient of duties. At this moment, his legal capacity to act, to have and use his goods, as well as his legal relations as a person, finishes. The legal personality finishes. What remains from the person... is a thing: The body. And besides, only the remembrance among the ones who lived with him will remain (Oexle, 1996, p.29).

Consequently, only the body would be subject to juridical rules, as it could cause health problems for the population and, also, needed to be protected against desecration. In earlier times, it could be said that the condition of the dead or dying person was not subject to the choice of those who were alive and that the remembrance of the dead meant something more: His presence among the living as a memory. If the worship of death throughout antiquity and a great part of the Middle Ages allowed creativity, during modernity this practice at least became polemic. Such proximity became rare and, as part of a death spectacle in this period some interdictions were made: No more burials were allowed within the city limits. The relics of saints and martyrs started to be moved from nearby churches and cemeteries to more distant places. This fact designed, in a long and slow process, the structure of the cities. The plague epidemics and the high number of deaths that they caused had an influence on the way of thinking and accepting the idea of death in the West, mainly in the establishment of the modern times.

Funeral vigil, funeral mass and burial - all this ended completely or partially, and something different and new took their place. Instead of relatives and friends, the servants of the plague (*becchini*, *beccamorti*) would take the corpse to the grave. Also, the dead that were part of the upper class of the city would be placed in the first grave that was free. People from the middle and lower class would take the corpses out of their houses and would leave them on the streets. Nobody would follow the corpse with tears and candles (Oexle, 1996, p. 57).

The death of the other gradually started to be feared. Whereas before the dead were confined to the Church and the grave site did not matter, mainly from the seventeenth century on, there was an excessive concern with their setting. The site became important and there was an interrelationship between the site and social class of the dead. This causes us to check the current divisions: Public and private cemeteries, burial places at different prices according to the view. In this atmosphere of fear the gasses and smell that came from the graves raised questions about hygiene and health, which would be discussed in analogy with the decomposition of bodies, epidemics and diseases of all kinds.

At this point, it can be said that the circle of dissociation of the dead from a person to a corpse was almost complete. The presence of the corpse had to be avoided. Its place had to be far enough away to avoid any kind of contact and contagion. This was how the body became inconvenient, dangerous, and had to be kept at a distance. No food, drinks or parties were made for and with the dead. From then on, the cemeteries became places to praise the memory of the dead, not allowing this kind of contact.

People who lived close to cemeteries, in their complaints, use to say they could conserve neither food nor beverages. Even the metals would change... it becomes confusing, then, under the same epithet, the odors of the plague and of the death: The odors were then called pestilential (Ariés, 1989, p.129).

As a result, public health was threatened. An important example can be elucidated by what happened at the Cemetery of the Innocents, in Paris. Large quantities of soil considered contaminated were removed from this place. Also, the remains and parts of corpses were taken out of this place and about forty or fifty common graves were opened and more than twenty thousand corpses were exhumed. These were transferred to the catacombs of Paris, after being transported in more than a thousand wagons filled with bones (Ariés, 1989). There were corpses of about eight or nine

centuries being removed from the graves, in a project that seemed endless. This task was done and redone, as, due to the urbanization process, the cemetery, which had been previously placed far from the city, ended up in the middle of human settlements again. This slow process continued and man, who was the owner of his death and coordinator of the dying process, no longer had this task. This chore was shared by the doctors, new agents, whose work would be to give the final advice, earlier delegated to the dying person, the divine, the priests and the clergymen. The priest was always ready, because it was necessary to follow some rituals that included, among others, the dying person's confession and forgiveness. When he entered the room, it was a visible sign of the end. Death was pushed to the clandestine abyss and people avoided talking about it. Death became hidden and a specific process began: The process of medicalization (Roudinesco, 2000).

The big event will not be the replacement of the family by the doctor, the power superiority of the doctor, it did not matter what kind of doctor it was... the former family doctor was, along with the family's priest, the assistant of the dying person. His follower, the general practitioner, was distant from death. Except in the case of an accident, he does not know it; it is not inside the sick person's room where the practitioner is not called in to, but in the hospital, where everyone with a serious illness and risk of death will be sent. And in the hospital the doctor is, at the same time, a man of science and a man of power, a power he will put into practice by himself (Ariés, 1989, p.130).

Transposition to the hospital opens a new period regarding the death and dying process that was accepted by the dying person and the family, that the advance of the medical techniques and the care would provide healing and isolation. Death needed to be overcome and it would also not be as public, as it gradually became something inconvenient. *Pari passu* the mourning, a unique element that expressed the pain felt by the family, became a ritual in which the trend, with the advance

of modernity, was to disappear. This was replaced by desperation, big gestures to reveal the pain, with several kinds of manifestations.

The family was banned from the funeral processions, becoming increasingly reclusive and feeling the pain in solitude, without the, often inconvenient, inference from other people. This also served the purpose of preventing them from forgetting the dead quickly and indulging themselves in the worldly pleasures of the flesh and sin. In this way, the family stayed distant, apart from the society, particularly with regard to women, whose participation in this process was limited. At first they were limited due to the reclusion at home and later due to the black clothing that represents mourning and the characteristic feelings of pain. Slowly, women started participating in burials and the mourning of their whole lives would be expressed for forty days, later considered almost an interdiction. It would not be good anymore to express pain or sorrow: This should be lived and felt, but as an individual experience that needs introspection. Just as people no longer talked about death, it would no longer be standardized.

This mask became more and more intense, to the point that Ariés (2000) described a curious scene where two women arrive home to prepare the dead person. However, the corpse was not there anymore. They ask: Where is the dead man? He must be cleaned, made ready and looking healthy. It is necessary to take care of the dead man's beauty the same, or better than he did while he was alive, preferably, without any sign of pain or sadness. After they finished, they called the family to admire the work that was done and said: The patient looks lovely now. He is not a dead man anymore, not even ill. He was an almost-alive man that was esthetically sculptured to preserve the body, the familiar features, dressed in new good quality clothes, with the purest angelical expression that must remain for eternity.

Paradoxically, at the same time, death comes closer and closer to people. The media introduces scenes of death, violence, accidents, and illnesses into people's lives on a daily basis. However, this is without any possibility of elaboration, because of

the speed with which it takes place (Kovács, 2005). Therefore, even if death is prevented, it becomes more and more present in people's lives, highlighting the discussion about our end, our individuality and the possibilities for our immortality.

## Conclusion

The expulsion of death from the world of the living resulted in the suppression and, at the same time, the adhesion to a set of ritual aspects, among them, one that states that the dying person should not be told he is about to die, and that this secret can only be told to one two family members. Death would not be in the home anymore, but in a special temple, and the mourning would gradually become invisible, shielded. The pain would individual and must be felt with less intensity. There was a kind of a shade, an interdiction, denominated by Morin as the death crisis.

This crisis includes the corrosion of death's own concept: Emptiness. It is the impotence of reasoning about death that undermines its concept and it is the crisis of individuality towards death that, in turn, is linked to the general crisis of the contemporary world. The social, economical and political crisis in which modern society was shaped, involving wars and poverty, loss of structure and new structuring of the capitalist economic model, which shocked the human individuality, while this was requested in its essence. The favorite child of a liberal period, individuality is increasingly demanded, brutalized, unbalanced and unhappy. There is a kind of non-participation of the individual, which contemplates the death that happened to him as the death he causes. Because of this, death in contemporary society becomes repulsive and, consequently, it is necessary to deny it. The role of the funeral procession tends to be reduced and the organization of the funeral and the procession itself, when done, is increasingly performed by outsourced services, by companies created specifically for this purpose.

The idea of incineration or cremation started gaining more space, as it became necessary to get rid of the corpse, with the fastest the procedure

being the best. The quick elimination of the corpse also eliminates, with it, any fears with or without a real basis. Other stages come from the tamed, familiar death: The death of the self and, after this, the death of the other. Currently, there is an interdicted death: A death that is not talked about and where it is necessary to get rid of its presence quickly, without a trace. At the same time that death is driven away from the daily lives, its presence becomes strong and mean, making it present everywhere, being seen and talked about in streets, homes, and work, overtaking life in all its dimensions. There is a progressive degradation in the relationship of death with people and with social entities, where death enters the medical-hospital context, coming from a holy place to the scientific and technical world. Finally, death becomes complex as the pursuit for immortality breaks the established limits between death and dying. There are no more rituals: People die aseptically and without the presence of others.

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