

This visual, accusable as simplistic, has nonetheless the virtue of laying out the cultures-stranding behind and within the present death-dying dialog in our culture in general and, in particular, in religion and medicine (bio-ethics, especially). On the x-axis I've used +/- because no attitude-words fit in all cases, though "love"/"fear" come closest.

The CHRISTIAN view is that life is to be loved as a gift of God. Enjoyed, shared, to God's glory. All the other boxes are out: (B) Death is not to be loved, for it negates the original divine will in creation and the effective divine will in redemption (esp. as seen in Jesus' death/resurrection); so, a generally negative attitude toward suicide, war, violence. (C) Life is not to be feared, for the God of power is also the God of justice and love; and in dying as in living, we are in better hands even than our own. (D) Death is not to be feared, for its sting as punishment for sin is taken away by the Cross through which grace-forgiveness comes to us through faith in God's work in Jesus--though this does not remove natural fear and pain and grief. (I speak ideally: Actually, Christians and others mix A-D in various proportions.)

The HEBREW view is the primary source of the Christian view. The JEWISH view, direct descendant of the Hebrew view, is--except for Jesus and his role--little different from the Christian view, which (again) is a descendant; for Late Judaism (Daniel onward) developed afterlife views more positive than the Hebrew "Sheol" land of the shades without memory (a view, however, not entirely dead among the Orthodox). Some in Reform have a "D" view little differing from Greek immortalism universalized.

The GREEK view (influencing Romans) loves/affirms both life and death (and so is not anti-suicide, but in some expressions [e.g., Stoicism] is even pro-suicide). Some tinge of its harmonism (acceptance of Nature's biorhythms and cycles) remains in Mediterranean culture, and is reappearing now in...

...the WESTERN view--"Western" in quotes, for I mean our present American Zeitgeist which is also European (and increasingly global, for "Western" is now, for good and ill, the world's dominant culture). The names of Eliz. Kübler-Ross and Raymond Moody signal the current "Greek" dominance in death-dying over the "Christian," which holds death as enemy to be resisted more than "natural" fact to be "accepted." The West now loves life and fears death, yet fears life and yearns for death: A-D!

BEST BOOK: Ken Vaux, WILL TO LIFE/WILL TO DIE (Augsburg/79). Covers, clearly, all the above.

