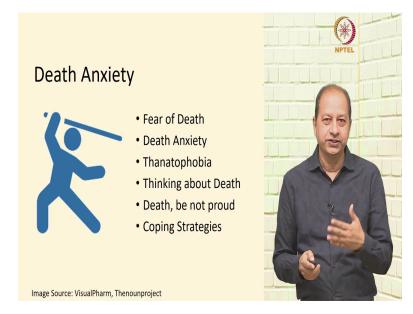
Literature and Coping Skills Professor Ajit K Mishra Department of Humanistic Studies Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) Varanasi Lecture 19 John Donne, "Death, be not proud"

Hello everybody, I am Ajit K Mishra, your course instructor for Literature and Coping Skills. I am back with another lecture for you. And this time I am going to talk about death anxiety. If you remember, I talked about the fear and anxiety factors in my last two lectures. If you have followed those lectures closely, you might have construed that death anxiety, and decision making anxiety will follow those ideas naturally.

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So, today I am going to talk about death anxiety. Let us take a quick look at what are the things that I am going to focus on in this lecture. I am going to focus on the fear of death. I talked about fear, the psychology of fear and also the neurobiology of fear in my last lecture, so I am going to focus on a specific type of fear that is the fear of death today. I am also going to extend that fear to death anxiety, so that we understand its clinical dimensions and its neurobiological dimensions.

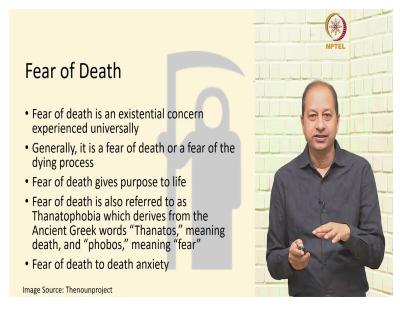
I am also going to focus on Thanatophobia, very different kind of phobia that is involved with death. I am also going to focus on thinking about death, how we think about death and how that

affects our everyday functioning. And then I will also be talking about *Death, be not proud*. As you all know from this lecture, we are going to focus on specific literary compositions, especially poetic compositions, in order to understand how these compositions can help us with certain coping skills and coping strategies.

So, *Death, be not proud* by John Donne is the poetic composition that I have picked, to show how this particular composition can teach us wonderful coping skills. And then I will be focusing on those coping strategies that are brought out in death be not proud, so that we learn how to discern such poetic compositions, which offer great insights into coping skills and coping strategies.

And with the help of such literary texts, or compositions, we can develop such coping skills in us as well. So, these are some of the things that I am going to talk about today. So, let us take a quick look at each of these elements. And as I walk you through these elements, are we focusing on the intricate complex and the important dimensions of each of these elements. So let us start.

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So, let us start with fear of death. Now, this is the kind of fear that we all are hounded by. If we have to think about or prepare a list of the things that we fear, we will definitely find that the fear of death is the most distressing, most disturbing of all human fears. Because the fear of death

tells us that it is going to put a full stop, or an end to our lives to our existence. Therefore, this is one of the biggest fears of humans or one of the biggest figures concerning human existence.

So, the fear of death is something that we also need to come to terms with. And before that, let me also tell you that the fear of death is not a negative one only because it has a positive dimension as well. Because if our fear of death is positively oriented, and that means we will be taking care of our lives, we will begin to go for exercise, we will eat healthy, we will sleep well, and do a variety of things to preserve this life. Because this life preservation instinct is an evolutionary need of humans.

So, let us take a look at the fear of death from these dimensions. So, every time we think of it we suddenly get a variety of images in our mind or right in front of our eyes. And this is one such image that tells you that yes, death is lurking somewhere right there. So, fear of death is an existential concern, which is experienced universally, we all know that it is universal, there is no one who does not experience the fear of death. As we all experience fear, we also experience specific fears as well. And that is one such fear.

Because we all know, we would not become aware of the fact that, right from the moment of our birth, this life is moving fast towards the end that is called death. So, it is an existential concern. And we all know that the fear of death is quite valid, and it is quite natural. So, we all experience fear of death. And then we also know that it is a fear of death, or fear of the dying process. So, it can be death, or it can be the dying process. So, most researchers think and they agree with the fact that people are far more scared or afraid of the dying process than just death.

So, death, of course, scares us frightens us. But it is a dying process that creates a kind of pain is in session in us. And that is the reason why most of us would like to avoid thinking about death, or even visualize the dying process. So, but at the same time, I have already talked about it. You also know this very well, that fear of death also gives purpose to our life. Imagine, if there were no deaths, what would happen with this life, we would probably not do anything, because we will continue to believe continue to think that, okay we will do it tomorrow. Let us postpone it, let us procrastinate it, and will not attach any meaning to life. Since we know that death will put an end to the enterprise or life's endeavors, we always strive to attach meaning to our life and meaning to our existence. So, we all would like to be assured of the fact that we have done something, we have achieved something, we have attached meaning to this life, before death comes forward and embraces us. So therefore, death is important because it attaches meaning to our lives.

And then fear of death is as you might know it is also referred to as Thanatophobia. But there is a difference between general everyday normal fear of death and Thanatophobia. I will be talking about Thanatophobia in detail after a while. So, it is called Thanatophobia, because it is a combination of two Greek words Thanatos, and phobos. So, Thanatos is a Greek word for death. And phobos is a Greek word for fear.

So therefore, Thanatophobia means the fear of death. And then finally, fear of death actually leads to death anxiety, I just told you that it is quite natural for all of us to experience fear of death. But if that fear of death becomes persistent, it grows in intensity, it grows in frequency and it goes in duration, then we need to be concerned about it.

Because this fear, which is otherwise not harmful, might quickly turn into an anxiety disorder. It can properly turn into a generalized anxiety disorder if we do not take care of it, if we allow our fear of death to promptly turn into death, anxiety. So, I will also be focusing on death anxiety in today's lecture.

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Death anxiety comes naturally to all people who find the thought of death and dying unacceptable Death anxiety is also caused by anxiety caused by death-recent thought-content Lower ego integrity, physical problems and psychological problems are predictive of higher levels of death anxiety Our goals, passions, hobbies, and activities are the coping strategies to face death anxiety

So, death anxiety, as I talked about a while ago, is a serious issue. It is a serious problem. Fear of death is not a clinical condition. But anxiety is, of course, a clinical condition because it leads to dysfunctional existence or dysfunctional everyday existence. So therefore, we need to be very, very careful that we do not move into the realm of death anxiety.

So, as you all know, you are familiar with anxiety, I also talked about anxiety in my last lecture. So, it invades, it attacks us from all the sides, and we are frozen, we do not know what to do, and how to take care of those triggers of our anxiety. But we need to do something about those things so that we emerge well, and then we ensure our well being. So, death anxiety, we all know it comes naturally to all of us.

It is not very disturbing; it is not very special. It comes to all of us, we all experience death anxiety. Because we find the thought of death and various sorts of deaths and dying unacceptable. I mean, barring just a few people who are either ascetics, or who have been able to overcome the fear of death, most of us are scared of the thought of death, forget alone, death itself. We are even scared or frightened of the thought of death, and dying. And we treat them as unacceptable thoughts.

Although these thoughts keep coming to us, we do our best to keep them under control, check them, and prevent them from invading us or coming to us frequently, repeatedly. But they do come back to us. There are occasions when we are faced with certain death scenes, and they come back to us, we cannot stop those thoughts from coming back to us. But it is also a good idea that we need to understand that we live in a death denying culture. It is the death denying culture; our culture tells us to focus on life, not focus on death- that will come to you naturally.

And that is one big reason why most people experience anxiety over death, because they insulate themselves from the thought of death, they do not like to think about death, they just hate death, and the thoughts associated with death, so that in fact leads to anxiety and more anxiety. So, we need to keep that under check. And then we come to the idea of death anxiety, which is also caused by anxiety caused by death recent thought content. So, death anxiety is also caused by a kind of anxiety that is the result of death recent thought content.

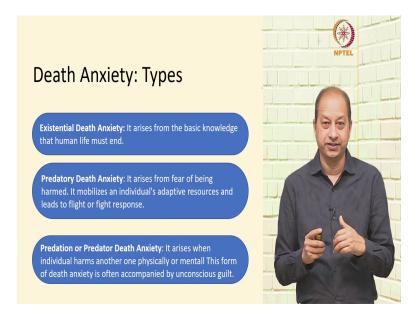
So, if you have been recently exposed to a death scene, which has created a death taught in you, then there is every possibility that that particular thought will continue to disturb you over a certain period of time. And if you are unable to take care of that particular distressing emotion, there is every possibility that you will promptly move into the realm of death anxiety.

And then, when it comes to the elderly people, the aged people, lower ego integrity, physical problems, and psychological problems says they are also predictive of higher levels of death anxiety because people who have physical problems, health issues, they are more likely to experience death anxiety, the elderly people experience low ego integrity, they are also likely to experience death anxiety.

Similarly, if you have psychological problems, you are also likely to experience death anxiety. And then our goals, passions, hobbies and activities are the coping strategy to face death anxieties, as I told you all that death anxiety is here to disturb us, we cannot prevent it from coming to us. It will keep coming to us.

But we create our passions, we create our goals, we create our hobbies and we engage in activities so that we can use these practices as strong natures to cope with death anxiety. So, death anxiety invites the certain coping strategies, certain coping approaches are from us.

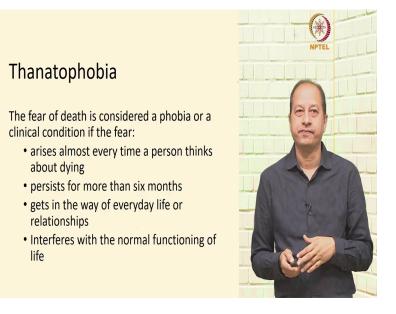
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So, let us take a quick look at the different types of death anxiety. There is one type of death anxiety is existential death anxiety, I have already talked about it, if you remember, lecture one, I talked about existential concerns and I also began with death, the ideal thought of death, and realms thought of death as well. So, existential death anxiety arises from our understanding, from our realization that our lives will end, nothing can stop it or prevented from ending or being ended, or coming to an end so that is, that is the realization that is the awareness, which leads to existential death anxiety.

And then predatory death anxiety. So, we are also scared, we also afraid that we will be harmed. and if that is the case, then that particular anxiety mobilizes our individual adaptive resources. And to prepare us for the fight or flight responses, I talked about this particular thing yesterday, or in my last lecture. So, and then the final one, that is predation or predictor death anxiety. So, the different kinds of death anxiety arise in us when we harm others, physically or mentally. So, this form of death anxiety is often accompanied by unconscious guilt. So, this is a very different kind of death anxiety.

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And now we come to the idea of Thanatophobia, we have taken a look at fear of death, death anxiety, and then we come to Thanatophobia. So, as you all know, the fear of death is considered a phobia. But this is an extreme kind of fear, this is a lingering fear. This is a fear that keeps coming back to us frequently, and in an intensified manner. So, there are very different kinds of fear. So, the fear of death is considered a phobia or a clinical condition because a phobia is generally perceived as a clinical condition.

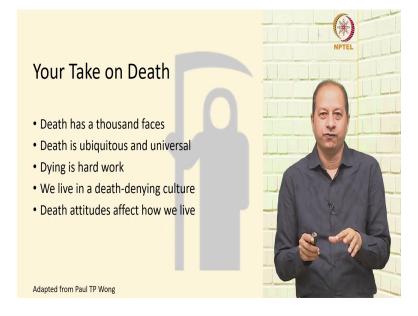
So, certain clinical interventions are required to take care of a certain type of phobia. So, if fear of death turns into a clinical condition, it actually turns into a phobia. So, when that happens, what things we can see. So, it arises almost every time a person thinks about time. So, every time a person thinks about time, the person is bound to experience that particular phobia. But then, if the frequency of such experience or such thinking increases, then that will certainly lead to a clinical condition.

And then now, if that particular thought persists for more than 6 months that means the duration increases. So, for more than 6 months, you continue to experience continuing to think about death. That means it is a clinical condition and it has turned into a phobia or Thanatophobia, and then gets in the way of your everyday functioning and your relationships. That means, your life will become either dysfunctional or partially functional and your relations or relationships will

be strained. If that is the case, then you need to understand that it is a clinical condition of Thanatophobia.

And then finally, it begins to interfere with the normal functioning of life. So, the same person who used to manage his or her life in a normal easy manner would find it extremely difficult and that will be visible, that will be discernible to people around the person. So, the normal functioning of life will be disturbed substantially. So, these are the indications, these are the signs of Thanatophobia. If that happens, then we need to, you know, ring the alarm bell, that it is an instance of Thanatophobia.

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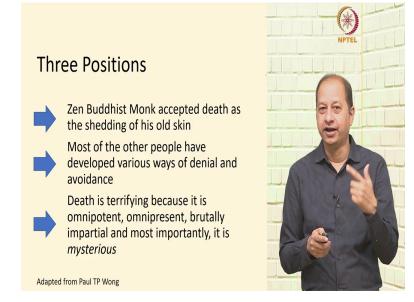
Now to- your take on death. So, every time you were asked this question, what do you think about death? What it is, according to you? So, if this question is asked to a large number of people, the responses will vary slightly. Because it is all about how we perceive death, since it is not an object, which is, I mean, it is not a tangible or visible object, we have to perceive, we have to think about it. So, every time we perceive death we do so in a different manner. So, let us take a look at how people think about death. Most of us would agree to the fact that that has 1000 faces.

It comes to us in different shapes, in different ways, in different manners. And death is universal, it is ubiquitous, and universal, we all have seen, we all know that. And then dying is a very, very

hard work, it is not an easy thing. Most people construe the process of dying. And we all know that the process of dying requires a great amount of courage. And that is one big reason because people think it is, it is a very painful process. That is the reason why most people are scared of it, even are scared of the thought of it. Because dying is hard work, it is not an easy task, easy job.

And then this is a very important reason- we live in a death denying culture. It is a death denying culture, because we do not accept the idea of death, the thought of death, death is also treated as a taboo subject, the moment you begin to talk about death people will suddenly they will desert you, they will ask you to stop talking about it. It is a taboo subject. So, we do not enjoy or we do not find it comfortable to talk about death, so that is how we have been the part of a death denying culture. And death attitudes affect how we live. And that is the most important thing of all, because the way we approach the idea of death, that is the death attitude, whether we think that yes, death is normal, it is natural, it is a natural end to the human enterprise, or human existence or human endeavor. If we embrace it, if we accept it as a natural process, then it will not be distressful or disturbing. So, it is all about the death attitude that we all carry with us.

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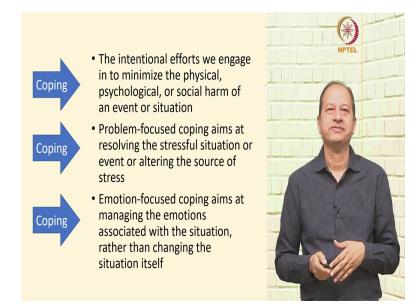
And then we come to three very different positions, and these ideas are taken from the work of Dr. Wonk. So, the first is, and these ideas are based on Palmer's cross cultural interview that was conducted in 1993, to develop an insight into how people think about the idea of death differently. So, Zen Buddhist Monk accepted death, as a shedding of his old skin. See how metaphorically the Buddhist Monk has talked about death is used as a metaphor, is like shedding of his own skin, so that is death.

So therefore, it is not disturbing; it is not painful, to the Buddhist Monk. So, there are people there are some people who think that death is not at all disturbing. It is not painful, and it is not distressing as well, so that is another category. A large number of people think death and the idea of death should be avoided at any cost. And that is one big reason why people enter into regimes of body training, healthy eating, I do not say these are bad habits, they are good because they serve our life preservation instinct, but at the same time, there is absolutely no need to be so manic about those activities.

Because people are so because of this particular reason, this particular standpoint. And there is a third position where people think that death is extremely terrifying because it is omnipotent, omnipresent and it is brutally impartial, it does not distinguish. And above all of this, it is mysterious, it is absolutely difficult for us to discern.

So, these are the three important positions that are generally taken vis a vis the idea of death. So, now, you can, in fact, try to identify with any of these ideas, try to understand what exactly has been your standpoint, your position in relation to the idea of death.

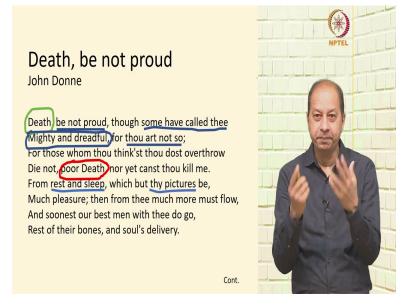
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So, that brings us to the idea of coping strategies, since the fear of death, death anxiety or Thanatophobia are serious issues. In terms of grading, we start with fear of death, which is not very, very serious, but the moment it turns into death anxiety it becomes serious. And then we come to the idea of Thanatophobia.

When that happens, we require we need certain coping strategies. So, these are certain coping strategies that we can adopt in order to take care of death. When it comes to coping strategies, I must tell you all that there are two very important coping strategies; one is problem focused coping strategy in which people try to change the stressful situation. And then that is how they alter the source of their stress.

And there is the emotion focused coping that aims at managing the emotions, since you know that you cannot change the situation, the best thing that you can do is to manage the situation itself emotionally, so that you know how to cope with it. (Refer Slide Time: 27:12)



That brings us to the poetic composition that I talked about at the beginning of today's lecture. And as I told you, then we are going to focus on very carefully chosen important texts that have a great deal of message for each one of us. And they are going to help us with wonderful coping skills.

So, let us take a quick look at *Death, be not proud* by John Donne. So, when you take a look at the title itself, you can easily understand that somebody is being addressed to by somebody else. So, there is a speaker who is addressing our listener, and the speaker is somebody here and the listener is Mr. Death.

So, how does the listener become a person we all know that death is an abstract idea. It is an abstract concept. So, with the help of personification strategy, personification is a wonderful, wonderful skill. If you remember I talked about personification in detail, while talking about rhetorical prosody. If you have gone through that lecture, you will be fine with the idea of personification.

So, with the help of personification, the speaker tries to create an image of Death, converts death into a person, a person who is not as frightening, as scary, or as powerful as the idea of death has been painted to be. So, with the help of personification, and a variety of other strategies, the speaker has tried to launch a fight against Death. And he is extremely successful in doing that.

So, I will show you how these skills and strategies have been employed with a great amount of success.

So, when we go through these lines, we will probably discover the fact that the speaker is addressing death as a person, and while doing so the speaker is trying to downsizing death. So, this is a very, very important strategy, coping strategy that we employ in order to manage an invisible enemy, who is extremely powerful, scary and frightening, so that is the strategy the speaker has employed here. And in order to do so, you need the skill of personification.

I must tell you all that personification is a wonderful skill it is a very, very important skill that we all need in our times. So, when we look at this we start with the idea of death. So, death has been personified. And Death is being warned. So be not proud. There is absolutely no need for you to be proud. So, some people have called you, mighty and dreadful. You are treated, to be mighty, powerful and scary by some people.

And that is very, very important. If you say, everyone treats you that mean your sudden dream, some people mean there are many others who do not treat you as mighty and dreadful. And I am probably one of them. So, this is exactly what will give you that much needed confidence, courage, to stand, face to face a ways death. And then denying that position to guess you are not so, so do not be proud about it. There are some people who think that you are mighty and dreadful, and that does not give you any right to feel that you are omnipotent and omnipresent. So do not be proud about it.

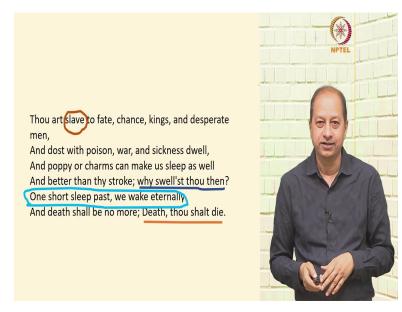
And then how that has been belittled and downsized. So downsizing is a wonderful skill, I told you all with the help of which you can manage your enemy, who is of course, I mean been stronger than you. So downsizing is a skill that is being employed here, poor death or poor wretched fellow death. So, you are powerless, you are a poor fellow. You do not have to be proud. So and then there are the tropes that are used to replace the idea of death. That is also a very, very important skill.

So, if you look at the idea of Tyger, Tyger, the moment we use this word Tiger, we say the word tiger. Now the image of a ferocious animal promptly comes to our minds. So, all flashes right in front of our eyes. Now, when William Blake talked about Tyger from a different perspective, he

was not pointing towards the ferocity of the animal he was in fact pointing towards the mysteriousness of that animal, therefore he changed the spelling and use a very different trope, different strategy, he used the spelling T Y G E R.

Similarly, A. A. Milne used the idea of Tiger by downsizing it he calls it Tigger, T I G G E R, Tigger. So that is how these tropes are used in order to downsize. So instead of talking about death, now the speaker is talking about rest and sleep. So, these are also the forms of death, and they are far more relatable forms of death than the idea of death itself. So, by focusing on the more relatable forms of death, the speaker is in fact, trying to downsize. And then these are the pictures, your pictures.

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And then we come to the next stage, where we see again, a user for war that downsizes the position of death, poor death now your slave, you are nothing more than just a slave, you are a slave to all these things. So therefore, why are you so proud? You are poor, you are powerless, you are a slave. So, there is absolutely no need for you to be powerful. And then the final warning, why swell'st thou then? That means, why are you swelling with pride, you do not deserve it. You do not have any right to be proud of your only pretense because you are not so.

And then the final trope, a one short sleep past, we wake eternally. So instead of talking about death, the speaker uses the idea of sleep twice, to reaffirm rest and sleep now sleep. One short

sleep past we wake eternally. So, and that is exactly where acceptance lies. You accept the fact that yes, death is fact. So, remember, the Zen Buddhist Monk. Acceptance is a key to overcoming your fear, your anxiety, because the moment you accept that will give you a plan or strategy to start working on your problems, and then finally says death, thou shalt die. You not live, so that is the final pronouncement.

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And that is how we can now take a look at the various coping skills and strategies employed in this particular literary composition, which is a wonderful, wonderful work. And that has been fascinating readers for ages. So, acceptance, as I told you, is key to overcoming problems. For example, I have a problem, the moment I accept it, yes, I have a problem that will give you strength and confidence to start working on that problem. If you run into a denial mode, no, I do not have a problem. And then I have a problem. But I do not want to accept that I have one that will lead to problems.

So, the speaker accepts that, yes that is the ultimate reality. But it is not as frightening or scary as it is painted to be. And then talking therapy, we all know that talking is therapy. So, when you begin to talk about the problems that you are facing, when you begin to talk about the ways you are employing or adopting in order to overcome that problem, all these things are going to give you certain therapeutic results. So, talking is therapy. That is exactly what the speaker is doing here.

And then personification, I have told you personification is a wonderful coping skill we can easily personify. If you remember, while talking about rhetorical prosody, I talked about anxiety, personification, so you can always personify and then see what lies right in front of you.

And then downsizing is a huge coping skill, or coping strategy that we all can use in order to minimize or belittle our enemy, so that it does not turn out to be scary enough. Now, this is a wonderful coping skill that this particular literary composition, in fact, communicates to us, teaches us, perspective shifts.

So, if you shift the perspective from the problem to the solution, then you can actually think about the solution. So, if you shift the perspective from fear, to the acceptance of it, to confidence to courage, then that will help him and that is exactly what is happening in this poetic composition.

So, from fear, the speaker is shifting the perspective to courage. So perspective shift is a very important skill that this poem teaches us. And then this is a very, very important skill terror management. So, we all know that we all have this evolutionary design of self preservation instinct, we all have self-preservation instinct.

But at the same time, we also understand, realize that death will put an end to this existence this life, this particular thing creates a conflict. And because of this conflict between the idea of death and the self preservation instinct, we experience terror. And that is exactly what is happening in this point. So, people experienced terror. And that is why the use of the word mighty and dreadful, dreadful because it is terrorizes.

So, and how do you manage terror, to manage terror, all you have to do there are two ways of managing terror. First, you escape, or you engage. So, the speaker decides to engage, engage in certain value systems, certain cultural beliefs. And that is the reason why he says that some people think that you are mighty and dreadful. That means, many others do not think that you're

mighty and dreadful. I belong to that community. So, he tries to find or preset his faith and the practice of that community.

So, he is actually doing terror management. So, this is very popularly called terror management theory. And then, finally, if you have taken a look at the firm, that is a sonnet form, it is a sonnet. If you take a look at the sonnet form, you will find that the solid form is in fact, is symbolic of the Eros Instinct. Because in sonnets, we generally talk about life and love.

So, the Eros instinct, which is quite prominent in this poetic composition is preserved by is attempt to take on death and to downsize death and to overcome death. So, these are some of the coping skills and strategies that we find when we approach this particular poetic composition *Death, be not proud* by John Donne.

So, you can also take another look, a fresh look at the poem and it may happen that you come out with something different, different coping skill or strategy that has been employed by the speaker. So, what I mean to say is every time we come across such compositions, we return wiser.

And in order to do so we need to engage in the processes because of this embodied simulation we see somebody doing something, fighting, making decisions so we begin to engage in that process. So, when we also begin to engage we also do the same things simultaneously, so that is how this particular composition teaches us how to take care of our death anxiety.

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And that is how we come to an end of this lecture. So, thank you very much for joining me. In my next lecture I am going to talk about decision making anxiety. Thank you.