

Philosophy of Death and Dying (PHIL10192): Semester 1 (2020-21)

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Tutorial schedule: Tuesday 10-11:00 am, Tuesday, Tuesday 12:00-13:00, and Thursday 12:00-13:00 (Further details about tutorial logistics and expectations to be made available via Learn.)

Office hours: The revisions to instruction implemented in response to the Covid pandemic make traditional office hours infeasible. Students desiring a one-on-one meeting are encouraged to e-mail me to set up arrangements. I'd be glad to speak with you!

Course description

Death is one of the few universals of human life and thus raises philosophical questions important to all reflective individuals. As a number of commentators have remarked, while all creatures die, humans are almost certainly unique in knowing this fact and in having to live in light of that knowledge. This course investigates fundamental philosophical questions raised by human mortality, with special attention to the metaphysical nature of death, death's significance for human well-being, and ethical quandaries related to mortality. We will investigate how the conditions for death should be medically determined, the possibility and desirability of immortality, rival views of death's welfare value, how we should respond to the deaths of others, and what attitudes we should adopt toward death and mortality, including fear. Students will have the opportunity to decide our course content for weeks 9 and 10 (see below for possible topics).

Teaching will occur through two channels:

1. On Mondays of each week, a series of recorded lectures will be made available to you via the Learn page for this course. The lectures will highlight primary ideas and arguments in our assigned texts.
2. Each student is required to attend a weekly tutorial associated with this course. (See above for the tutorial schedule). These tutorials will be held via Blackboard Collaborate, the online meeting and videoconferencing technology accessible through Learn. The tutorials will be discussion- and activity-driven, so students will be expected (a) to give the assigned materials a careful and critical read beforehand, and (b) watch the weekly lectures beforehand.

Learning outcomes

This course will provide students many opportunities to practice the fundamental skills of philosophical inquiry, including the extraction, expression, and evaluation of arguments articulated in philosophical texts; the crafting of compelling and convincing philosophical prose; and the development of their own informed point of view on philosophical issues. In addition, by the conclusion of the course, students should be able to

1. outline influential positions and arguments concerning metaphysical and ethical issues raised by death and dying;
2. critically assess these positions and arguments, drawing their own reasoned conclusions about their defensibility;
3. relate disputes in the philosophy of death and dying to larger questions within various subdisciplines of philosophy (ethics, metaphysics, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, etc.);

4. better articulate their own views regarding the significance of death and dying for their own lives and for humanity in general; and
5. participate more meaningfully in larger societal conversations concerning controversies related to death and dying.

Assessment

- Midterm Essay, 35% of course mark (1,500 words): due via Learn, Thurs 22 Oct, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 1 Oct.
- Final essay, 60% of course mark (3,000 words): due via Learn, Thurs 10 Dec, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 9 Nov.
- Reflective course experience essay 5% (1,000 words): due via Learn Tues 15, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 23 Nov.

Coursework dissertations

I welcome the opportunity to work with you on a coursework dissertation. You are required to notify the Philosophy Teaching Office of your intent to complete a coursework dissertation this semester by Mon 19 Oct, 12 pm. Coursework dissertations are due Tues 15 Dec, by 12 pm.

Course content and schedule

There are two ways of accessing the course readings:

1. via the University Library's resources lists (you will need to use your university login for this):

https://eu01.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/leganto/public/44UOE_INST/lists/26417556640002466?auth=SAML

2. via Learn (see the Course Materials for each week)

One note: A number of our course readings are from a forthcoming anthology I am editing:

<https://www.routledge.com/Exploring-the-Philosophy-of-Death-and-Dying-Classical-and-Contemporary/Cholbi-Timmerman/p/book/9781138393585>

These are marked on the schedule below with (CT). *These readings are only accessible via Learn* (not through the resource list).

As you likely know by now, reading philosophy can often be challenging. Here are some resources students report they've found useful in improving their reading experience (but feel free to contact me for more guidance about reading):

<https://www.blogs.ppls.ed.ac.uk/2017/02/28/read-philosophy-step-step-guide-confused-students/>

<http://faculty.buffalostate.edu/hunterda/Advice/HowToReadPhilosophy.htm>

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

The readings below are divided into **core** and **secondary**. The core readings lay out the main issues associated with the particular topic and articulate main positions. The secondary readings are more difficult, operating at later points in the philosophical dialectic. I expect each of you to make one (and preferably, *two*) good faith efforts to read the *core* readings for each week. Move on to the secondary readings only if (a) you have good reason to think you've comprehended the

core readings fully, and/or (b) you'd be interested in writing on the topic for a course essay or dissertation.

1 21 Sept
Declaring death

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aviv, "What Does it Mean to Die?", <i>New Yorker</i>, 29 Jan 2018 (https://bit.ly/2AGFIrD) • President's Commission, "Defining Death" (CT) • Lizza, "Defining Death in a Technological World: Why Brain Death is Death" (CT) • Nair-Collins, "We Die When Entropy Overwhelms Homeostasis" (CT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gilmore, "What It Is to Die" (CT) • Davis, "Defining Death" in Davis, ed., <i>Ethics at the End of Life</i>

2 28 Sept
The possibility of immortality I: 'Staying alive' and resurrection

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unamuno, <i>Tragic Sense of Life</i>, excerpt (CT) • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 6-10 • de Grey, "A Thousand Years Young" • Cave, "Can We Survive Our Deaths?" (through 'Resurrection') (CT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennyson, "Tithonus" • David and Rose Hershenov, "The Possibility of An Afterlife" (CT) • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 118-27 (Bb) • Olson, "An Argument for Animalism"

3 5 Oct
The possibility of immortality II: Souls and legacies

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cave, "Can We Survive Our Deaths?" ('Soul' through conclusion) (CT) • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 13-18, 24-56, 115-118 • Scheffler, <i>Death and the Afterlife</i>, pp. 15-36 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 57-68 • Altshuler, "The Significance of Future Generations" (CT) • <i>Children of Men</i> (2006 feature film, dir. A. Cuarón)

4 12 Oct
Epicureanism about death's value

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epicurus, "Letter to Menoecus" (CT) • Mitsis, "When Death Is There, We Are Not: Epicurus on Pleasure and Death" • Cyr, "How Does Death Harm the Deceased?", through p. 37 • Luper, "Annihilation" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor, "Why Death is Not Bad for the One Who Dies" • Fischer, "Mortal Harm"

5 19 Oct

Deprivationism about death's value

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nagel, "Death"• Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 206-212• Egerstrom, "Making Death Not Quite as Bad for the One Who Dies" (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Belshaw, "Victims"• Hawley, "Persistence and Time"

6 26 Oct

Two puzzles about death's badness

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lucretius <i>On the Nature of Things</i> (excerpts) (CT)• Cyr, "How Does Death Harm the Deceased?", pp. 37-45• Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 224-233• Feit, "Death is Bad for Us When We're Dead" (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Johansson, "When Do We Incur Mortal Harm?"• Timmerman, "If You Want to Die Later, Why Don't You Want to Be Born Earlier?" (CT)• Kaufman, "Coming Into and Going Out of Existence" (CT)

7 2 Nov

The desirability of immortality

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Either</i> Epic of Gilgamesh (excerpt) <i>or</i> Ozaki, "The Story of the Man Who Did Not Wish to Die" (CT)• Mitchell-Yellin, "How to Live a Never-ending Novela" (CT)• Beglin, "Immortality, Boredom, and Standing for Something" (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gorman, "Taking Stock of the Risks of Life Without Death" (CT)• Rosati, "The Makropulos Case Revisited: Reflections on Immortality and Agency"• Bortolotti and Nagasawa, "Immortality Without Boredom"• Overall, "From Here to Eternity"• Cholbi, "Immortality and the Exhaustibility of Value"

8 9 Nov

Addressing the deaths of others

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seneca, "On Grief for Lost Friends" (CT)• Cholbi, "Finding the Good in Grief: What Augustine Knew but Meursault Could Not"• Solomon, "Grief and Gratitude"• Stokes, "Death and Survival Online" (CT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moller, "Love and Death"• Lewis, <i>A Grief Observed</i>

The topics for weeks 9 and 10 will be determined by student interest. Possible topics include

- the ethics of suicide, suicide prevention, and assisted dying
- the 'duty to die'
- memory and memorialization of the dead
- duties to/interests of the dead
- death and life's meaning
- human extinction

Students may also opt to investigate previous course topics in greater depth.

9 16 Nov

To be determined

Core readings	Secondary readings
•	•

10 23 Nov

To be determined

Core readings	Secondary readings
•	•

11 30 Nov

How shall we feel about death and mortality?; Course recap and reflection

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Noble Truths (CT) • Nietzsche, "Voluntary Death" (CT) • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 282-303 • Cholbi et al, "Fear and Other Attitudes Toward Death: Contemporary Developments" • Gorer, "The Pornography of Death" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i> • Solomon et al, <i>The Worm at the Core</i> (excerpt) • Draper, "Death and Rational Emotion" • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 186-96 • May, "Death, Mortality, and Meaning" • Emanuel, "Why I Want to Die at 75" • Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?"