

PHL 382: Death and Dying

Syllabus

Course Information

Instructor

Instructor: Jeremy Davis
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Office Hours: Mondays, 5PM-6PM (Location TBA)

Course Description

Death is inevitable, and so is thinking about it. Nearly every intellectual tradition has formulated different ways of understanding the idea of death, whether it is something to be feared, the mysteries of what comes after, and how this ought to influence our lives as we live them. While death can be inspected through any number of academic lenses—e.g., religious studies, literature, biology, anthropology, etc.—in this course, we will attempt to better understand it using the resources of (mostly) analytic moral philosophy.

Among the questions we will ask are the following: Is death bad for the one who dies? If so, what makes death bad? Would it be better if we were immortal? Or is death somehow necessary for life to have the meaning we take it to have? How does the prospect of our eventual death shape our evaluative perspectives during our lifetimes? Is death sometimes worth seeking out? And what moral conditions govern such a choice?

Students will be assessed on the basis of a short essay (20%), a longer essay (35%), a final exam (35%), and five short reading responses (10%).

Course Texts

All course readings are available on Blackboard or through the University Libraries website.

Evaluation

Short Essay (20%)

This is a short essay (1250 words) in which you will explain the structure of a particular argument (to be provided) and briefly assess it. The task is to show that you understand how to read an argument, identify its premises, and assess its soundness.

This assignment is due early in the term, so students are advised to begin thinking about this, and to consult with the instructor if there are questions, as soon as possible.

Long Essay (35%)

This essay will take a similar form as the short essay, but with a bit more depth. The word count is 1750 words. The goal here is to show that you can encounter an argument on your own, incorporate it into a larger philosophical discussion, and assess it accordingly. Students will be provided with two topics, from which they will choose one on which to write.

For this assignment, advanced students are invited to propose alternative topics to the instructor. Essays written on alternative topics *must be approved by the instructor no later than one week before the deadline*. Essays on alternative topics that were not approved will not be accepted. Be advised that requests to write on an alternative topic may be either approved but strongly discouraged (e.g., if the idea is not particularly promising or would be too difficult to tackle in 1750 words), or denied.

Final Exam (35%)

The final exam will be made up of a mix of short answer and essay questions, and will cover material from the entire semester. A very schematic study guide will be provided to students in advance of the exam to aid their study.

5 Reading Responses/Participation (10%)

The final 10% of the course will be determined by two factors: (1) the submission and quality of your reading responses (see below), and (2) your participation in lecture, broadly construed. Participation includes, but is not limited to, your preparedness, your attention (constantly playing on your phone or laptop will reduce your grade for this component considerably), and your active participation.

Reading responses are engaged, thoughtful, and short (200-300 words) responses to one of the week's readings, which will be submitted at least 24 hours prior to lecture via email. Students will select 5 of the 10 substantive lectures to submit reading responses for.

These responses can include short summaries of one or more of the essay's arguments, but should be primarily critical in nature—that is, you should identify possible criticisms or objections to the view. It is also possible to address possible ambiguities and confusions, when they occur; however, students are expected to attempt to articulate precisely where the confusion lies.

Reading responses will be assessed on the following four-point scale: 4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: satisfactory; 1: unsatisfactory; 0: incomplete.

Course Policies

Email

You should email the instructor for all questions relating to course business. Emails should either concern administrative matters about which you are unclear, or else very brief philosophical questions. Longer philosophical discussions or questions ought to be addressed in class or in office hours.

Technology

1. You are not permitted to use your cell phones during lecture. This is very distracting to your fellow students as well as to your instructor. You are strongly discouraged from using your laptop in lecture. The value on balance of using a laptop during lecture is typically outweighed by the disvalue of the potential (and often actual) distraction that it causes. (Note that this is not a blanket prohibition on computers. I realize that many students will, for one reason or another, require the use of a computer during lecture. Any students who misuse technology during lecture or tutorials may be asked to leave, or marks may be deducted.)
2. You are required to use a cloud-based program of some kind to back up your work in this course. I recommend free services such as Dropbox or Google Drive, but emailing it to yourself is a satisfactory second-best option. I will have no way of verifying that you are in fact using such a program. However, with this requirement, students will be unable to avail themselves of the reasoning that they should be granted an extension because, e.g., their hard drive has crashed. (If you're entrusting the entire existence of your very important work to a flimsy piece of metal spinning at 700+ RPM, then, in my humble opinion, you're living too dangerously. Use a cloud for backup.)

Deadlines, Lateness, Extensions

Papers are due at 11:59 PM, and must be submitted through both Blackboard and Turnitin.com (details will be provided on how to submit your assignments closer to the deadlines). Late assignments will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but your grade will be reduced by 4% per day for each day past the due date (including weekends). No assignments will be accepted after that date, unless arrangements have been made with the instructor prior to the deadline.

In order to secure an extension, the student must do two things prior to the deadline: (1) make a request via email to the instructor, and (2) provide documentation of illness or unforeseen conflict that precludes submission by the deadline. Please note that having other assignments or a busy work schedule do not qualify as unforeseen conflicts. Extensions requested *after* the deadline will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to submit only your own work. Students caught plagiarizing will, at a minimum, fail the assignment, and further university sanctions may also be applied. All incidents of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the University's office of Academic Integrity. If

you are unfamiliar with the guidelines surrounding academic integrity, you are advised to visit: www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity, or ask the instructor for further information.

Turnitin.com

Students will be asked to submit their essays through Turnitin.com in order to check for possible plagiarism. Students who object to this requirement may opt out, in which case alternative arrangements will be made to check for plagiarism, such as meeting with the professor to discuss the contents of the essay. Students who choose to opt out must do so at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.”

Course Schedule

July 5: Introduction

1. Fred Feldman, "The Enigma of Death" (16 pages)

July 10: Badness of Death I: The Basic Views

1. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (3 pages)
2. Thomas Nagel, "Death" (10 pages)

July 12: Badness of Death II: Challenges to Epicurus

1. Jeff McMahan, "Death and the Value of Life" (30 pages)
2. Fred Feldman, "Some Puzzles about the Evil of Death" (23 pages)

July 17: Badness of Death III: Challenges to Nagel

1. Stephen Rosenbaum, "How to be Dead and Not Care" (9 pages)
2. Frances Kamm, "Why is Death Bad?" (14 pages)

July 19: After Death I: Immortality

1. Bernard Williams, "The Makropoulos Case" (20 pages)
2. John Martin Fischer, "Why Immortality is Not So Bad" (13 pages)

****Short essay due by 11:59 PM on Friday, July 21st*

July 24: After Death II: Scheffler's 'Afterlife'

1. Samuel Scheffler, "Lecture 1: The Afterlife (Part I)," from *Death and the Afterlife* (34 pages)
2. Susan Wolf, "The Significance of Doomsday," from *Death and the Afterlife* (8 pages)
3. Mark Johnston, "Is Life a Ponzi Scheme?" from the *Boston Review* (12 pages)

July 26: After Death III: Scheffler's 'Afterlife'

1. Samuel Scheffler, "Lecture 3: Fear, Death and Confidence" (12 pages)
2. Niko Kolodny, "That I Should Die and Others Live" (8 pages)

July 31: After Death IV: Love and Death

1. Dan Moller, "Love and Death" (23 pages)
2. Aaron Smuts, "Love, Death, and Resilience" (22 pages)

Aug 2: Euthanasia I: Arguments Against

1. James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia" (6 pages)

****Read this for background, if you aren't familiar with it. It won't appear on the exam in any direct way, though you are expected to be familiar with the distinctions drawn herein.*

1. David Velleman, "A Right of Self-Termination?" (23 pages)
2. Neil Gorsuch, "The Right to Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia," *only Sections VI and VII.* (31 pages)

****For background: "Trump Picks a Bioethicist for the Supreme Court," by Emma Green, in The Atlantic, Feb. 2017*

Aug 9: Euthanasia II: Arguments in Favor

1. Ronald Dworkin, et. al., "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief" (10 pages)
2. Frances Kamm, "Some Arguments by Velleman Concerning Suicide and Assisted Suicide" (19 pages)

****Longer essay due by 11:59 PM on Friday, August 10th*

Aug 14: Euthanasia III: Disability

1. Jerome Bickenbach, "Disability and Life-Ending Decisions" (10 pages)
2. Wayne Sumner, "Death, Disability, and Self-Determination" (19 pages)
3. *Time permitting, the remainder of this lecture will consist of review for the final exam. Students are expected to come to lecture with questions about the course materials. (If there isn't time in this period, a separate review session will be organized.)*

****Final Exam—Date TBA (see A&S Exam Schedule)*