Philosophy 320
Selected Topics in Ethics: Death

Fall 2016
Lattimore 531, MW 10:25-11:40

Richard Dees, Ph.D.
Office: Lattimore 529
Hours: M 11:45-12:45, R 8:30-9:30
and by appointment
Phone: 275-8110
richard.dees@rochester.edu

Death poses a number of philosophical puzzles: What does it mean to die? Am I harmed when I die? I don’t experience my death or being dead, so why would it be bad for me? Is it appropriate, then, to fear my death? Is it wrong to kill myself? Can I be harmed after I die? If dying is bad, would it be better if I never died, if I lived forever? Does the fact of that we will die change the way we should live? Does death shape the meaning of our lives?

Required Texts:
Plato, Phaedo, trans. GMA Grube (Hackett)
Samuel Scheffler, Death and the Afterlife (Oxford)
Susan Wolf, Meaning in Life and Why it Matters (Princeton)
Readings on Blackboard

Course Requirements:
Class participation is worth a significant portion of your grade. The class is based on student discussions, not on lectures. You are expected to come to class, and you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings – if only to ask relevant questions about them. Most of your class participation grade is based on regular, substantive participation in class discussions.

Reflection papers. Almost every week, you will be expected to write a brief one-page reaction paper to the upcoming week’s reading, due generally at 9:00 p.m. on the Sunday or Tuesday night before we start a unit. Please email them to me. These papers should respond to some specific arguments or position in the readings by explaining why you agree or disagree with it. Reflections are due on the following dates: September 6 (Tuesday), September 11 (Sunday), September 18 (Sunday), September 25 (Sunday), October 9 (Sunday), October 23 (Sunday), November 6 (Sunday), November 13 (Sunday), November 28 (Sunday), December 4 (Sunday). Each is worth 8 points.

Paper assignments. The major assignments in this course will be done using a tutorial system. I will give you a series of questions about particular texts, and I will ask you to respond to them in a paper of 6-8 pages. You and another student will meet with me in my office during the time set aside for that purpose. Together, the three of us will discuss each of your papers.
While attending a tutorial is required, you will be graded only on what is in your paper. I will explain the tutorial method in more detail later.

For your final assignment, you will have a choice: you may either write a third tutorial of 7-10 pages on a topic I will give you, or you may write a 7-10 page paper on a topic of your own choosing. This latter option will give you the opportunity to explore an issue of particular interest to you at greater length. Note that the paper must be a philosophy paper: it should explain and evaluate a line of argument that concerns neuroscience or neurological practice. I will be happy, however, to help you develop your topic. In any case, if you choose to write a paper, you must consult me.

The course grade is divided into 500 points, apportioned as shown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First tutorial</td>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second paper</td>
<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final assignment</td>
<td>Dec 13</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction papers</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>100</td>
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**Academic honesty:** The Honor Pledge will be required on the papers for the course. I expect the work on these assignments to be your own; all quotations and ideas from others that are used in your work must be properly cited. The reflections papers are more informal, so I do not expect rigorous citations or the Pledge, but I do expect the work to be your own. This is an ethics course, and I take a particularly dim view of violations of academic honesty. Please consult the College’s policy at [www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/](http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/). If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact one of the instructors of this class.

**Schedule of Readings**

This schedule is tentative (especially for topics later in the course). However, any changes will be announced on Blackboard, and an up-to-date copy of the syllabus can always be found on Blackboard. All readings, except those in the required books for the class, are on Blackboard.

**Aug 31**

**Introduction**

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1599) 3.1.56-88

Montaigne, “To study philosophy is to learn to die” (1580), in *Complete Essays*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943), 56-68

**Sep 7**

**Defining death**


*Reflection paper due, 9 pm, September 6*

**Sep 12-14**

Don Marquis, “Are DCD Donors Dead?,” *Hastings Center Report* 40.3 (2010), 24-31
*Reflection paper due, 9 pm, September 11*

**Sep 19-21**  
**The badness of death**  
Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeccus* (c. 300 BCE)  
*Reflection paper due, 9 pm, September 18*

**Sep 26-28**  
**The asymmetry problem**  
Lucretius, *The Nature of Things* (c 50 BCE), trans. Frank Copley (New York: WW. Norton, 1977), Book III, lines 971-77 (more generally, 830-1094)  
*Reflection paper due, 9 pm, September 25*

**Oct 3**  
**First tutorials (No regular class meeting)**

**Oct 5**  
**Dead bodies**  

**Oct 7**  
**Tour of Mt. Hope Cemetery with Dennis Carr. Meet at 9:30 am at North entrance to the cemetery along Mt. Hope Ave**

**Oct 10-12**  
**Harming the dead**  

Reflection paper due, 9 pm, October 9

Oct 17-19  
*Fall break (No class)*

Oct 24-26  
*Souls*  

Reflection paper due, 9 pm, October 23

Oct 31  
*The undead*  
Richard Greene, “The Badness of Undeath,” in *The Undead and Philosophy*, 3-14

Nov 2-7  
*Imortality*  
Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Viking 2005), ch. 6 excerpts (pp 312-30, 337-42)
Jonathan Swift, “The Struldbruggs,” *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), ch. 26

Reflection paper due, 9 pm, November 1

Nov 9  
*Second tutorials (No regular class meeting)*

Nov 14-16  
*Suicide*  
David Hume, “Of Suicide” (1755), in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, 577-89

Reflection paper due, 9 pm, November 13

Nov 19  
*Valuing life*  
Move: “Never Let Me Go,” 12 noon, place TBA
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 28-30</td>
<td>Thanksgiving break (No class, Nov 21-23)</td>
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<td>Reflection paper due, 9 pm, November 27</td>
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<td>Dec 5-7</td>
<td>Living with death</td>
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<td>Reflection paper due, 9 pm, December 4</td>
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<td>Dec 12</td>
<td>Montaigne, “That Our Happiness Must Not Be Judged Until After Our Death” (1580), in <em>Complete Essays</em>, 54-55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 13</td>
<td>Third tutorial/Final assignment due</td>
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