Philosophy 321
Death

Spring 2019
Lattimore 531, Th 2:00-4:30

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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)
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 Wednesday before class. 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. Each is worth 10 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 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.

In addition, students are encouraged to form study groups to discuss the issues raised in the course. If you have a group and you would like me to meet with it, please contact me, and I will be happy to attend.

The course grade is divided into 610 points, apportioned as shown:

- First tutorial: 120 points
- Second paper: 120 points
- Final assignment: 140 points
- Reaction papers: 100 points
- Participation: 130 points

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/. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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.

Jan 17  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

Defining death
Fred Feldman, “Vitatlist Theories of Life” and “The Enigma of Death” chs. 3-4 in *Confrontations with the Reaper* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 39-71

Don Marquis, “Are DCD Donors Dead?,” *Hastings Center Report* 40.3 (2010), 24-31
Rachel Aviv, “The Death Debate,” *New Yorker*, 5 February 2018, 30-41

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, January 23

Jan 31
The badness of death
Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* (c. 300 BCE)

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, January 30

Feb 7
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, 7 pm, February 6

Feb 14
First tutorials (No regular class meeting)

Feb 21
Harming the dead

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, February 20

Feb 28
Souls

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, February 27

Mar 7

Immortality
Richard Greene, “The Badness of Undeath,” in The Undead and Philosophy, 3-14
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, 7 pm, March 6

Mar 14

Spring break

Mar 21

Second tutorials (No regular class meeting)

Mar 28

Suicide
David Hume, “Of Suicide” (1755), in Essays: Moral, Political and Literary, 577-89
Immanuel Kant, “Suicide” (1780), in Lectures on Ethics, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett , 1963), 148-54

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, March 27

Apr 4

Valuing life
Movie: “Never Let Me Go”

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, April 3

Apr 11

Living with death

Reflection paper due, 7 pm, April 10
Apr 18  Dead bodies
        Tour of Mt. Hope Cemetery
        Thomas Laquer, “Places of the Dead in Modernity,” in The Age of Cultural
        Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820, edited by Colin Jones and
        Dror Wahrman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-32
        (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 59-84

        Conclusion
        Montaigne, “That Our Happiness Must Not Be Judged Until After Our Death”
        (1580), in Complete Essays, 54-55
        Reflection paper due, 7 pm, April 17

Apr 25  Third tutorial/Final assignment due