

Philosophy 371: Death and Dying
Rutgers University – New Brunswick
Monday, Thursday: 9:50am – 11:10am
Hardenbergh Hall A6

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Office Hours: Monday, 2-4pm and by appointment

Course Description

This course explores some of the central issues of human existence: death, dying, and the meaning and value of life. We will begin by considering philosophical views regarding what is good or meaningful about life, and, in particular, about life for creatures like us. We will then consider philosophical discussion of the following questions: What is death? What is death for creatures like us? Could we survive our deaths? What is dying like? What is bad about death? How should we think about our own death? Should we ever hasten death? Can we be harmed after we die? Would it be good to be immortal? Having thought about these somewhat more personal issues, we will then consider philosophical issues that arise as any society confronts death. How should we treat the dying? How should we talk about death and the dead? Which deaths should we prevent? When should we stop trying to prevent death? We will consider these questions from a variety of perspectives and traditions, using philosophical texts, as well as works of non-fiction, fiction, and poetry.

Readings

There is no required text for this course. Readings will be posted on the course's Sakai site.

YOU MUST DO THE ASSIGNED READING BEFORE EACH CLASS MEETING

Course Requirements

- (A) 2 Short Papers (10% each, 20% total)
 - 1000 to 1500 words
 - details to follow in class
- (B) 3 Quizzes (10% each, 30% total)
 - multiple choice and true-false quizzes
- (C) In-Class Group and Individual Participation (25% total, roughly 1% for each day of class)
 - Attendance is necessary, but not sufficient!
 - Based on engagement and effort in argument groups (more on this in class)
- (D) Longer Paper (25% total)
 - 2000-2500 words
 - details to follow in class

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Rutgers University policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe, including an automatic failing grade for the course and worse. This document provides a comprehensive overview of those policies:

https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2014/11/AI_Policy_2013.pdf

Accessibility

I want this class to be a great and educational experience for all of you, and all of you are entitled to equal access to educational opportunities at Rutgers.

Disabled students are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Office of Disability Services: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Plan for Course and Readings

All readings are posted on Sakai on the course website.

Day	Topic	Reading
9/8	Introduction	Ezekiel Emanuel, "Why I Hope to Die at 75" Naomi Rosenberg, "How to Tell a Mother Her Child is Dead" Poem: Philip Larkin, "Aubade"
I. What is good or meaningful about life?		
9/12	Sisyphus and Meaninglessness	Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" (from <u>Good and Evil</u>)
9/15	Transcending Limits and Leaving Traces	Robert Nozick, "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life" (from <u>Philosophical Explanations</u>) Poem: Kay Ryan, "Things Shouldn't Be So Hard"
9/19	Meaning and Absurdity	Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd" Poem: William Bronk, "Fides et Ratio"
9/22	Meaning and Living	John (Fire) Lame Deer, <u>Seeker of Visions</u> (excerpts) Poem: Brian Turner, "How Bright It Is" Poem: Jimmy Santiago Baca, "Who Understands Me But Me"
II. What is death for creatures like us?		
9/26	Human Death	David DeGrazia, "The Nature of Human Death"
9/29	Personal Identity and Survival (I)	Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity" (excerpt from <u>Reasons and Persons</u>)

10/3 <i>Quiz #1</i>	Personal Identity and Survival (II)	Marya Schechtman, "The Malleability of Identity"
10/6	Class Cancelled	
10/10 <i>Paper #1 assigned</i>	Personal Identity and Survival (III)	Kwame Gyekye, "The Relation of Ōkra (Soul) and Honam (Body): An Akan Conception" Poems: William Bronk, "The Length of Life" and "All Part of Things" Poem: Reginald Dwayne Betts, "At the End of Life, A Secret"
10/13	Personal Identity and Survival (IV)	Identity and the Self in Chinese Buddhism (several different readings)
10/17	Personal Identity and Survival (V)	Sophie-Grace Chappell, "Seeds: On Personal Identity and Resurrection" Poem, William Bronk, "Staying On"
III. What is bad about death?		
10/20	No class	
10/24 <i>Paper #1 due</i>	Death and Depravation	Thomas Nagel, "Death"
10/27	Death and Harm	John Martin Fischer, "Mortal Harm" Poem: William Bronk, "Eternity"
10/31 <i>Paper #2 assigned</i>	Death and The Story of Our Lives	Kathy Behrendt, "Learning to be Dead: The Narrative Problem of Mortality"

IV. How should we approach our own death?		
11/3 <i>Quiz #2</i>	Thinking of Death	David Velleman, “Dying” from <u>Beyond Price</u> Jeanne Fitzpatrick and Eileen Fitzpatrick, <u>A Better Way of Dying</u> (excerpts) Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, “Some Interviews with Terminally Ill Patients,” from <u>On Death and Dying</u> “Micromort” from Wikipedia Poem: David Antin, “Meditation 13”
11/7	Death and Ideology	Beverly Clack, “Constructing Death as a Form of Failure: Addressing Mortality in a Neoliberal Age”
V. Would it be good to be immortal?		
11/10	Immortality	Bernard Williams, “Reflections on Makropoulos...” Poem: A.E. Stallings, “Thyme” Poem: Carl Dennis, “Eternal Life”
11/14 <i>Paper #2 Due</i>	Immortality (II)	Connie Rosati, “The Makropulos Case Revisited”
VI. Can we be harmed after we die?		
11/17	When does harm occur?	Katherine Hawley, “Persistence and Time”
11/21	Harm after death	Simon Keller, “Posthumous Harm”
VII. How should we treat the dying? How should we think and talk about the dead?		
11/22 (Tue)	How We Treat the Dying	Atul Gawande, <u>Being Mortal</u> , pp. 111-147 (“A Better Life”) Poem: Tony Hoagland, “Safeway”

<p>11/28 <i>Paper #3 assigned</i></p>	<p>Our Reactions to Deaths of Others</p>	<p>Dan Moller, "Love and Death"</p> <p>Ernest Morgan, "Death Ceremonies," and "Simple Burial and Cremation" from <u>Dealing Creatively with Death</u>, pp. 77-88, 47-69, 125-145, 109-112</p> <p>Poem: Tory Dent, "Variations"</p> <p>Poem: Sharon Olds, "Birthday Poem for My Grandmother"</p>
<p>VIII. Should we ever hasten death?</p>		
<p>12/1</p>	<p>Suicide</p>	<p>Anne Case and Angus Deaton, "Suicide, age, and wellbeing: an empirical investigation"</p> <p>David Velleman, "A Right of Self-Termination?"</p> <p>Poem: Bucky Sinister, "The Other Universe of Bruce Wayne"</p> <p>Poems: Brian Turner, "Two Stories Down" and "Eulogy"</p>
<p>12/5 <i>Quiz #3</i></p>	<p>Assisted Suicide</p>	<p>Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, and Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Philosopher's Brief"</p> <p>Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Moral Arguments"</p>
<p>IX. Which deaths should we prevent?</p>		
<p>12/8</p>	<p>Preventing Death</p>	<p>Peter Unger, <u>Living High and Letting Die</u> (excerpts)</p>
<p>12/12 <i>Paper #3 due</i></p>	<p>Which Deaths to Prevent?</p>	<p>Govind Persad et al., "Principles for Allocation of Scarce Medical Interventions"</p> <p>Jeff McMahan, <u>The Ethics of Killing</u> (excerpts)</p>