

Death and Dying

PHIL 20203 01

9:30–10:45 Tuesday and Thursday

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2–4 and by appointment

Course Description: Like everyone else, philosophers have always thought about death. But the conclusions philosophers reach on this topic are not idle; they have important consequences for how we live and how we die. Death, of course, is personal. But it is also public. Many contemporary social issues revolve around death and dying. The first goal of this course is to learn and explore both historical and contemporary philosophical treatments of death. Topics include: What, precisely, is death? What happens to us when we die? Why is death bad? Are there circumstances in which death is good? When is it permissible to end a life? How does the possibility of immortality affect the value of life and death? The second goal of this course is to help students discover their own beliefs about death and improve their ability to articulate, defend, and act upon those beliefs.

Texts: *Philosophy and Death*, Eds. Samantha Brennan and Robert J. Stainton; *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, John Perry

Grade Distribution:

Write-ups	20%
Quests	30%
Papers	40%
Attendance & Participation	10%

Letter Grade Distribution: Notre Dame does not have an official Numeral-to-letter grade conversion. In this course I will use the following:

≥ 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	≤ 59.99	F

Course Policies:

- Electronic devices are allowed, but discouraged.
- Students should come to class having read the material and be prepared to discuss it.
- Quizzes are closed book, closed notes.
- Papers are not to consult philosophical material outside of course material
- Late papers will be deducted one half-letter grade for each day late (A to A-, etc.).
- **Unless the student has an official excuse, there will be no makeups.**

Honor Code:

Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. Notre Dame has extensive guidelines on the honor code. Additionally, the philosophy department has a document explaining how Notre Dame's honor code applies to writing philosophy papers. Links to both of these can be found on the course website.

I take academic integrity very seriously. Cheating of any kind will be reported, will result in a failing grade on the assignment, and might lead to even stronger penalties. Any particular questions about the honor code should be directed to me.

Accessibility:

Notre Dame and I are committed to making this course accessible to all students. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability, or who have questions about disability, are invited to talk to me or to contact the Office of Disability Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Learning Center for Students with Disabilities, or by phone at 574-631-7157. All information given to Disability Services is confidential and is shared only with your consent. Students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course should contact the Office of Disability Services at their earliest opportunity to ensure there is time to complete the process before accommodations are actually needed. Additional information about Disability Services and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at disabilityservices.nd.edu.

Further, there are other support services available on campus. I especially encourage students to take advantage of the Writing Center.

Content Warning:

This is a course about death. At times, the material might feel heavy. That is okay. Any students who want to should feel free to talk to me or, better, to talk to someone at Notre Dame's Counseling Center.

Given the content of this course, discussion can often turn personal. I expect everyone to treat each other with respect, especially when there is a disagreement. Philosophical exploration is best when all parties feel supported in their pursuit of knowledge.

Assignments:

Weekly Writing: Writing frequently is a great habit. Roughly once a week, students will submit a brief written assignment. These assignments can take many forms, but will always be under a page of writing. Possible assignments include: clearly state the main thesis of a reading; reconstruct an argument in a passage; state whether or not you agree with a claim discussed in class and explain why or why not. The weekly writing assignments will be graded on an Acceptable/Unacceptable scale. The proportion of submissions that are Acceptable to those that are Unacceptable will determine this portion's contribution to the overall grade.

Quests: There will be four exams that are longer than your average quiz and shorter than your average test – let's call them "quests". Each quest covers one of the main units of the course and is worth 7.5% of students' overall grade. Quests are closed book, closed notes. Quests will ask students to identify, explain, and engage with the main claims and arguments discussed in the unit. Quests are *not* restricted to only material emphasized in class. (Quests are, of course, restricted to assigned course materials.)

Papers: Students will write two papers (\approx 5 pages) for this course, each worth 20% of students' overall grade. The first paper will be on material covered in Units 1 and 2. The second paper will be on material covered in Units 3 and 4. We will spend time in class working on these papers. Students are expected to write their papers using only the material given in class. Papers will be assigned letter grades. Late papers will be deducted one half-letter grade for each day late (A to A-, etc.).

Attendance & Participation: Active participation in philosophy is the best way to learn philosophy. Students are encouraged to interact with me and with other students inside and outside of class. However, "perfect participation" is not just a function of the aggregate sum of comments made. A "perfect participant" is not necessarily the most vocal participant. A perfect participant engages with her peers, often by supporting, clarifying, or justifying their comments. She plays less like a tennis player and more like a volleyball player.

Students who have more than two unexcused absence will have points deducted from this portion of the overall grade.

Course Outline:

Schedule (Subject to Change)							
Date	Topic	Reading --- * Indicates the reading can be found in the Philosophy and Death book					
Unit 1 - The Nature of Death							
Tuesday, Aug 25	Introductions						
Thursday, Aug 27	Orientation	Rosenberg, "Life After Death: In Search of the Question"					
Tuesday, Sept 1	Two Conceptions of Life and Death	Perry, A Dialogue on Personal Identity (First Night)					
Thursday, Sept 3	Two Conceptions, cont'd	Perry, A Dialogue on Personal Identity (Second and Third Nights)					
Tuesday, Sept 8	Arguments for Immortality	*Plato, excerpts from the Phaedo					
Thursday, Sept 10	Some Puzzles in Defining Death	*Feldman, "The Enigma of Death"					
Tuesday, Sept 15	Death, Medicine, and the Law	*Pojman, "The Nature of Death"					
Thursday, Sept 17	Quest #1 -- The Nature of Death						
Unit 2 - The Value of Death							
Tuesday, Sept 22	Epicureanism	*Epicurus and Lucretius, Letter to Menoeceus, The Principal Doctrines, and excerpts from On the Nature of Things					
Thursday, Sept 24	The Badness of Death	*Nagel, "Death"					
Tuesday, Sept 29	When is Death Bad?	Bradley, "When Is Death Bad for the One Who Dies?"					
Thursday, Oct 1	Another Take on Death's Badness	Blatti, "Death's Distinctive Harm"					
Tuesday, Oct 6	When is it Better to Die?	Bradley, "The Worst Time to Die"					
Thursday, Oct 8	Death and Gender	*Brennan, "Feminist Philosophers Turn Their Thoughts to Death"					
Tuesday, Oct 13	Writing Workshop						
Thursday, Oct 15	Quest #2 -- The Value of Death	Quest #2 -- The Value of Death					
Mid-term Break							
Unit 3 - Death and Society							
Tuesday, Oct 27	Abortion	*Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"					
Thursday, Oct 29	Euthanasia	*Rachels and Steinbock, "Active and Passive Euthanasia" and "The Intentional Termination of Life"					
Tuesday, Nov 3	Suicide	Pilpel and Amsel, "What is Wrong with Rational Suicide?"					
Thursday, Nov 5	Ethics of War	McPherson, "Is Terrorism Distinctively Wrong?"					
Tuesday, Nov 10	Self-defense	Frowe, "A Practical Account of Self-defence"					
Thursday, Nov 12	Capital Punishment	Finkelstein, "Death and Retribution"					
Tuesday, Nov 17	Quest #3 -- Death and Society						
Unit 4 - Death and Religion							
Thursday, Nov 19	Boredom and Immortality	*Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"					
Tuesday, Nov 24	Alvy Singer and the End of Humanity	Scheffler, Death and the Afterlife -- Lecture #1					
Thursday, Nov 26	Thanksgiving -- No class						
Tuesday, Dec 1	Knowledge of an Afterlife	Buchak, "Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?"					
Thursday, Dec 3	Nature of Heaven and Hell	Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven"					
Tuesday, Dec 8	Reincarnation	Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Does Rebirth Make Sense?"					
Thursday, Dec 10	Review/Paper Workshop						
Final	Quest #4 -- Death and Religion	Tuesday, Dec 15, 10:30--12:30					
Second Paper		Wednesday, Dec 16, 11:59pm EST					