

PHL 382: Death and Dying Summer 2016

Eric Mathison

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00–6:00 pm

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Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:00–9:00 pm

SS 2105

Description

We are all going to die. For this reason, humans have spent a great deal of time thinking about death. This course will consider some major questions, beginning with normative ethical questions of the following sort: What does it mean to die? Why, if at all, is death a bad thing for the one who dies? And what is the appropriate attitude for us to have towards death?

In the second part of the course we will turn to applied issues related to death and dying, in particular suicide and euthanasia. Whereas the first part of the course primarily deals with ethical questions, this part will also consider some legal issues. Are suicide and euthanasia ever rational? Are they morally permissible or sometimes even obligatory? Should euthanasia be legal, and if so, under what circumstances? We will focus on the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision which struck down legal prohibitions on physician-assisted death.

Grading

The first paper must be no longer than 1,500 words. The second paper must be no longer than 3,000 words. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54 cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. Late papers will be penalized one letter point per day (e.g., a paper submitted one day late will go from a B to a B-). You may write your first paper on anything we have covered by that point in the course. For your second paper, you may write on any topic we have covered in the course, so long as you

didn't write your first paper on the same topic. I will post sample essay topics, but you are encouraged to write on whatever you find most interesting. Papers will be submitted on Blackboard, and must be prepared for blind grading, which means that you must not include your name in the file name or the file itself.

The final exam will consist of short-answer questions. Participation means *participating*. Attending class is a necessary condition for getting a good participation grade, but it isn't sufficient. You must also have done the readings and contribute to the class discussion.

Paper 1 (Due July 15th)	20%
Paper 2 (Due August 7th)	40%
Final Exam	30%
Participation	10%

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence which many students commit unintentionally. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. In particular, for this course, you are required to give a citation whenever you discuss someone else's work. This is true regardless of whether you directly quote the author or, alternatively, summarize the author's ideas in your own words. This course, and philosophy in general, has no agreed-upon style guide. You can use whichever method you prefer, so long as I can find the relevant passage. Most importantly, *you must provide page numbers*. Here are two examples:

Direct quotation: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit says "Like my cat, I often simply do what I want to do" (p. ix).

Summarization: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit describes how he often behaves like his cat by acting in whatever way he wants to (p. ix).

If you are unsure how to properly cite something, consult one of the following sources: [The Writing Centre website](#); [one of the physical writing centres](#); or me, the instructor. For more information on academic integrity, please consult the [university's webpage](#).

Contacting the Instructor

I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours. If you email me, please include the course code in the subject or body of the message. If you are unable to attend my office hour (right before class) we can usually arrange to meet another time either in person or via Skype, Google Hangouts, or some other medium.

Reading Schedule

There is no assigned textbook or reading pack for this course. All of the readings are either available for free online or will be made available on Blackboard.

Week 1: What is Death?

June 27

Introduction

June 29

- Fred Feldman, “The Enigma of Death,” *Philosophia* 21: 3–4 (1992): 163–181.
- Louis Pojman, “What is Death? The Crisis of Criteria,” from *Life and Death*.

Week 2: Well-Being and Harm

July 4

- Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?” from *Reasons and Persons*, 494–499.
- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Second Edition), 83–109.

July 6

- Thomas Nagel, “Death” from *Mortal Questions*.
- Frances Kamm, “Why Is Death Bad?” from *Morality, Mortality*.

Week 3: Harm and the Epicurean Challenge

July 11

- Fred Feldman, “Some Puzzles About the Evils of Death,” *The Philosophical Review* 100:2 (1991): 205–227.
- Frances Kamm, “Accounting for Asymmetry” from *Morality, Mortality*.

July 13 (First Paper Due July 15)

- Jeff McMahan, “Part 2,” from *The Ethics of Killing*, 95–145.

Week 4: Immortality and The Appropriate Attitude

July 18

- Bernard Williams, “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality,” from *Problems of the Self*: 82–100.
- Julian Barnes, “The Dream,” from *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, 281–307.
- Philip Larkin, “Aubade”.

July 20

- Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, Part I.
- W.H. Auden, “Funeral Blues”.

Week 5: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia

July 25 (Last day to withdraw without academic penalty)

- R.B. Brandt, “The Morality and Rationality of Suicide,” from *A Handbook for the Study of Suicide* (1975).
- John Hardwig, “Is There a Duty to Die?” *The Hastings Center Report* 27:2 (1997): 34–42.

July 27

- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 292 (1975): 78–80.
- Dan Brock, “Voluntary Active Euthanasia,” *The Hastings Center Report* 22:2 (1992): 10–22.
- Daniel Callahan, “When Self-Determination Runs Amok,” *The Hastings Center Report* 22:2 (1992): 52–55.

Week 6: The Legality of Euthanasia in Canada

August 1: NO CLASS

August 3 (Final Paper Due August 7)

- Jocelyn Downie, “What the Law Should Be for Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia,” from *Dying Justice*, 88–107.

- L.W. Sumner, “From Prohibition to Regulation,” from *Assisted Death: A study in ethics & law*, 165–203.

Week 7: Euthanasia Law and Review

August 8

- Carter v. Canada