

PHIL 2190: Philosophy of Death and Dying

Summer 2006 TTh 6:15-9:25pm

Instructors:

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General Remarks:

Preparing for this course, it is easy to get lost in the sheer amount of literature available on the topic. Because of this, some choose to approach this course narrowly; they pick one of the incredible number of sub-topics available and engage it in depth. Others choose to attempt to cover the wide breadth of material on this topic, addressing everything from the definition of death to cross-cultural burial rituals to the ethics of killing. This course will be somewhere in between; it is divided loosely into four units addressing four questions: What is death? Is death bad? What happens after death? How do we deal with death?

What is important to understand in this course is that the instructors are less concerned with fully answering these questions and more concerned with working with the students in developing an understanding of what it is to approach these questions philosophically. With this in mind, the instructors expect this course to revolve around discussion amongst the students, rather than around the lectures given by the instructors. Ideally, any given class period will hear much more from the students than from either of the instructors. The structure of the course and the assignments are designed with this in mind.

Expert Presentations:

Each student is expected to become an “expert” on one of the readings for this course. Experts are expected to come to class on the day their reading is assigned with a prepared 15-minute presentation on their reading. This presentation should include a thorough outline of the reading as well as the expert’s own reactions to it. The expert is expected to take and defend a serious position with regards to the arguments and conclusions presented in the reading. After each presentation both the class and instructors will be invited to ask the expert questions about the reading; these questions may be either clarificatory or may address some part of the reading’s argument or the expert’s own position. Readings will be assigned on the second day of class based on interest and philosophical background. The readings are, more or less, of two types. Some of the readings are published papers in philosophy. These tend to be dense, but are also arguments, and thus somewhat easier to outline and respond to. Other readings are from texts, such as *Western Attitudes Towards Death* and, while less dense reading, will require serious work as the expert will still be expected to take a position on the reading’s conclusions. Students

should be prepared to hand in a copy of their presentation notes to the instructors at the end of class.

Response Papers:

In addition to his or her expert presentation, each student is expected to write a short response paper (~2pp) to another student's presentation. Each student will be assigned as respondent to a specific reading. The purpose of assigning respondents is two-fold: First, students will know when arriving in class that they will need to be prepared to respond to that day's presentation. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this ensures that each expert will have the benefit of reading a response paper from one of their classmates. Response papers are to be handed in at the beginning of the following class. One copy should be handed in to the instructors and another to the expert being responded to.

Final Paper:

Each student is expected to hand in one final paper (4-5pp) at the end of class. This paper should be a rigorous philosophical investigation into one of the topics discussed over the course of the six weeks. It is recommended that students write this paper on the topic of their expert presentation, as this will afford them the benefit of not only their own previous work on the topic but of the feedback of both the instructors and their assigned respondent. This is not, however, a requirement, and if a student chooses to write on another relevant topic of interest, he or she may do so.

Class Participation:

Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussion. The attendance policy is not rigid and students will not be penalized some fraction of a grade or even failed based purely on attendance. However, a balance of both attendance and participation in the discussion when attending will count towards a student's participation grade. Failure to attend on the day of one's expert presentation or assigned day as respondent will result in a zero for that assignment as well as a significant loss of participation points.

Readings:

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. This list may change in order or content at any time. Readings assigned to an expert are marked with a bolded E and a number in front of them. You will note that some readings have two experts assigned to them. Some of these readings will be split up so that each expert will present on one-half of that reading. In other cases, the instructors will ask two students to work together as co-experts. On these occasions, presentations will last 25-30 minutes rather than the standard 15. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. If changes are made in the order of the list, steps will be taken to ensure that this will not put undue

stress on the affected expert(s). Students will not, for example, arrive to class to discover that they have suddenly become the expert for that class period. Changes made in the content of the course will similarly be made taking into account the assigned expert(s) for the affected reading(s).

6/27/06	Introduction
6/29/06	Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <i>What is Death?</i> *EXAMPLE EXPERT* Excerpt from Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> *EXAMPLE EXPERT* Epicurus, <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>
7/6/06	Nagel, <i>Death</i> E1&2: Rosenbaum, <i>How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus</i>
7/11/06	E3&4: Feldman, <i>Some Puzzles About the Evil of Death</i> E5: Gardner, Chapter 5 of <i>Grendel</i>
7/13/06	E6: Flew, <i>Can We Survive Our Own Deaths?</i> E7: Mill, <i>Immortality</i> E8: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <i>The Phaedo's Theory of Soul</i>
7/18/06	E9: Perry, <i>A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality</i> Film, <i>Defending Your Life</i>
7/20/06	E10&11: Aries, "Forbidden Death" from <i>Western Attitudes Toward Death</i> E12: Rosenblatt, "Cross-Cultural Variation in the Experience, Expression, and Understanding of Grief" from <i>Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death, and Grief</i>
7/25/06	E13: Doerflinger, <i>Assisted Suicide: Pro-Choice or Anti-Life?</i> E14: Rachels, <i>The Morality of Euthanasia</i> E15: Excerpts from Shakespeare, <i>The Life and Death of King John</i>
7/27/06	E16&17: Marquis, <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i> E18: Warren, <i>The Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> E19: Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i>
8/1/06	E20-21: Hook, <i>The Ethics of Suicide</i> E22: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <i>The Morality and Rationality of Suicide</i>
8/3/06	Wrap-Up

Grading:

30% Expert Presentation

15% Response Paper

35% Final Paper

20% Class Participation

Office Hours:

Office hours will be on an as-needed basis. If you would like to arrange to meet with one or both of the instructors, please contact them by phone or email.

Academic Dishonesty:

It is the instructors' hope that this section of the syllabus is merely a formality. Please do not plagiarize. In all but the most extremely exceptional cases, students found presenting others' work as their own will fail the course.