

## PHIL 225 Death and Dying

Department of Philosophy  
University of Victoria  
Winter Session – Second Term

Mondays and Thursdays  
11:30-12:50  
Cornett B143

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Office Hours: Mondays & Thursday 2:00-3:00 (or by appointment)

### Course Description

This course will be conducted with a twofold goal in mind.

On the one hand, it is meant to serve as an introduction to the sorts of concerns that arise amongst bioethicists when matters of death and dying are at issue. As such, our discussions of death and dying throughout the course will touch on deliberations over medical, moral and legal topics, including: the clinical definition of death; the rationality of suicide; the nature of the relationship between caregivers and the dying; the role that surrogate decision makers or proxies play at the end of life; passive and active euthanasia; physician-assisted suicide; and, the legitimacy of requests made by the dying to have treatment withheld or withdrawn.

On the other hand, this course on death and dying affords us an opportunity to explore the question of the meaning of death and dying.

All humans are mortal. We are humans, and therefore we are going to die.

This simple syllogism carries with it an enormous weight. It states a fact. A fact about all of us, and it is an unsettling and indeed unpleasant fact to grapple with. It is precisely about death, however, which has acted as a powerful motive force, prompting deep philosophical reflection about the value and meaning of life and how best to live that life. It is in taking up these reflections that we will be most engaged throughout the course. As such, much of our discussion will focus on how we are to respond to the fact that we are dying. We will take up the question of whether or not death is an evil, and whether or not it is to be feared. We will touch on the question of whether the fact of death robs life of meaning, or, on the contrary, it is that which provides life with meaning. We will examine the nature of suicide, and look to some classical views on whether or not it is ever permissible to kill oneself or perhaps, whether it is sometimes laudable to do so. Lastly, we will take up the related question of who decides when and how we are to die. Is our own death a matter for us to decide, and if so, are we entitled to ask, or even demand, that others not only respect our right, but assist us in exercising it?

## Reading:

All readings for the course are available to download (as PDF) on the Course Spaces site.

All of the readings in the course package are required reading (i.e., you are expected to have read this material prior to coming to class).

## Evaluation &amp; Due Dates

- i) One short, introductory written assignment (5%) – due Monday, January 21
- ii) One short textual commentary (30%) – due Monday Feb. 25
- iii) One case study specification (25%) – due Tuesday, March 21
- iv) A Final Take-home Examination (35%) – due Monday, April 8 (SOLE DEADLINE)
- v) Attendance and Participation (5%)

UNIVERSITY & COURSE POLICIES

Statement on Academic Integrity:

'Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and

Schedule of Readings:	
I. ENCOUNTERING DEATH	
Topic 1	<b><i>Preparing for Death and Dying</i></b> - No Reading
Topic 2	<b><i>Seeing Dead People: Some Clinical and Philosophical Considerations</i></b> Reading: i) The Whole Brain Definition of Death: Defining the Norm - President's Commission.... Defining Death: Medical Legal and Ethical Issues in the Definition of Death - President's Commission.... Guidelines for the Determination of Death ii) Non-Brain Definitions of Death: A Place of Tradition - President's Commission... Non-Brain Formulations: The Alternative to the Brain-Based Definitions iii) The Higher Brain Definition of Death: An Alternative Rejected - President's Commission... The 'High Brain' Formulations. iv) The Higher Brain Definition of Death: An Alternative Defended - Veatch, Robert M. The Impending Collapse of the Whole Brain Definition of Death
Topic 3	<b><i>Being Dying People: The View from Literature</i></b> Reading - Tolstoy, Leo, The Death of Ivan Ilych
Topic 4	<b><i>Being Dying People: The View from Philosophy</i></b> Reading: - Montaigne, Michael de. That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die - Gray, J. Glenn The Idea of Death in Existentialism
II. EVALUATING DEATH	
Topic 5	<b><i>Is Death an Evil to be Feared?: Some Views from Antiquity</i></b> Reading - Epicurus. Letter to Menoecus - Lucretius. The Soul is Mortal & Folly of the Fear of Death. - Seneca On the Natural Fear of Death
Topic 6	<b><i>Is Death an Evil to be Feared?: Some Contemporary Views</i></b> Reading: - Nagel, Thomas Death - Williams, Bernard. The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality. - Umanuno, Miguel de. The Hunger of Immortality * Optional reading: - Barnes, Julian. The Dream From History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters (on Course Spaces)

