

371: The Philosophy of Death and Dying Syllabus
Fall 2021

Instructor: Martin Lin

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Place: Tillett Hall 246

Time: MW 3pm-4:20pm

Office Hours: by appointment on Zoom

Course site: Canvas

Course Description: In this course we will examine various philosophical issues relating to the nature and value of death and dying. What is death? Could we survive the death of our bodies? What are we such that we may or may not survive death? What does it mean for us to believe that we will die? What is the value of death? Is it a bad thing? Would it be a good thing to live forever? Is it ever morally permissible to take your own life or the life of another? We will conclude by considering moral issues surrounding death and dying during a global pandemic.

Assignments:

Midterm exam: 35%

Final essay outline and annotated bibliography: 10%

Final essay: 45% (~2,000 words)

Participation in class discussion: 10%

Plagiarism: You are required to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. You can find the University's plagiarism policy here:

<http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

If you have any questions, you must ask me.

Text: The textbook, Shelley Kagan, *Death*, is available from the University Bookstore. Other readings will be distributed on Canvas.

Module 1: Arguments for the existence of an immortal soul: Descartes, *The Sixth Meditation*; Plato's *Phaedo*; Kagan, chaps. 4 and 5.

Module 2: Personal Identity: John Perry *Dialogue*; Kagan, chaps. 6 and 7.

Module 3: What is it to Die?: Fred Feldman “The Enigma of Death;” Kagan, chap. 8.

Module 4: Believing you will die: Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; Kagan, chap. 9.

Module 5: The Badness of Death: Epicurus, Lucretius, and Fred Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, chap. 8-9; Nagel, “Death;” Kagan, chap. 10.

Module 6: Immortality: Bernard Williams, “The Tedium of Immortality;” Fisher, “Why Immortality is not so Bad;” Hindu and Buddhist perspectives: Kupperman, *Classical Asian Philosophy*, chap. 1, Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Introduction; Kagan, chap. 11.

Module 7: The value of life: Kagan, chaps. 12 and 13.

Module 8: Suicide: Hume, “On Suicide;” Brandt, “The Morality and Rationality of Suicide;” Kagan, chap. 15.

Module 9: Abortion: Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion;” Marquis, “Why Abortion is Wrong;” Sinnott-Armstrong, “You Cannot Lose What You Never Had.”

Module 10: Life and Death in a Pandemic: Persad, “Principles of Allocation of Scarce Medical Intervention;” Romeo, “The Grim Ethics of Rationing Health Care Explained;” Singer, “Double Jeopardy and the Use of QALYs;” Kamm, “Moral Reasoning in a Pandemic.”

Important dates:

October 13th: Midterm study guide distributed

Wed. October 20th: Midterm (in class).

Wed. Nov. 3rd: Paper outline and bibliography due.

Thurs. Nov. 24th – Sunday Nov. 28th: Thanksgiving recess.

Wed. Dec. 13th: Last class.

Final paper due: TBD.

