PHI 380  
Death, Dying and the Quality of Life  
Fall 2007

Syllabus

Section § 001  MWF 2:00-2:50 pm  CB 235

Contact Information
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Office Hours:
M & W: 3:00 - 4:30 pm
(or by appointment)
Office: 1429 Patterson Office Tower
Class Web Page:
http://sweb.uky.edu/~rsand1/phi380/

Required Texts
3. Class Handouts (available on class web page).

There is nothing more universal among our kind than the phenomenon of death. Who here will escape it? Even if the reality of death may seem remote, it lies ahead of each of us. This universality is expressed in the well known syllogism: all humans are mortal, and Caius is a human. Therefore, he, too, must die. Yet however easy it is to comprehend the necessity of this abstract man's death, there remains the infinitely more difficult task of understanding the meaning of our own death or that of a loved one. Furthermore, all too often in these modern times death is not a simple event but a long and drawn out affair. Indeed, at the farthest extreme there are persons who are kept alive in only the barest mechanical sense. Yet, death is such that it anchors our mortal frame. Our individual finitude bestows a poignant meaningfulness to life, itself. Hence death, dying and the quality of life, itself, are worthy subjects of investigation. This course offers such a philosophical investigation about the living significance of personal death and dying, the meaning of another's death and dying, and the questions of personhood that arise when we examine the quality of a life as we contemplate its end.

This course is divided into six sections. First, as an introduction to the subject we will read two pieces by Leo Tolstoy: his novel, The Death of Ivan Illyich, and an extract on the significance of death in life and the fear we have of death as a consequence. Second, we will turn to examine the philosophical root of the Western conception of death, first, by reviewing briefly historical attitudes in the West to death and, then, by looking at a number of exemplary statements by prominent ancient and medieval philosophers on the significance of death. Third, we shall turn to the modern absurdist framing of the mortality existence. Here we shall read a number of authors having different viewpoint. We shall also watch two well known dramatic representation on the absurdity of mortal life. Fourth, we shall examine the problem of voluntary death, i.e., suicide and euthanasia. Here we shall read a couple of famous cases and examine the social policy implications implicated by these cases. We shall also watch an film about a severely injured man who wishes to die and the effect his efforts to fulfill this wish has on those around him. Fifth, we shall examine the question of personhood that arises when contemplating the end of another's life, most the personhood of one whose quality of life is seriously diminished. Lastly we shall examine the relation of death to life insofar as death bestows significance to individual life. Here we shall watch a famous Japanese film about a man who does not really live until he know he is about to die. We will conclude with two final short readings on the meaning of life.
Grading

- 3 analysis papers on the readings: 5 to 7 pages each  
  due date for the required paper:
  Fri, Sep 21st  The Philosophical Root of the Western Conception
  due dates – will count only the two highest grades:
  Fri, Oct 26th  The Modern Absurdist Question
  Fri, Nov 16th  Voluntary Death
  Fri, Nov 30th  Personality and Death
  20% each x 3  = 60%

- 2 reflection papers on two films: 3 to 5 pages
  due dates – will count only the two highest grades:
  Mon, Sep 24th  Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal
  Mon, Oct 22nd  Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot
  Mon, Nov 5th  Alejandro Amenábar's The Sea Inside
  Mon, Dec 3rd  Akira Kurosawa's Ikiru
  10% each x 2  = 20%

- Reading Journal: covering readings assigned over duration of the semester
  20%

There will be separate handouts detailing the different requirements and evaluation criteria for the three kinds of writing assignments. These will be posted on the class web site as they come available.

Grading Scale

100% – 90% = A  "exceptionally high achievement"
99% – 80% = B  "high achievement"
79% – 70% = C  "satisfactory achievement"
69% – 60% = D  "unsatisfactory achievement"
≤ 59% = E  "unsatisfactory performance and failure"

Attendance Policy

The student is responsible to notify the professor within one week following the period of the excused absence and make up tests in a timely manner See §5.2.4.2 of Student Rights and Responsibilities for the policy on excused absences. It is the student's responsibility to arrange a convenient time to make up the work. There will be no make-ups for graded material missed due to an unexcused absence, and a grade of zero will be awarded for all such tests.

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism not only robs other students not only of a fair grade in this course but also fundamentally threaten the mission of this institution of higher education. All students who are confirmed to have plagiarized will obtain a grade of zero for the class, and a mark will occur on the student's transcripts. Two web sites are available which (i) define plagiarism and (ii) offer a helpful tutorial to help you understand what it is and how properly to attribute sources and so avoid plagiarizing another's writing. These hyperlinks are found on the UK Ombud's website or click:

(i) http://www.uky.edu/Ombud/Plagiarism.pdf
(ii) http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_understand_plagiarism_1/0,6622,427064-,00.html

Academic Accommodation

If you have a documented disability which requires academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center. If you have not already done so, please register with the Disability Resource Center (Room 2 Alumni Gym, 257-2754, jkarnes@email.uky.edu) for coordination of campus disability services available to students with disabilities.
### Class Schedule

1. **Introduction to the Subject**
   - **Wed Aug 22**
     - Syllabus
   - **Fri Aug 24**
     - Tolstoy. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 31-52
   - **Mon Aug 27**
     - Tolstoy. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 53-113
   - **Wed Aug 29**

2. **An Philosophical Root of the Western Conception**
   - **Fri Aug 31**
     - "Death in the West." In *PTADD*, p. 32-50
   - **Mon Sep 3**
     - No class
   - **Wed Sep 5**
     - Plato. In *LD*, 1-16
   - **Fri Sep 7**
     - Aristotle. In *LD*, 17-21
   - **Mon Sep 10**
     - St. Augustine. In *LD*, 22-29
   - **Wed Sep 12**
     - St. Thomas Aquinas. In *LD*, 32-56

3. **The Modern Absurdist Framing of Mortal Existence**
   - **a. Introduction**
     - **Fri Sep 14**
       - Albert Camus. In *LD*, 68-79
     - **Mon Sep 17**
       - Bergman. *The Seventh Seal* (in class film)
     - **Wed Sep 19**
       - Bergman.
     - **Fri Sep 21**
       - Bergman. Class Discussion
   - **b. An analytic approach**
     - **Mon Sep 24**
     - **Wed Sep 26**
       - Westphal & Cherry. In *LD*, 98-103
     - **Fri Sep 28**
       - Hare. In *LD*, 104-111
   - **c. The existentialists**
     - **Mon Oct 1**
       - "Existentialist Thought," in *PTADD*, 55-61 (Kierkegaard)
     - **Wed Oct 3**
     - **Fri Oct 5**
       - "Existentialist Thought," in *PTADD*, 61-68 (Heidegger)
     - **Mon Oct 8**
       - Sartre. In *LD*, 59-67
     - **Wed Oct 10**
       - de Beauvoir. In *LD*, 80-85
     - **Fri Oct 12**
       - "The Evil of Death," in *PTADD*, 70-80
     - **Mon Oct 15**
       - Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* (in class film)
     - **Wed Oct 17**
       - Beckett.
     - **Fri Oct 19**
       - Discussion of unit

4. **Voluntary Death**
   - **Mon Oct 22**
     - Suicide & Euthanasia. Introductory Cases, in *PTADD*, 141-149
   - **Wed Oct 24**
     - Euthanasia, in *PTADD*, 149-159
   - **Fri Oct 26**
     - Suicide: Hume, Kant and the Utilitarians, in *PTADD*, 161-178 (changed)
   - **Mon Oct 29**
     - Amenábar. *The Sea Inside* (in class film)
   - **Wed Oct 31**
     - Amenábar
   - **Fri Nov 2**
     - Amenábar
   - **Mon Nov 5**
     - Social Policy, in *PTADD*, 197-211 (changed)
   - **Wed Nov 7**
     - DNR, in *PTADD*, 214-229 (changed)
   - **Fri Nov 9**
     - (class cancelled due to conference)

5. **Personality and Death**
   - **Mon Nov 12**
     - The Self, in *PTADD*, 83–96
   - **Wed Nov 14**
     - Personal Identity, in *PTADD*, 96-101
   - **Fri Nov 16**
     - Problems of Defining Death, in *PTADD*, 11-21
   - **Mon Nov 19**
     - The Person Who Dies, in *PTADD*, 21-30
   - **Wed Nov 21**
     - No Classes

6. **Conclusion: Death and the Meaning of Life**
   - **Mon Nov 26**
     - Kurosawa. *Ikiru* (in class film)
   - **Wed Nov 28**
     - Kurosawa
   - **Fri Nov 30**
     - Kurosawa
   - **Mon Dec 3**
     - Ayer. In *LD*, 117-126
   - **Wed Dec 5**
     - Wittgenstein. In *LD*, 152-161
   - **Fri Dec 7**
     - Wrap-up