

# PHL 382 H1S – Ethics: Death and Dying

M6-9, W6-9

Location: RW 140

Instructor: Matthew Wurst

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Office Hours: M 4:30-5:30, W 4:30-5:30, Rotman Exchange Café

TA: Ethan Lewis

## **Course Description**

We will all die, and we can all be certain of this. The prospect of our death raises many interesting philosophical questions. This course examines some of these. Some of the questions we will ask is: is death an evil? If so, then why is it? Ought we fear death? What meaning can we find in our life or in our death? Does anything of us survive our deaths? And is immortality something that is desirable anyway, or would it be just very boring? In addressing these specific questions, we'll develop more general, philosophical skills, including: the ability to engage in critical, constructive debate and disagreement; the ability to re-construct and critically engage with philosophical arguments; and the skill to construct and defend your own arguments.

## **Course Texts**

All readings will be made available on Blackboard.

## **Schedule**

### **Lecture 1 – Introduction**

Derek Parfit, selection from *Reasons and Persons* (18 pp.)

Fred Feldman, “The Enigma of Death” (16 pp.)

### **Lecture 2 – Is Death Bad? Part I**

Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” (3 pp.)

Thomas Nagel, “Death” (10 pp.)

### **Lecture 3 – Is Death Bad? Part II**

Lucretius, selections.

John Martin Fischer, “Why is Death Bad?” (12 pp.)

Frances Kamm, “The Asymmetry Problem: Death and Prenatal Nonexistence” (25 pp.)

### **Lecture 4 – Is Death Bad? Part III**

Samuel Scheffler, "Lecture 3," from *Death and the Afterlife* (27 pp.)  
Shelly Kagan, "Fear of Death" (15 pp.)

### Lecture 5 – Death and the Good

Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death*, selections  
*Ecclesiastes*, selections  
Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" (9 pp.)  
Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd" (11 pp.)

### Lecture 6 – Death and the Good II

Robert Nozick, "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life" (27 pp.)  
Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives" (16 pp.)

### Lecture 7 – Afterlife, Part I

Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" (22 pp.)  
John Martin Fischer, "Why Immortality is Not So Bad" (13 pp.)

### Lecture 8 – Afterlife, Part II

Samuel Scheffler, "Lectures 1 and 2," from *Death and the Afterlife* (68 pp.)

### Lecture 9 – Afterlife, Part III

Plato, *Phaedo*

### Lecture 10 – Afterlife, Part IV

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

### Lecture 11 – Wrap-Up

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

## **Course Requirements**

1. Reading Responses, 10% (5 reading responses, worth 2% each). Each response is due at the start of class. You **MUST** hand them in in person, at the **start** of class. The first is due on July 8<sup>th</sup>, the second on July 15<sup>th</sup>, the third on July 24<sup>nd</sup>, the fourth on July 29<sup>th</sup>, and the fifth on August 7<sup>th</sup>.
2. First Essay, 25% (1000 words, due **July 21st**)
3. Second Essay, 35% (1500 words, due **August 11th**)
4. Final Exam, 30%

Expectations for the reading responses and essays will be discussed in class. The First Essay and Second Essay will be submitted online.

### **Sessional Dates**

July 1: Canada Day, University Closed

July 2: Classes resume in Y course codes and begin in S course codes

August 5: University Closed, Civic Holiday

August 12: Classes end in Y and S course codes

### **Course Policies**

*Academic Integrity* (from <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai>)

Academic integrity is applying values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility to all academic pursuits, even in the face of challenge. AI applies to every member of the University, and acting with academic integrity helps preserve a community where academic skills are cultivated and where intellectual property is respected.

Please familiarize yourself with AI. You can find details in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). Violations of AI include (but are not limited to):

- Using unauthorized aids during exams or on papers.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Failing to properly cite or reference material or sources.
- Submitting the same work to more than one course.
- Sharing your work with another student.
- Plagiarism

For more on plagiarism, please see the guide provided by the [University Writing Centre](#). And see [How Not to Plagiarize](#). Academic misconduct is taken very seriously at the University of Toronto. Cases of academic misconduct will be investigated following the procedure laid out in the Code. *The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on your transcript.* If you are unsure what the expectations are for an assignment, or unsure about what constitutes a violation of AI, then please do not hesitate to speak with me.

#### *Course Website*

Periodically, announcements will be posted and course material will be uploaded to the course website, found on Blackboard. You will be expected to check Blackboard regularly.

#### *Lateness policy*

Late papers will be penalized at a rate of **5% per day** (this includes holidays and weekends), unless you have an letter from a doctor documenting illness, or a letter from your registrar **and** my approval. All late exemptions subject to **my final approval. Papers will not be accepted if submitted more than one week after the paper's due date.**

### *Paper Submissions*

You will submit your paper through the course website on Blackboard.

### *Email*

If you have a questions about the structure of the course or expectations of the course, then please do send me an email. If you have a philosophical question or a question about the course material, then please see me in office hours.

### *Accessibility*

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom, or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

[accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca)