PHIL The Metaphysics of Death

Course Description

In this course, we will consider a series of metaphysical questions related to death including the following: What is Death? What conditions need to be met for a death to occur? Can we survive our own death? Is death bad for the person who dies? If we don’t consider the time before we were born to be bad for us, why do we think of the time after we cease to exist to be bad for us? Would immortality be good for us? What attitude ought we to take toward our own death? Does death affect the meaningfulness of our lives?

We’ll engage these questions by reading the work of a series of philosophical thinkers from ancient philosophers to modern philosophers. I’ll ask you to develop your own thoughts on fundamental questions on these topics that impact us all.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Work through metaphysical debates about death in nuanced and thoughtful ways.
2. Identify, understand, and reasonably respond to the points of view of people with whom you disagree.
3. Articulate the major moral theories in a way that indicates familiarity with some of the history of thought on this topic.

Instructor

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Office: Old Main 002H
Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom.

Course Resources

Textbooks:

- Exploring the Philosophy of Death and Dying: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives · Michael Cholbi & Travis Timmerman (eds.) Routledge (2021) *This
Course Requirements

Each student will:

1. Contribute to weekly discussion boards. Each student must provide their own response to the question prompt and respond in a meaningful way to the contribution of another student. (200 points, 20% of the course grade).

2. Take two exams, a midterm (250 points, 25% of the course grade) and a final (250 points, 25% of the course grade). These will be essay exams. Students will receive five prompts and will be asked to complete three of their choosing.
   - Midterm Exam available in the Testing Center October 18th-October 20th.
   - Final Exam available in the Testing Center December 13th-15th.

3. Complete a series of Term Paper Assignments, building to a final paper. (300 points, 30% of the course grade). Students will identify one of the issues presented in class (or a topical issue of their choosing if it is approved by the instructor) This assignment will be scaffolded; the student will do a series of assignments on Canvas throughout the semester that will assist them in completing their final case study paper at the end of the semester. Students may not write on abortion.
   - Term Paper Assignment One: Peer Review (50 points). Due Monday, October 25th.
     - This paper should be five pages, doubled spaced with 12-point font and standard margins. You will submit this paper on Canvas for Peer Review. Every student must evaluate the paper of another student in the class. Page length does not include any cover page or works cited page.
   - Case Study Assignment Two (50 points). Due Monday, November 15th.
     - This paper should be at least six pages, doubled spaced with 12-point font and standard margins. You will submit this paper on Canvas for feedback from the instructor. Page length does not include any cover page or works cited page.
   - Case Study Assignment Three (200 points). Due Monday, December 6th.
     - This paper should be at least eight pages, doubled spaced with 12-point font and standard margins. You will submit this paper on Canvas. Page length does not include any cover page or works cited page.

Evaluation Methods and Criteria
Rubrics will be available for each assignment so students can get a sense of how they will be graded.

Grade Scheme

The following grading scheme will be used in this class:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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Course Schedule/Outline

Week One (August 30th-September 3rd): NO CLASS ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 3rd.

Defining Death. The big questions for this week are: What is death? How do we determine whether death has occurred? What are the practical consequences for our definition of death?

Reading(s):

Defining Death: A Report on the Medical, Legal, and Ethical Issues in the Determination of Death by The President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Issues in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research.

Defining Death in a Technological World: We Brain Death is Death by John P. Lizza

Due September 1st: Discussion One: Introductions.

Week Two (September 6th-10th): NO CLASS ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH (LABOR DAY).
**Defining Death.** The big questions for this week are: What complications arise when it comes to defining death? How should we deal with those complications?

*Reading(s):*

*We Die when Entropy Overwhelms Homeostasis* by Michael Nair-Collins

*What is it to Die?* by Cody Gilmore

**Due September 10th: Discussion Two.**

**Week Three (September 13th-17th):**

**Can We Survive Our Own Death?** The big questions for this week are: What is it to say that we have survived our own death? If death involves the destruction of the physical body, can we survive our own death? If so, how is this possible?

*Reading(s):*

*The Tragic Sense of Life* by Miguel de Unamuno

*Can We Survive Our Own Deaths?* by Stephen Cave

**Due September 17th: Discussion Three.**

**Week Four (Sept 20th-24th):**

**Can Death be Good or Bad for Us?** The big questions for this week are: Is death bad for the person who dies? If so, how can death be bad for the person who dies, given that they no longer exist? Can death be good for a person? If so, under what conditions can death be good? What are the practical implications of these questions?

*Reading(s):*

*Letter to Menoeceus* by Epicurus

*Two Arguments for Epicureanism* by Jens Johansson

**Due September 24th: Discussion Four.**

**Week Five (September 27th-Oct 1st):**

**Can Death be Good or Bad for Us?** The big questions for the week are the same as they were for the previous week.

*Reading(s):*

*Why Death is Not Bad for the One Who Dies* by James Stacey Taylor
Week Six (October 4th-8th):

The Asymmetry Problem. The big questions for the week are: If we don’t view the time before we were born as bad for us, why do we view the time after we die as bad for us?

Reading(s):

On the Nature of Things by Lucretius

If You Want to Die Later, Then Why Don’t You Want to Have Been Born Earlier? by Travis Timmerman

Due October 8th: Discussion Six.

Week Seven (October 11th-15th): Would Immortality be Good? The big questions for this week are: if death is bad for us, would eternal life be preferable? Would eternal life inevitably lead to boredom?

Reading(s):

The Epic of Gilgamesh (excerpts)

The Story of the Man Who Did Not Wish to Die by Yei Theodora Ozaki

Week Eight (October 18th-22nd): Would Immortality be Good? The big questions for this week are: Does eternal existence lead inevitable to the destruction of the person? Can we retain a consistent and identifiable set of traits while living forever?

Reading(s):

How to Live a Never-Ending Novella (Or, Why Immortality Needn't Undermine Identity) by Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin

Taking Stock of the Risks of Life Without Death by August Gorman

Immortality, Boredom, and Standing for Something by David Beglin

Exam One In Testing Center October 18th-20th (Day off on the 18th to take the exam)
Due October 22nd: Discussion Seven.

Week Nine (November 1st-5th): What is the Best Attitude to Take Toward Our Own Mortality?
Reading(s):
Death, Mortality, and Meaning by Todd May
Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion (excerpts) Buddha

Week Ten (November 8th-12th): What is the Best Attitude to Take Toward Our Mortality?
Reading(s):
The Enchiridion by Epictetus
Voluntary Death (excerpts) by Friedrich Nietzsche

Week Eleven (November 15th-19th): How Should We React to the Deaths of Others?
Reading(s):
Letter to Lucilius buy Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Week Twelve (November 22nd-26th): THANKSGIVING BREAK
Reading(s):
No new reading.

Week Thirteen (November 29th-December 3rd): How Should We React to the Deaths of Others?
Reading(s):
The Significance of Future Generations by Roman Altshuler
Death and Survival Online by Patrick Stokes
Week Fourteen (December 6th-10th):  How Does Death Affect the Meaningfulness of Our Lives?

The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus (On Canvas)
The Death of Ivan Illych (On Canvas)

Week Fifteen:  How Does Death Affect the Meaningfulness of Our Lives?
World as Will and Representation by Arthur Schopenhauer

*Final Exam available in the Testing Center December 13th-17th.*

Library Services

All USU students attending classes in Logan, at our Regional Campuses, or online can access all databases, e-journals, and e-books regardless of location. Additionally, the library will mail printed books to students, at no charge to them. Students can also borrow books from any Utah academic library. Take advantage of all library services and learn more at [libguides.usu.edu/rc](http://libguides.usu.edu/rc).

Classroom Civility

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read [Student Code Article V Section V-3](http://studentcode.usu.edu/article-v-section-v-3) for more information.

University Policies & Procedures

COVID-19 Classroom Accommodations

If you face COVID-19 related challenges and feel you need accommodations, you must request those accommodations by filling out the [COVID-19 Questionnaire](http://covid19questionnaire.usu.edu). Upon doing so, the University [COVID CARE Team](http://covidcareteam.usu.edu) will contact you to determine your needs and how to support you. The CARE Team will also contact your instructors and provide important direction on how best to accommodate your needs. For additional reference,
Reducing COVID-19 Risk

You can help keep classes, events, and activities happening in person this semester by following these steps:

1. **Get vaccinated if you're able.** Vaccines are the best available tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19. They are safe, free, and easy to access.
2. **If you are vaccinated, let USU know.** Please upload your proof of full vaccination to AggieHealth. If you are exposed to COVID-19, USU’s case containment will not require you to quarantine if they know you are vaccinated and you do not have symptoms.
3. **Stay home if you're sick** and get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or have been exposed. It’s important to not bring any illness to campus.
4. **Wear a mask indoors.** Public health experts recommend that even vaccinated people wear masks indoors in high COVID-19 transmission areas, which includes most of Utah.

If USU's COVID Case Containment team identifies an uncontained situation in the classroom, you will be notified of any temporary changes to your course delivery method through a Canvas announcement. Please make sure you are receiving immediate notifications of new Canvas announcements. The situation will be handled according to protocols on the COVID Classroom Exposure page.

Class Seating Charts (For In-Person Classes)

In classes with more than 10 students, a seating chart will be used to track where you are sitting. After the first week of classes, your instructor will tell you how to enter your seat number in Canvas. **You must sit in the same seat for the rest of the semester.** This is extremely important for tracking cases of COVID-19 and helping classes remain in person.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities

Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Faculty Code Policy #403 further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

Academic Integrity – "The Honor System"

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge: "I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity." A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:
• Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
• Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
• Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

Academic Dishonesty

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University’s Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

• **Cheating**: using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
  o Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done “individually;”
  o Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
  o Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
  o Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
  o Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
  o Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.
• **Falsification**: altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.
• **Plagiarism**: representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.

For additional information go to: [ARTICLE VI. University Regulations Regarding Academic Integrity](#)

Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct

General Overview

USU strives to provide an environment for students and employees that is free from discrimination and sexual misconduct. If you experience sexual misconduct or discrimination at any point during the semester inside or outside of class, you are encouraged to contact the USU Title IX Coordinator via Old Main room 161 in Logan, 435-797-1266, titleix@usu.edu, or at equity.usu.edu/report. You can learn more
about the USU resources available for individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct at sexualrespect.usu.edu. Resources for individuals who have experienced discrimination are listed at equity.usu.edu/resources.

**Required Reporting of Sexual Misconduct**

The instructor is designated by USU as a "reporting employee." This means that if you share information about sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, or sex-based stalking) with the instructor, they will report that information to the USU Title IX Coordinator. The instructor is also required to tell you about designated confidential resources, supportive measures, and how you can file a report with the USU Title IX Coordinator.

**Withdrawal Policy and "I" Grade Policy**

Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term ‘extenuating’ circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

**Students with Disabilities**

USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.

**Respect for Diversity**

Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: https://studentaffairs.usu.edu, (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220
- Student Legal Services: https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/student-advocacy/legal-services, (435) 797-2912, TSC 326,
• Access and Diversity: http://accesscenter.usu.edu, (435) 797-1728, access@usu.edu; TSC 315
• Multicultural Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/multiculture, (435) 797-1728, TSC 315
• LGBTQA Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/lgbtqa, (435) 797-1728, TSC 3145
• Provost’s Office Diversity Resources: https://www.usu.edu/provost/diversity, (435) 797-8176

You can learn about your student rights by visiting:
The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII.

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

• Student Conduct
• Student Code
• Academic Integrity
• USU Academic Policies and Procedures
• Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy

Emergency Procedures

In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.

Mental Health

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).

Students are also encouraged to download the “SafeUT App” to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time
crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide related issues.