

# RELIGION 319: DEATH AND DYING

Tuesdays 2 – 4:50 p.m., THH 203

**Fall 2011**

**Instructor:** Shlomo Sher, Ph.D.

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 12 – 2 pm & by appointment

**Office Location:** ACB 226

**Email:** ssher@usc.edu

**Phone:** (213) 740-0270

**Religion Dept. Office:** ACB 130

*\* Keep a hardcopy of this syllabus in order to keep up with your reading and writing assignments throughout the semester. You can also download a copy at any time from this courses' Blackboard site.*

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

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The question of death, with or without religious guidance, is essentially ethical – what to do in recognition of the fact that we, everyone we love, and everyone who loves us, is going to die. At the heart of this course are ethical questions about the value of life and death, the freedoms we should and should not have to control our death and dying process, and our responsibilities to others who seek to live and die. The course, then, will touch on matters of profound personal importance as we consider the significance of death and dying on our lives, as well as on some of the most pressing and divisive moral questions our society struggles to answer through its laws and policies.

### *Course Objectives*

While this course aims to familiarize you with some of the most central and pressing problems regarding death and dying, keep in mind that this is merely an introduction to topics. Moreover, there are many ethical problems you will no doubt encounter down the road we will not have covered in this class because, as a society, we do not yet see them as issues demanding reflection. For this reason, a central aim of this course will be to provide you with the theoretical skills that will help you continue to explore the issues presented in the course and to tackle new problems effectively on your own.

That said, we will be guided in our course by 3 central objectives:

- (1) To familiarize you with some of the ways questions of life and death connect with our choices and responsibilities, our understanding of ourselves as mortal beings, and our vision of what constitutes a good life (and maybe a good death).
- (2) To help you differentiate between ethical (normative) and factual (descriptive) questions, facts, and points of disagreement in the debates we examine.
- (3) To provide you theoretical tools with which to identify ethical considerations, summarize ethically difficult situations, analyze these situations, and present well-supported written arguments for their resolution.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS: (AVAILABLE AT BOOKSTORE)

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1. *A Very Easy Death*, by Simon de Beauvoir (any edition)
2. *Death and Dying: Life and Living* by Corr, Nabe, & Core, Wadsworth Publishing; (2008) [Referred to as CNC in your reading schedule below]

*You can also get eText digital rental of the 6<sup>th</sup> edition at Course Smart*  
([http://www.coursesmart.com/9780495506461?\\_professorview=false&\\_instructor=3394743](http://www.coursesmart.com/9780495506461?_professorview=false&_instructor=3394743))

OR

*You can purchase the 5<sup>th</sup> edition used on Amazon for considerably cheaper. Given that the differences between editions is usually not very significant, that edition may work as well. That said, I have not seen that edition and can not guarantee its usefulness to you.*

3. *All other reading materials will be available for download through Blackboard*

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND BREAKDOWN OF GRADES

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15%	Ancillary Assignments (5 short assignments, 3% each)
25%	Midterm
20%	Term Paper
30%	Final Exam
10%	Consistent and Constructive Participation

The following are the cutoff points for each grade:

		B+	88	C+	78	D+	68
A	93	B	83	C	73	D	63
A-	90	B-	80	C-	70	D-	60

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

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In each assignment, performance is considered in light of these key activities:

**Comprehension of the material:** Your understanding of the concepts and facts presented in the readings and lectures.

**Analysis of the material:** The display of your understanding of the structure and relationship between the parts of a text or between texts.

**Application of the material:** Your ability to apply the concepts and frameworks discussed in the readings and the class to new cases or situations.

**Synthesis of the material:** Your ability to create new ideas or note interesting new conditions from the materials cover by the class.

**Clarity of communication:** Having good ideas is not particularly useful if you cannot also articulate these ideas clearly. Moreover, I can only credit you for work that I can comprehend directly from your written assignments. For these reasons, not only is it expected that all written assignments will be free from errors of spelling, punctuation, and syntax when they are handed-in, but you are also expected to present your ideas in a clear and coherent fashion. Presenting complex ideas in a coherent manner can be quite difficult to do and should not be taken for granted – especially if you have never written this type of paper before. I will supply you with some materials that can help you towards that end and urge you to see me or the folks at the Writing Center for questions on how to tackle this challenge.

I will use the following point scheme when scoring your ancillary assignments:

- 3 Very good comprehension, analysis, and application of material.
- 2 Good comprehension of most of the material, thoughtful analysis, clear application.
- 1 Little comprehension of material, analysis and application.
- 0 Assignment is incomplete or misses the whole point of the lecture.

## **PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

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<b>WEEK</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>READINGS</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENTS</b>
<b>1</b>	8/23	Introduction: What is Death?	Syllabus <i>Film: Moment of Death</i>	AA1 assigned
<b>2</b>	8/30	A Very Easy Death?	<i>Beauvoir, "A Very Easy Death"</i>	AA1 due AA 2 assigned
<b>3</b>	9/6	How we die	<i>CNC, Chapters 2 and 4</i>	AA 2 due
<b>4</b>	9/13	Coping with care – how individuals can help	<i>CNC, Chapters 6 and 7</i>	AA 3 assigned
<b>5</b>	9/20	Coping with care – institutional support	<i>CNC, Chapter 8</i>	AA 3 due
<b>6</b>	9/27	Suicide	<i>CNC, Chapter 17</i>	

7	10/4	The Significance of Death	<i>CNC, Chapter 19</i>	AA 4 assigned
8	10/11	Abortion	<i>Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion"</i> <i>Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"</i> <i>Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory &amp; Abortion"</i>	AA 4 due
9	10/18	<b>Midterm</b>		
10	10/25	Withdrawal of Care: Seriously Ill Newborns	<i>Verhagen and Sauer, "The Groningen Protocol – Euthanasia in Severely Ill Newborns"</i> <i>Liao, Savulescu, and Sheehan "The Ashley Treatment: Best Interests, Convenience, and Parental Decision-making"</i> <i>Engelhardt, "Ethical Issues in Aiding the Death of Young Children"</i> <i>Robertson, "Legal Aspects of Withholding Treatment from Handicapped Newborns"</i> <i>Davis, "Right to Life of Handicapped"</i> <i>In-Class Film: Who Shall Survive?</i>	
11	11/1	Withdrawal of Care: Competent Patients	<i>CNC, Ch 18</i> <i>Watch: The Sea Inside</i> <i>In-Class Film: Dax's Case</i>	Paper assigned
12	11/8	Withdrawal of Care: Incompetent Patients	<i>Read: The Cruzan Case</i> <i>In-Class Film: No Heroic Measures</i>	AA5 assigned

<b>13</b>	11/15	Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide	<p><i>Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia"</i></p> <p><i>Singer, "Voluntary Euthanasia: A Utilitarian Perspective"</i></p> <p><i>Callahan, "When Self-Determination Runs Amok"</i></p> <p><i>Callahan, "Ethics without abstraction: squaring the circle"</i></p>	AA5 due
<b>14</b>	11/22	Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide	<p><i>Visit Final Exit's website (<a href="http://www.finalexitnetwork.org/">http://www.finalexitnetwork.org/</a>)</i></p> <p><i>Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"</i></p> <p><i>Catholic Declaration on Euthanasia</i></p> <p><i>In-Class Film: You Don't Know Jack</i></p>	Paper due
<b>15</b>	11/29	Striving for Immortality	<p><i>Hardwig, "Is there a duty to die?"</i></p> <p><i>Hamilton, "Chasing Immortality - An Interview with Ray Kurzweil"</i></p> <p><i>In-Class Film: Flight From Death: Quest For Immortality</i></p>	
<b><i>Final Exam: Thursday, May. 5, 2-4 p.m.</i></b>				

## **PAPER INSTRUCTIONS:**

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Your paper will respond to an ethically challenging case by summarizing the ethical considerations relevant to the case, weighing the (ethical) strengths and weaknesses of the available courses of action, proposing a course of action, and defending it against at least one serious objection.

Your papers should:

1. Include a summary introduction that briefly describes what is at stake and your position on the issue
2. Describe the case you are writing about
3. Discuss the various ethical considerations it raises
4. Weigh the (ethical) strengths and weaknesses of the available courses of action
5. Argue for a course of action
6. Defend that argument against at least one serious objection
7. Engage arguments or contextual information from your readings.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND FORMAT:**

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- Paper assignments will be turned in electronically through the appropriately marked assignment on Blackboard. They are due by the beginning of class on the paper's due date.
- Any assignment you turn in should include your name, the course (Religion 319), and the assignment title.
- Formatting: Assignments must be double-spaced with 1.25 inch margins in Times New Roman 12 point font. There should be no extra spaces between paragraphs.
- All pages should be numbered in the bottom right-hand corner.
- All students are expected to keep a copy of their work and be able to produce it upon request.

## **PLAGIARISM:**

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Each student is expected to know the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated in SCampus (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/behavior.html>). Students caught plagiarizing on a paper, exam, or any assignment, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and will be failed for the course. Proper citations are an easy way of avoiding this problem. If you are unsure about how to cite in your paper, please see me.

## **YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:**

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At this point in our academic careers, we should be working to establish a fun but professional learning environment. I expect considerate behavior from each of you in order to make the most of your time in class. Most situations that would fall into this discussion are simple common sense; below, though, are a few of the more prevalent distractions:

- Feel free to snack in class, as long as your “meal” will not cause a significant distraction. For example, yogurt or a Snickers bar would be fine, but Doritos (which tend to be VERY

noisy) or a large salad (which would take up your entire desk space and much of your attention) are a bit extreme.

- Do not read non-class materials during class time (novels, the newspaper, textbooks for other classes, etc.)
- Please turn off cellular phones, pagers, or any other noisy/distracting device. Anything that might happen during class will be waiting for you when class is over.
- Participation is a central component of the course, but keep in mind that you should be considerate of other students when you are participating.

## **THE WRITING CENTER**

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The Writing Center is a valuable resource for students from all disciplines, backgrounds, and skill levels. The trained staff can help you in any stage of your process. You can call the Writing Center at 213-740-2691 for more information or to schedule an appointment. They also accept walk-ins.

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:**

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Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5pm Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

\*Syllabus subject to revision