

**PHIL 225**  
**Death and Dying**

**Department of Philosophy**  
**University of Victoria**  
**Fall Session – First Term**

**Synchronous Meetings via Zoom**  
**Thursdays**  
**6:00 pm – 7:20 pm**

**Instructor:** Klaus Jahn

**Email:** kjahn@uvic.ca

**Office Hours:** Mondays & Thursdays 2:00-3:00, or by appointment (via Zoom)

**Course Description**

This course will be conducted with a two-fold goal in mind.

On the one hand, it is meant to serve as an introduction to the sorts of concerns that arise amongst bioethicists when matters of death and dying are at issue. As such, our discussions of death and dying throughout the course will touch on deliberations over medical, moral and legal topics, including: the clinical definition of death; the rationality of suicide; the nature of the relationship between care-givers and the dying; the role that surrogate decision makers or proxies play at the end of life; passive and active euthanasia; physician-assisted suicide; and, the legitimacy of requests made by the dying to have treatment withheld or withdrawn

On the other hand, this course on death and dying affords us the opportunity to explore some of the broader and deeper questions about death and dying that have exercised philosophers from Plato to the present.

All humans are mortal. We are humans, and therefore we are going to die.

This simple syllogism carries with it an enormous weight. It states a fact. A fact about *us*, about *all* of us, and it is an unsettling and indeed unpleasant fact to grapple with. It is precisely this fact about death, however, which has acted as a powerful motive force, prompting deep philosophical reflection about the value and meaning of life and how best to live that life. It is in taking up these reflections that we will be most engaged throughout the course. As such, much of our discussion will focus on how we are to respond to the fact that we are dying. We will take up the question of whether or not death is an evil, and whether or not it is to be feared. We will touch on the question of whether the fact of death robs life of meaning, or, on the contrary, it is that which provides life with meaning. We will examine the nature of suicide, and look to some classical views on whether or not it is ever permissible to kill oneself or, perhaps, whether it is sometimes laudable to do so. Lastly, we will take up the related question of who decides when and how we are to die. Is our own death a matter for us to decide, and if so, are we entitled to ask, or even demand, that others not only respect that right, but assist us in exercising it?

**Lectures:**

Asynchronous lectures will be posted on or before the Monday of each week as Kaltura Capture videos.

Synchronous meetings will be run via Zoom on Thursday afternoons, and will involve a combination of lecture and tutorial, in which you are encouraged to participate.

**Reading:**

All readings for the course are available to download (as PDFs) on the Bright Spaces site.

All of the readings in the course package are *required reading* (i.e., you are *expected* to have read this material *prior* to coming to class).

**Evaluation & Due Dates**

- i) One short, introductory written assignment (5%) – **due Monday, September 27**
- ii) One textual commentary (30%) – **due Monday, October 25**
- iii) One case study specification (25%) – **due Monday, November 29**
- iv) A Final Take-home Examination (35%) – **due Monday, December 13 (SOLE DEADLINE)**
- v) Attendance and Participation: Class discussion, Bright Spaces Discussion, etc. (5%)

**Policy Regarding Late Submission of Written Work:**

All term work submitted on or before the specified due dates will be adjudicated and returned with written comments. Term work submitted *within one week* of the specified due dates will be adjudicated without penalty, but will be returned without written comments. Any term work submitted after the week following the specified due date will be adjudicated and returned without comment, and a penalty of 3% per day will be assessed.

**Grading Scale & Description:**

| GRADE | PERCENTAGE     | DESCRIPTION  |
|-------|----------------|--|
| A+    | 90-100         | An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.  |
| A     | 85-89          |  |
| A-    | 80-84          |  |
| B+    | 77-79          | A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. |
| B     | 73-76          |  |
| B-    | 70-72          |  |
| C+    | 65-69          | A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.  |
| C     | 60-64          |  |
| D     | 50-59          | A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.   |
| F     | 0-49           | F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.  |
| N     | Grade withheld | Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session.   |

**Important Dates:**

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Tuesday, October 12</b>     | Last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees to be assessed for courses dropped after this date. |
| <b>Sunday, October 31</b>      | Last day for withdrawal without penalty of failure.  |
| <b>Wed-Fri, November 10-12</b> | Reading Break – No classes.  |
| <b>Friday, December 3</b>      | Last day of classes  |

## UNIVERSITY & COURSE POLICIES

### **Statement on Academic Integrity:**

‘Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. It is expected that students, faculty members and staff at the University of Victoria, as members of an intellectual community, will adhere to these ethical values in all activities related to learning, teaching, research and service. Any action that contravenes this standard, including misrepresentation, falsification or deception, undermines the intention and worth of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community.’

For the full statement of the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity, including definitions of the violations of the policy, the procedures for dealing with such violations and the possible penalties that might be administered, please consult the Undergraduate Programs Calendar.

### **Diversity Statement:**

UVic is committed to equity, diversity, social justice and fostering a welcoming and diverse learning, teaching and working environment. These are essential elements in achieving excellence in research and education. As members of a diverse and dynamic learning community, we each have a role to play in creating safe, supportive, inclusive and healthy learning environments that foster mutual respect and civility, and that recognize that people are our primary strength.

### **Accessibility Statement:**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible. The CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations <https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

### **Policy on Names:**

Though there is no official policy on the use of names and pronouns that are appropriate to individual students’ identities, my own personal policy is that of respecting the student’s own wishes for how he/she/they would like to be addressed. Please feel comfortable in coming to talk to me about which names and pronouns are appropriate to you.

### **Territorial Acknowledgment:**

We acknowledge with respect the Lkwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

### **Trigger Warning:**

This course will involve frank discussions of death and dying, including, *our own* inevitable dying and death as well as the dying and death of others. Should it be the case that your circumstances are such so as to make these conversations difficult, please feel free to speak to me.

| <b>Schedule of Readings:</b> |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>I. ENCOUNTERING DEATH</b> |   |
| <b>Topic 1</b>               | <b><i>Preparing for Death and Dying</i></b><br>- No Reading   |
| <b>Topic 2</b>               | <b><i>Seeing Dead People: Some Clinical and Philosophical Considerations</i></b><br><b>Reading:</b><br>i) <i>The Whole-Brain Definition of Death: Defining the Norm</i><br>- President's Commission.... <i>Defining Death: Medical Legal and Ethical Issues in the Definition of Death</i><br>- President's Commission.... <i>Guidelines for the Determination of Death</i><br>ii) <i>Non-Brain Definitions of Death: A Place for Tradition</i><br>- President's Commission... <i>Non-Brain Formulations: The Alternative to the Brain-Based Definitions.</i><br>iii) <i>The Higher-Brain Definition of Death: An Alternative Rejected</i><br>- President's Commission... <i>The 'Higher-Brain' Formulations.</i><br>iv) <i>The Higher-Brain Definition of Death: An Alternative Defended</i><br>- Veatch, Robert M.. <i>The Impending Collapse of the Whole-Brain Definition of Death.</i> |
| <b>Topic 3</b>               | <b><i>Being Dying People: The View from Literature</i></b><br><b>Reading:</b><br>- Tolstoy, Leo, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych.</i>  |
| <b>Topic 4</b>               | <b><i>Being Dying People: The View from Philosophy</i></b><br><b>Reading:</b><br>- Montaigne, Michael de. <i>That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die.</i><br>- Gray, J. Glenn. <i>The Idea of Death in Existentialism.</i>  |
| <b>II. EVALUATING DEATH</b>  |   |
| <b>Topic 5</b>               | <b><i>Is Death an Evil to be Feared?: Some Views from Antiquity</i></b><br><b>Reading:</b><br>- Epicurus. <i>Letter to Menoecus.</i><br>- Lucretius. <i>The Soul is Mortal &amp; Folly of the Fear of Death.</i><br>- Seneca. <i>On the Natural Fear of Death.</i>  |
| <b>Topic 6</b>               | <b><i>Is Death an Evil to be Feared?: Some Contemporary Views</i></b><br><b>Reading:</b><br>- Nagel, Thomas. <i>Death.</i><br>- Williams, Bernard. <i>The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality.</i><br>- Umanuno, Miguel de. <i>The Hunger of Immortality.</i><br><b>* Optional reading:</b><br>- Barnes, Julian. <i>The Dream.</i> From <i>History of the World in 101/2 Chapters.</i>  |

| <b>III. MORAL THEORIES &amp; ETHICAL DELIBERATION</b>  |  |
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| <b>Topic 7</b>   | <p><b><i>A Model Proposed</i></b><br/> <b>- No reading</b><br/> <b>*Optional readings:</b><br/>           i) <i>Ethical Theories</i><br/>               - from Singer, Peter. (ed). <i>A Companion to Ethics</i>. (on reserve at McPherson Library)<br/>               - Pettit, Philip. ‘Consequentialism’. pgs. 230-240<br/>               - Davis, Nancy. ‘Contemporary Deontology’. pgs. 205-218<br/>               - Almond, Brenda. ‘Rights’. pgs 259-273<br/>           ii) <i>Deliberative Models</i><br/>               - from Kuhse, Helga &amp; Peter Singer (eds). <i>A Companion to Bioethics</i> (on reserve at McPherson Library &amp; Online)<br/>               - Childress, James. ‘A Principle-Based Approach’. pgs. 61-71<br/>               - Manning, Rita C.. ‘A Care Approach’. pgs. 98-105<br/>               - Arras, John D.. ‘A Case Approach’. pgs. 106-116</p> |
| <b>V. SUICIDE</b>                                      |  |
| <b>Topic 8</b>   | <p><b><i>Definitions &amp; Some Classical Texts on the Morality and Rationality of Suicide</i></b><br/> <b>Reading:</b><br/>           i) <i>Defining Suicide</i><br/>               - Velasquez, Manuel G.. <i>Defining Suicide</i>.<br/>               - Beauchamp, Tom L.. <i>The Problem of Defining Suicide</i>.<br/>           ii) <i>Some Classical Views</i><br/>               - Seneca. <i>On Taking One’s Own Life</i>.<br/>               - Augustine. §11 &amp; §§16-27 – <i>City of God</i>.<br/>               - Aquinas, Thomas. <i>Whether it is Lawful to Kill Oneself?</i>.<br/>               - Hume, David. <i>Of Suicide</i>.<br/>               - Kant, Immanuel. <i>Of Duties to the Body, In Regard to Life; Of Suicide; and Of Care for One’s Life</i>.</p>  |
| <b>Topic 9</b>   | <p><b><i>Evaluations of the Rationality of Suicide</i></b><br/> <b>Reading:</b><br/>               - Pabst-Battin, Margaret. <i>The Concept of Rational Suicide</i>.<br/>               - Feinberg, Joel. <i>Whose Life is it Anyway?</i>.</p>   |
| <b>VI. EUTHANASIA &amp; PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE</b> |  |
| <b>Topic 10</b>  | <p><b><i>Definitions and Distinctions</i></b><br/> <b>Reading:</b><br/>               - Quill, Timothy. <i>Death &amp; Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making</i>.<br/>               - Rachels, James. <i>Active and Passive Euthanasia</i>.<br/>               - Beauchamp, Tom L. &amp; James F. Childress. <i>Rachels on Active and Passive Euthanasia</i>.<br/>               - Brock, Dan. <i>Cause of Death</i>.<br/>               - Quill, Timothy E., Christine K. Cassel &amp; Diane E. Meier. <i>Care of the Hopelessly Ill: Proposed Clinical Criteria for Physician-Assisted Suicide</i>.</p>   |
| <b>Topic 11</b>  | <p><b><i>Evaluations of the Practice</i></b><br/> <b>Reading:</b><br/>               - Pellegrino, Edmund D.. <i>Distortion of the Healing Relationship</i><br/>               - ----- . <i>Intending to Kill and the Principle of Double Effect</i>.<br/>               - Fenigsen, Richard. <i>A Case Against Dutch Euthanasia</i>.</p>  |