



PHIL 225 A02 - Death & Dying Spring 2023

Instructor: [Geordie McComb](#) (he/him)

TA: [Ghada Youssef](#) (she/her)

Class times: Mondays & Thursdays, 11:30am–12:50pm

Class location: ECS 104

Student drop-in times: Mondays, before class, 10:15am–11:15am, CLE B309

Zoom drop-in: Email me to set up a time.

The books you have to buy: None! All readings are [free](#) via [Brightspace](#).

Email: gmccomb@uvic.ca If 48 hrs pass without a reply, please email me again.

When to email me: When it's private. Post all other questions to the [Brightspace](#) open discussion thread.

For tech help: Email helpdesk@uvic.ca or visit the [IT Service Desk](#) website.

1 Welcome!

We are all humans—all *H. s. sapiens*—and one day our brains will completely and irreversibly cease to function. We will die. Kick the bucket. Cease to exist. Or will we? Might there be an afterlife? And, even if there isn't, why should we be afraid of death? After all, once we're dead, how could any harm come our way? These are some of the questions that, drawing on a variety of classic and contemporary writings, we will survey in this class. Other questions are these: Does death make our lives absurd or meaningless? Would immortality be great or a great bore? Is a *digital* afterlife possible? After exploring these questions, we will take the concepts we have learned and use them to tackle yet other questions—ones about the deaths of other people, about choosing to die and, finally, about medical assistance in dying.

By the end of term, apart from having improved your skills as a critical reader, thinker, and writer, you will have learned to do the following: to grasp “the timing problem” and related ideas; to master the use of philosophical terms, such as “counterfactual conditional” and “active euthanasia”; and, to describe approaches to various philosophical problems—ones, for example, about the nature of death, about its badness, about the value of immortality, and about choosing to die.



2 Plan

Here is the course plan, which I may adjust from time to time as we go along:

weeks	dates	topics	readings
wk 1	jan 9	Welcome!	
	jan 12	What is death?	President's Commission
wk 2	jan 16		Lizza - Why brain death is death
	jan 19	Is there an afterlife?	Cave - Can we survive our deaths?
wk 3	jan 23		Hershenovs - Possibility of an afterlife
			Matthews - Death in Soc., Plato, & Aristotle
	jan 26	Is death bad?	Epicurus - Letter to Menoeceus
			Nagel - Death
***	jan 29	Argument summary due	
wk 4	jan 30	Are bad deaths <i>deprivations</i> ?	Johansson - Arguments for Epicureanism
	feb 2		Feit - Death is bad for us
wk 5	feb 6		Egerstrom - Making death not quite as bad
	feb 9	Why not desire an earlier birth?	Lucretius - <i>De rerum natura</i> excerpts
			Kaufman - Coming into existence
wk 6	feb 13	Wouldn't immortality be boring?	Williams - Makropulos case
			Ozaki - Did not wish to die
	feb 16		Fischer & M-Y - Immortality and boredom
		Reading break	
wk 7	feb 27	*** Mid-term exam ***	
	mar 2	How should we face death?	Bradley - Fitting attitudes
			Epictetus - Enchiridion excerpts
wk 8	mar 6		Cholbi - Why grieve?
			Seneca - Letter to Lucilius
	mar 9	Future people give life meaning?	Altshuler - Future generations
wk 9	mar 13	Doesn't death make life absurd?	Metz - Meaning in spite of death
	mar 16	Is there a digital afterlife?	Stokes - Survival online
wk 10	mar 20	Choosing death	Aquinas - Whether allowed to kill oneself
			Hume - Of suicide
			Dostoevsky - <i>Demons</i> excerpt
	mar 23		Benatar - Sometimes defensible
			Varelius - An irrational suicide?
***	mar 26	Essay due	
wk 11	mar 27	When is euthanasia moral?	Rachels - Active and passive euthanasia
			Documentary - TBA
	mar 30	Medical assistance in death	Brock - Voluntary active euthanasia
			Callahan - Self-determination amok
wk 12	apr 3	MAiD in Canada	Platt - Depression and the desire to die
	apr 6	Catch-up & study session	

For other important dates, see the UVic [calendar](#).



3 Assignments

I'll calculate your grade as follows:

Pre-lecture quizzes	10% (10 quizzes, 1% each)	due weekly
Argument summary	5%	due Jan 29
Mid-term exam	20%	Feb 16
Essay	30%	due Mar 26
Final exam	30%	TBA
Class participation	5%	

Absent special considerations, missed exams receive a grade of zero. Written work that is late drops one letter grade per day, including weekend days. For example, a B- would drop to a C+. A single one-day extension is automatically granted to all students.

The weekly (very short) quizzes test for a (very basic) comprehension of readings *ahead of lectures*. They will typically be due Sunday nights, and late ones will not be accepted. Your two lowest scoring quizzes will not count toward your grade.

Participation grades are based on attendance as well as questions, answers, and comments that contribute to discussion in class, on Brightspace, or else during student drop-in hours.

4 Grading

Here is how to understand percentage grades:

Superior work	A+ (90–100%)	A (85–89%)	A- (80–84%)
Good work	B+ (77–79%)	B (73–77%)	B- (70–72%)
Adequate work	C+ (65–69%)	C (60–64%)	—
Min. acceptable work	D (50–59%)	—	—
Inadequate work	F (0–49%)	—	—

For more, see the standard UVic grading scheme [here](#) and [here](#).

5 Email

Please post class-related questions to the [Brightspace](#) open discussion board. If the matter is private, with “PHIL 225” in the subject line, email me at: gmccomb@uvic.ca

6 Lateness policy

To receive special consideration for missed exams or late work—because of illness, a medical or family emergency, etc.—contact me as soon as possible.



7 Academic integrity

Plagiarism is a grave offence. The University of Victoria treats it and other forms of academic dishonesty very seriously. Offences include, but are not limited to, using the ideas or work of another without appropriate acknowledgement; misrepresenting your identity on an exam or essay; accessing unauthorized internet resources for assessments; unauthorized sharing of assessment questions and answers in online course groups or on social media; and other things. It is your responsibility to understand the relevant policy, available [here](#).

8 Writing help

For help with academic writing, you can book a free online appointment with the nice people at the [Centre for Academic Communication](#). They can help you to better understand assignment instructions, to improve the structure of your essays, and to clarify your writing at the sentence-level. They also offer many other [online resources](#).

9 Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are very welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please contact the [Resource Centre for Students with a Disability](#), and feel free to approach me for any further help.

10 Territory acknowledgement

The institution which brings us together is located on the traditional territory of the $lək^wəŋən$ peoples, whom we acknowledge and respect together with the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. These are beautiful lands, and we are grateful for the opportunity to study here. How we came to have this opportunity, and what it means for these to be their traditional lands, are questions we in the humanities especially should ask, in light of historical and present injustice, for the sake of reconciliation.