

Life and Death

PHIL-UA 4

Fall 2016

Course Objective

We will make use of the methods of analytic philosophy in order to reflect on essential and often troubling questions about human existence. What am I, and why am I still the same person I was twenty years ago? What is a good life, and how should *I* live *my* life? Should I be afraid of death? What is the meaning of life, and how can I give *my* life meaning? Students will have the occasion, and are highly encouraged, to use the theories and practices we will consider to reflect on their own lives.

Schedule

September 6: **Introduction**

Unit 1: The Good Life

September 8: **The Good Life: Hedonism (day 1)**
John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 42-45
Cicero, *De Finibus*, Selection

September 13: **The Good Life: Hedonism (day 2)**

September 15: **The Good Life: Buddhism (I): Conditioned Existence**
In the Buddha's Words, Ch. VI

- September 20: **The Good Life: Buddhism (II): The Eightfold Path to Liberation from Suffering: Introduction**
In the Buddha's Words, Ch. VII
- September 22: **The Good Life: Buddhism (III): The Eightfold Path to Liberation from Suffering: Mental Control and Insight**
In the Buddha's Words, Chs. VIII-IX
- September 27: **The Good Life: Aristotle (day 1)**
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II (pp. 3-36)
- September 29: **The Good Life: Aristotle (day 2)**
- October 4: **The Good Life: Aristotle (day 3)**
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III sections 1-9, Book VI sections 12-13, Book VII sections 1-10 (pp. 37-54, 115-118, 119-136)
- October 6: **The Good Life: Aristotle (day 4)**

Unit 2: Interpersonal Relationships

- October 11: **Friendship (day 1)**
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX (pp. 192-247)
- October 13: **Friendship (day 2)**
Magna Moralia, Selections
- October 18: **Familiar Ties and Family Resemblance**
David Velleman, "Family History"
- October 20: **Trust**
Annette Baier, "Trust and Anti-Trust"
- October 25: **Love**
David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion"

Interlude: Absurdity, Tragedy and Vulnerability

- October 27: **The Absurd**
Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd"

November 1: **The Absurd**
Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphos*

November 3: **Vulnerability and Tragedy**
Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Selections

Unit 3: Personal Identity

November 8: **Personal Identity and the Self: Introduction**
John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*

November 10: **Personal Identity and the Self: Locke**
John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity"
Thomas Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity"

November 15: **Personal Identity and the Self: Parfit**
Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity"

November 17: **Personal Identity and the Self: Hume**
David Hume, "Of Personal Identity"

Unit 4: Death

November 22: **Death and Living Authentically**
Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

November 29: **The Harm of Death**
Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"
Anthony Brueckner and John Martin Fischer, "Why Is Death Bad?"

December 1: **The Benefits of Fatality**
Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case"

December 6: **Death and the Passage of Time**
David Velleman, "So it Goes"

December 8: **Birth**
Seana Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm"

December 15: **Review**

Required Texts

Please acquire copies of the books listed below. They will be available at the NYU book store. All other materials will be made available on NYU classes.

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch & Confession* (New York: Liveright, 2014)
- Bhikku Bhodi, ed., *In the Buddha's Words. An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (Somerville: Wisdom, 2015)

Requirements

Course Policies

- All assigned work must be handed in to receive a passing grade in the course.
- Any student who is found to have cheated on an examination or to have committed plagiarism will receive an F grade in the course and the matter will be referred to the office of the relevant dean for consideration of further disciplinary action.
- Regular attendance is a requirement to receive a passing grade in the class.

Office Hours

Thursdays, 5-7 pm and by appointment