

Philosophy 394D
Seminar: Death
Spring 2005

W 3:35-6:00
Tobin 520

Syllabus

Instructor

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30-3:30, and by appointment
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Course Description

Epicurus claimed that it is irrational to fear death, since death does not harm the living (it does not touch them while they live), and it does not harm the dead (nothing can harm them, since they no longer exist). This argument gives rise to many questions about the nature and value of death. One of the most prominent is, What is death? Another concerns the possibility of surviving death: What must human persons be like if “life after death” is to be possible? The central questions about the value of death are, Is death an evil?, and, If so, how? How is it possible for death to harm someone if he or she doesn’t exist when dead? Other evaluative questions that we may study concern the rationality of the fear of death, the asymmetry in our attitudes about postmortem and prenatal nonexistence, the desirability of immortality, and the morality of killing.

Prerequisites

Two courses in philosophy.

Course Website

I have set up a (so far very minimal) course website. I’m not yet certain whether we’ll be using it a lot. In any case, here is the URL: <www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~cheathwo/phil394/>.

Readings

Three books and a course packet are required. The three books are:

- Fred Feldman, *Confrontations With the Reaper: A Philosophical Study of the Nature and Value of Death* (Oxford University Press, 1992). ISBN: 0195089286 \$25.00 new
John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Death* (Stanford University Press, 1993). ISBN: 0804721041 \$27.95 new; \$20.95 used
John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1978). ISBN: 0915144530 \$5.95 new

Each book is available at Amherst Books, 8 Main St. in downtown Amherst, (413) 256-1547.

The course packet is available at the CopyCat Print Shop, 37 E. Pleasant St. in downtown Amherst, (413) 549-2854. They’ll ask for a “CP number” when you pick it up. Our CP number is 715. The cost of the course packet is \$19.51.

Requirements

Papers: A term paper (10-15 pages in length) is due at the end of the semester. Two shorter papers will be assigned throughout the semester. For the shorter papers, you must write on one of the assigned topics. For the term paper, you may pick your own topic, but it must be approved in advance by me. Your term paper may be an extension of one of your shorter papers. I will have more to say about how these papers will be graded when they are assigned.

Presentations: Each student is required to do one class presentation, about 15-20 minutes long, on some issue from the week's reading. The topic of your presentation must be approved by me. And you must, in advance, either email me a detailed account of what you plan to present or meet with me to discuss it.

Participation: You are expected to participate regularly in classroom discussion. Ask questions, make comments, speak your mind. This, of course, will require coming to class regularly and completing the reading assignments on time.

Pop Quizzes: There will be 5-10 pop quizzes throughout the semester. They are designed to compel you to do the readings and take notes on them. They are "open note," but not "open book." If you do the readings and take notes, you will find them very easy; if not, you will fail.

Internet: You must have an email account and regular access to the internet, and you must check your email (and possibly the website) frequently. If you don't, you will miss crucial information about course content, assigned readings, papers, presentations, quizzes, etc.

Grading

Your final grade for the course is determined by your performance with respect to the requirements listed above, as follows:

Participation	10 points
Pop Quizzes	10 points
Very Short Paper	10 points
Presentation	20 points
Short Paper	20 points
<u>Term Paper</u>	<u>30 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

We will use the following grading scale:

93-100	A	77-79	C+		
90-92	A-	73-76	C		
87-89	B+	70-72	C-		
83-86	B	67-69	D+		
80-82	B-	60-66	D	0-59	F

Cheating

Passing off another's ideas or writings as your own is plagiarism. It is very easy to catch and will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarists (and cheaters of any other variety) will receive an automatic 'F' for the course and may be subject to expulsion from the university.