

**Acknowledgement:** UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the *xwməθkwəy̓əm* (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

**Philosophy 491: Life & Death  
Winter Term 2 2021**

**Instructor:** Brooks Sommerville  
**Lecture Times:** Mondays 2:00-5:00pm BUCH B302  
**Office Hours:** Fri. 2:00-3:00pm or by appointment  
**Email:** brooks.sommerville@ubc.ca

**Course Description:**

Death is on a very short list of life's certainties. However, the philosophical issues it raises are numerous and complex. This course will introduce you to some of the main debates related to life, death, and mortality. It is divided into three parts. Part 1 will focus on the question of what it means for someone to be dead. Do we cease to exist when we die? Is there an afterlife? Can we properly have an experience of our own mortality? These are some of the questions we will investigate. Part 2 will focus on the (surprisingly difficult!) question of whether death is bad for the person who dies, and why. Our aim in this section is to illuminate the philosophical motivations for what is called the *deprivation account*, the prevailing explanation of death's badness. Finally, Part 3 will turn to the related question of what makes a life go well, examining several accounts of well-being. Some of the authors we will read: Plato, Epicurus, John Perry, Thomas Nagel, and Susan Wolf.

**Synchronous Instruction:** Please note that students will be expected to attend one hour of synchronous instruction per week. All remaining elements of instruction will be asynchronous, except for office hours.

**Required Texts:**

It is important that everyone be using the same texts, so please use the following books, which are all available at the UBC Bookstore:

Perry, John. *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Hackett, 1978. [DPII]

All other required texts (marked with \* on the reading schedule below) will be made available online or distributed in class.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Midterm Assignment (4-5 double-spaced pages): **25%**
2. Final Paper (12-15 pages): **60%**
3. Quizzes (x5): **15%**

**Course Work:**

Midterm assignments and final papers must be written in 12 pt. font and double-spaced, with one inch margins and numbered pages.

In your midterm assignments and final papers, make sure to explain any technical terms you use. What constitutes a technical term? Ask yourself the following question: 'Would a friend of mine who has never taken a philosophy course readily understand what the term means?' If the answer is no, then it's a technical term. Explain it.

In your midterm assignments and final papers, use direct quotations (i.e. "\_\_\_\_") only on those rare occasions when you want to call attention to the author's precise wording. Otherwise, explain the reading in your own words and cite accordingly in parentheses or footnotes. Any standard citation style (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago) is acceptable, but please remain consistent in your paper. If you have any questions about citations, ask the instructor.

Your introductory paragraph *must* include a clear thesis statement. A thesis statement has two main components: i) A clear statement of the position you will take in the paper; and ii) a brief, clear outline of the case you will make in support of that position.

Late midterm assignments will be penalized at the rate of one increment of a grade per day late (an A becomes an A-), weekends included. Extensions for assignments and in-class presentations will **only** be granted for officially documented illnesses or emergencies.

#### **Course Policies:**

Final Exam: The final exam will consist of essay questions for which lectures and online activities should prepare you.

#### **Course Policies:**

In-Term Concession Requests: Arts Students must contact Arts Advising as soon as you are aware you may need an in-term concession. Please review their website for concession criteria as well as process to follow:

<https://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession/>

Students in other Faculties should contact their Faculty advising office for direction.

Course Work: Failure to complete any major course work (Homework Assignments 1-2; Essay Assignments 1-2; final exam) will result in a grade of F.

#### Plagiarism:

*Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.*

Please consult UBC's Learning Commons website: <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/>

Individual Learning Needs: Students seeking accommodation because of disabilities are asked to contact the instructor as soon as possible. They should also contact the UBC Centre for Accessibility:

<https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/centre-for-accessibility>

*UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here: (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>)*

## Topics and Readings:

Week 1:	Introduction
	<b>Part 1: What is Death?</b>
Week 2:	*Plato, <i>Apology</i> (34b6-end)
Week 3:	*Anil Ananthaswamy, 'The Living Dead' *Shelley Kagan, 'Descartes' Argument'
Week 4:	*Fred Feldman, <i>CWR</i> , Ch. 6: 'The Survival of Death,' pp. 89-105.
Week 5:	John Perry, <i>DPII</i> (all)
	<b>Part 2: Is Death Bad?</b>
Week 6:	*Epicurus, 'Letter to Menoeceus' *Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> (selections)
Week 7:	*Thomas Nagel, 'Death'
Week 8:	*Katherine Hawley, 'Persistence and Time'
	<b>Part 3: Is Life Good?</b>
Week 9:	*Robert Nozick, 'The Experience Machine'
Week 10:	*Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Sufferings of the World'
Week 11:	*Susan Wolf, 'Meaning in Life and Why It Matters,' <i>The Tanner Lectures on Human Values</i> (Lecture 1)

Week 12:                      \*Bernard Williams, 'The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality'

Week 13:                      Review