

## PHIL 20203 – Death and Dying

Classroom: DeBartolo 202  
Class Time: TR, 12:30–1:45 pm (sect. 01); 2:00–3:15 pm (sect. 03)  
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda  
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### Course Description

This is a course of philosophical questions related to death and dying. Our initial theme will be the possibility of life after death. Is biological death simply “the end” for us, or is there good reason to believe that we will live on? To answer this question we’ll look at both philosophical arguments and empirical arguments based on near-death experiences. Next, we’ll consider the meaning of life in the light our (and our universe’s) eventual death. If death were “the end” would that mean that human existence is objectively pointless? What, if anything, does personal immortality contribute to the meaning of life? Finally, we consider the ethics of suicide and euthanasia. When, if ever, is it appropriate to end one’s own life or to help someone else end theirs?

### Course Texts

1. Plato, *Five Dialogues*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hackett, 2002)
2. John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (Hackett, 1978)
3. Gary Habermas & J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death* (Wipf and Stock, 2004) [NB: the 1998 edition is fine too.]
4. John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (Routledge, 2002)
5. Gerald Dworkin, R. G. Frey, & Sissela Bok, *Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide* (Cambridge, 1998)

### Summary of Course Requirements

Participation .....	10%
Short papers (3 @ 22.5% each).....	67.5%
Final exam.....	22.5%

### Participation

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. Each *unexcused* absence after the second will result in a 2% reduction of your final grade. Repeated or excessive tardiness will also be penalized. To be excused, an absence must be officially approved by the university, specifically, by the assistant vice-president for residence life.

You should always come to class prepared, having read the assigned material and being ready to participate in class discussion. The readings in this course are typically short, but often difficult, so make sure that you get an early start on them.

### Short Papers

You will be asked to write four 3-4 page argumentative essays: one on Socrates / Plato, one on the possibility of life after death, one on the meaning of life and the value of death, and one on the morality of physician-assisted suicide. *Only the top three will count toward your final grade.*

All of your work should of course be your own. *Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the full extent the University allows.* You must *fully document* all of your sources, whether you are quoting directly or merely paraphrasing. In short, you will be held to the standards of Notre Dame’s Academic Code of Honor.

### Final Exam

There will be an in-class, closed-notes essay final exam worth 18% of your grade. My plan is to give you a list of three or four questions to prepare for ahead of time and randomly pick two for you to answer at the final.

Schedule: This schedule is subject to revision at my discretion. In particular, the latter half of the schedule is very much in flux right now. I'll have a more firm schedule ready in a couple weeks.

Note: 'HM' = Habermas and Moreland; 'DFB' = Dworkin, Frey, & Bok.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1	1/18: Course introduction	1/20: Plato, <i>Apology</i>
2	1/25: Plato, <i>Crito</i>	1/27: Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> (57a–88b); <i>Meno</i> (80d–86c)
3	2/1: Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> (84c–95e, 105c–108c, 113d–118a)	2/3: Plato, <i>Republic</i> , books II, IV, and IX (selections)
4	2/8: Plato, <i>Republic</i> , book X (selections)	2/10: Personal Identity - Preliminaries <b>1st paper due 2/11</b>
5	2/15: Perry, "The First Night"	2/17: Perry, "The Second Night"
6	2/22: Perry, "The Third Night"	2/24: HM, pp. 15–48
7	3/1: HM, pp. 49–83	3/3: HM, ch. 4
8	3/8: HM, chs. 7–8	3/10: HM, chs. 9, 11 <b>2nd paper due 3/11</b>
9	Mid-term break (no class)	
10	3/22: Epicurus, "Letter to Menoecus" Feldman, "Epicurus and the Evil of Death"	3/24: Feldman, "More Puzzles about the Evil of Death"
11	3/29: Cottingham, ch. 1	3/31: Cottingham, ch. 2
12	4/5: Cottingham, ch. 3	4/7: Aquinas on Suicide Hume, "On Suicide"
13	4/12: Feldman, "The Morality and Rationality of Suicide" <b>3rd paper due 4/13</b>	4/14: DFB, pp. 3–5, ch. 2
14	4/19: DFB, ch. 3	4/21: DFB, chs. 1, 4
15	4/26: DFB, chs. 5–6	4/28: DFB, chs. 7–8
16	5/3: TBD	5/5: Study session for final exam (attendance optional) <b>4th paper due 5/6</b>
17	Final exam: TBA	