

PHIL 20218: Introduction to the Philosophy of Life and Death
Summer Course: Syllabus

Time/Location: 9am-3pm, in TBD

Instructor: John Proios, jdproios@uchicago.edu

Instructor Office Hours: 3-4pm in Stuart 231-B, see schedule for dates

Sign Up:  Summer Course Office Hours

Course Assistant: Valerie Yip, valerieyip@uchicago.edu

Course Assistant Office Hours: 3-4pm, see schedule for dates

Sign Up:  Summer Course Office Hours

Course Description:

The focus of this course will be how philosophy arises in response to problems in the conditions of human life, especially our mortality and the prevalence of social injustice. Every one of us will die one day; and every one of us suffers from and/or helps perpetuate some form of injustice. These can be sources of alienation, suffering, and bad choices; they can also be sources of conviction, bravery, and wisdom. We will aim to understand how philosophy fits into this picture, and especially how a person can use philosophy to find meaning for their life in relation to both death and injustice. Topics will include Plato's Socrates, the Buddha, and social injustice.

Course Goals:

- Develop reading habits appropriate for the style and content of historical and contemporary philosophical texts
- Explore concepts such as mortality, the meaning of life, and ideology
- Develop skills at critical thinking and dialogue through discussion and writing
- Write short essays reconstructing and offering an original, thoughtful evaluation of a philosophical argument and clearly expressing original ideas about it.

Course Topics:

- What is death and is it harmful to the one who dies?
- If death is the end of a person, what is a person such that they end? How do different views of what makes a person entail different conceptions of what death is and whether it is harmful?
- Does death make life meaningless? If we accept that we are finite beings, what sort of meaning can we get from life?
- How do forms of injustice (systematic oppression, exploitation, etc.) limit a person's ability to live a meaningful life? How is death structured by these forms of injustice?

Grading

25% Participation

30% Reading Responses

15% Essay 1

15% Essay 2 (revision of essay 1)

15% Essay 3

Course Texts

All readings are available on Canvas.

Attendance

Every class is required: the Pre-College Program does not permit missing *any* class time. If you are not in class by 30 minutes past the start time, I will contact the Pre-College Program.

Assignments

Participation: Participation is measured by engagement in class activities. People participate in different ways, so we will not have universal expectations that you will be extremely vocal. But there is an expectation that you will listen attentively and speak at least occasionally. Additionally, in-class group work will be part of your participation grade.

Reading responses: 1 paragraph responses to a question about the reading. These should be accessible in class on the day they are assigned. They should be handed in on Canvas before class starts.

Essays: 3 writing assignments (1-3 pages) in response to assigned prompts.

Course Expectations:

1. Engage in honest, respectful dialogue. Do not interrupt each other or have private conversations while others are speaking. Please read through the philosophy department discussion norms here:
<https://humanities-west-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/philosophy/prod/2020-05/Norms%20April%202020.pdf>
2. Feel free to share your preferred pronouns at the beginning of class or before speaking; I welcome any requests to be referred to in a specific way. My preferred pronouns are he/him/his.
3. Complete all reading assignments before class and have the text accessible during class.
4. Participate in class discussions and in-class assignments.
5. It is really not in your interest to plagiarize, which means *representing someone else's idea or work as your own* (even in a piece-meal way). The penalty for plagiarism will depend on the specific circumstances, but no plagiarized work will be accepted for any credit. The standard penalty is failure for the assignment and/or the course. Please consult the University of Chicago guidelines:
<https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/>
6. Absolutely no use of Artificial Intelligence tools such as ChatGPT or Dall-E 2 is permitted. The point of the assignments is for you to develop skills and knowledge that you can't get if

you use AI to help. Students are also expected to present work that is their own without assistance from others, including automated tools. If you are unclear if something is an AI tool, please check with me. Using AI tools for any purposes in this course will violate the University's academic integrity policy (in other words, it will be treated as a case of plagiarism).

7. **Please do not ask me for a letter of recommendation. My standing policy will be to decline.**

Student Services:

Disabilities: I intend for this course to be accessible to all students and am eager to work with disabled students on any issues that arise. If you are able to register with Student Disability Services (SDS), then you will qualify for the use of academic accommodations arranged by SDS. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. To contact SDS: website: disabilities.uchicago.edu phone: (773) 702-6000 email: disabilities@uchicago.edu. Whether or not you choose to use SDS I encourage you to let me know about any ways the course design poses problems for you due to a disability.

Mental Health: Students can access mental health care and other health care through the UChicago Student Wellness office: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/>

Rough Outline of Assignments:

Date	Reading	Writing
M	Epicurus, from <i>The Epicurus Reader</i>: • "Letter to Herodotus" (selection) • "Letter to Menoeceus" "The Parable of the Mustard Seeds" https://sacred-texts.com/bud/btg/btg85.htm	N/A
T	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>: • Book 3, 1-130, 830-980 Thomas Nagel, "Death"	Reading response 1
W	From <i>Early Buddhist Discourses</i>: • "Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness" (sections 17-end) • "Discourse to the First Five Disciples" • "Verses of Sister Vajira"	Reading response 2

	From <i>Questions of King Milinda</i>: - Sections 25-28 (pp.34-38), 40-41 (pp.54-57) - Sections 31-33 (pp.41-44), 68-71 (pp.93-98)	
TH	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
F	Re-read: From <i>Questions of King Milinda</i>: Sections 25-28 (pp.34-38), 40-41 (pp.54-57) Sections 31-33 (pp.41-44), 68-71 (pp.93-98) New reading: Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> beginning through 73a (page 63)	Reading response 3
M	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> (finish the text)	Essay #1 due before class
T	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (selections)	Reading response 4
W	Leo Tolstoy, <i>A Confession</i> , read pages 115-163 (chapters I-VII)	Reading response 5
TH	Leo Tolstoy, <i>A Confession</i>, read pages 163-188 (chapters VIII-XII) Simone De Beauvoir, selection from <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> (pp.293-5 in <i>Existentialism: a Reader</i>)	N/A (break from writing)
F	Simone De Beauvoir, selection from <i>The Second Sex</i> (pp.296-307 in <i>Existentialism: a Reader</i>)	Reading response 6
M	Simone De Beauvoir, <i>A Very Easy Death</i> (you can skip pp.32-49) Sidra Shahid, "Growing Older and The Value of Intergenerational Bonds" https://blog.apaonline.org/2023/01/13/growing-older-and-the-value-of-intergenerational-bonds/	Essay #2 due before class

T	James Baldwin: • “Notes of a Native Son” • “Introduction (1984)” to <i>Notes of a Native Son</i> Richard Wright, “Between the World and Me”	Reading response 7
W	Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, Anne E. Fehrenbacher, and Alexis Cooke, “Material Insecurity, Racial Capitalism, and Public Health” Ramona Coelho, John Maher, Sonu K. Gaind, and Trudo Lemmens, “The realities of Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada”	Begin drafting essay 3 (no reading response)
TH	Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, selection from <i>The German Ideology</i> Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, “On Liberty, Security, and Our System of Racial Capitalism,” https://aeon.co/essays/on-liberty-security-and-our-system-of-racial-capitalism	Essay #3 due by end of day
F	NO CLASS	