

PHILOSOPHY 112: MORTAL QUESTIONS¹

UC Riverside, Summer (Second Session) 2015
Instructor: Taylor Cyr (taylor.cyr@email.ucr.edu)

Basic Information:

Class Meeting Times: MW 1:40pm-4:30pm
Class Meeting Location: Sproul Hall (SPR) 2356
Instructor's Office Hours: MW 11:00am-noon,
and by appointment
Instructor's Office: Humanities and Social
Sciences Building (HMNSS) 3307

Questions to Consider:

Q1: Are we mortal?
Q2: Is death bad (for the one who dies)?
Q3: Is it rational to fear death?
Q4: Is immortality desirable?
Q5: What gives meaning to life?
Q6: Do we have free will?

Course Overview

Description:

In this course, we will carefully consider some of the central philosophical questions pertaining to the metaphysics and ethics of mortality. The first half of the course will focus on issues that more directly pertain to death itself—whether we are mortal, whether death can be bad for the one who dies, whether it is rational to fear death—and the second half of the course will focus on (apparently) related issues—whether immortality is desirable, what gives meaning to life, and whether we have free will.

Learning Outcomes:

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Distinguish philosophical questions about mortality from non-philosophical ones
- Analyze and evaluate complex philosophical arguments

Instructional Objectives:

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Critically read philosophical texts by identifying and assessing the author's reasoning
- Articulate the main positions and arguments in philosophical debates about death, immortality, meaning in life, and free will
- Present arguments in their own words and provide their own objections to them

Course Requirements (% of Final Grade)

- Midterm Exam (25%)
- Final Exam (30%)
- Paper (25%) — 5-7 pages
- Attendance (10%) — 1 free absence
- Reading Quizzes (10%) — lowest score dropped

¹ This syllabus is subject to change (at the instructor's discretion) with advanced notice.

Midterm Exam and Final Exam:

- The midterm exam (August 10, normal class time) and final exam (August 28, 3:30pm-5:30pm) will be similar in length and in format, though the final exam will cover the material of the entire course.
- The format of both exams will be a combination of true/false, multiple-choice, and short-answer (4-6 sentences) essay questions designed to test understanding of the material covered in the assigned readings and the lectures.

Paper:

- A paper of 5-7 pages in length is due on August 19. The paper topic is the desirability of immortality, and more specific instructions for the paper will be given during week 3.
- Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B- to C+) for each day past their due date.

Attendance and Reading Quizzes:

- Attendance will be taken at each of the meetings for the course, and one unexcused absence will be permitted.
- There will be 8 reading quizzes—one during every regular day of class (i.e., all days except first day and exam days). These will be short, multiple-choice quizzes that will test basic comprehension of the assigned readings for the day of the quiz. At the end of the course, I will drop students' lowest scores (i.e., only a student's 7 best reading quizzes will count toward her final grade). Make-up quizzes will not be offered.

Course Policies**Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to act with academic integrity. For details, visit <http://conduct.ucr.edu/learnPolicies/Pages/AcademicIntegrity.aspx>. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be reported to the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Programs office and will result in an F on the assignment.

Respect:

Students are expected to treat each other and the instructor with respect. This includes, among other things, paying attention to what a person is saying, being charitable to others' points of views, and criticizing ideas rather than persons.

Email:

Course announcements will be delivered via email, so students are expected to check their email at least once per day on weekdays. The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours (and often much more quickly than that).

Disabilities:

Students with disabilities requiring accommodation should inform the instructor within the first week of class and follow the guidelines outlined by the Student Special Services office. For details, visit <http://specialservices.ucr.edu/disabilities/forms/applyservices.html>.

Course Schedule and Readings²

- Week 1 (July 27)
 - M: *Discuss Syllabus* / Q1: Plato, “Death and Immortality”
 - W: Q2: Epicurus, “Death Is Nothing to Us”; Mitsis, “When Death Is There, We Are Not”; Nagel, “Death”

- Week 2 (August 3)
 - M: Q2: Brueckner and Fischer, “Why Is Death Bad?”; Kaufman, “Pre-Vital and Post-Mortem Non-Existence”; Nussbaum, “The Damage of Death” [Note: you may skip section III of Nussbaum’s paper]
 - W: Q3: Murphy, “Rationality and the Fear of Death”; Draper, “Death and Rational Emotion” / *Review for Midterm Exam*

- Week 3 (August 10)
 - M: Midterm Exam
 - W: Q4: Williams, “The Makropulos Case”; Fischer, “Why Immortality Is Not So Bad”; Rosati, “The Makropulos Case Revisited” / *Discuss Paper Topic*

- Week 4 (August 17)
 - M: Q5: Velleman, “Well-Being and Time”
 - W: *Paper Due* / Q5: Fischer, “Free Will, Death, and Immortality: The Role of Narrative”; Fischer, “Stories and the Meaning of Life”

- Week 5 (August 24)
 - M: Q6: Fischer, “The Issues”; Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action”
 - W: Q6: Kane, “Acting ‘of One’s Own Free Will’”; Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”; Pereboom, “Free-Will Skepticism and Meaning in Life” / *Review for Final Exam*
 - F: Final Exam (August 28), 3:30pm-5:30pm

² There is no required textbook. All readings will be made available as PDFs on iLearn.