

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2023/24 1st semester
PHIL5543 Philosophy of the Human Condition: Life, Death, Love & Desire
Course Outline

Instructor: Dr. Kwok Pak Nin, Samson
Time: Thursday 18:30-21:30
Venue: CYT 203

Course overview:

This course focuses on the existential problems of the human condition from a comparative philosophical perspective. Original texts on philosophies of life, death, love and desire from classical and contemporary Western as well as Chinese philosophical tradition will be discussed. Topics included: the nature and justification of love, sexual desire, the theory of Well-Being, the absurdity of life, the evil of death, Immortality and Extinction...etc.

Learning outcomes:

1. Understand contemporary human conditions from a philosophical point of view.
2. Be familiar with the main ideas and theories in philosophy of life.
3. Demonstrate the/an ability to analyze life issues.
4. Develop own critical views on the meanings and values of life.
5. Acquire skills in argumentative discussion and in writing about the debate on real-life issues.

Learning activities and workload:

1. **Lecture:** 2.5 hours each week.
2. **Reading:** 2-3 hours per week. Student are required to read the reading material assigned.
3. **Tutorial:** Students are required to discuss, and present reading material assigned.

Assessment:

Task nature	Description	Weight
Tutorial	Discussion and Presentation	30%
Reading Notes	Argument Analysis (500 words) x 2	10%
Mid-term Paper	Short Research Paper (2000-3000 words)	30%
Term-end Paper	Short Research Paper (2000-3000 words)	30%
<i>Participation*</i>	<i>Students who actively participate in both class and online discussions may receive a bonus of up to 5% on their final grade</i>	

Grade Descriptors:

http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf

Details of course website:

Lecture notes and information on assignments will be posted on the Blackboard Learn website.

Course schedule:

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Reading	Remark
1	Sept 7	Introduction: Philosophy of Life?	Thomas Hurka, <i>The Best Things in Life</i> , Introduction & ch.1.	
2	Sept 14	Romantic Love	Robert Solomon, "About Love"	
3	Sept 21	Love, Sex, and Marriage	Patricia Marino, "Love and marriage"	1 st Tutorial (8:00-9:30pm) Bernard Suits, "Is Life a Game We are Playing?"
4	Sept 28	The Nature and Justification of Love	Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond"	
5	Oct 5	Sexual Desire	Alan Goldman, "Plain Sex"	2 nd Tutorial (7:30-9:30pm) Irving Singer, "Appraisal and Bestowal"
6	Oct 12	The Nature of Desire	Federico Lauria and Julien A. Deonna, "Reconsidering Some Dogmas about Desires"	
7	Oct 19	Well-being	Brad Hooker, "The Elements of Well-Being"	3 rd Tutorial (7:30-9:30pm) Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"
8	Oct 26	Moral Luck	Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"	
9	Nov 2	The Absurdity of Life	Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"	4 th Tutorial (7:30-9:30pm) Shelly Kagan, "Me and my life"
10	Nov 9	The Evil of Death	Thomas Nagel, "Death"	
11	Nov 16	Immortality	Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"	5 th Tutorial (7:30-9:30pm) Robert J. Hartman, "Moral luck and the unfairness of morality"
12	Nov 23	Extinction	James Lenman, "On Becoming Extinct"	
13	Nov 30	Remaining Issues		6 th Tutorial (7:30-9:30pm) Johann Frick, "On the survival of humanity"

Recommended learning resources:

General References:

- David Benatar (Ed.). *Life, Death, and Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2016.
- Guy Fletcher, *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*. Routledge, 2015.
- Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, vol. 1-3. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Raja Halwani, Alan Soble, Sarah Hoffman and Jacob M. Held (Eds.). *The Philosophy of Sex-Contemporary Readings*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2017.
- Samuel Scheffler, *Why Worry about Future Generations?* Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Shelly Kagan, *Death*. Yale University Press. 2012.
- Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Thomas Hurka, *The Best Things in Life- A Guide to What Really Matters*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- 唐君毅，〈人生之體驗續篇〉，台北：學生書局，1992年。
- 張燦輝，〈生死愛欲 I：從希臘神話到基督教〉，香港：漫遊者文化，2016年。
- 郭柏年，〈定見之外：生活日常的哲學短篇〉，香港：牛津大學出版社，2020年。

Reading list:

Topic-specific lists of references, required and suggested readings will be given in lecture notes and bibliographical notes (separate) for each topic.

Contact:

Lecturer	
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Feedback for evaluation:

1. Students are strongly encouraged to provide feedback on the course via email or meetings with lecturer.
2. Students evaluate the course through a survey and written comments at the end of the term as well as via regular feedback between teacher and students. This information is highly valued and is used to revise teaching methods, tasks, and content.

Academic honesty and plagiarism:

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations.

Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/> .

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed **declaration** that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.