The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2026/27 1st semester
PHIL 3383 Philosophy of Death
Course Outline

Instructor: Dr. Kwok Pak Nin, Samson
Time: Thursday 15:30-17:15
Venue: LSK 206
Tutorial Section: TBA

Course overview:

This course aims to be a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of death. It will introduce and critically examine the major issues of philosophy of death from the Anglo-American philosophical perspectives. Topics to be discussed include: the definition of life and death, human ontology, the nature and evil of death, death and existence, the problem of immortality...etc. The practical issues related to death such as suicide, human extinction, and the meaning of life will be discussed as well.

Learning outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:
1. understand the meaning of death in both Western and Chinese philosophical traditions.
2. read and understand the classic text on philosophy of death.
3. understand the existential relevance of philosophy of death to everyday life.
4. reflect on the meaning of life in contrast to death.

Learning activities and workload:

1. **Lecture**: 2 hours each week.
2. **Interactive tutorial**: one 2-hour session every two weeks. Students are required to discuss, and present reading material assigned.

Assessment:

Task nature	Description	Weight
Tutorial	Discussion and Presentation	30%
Mid-term quiz	In-class Quiz	30%
Term-end Paper	Short Research Paper (2500-3500 words)	40%
Participation*	*Students who actively participate in both class and online discussions may receive a bonus of up to 5% on their final grade*	

Details of course website:

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

Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Use only with prior permission
Students may use AI tools for Term Paper, but not for other assignments. These tools can be used for: 1. Checking grammar and 2. Polishing arguments. ***All use of AI tools must be cited or acknowledged.***

Late submission policy:

Assignments submitted after the due date will incur a ***10% grade reduction per day***. Extensions will only be granted in cases of unexpected or exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control.

Topics & schedule:

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Reading	Tutorial
1	Sept 10	Introduction	John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Death*, "Introduction"	
2	Sept 17	Life and Death	David DeGrazia, "The Nature of human death"	
3	Sept 24	Human Ontology	Eric Olson, "The nature of people"	1st Tutorial: Christopher Belshaw, "Death"
4	Oct 1	Public Holiday		
5	Oct 8	Mind and Soul	Plato, *Phaedo* (Selection)	2nd Tutorial: Dean W. Zimmerman, "Two Cartesian Arguments for the Simplicity of the Soul"
6	Oct 15	Death and Existence	Fred Feldman, "The Termination Thesis"	
7	Oct 22	The Evil of Death	Thomas Nagel, "Death"	3rd Tutorial: Robert Francescotti, "Surviving death: how to refute termination theses"
8	Oct 29	**In class quiz**		
9	Nov 5	Immortality	Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"	4th Tutorial: Fred Feldman, "Some Puzzles About the Evil of Death"
10	Nov 12	University Holiday		
11	Nov 19	Better Never to Have Been	David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been*.ch.2	5th Tutorial: Mikel Burley, "Immortality and Meaning: Reflections on the Makropulos Debate"
12	Nov 26	Human Extinction	James Lenman, "On Becoming Extinct"	
13	Dec 3	Death and the Meaning of Life	Brooke Alan Trisel, "Does Death Give Meaning to Life?"	6th Tutorial: Ben Bramble, "The Heart of the Problem with Longtermism"

Grade Descriptors:

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

Recommended learning resources:

Main Reference:

David Benatar (ed.), *Life, Death, and Meaning: Key Philosophical Readings,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.

Shelly Kagan, *Death*. Yale University Press. 2012

Supplementary Reference:

Ben Bradley, *Well Being and Death*, Oxford: Oxford University Press,2009.

Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman, Jens Johansson(ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death,* Oxford University Press, 2012.

Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Christopher Belshaw, *Annihilation: The Sense and Significance of Death*, Acumen Press, 2009.

Eric Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Fred Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Geoffrey Scarre, *Death*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

James Stacey Taylor (ed.), *The Metaphysics and Ethics of Death: New Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

James Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

John Martin Fischer (ed.), *The Metaphysics of Death*, Stanford University Press, 1993.

Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Michael Cholbi (ed.), *Immortality and the Philosophy of Death*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.

Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the afterlife*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Samuel Scheffler, *Why Worry about Future Generations?* Oxford University Press, 2018.

Steven Luper-Foy, *The Philosophy of Death*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Steven Luper-Foy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

唐君毅，《人生之體驗續篇》，台北：學生書局，1992。

郭柏年，《定見之外：生活日常的哲學短篇》增訂版，香港：牛津大學出版社，2024。

郭柏年，《流光之中：時間向度的人生哲學短篇》，香港：牛津大學出版社，2024。

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.