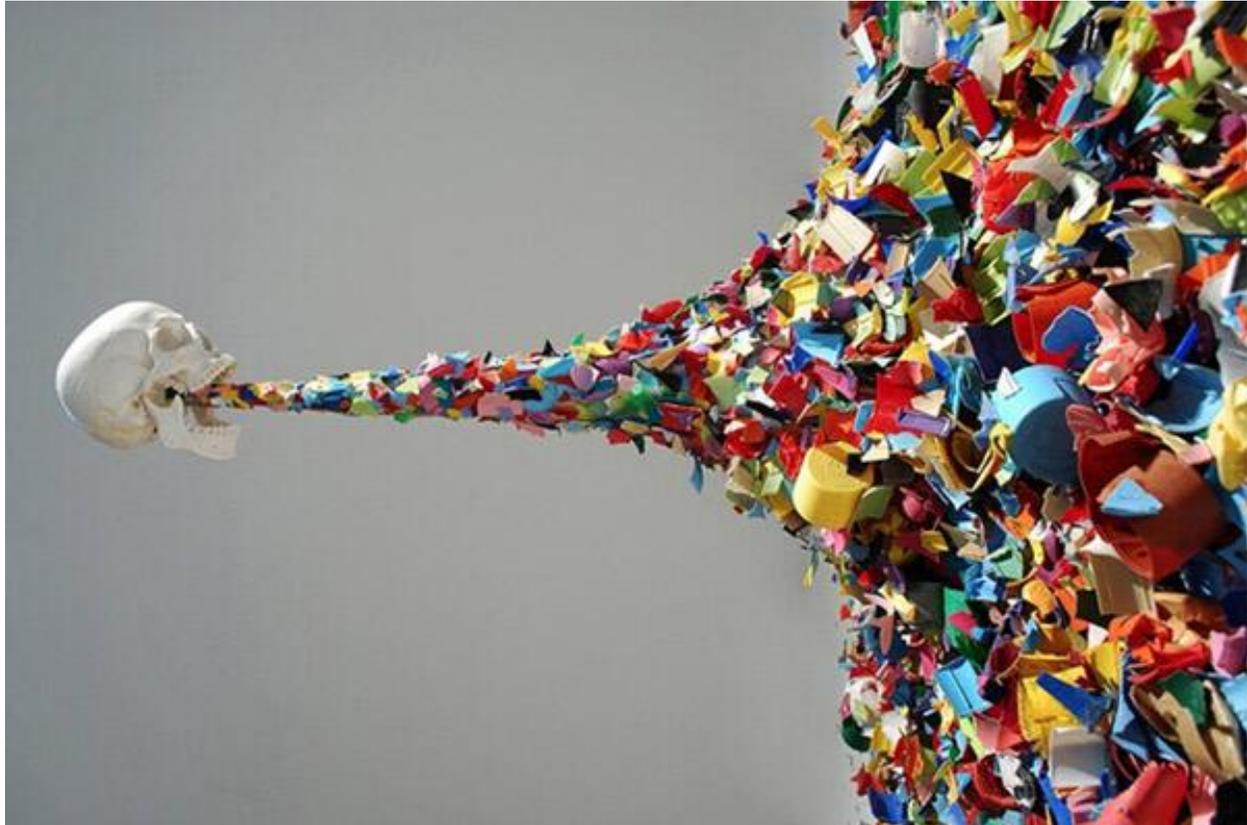


Confrontations with the Reaper (PHL345)

Fall 2017



Class meetings

MWF, 10:30-11:35, 5-124

Instructor Michael Cholbi

E-mail mjcholbi@cpp.edu

Phone 909.869.3845 (*Never call!*)

Office hours Mondays 4:00-5:00, Wednesdays 1:00-2:00, and Fridays 9:30-10:15

Please do not hesitate to contact me to set up an appointment outside of these hours if necessary.

Office Building 1, room 319B

Description

Every human being who has ever lived eventually died, and barring a radical technological advance, every human being who will ever live will eventually die. You will die. And so will I. Death is therefore one of the few genuine human universals, experienced by all persons everywhere. It has often been pointed out that though all organisms eventually die, human beings are unique in that we alone *know* that this is true. And yet we rarely stop to reflect on the fact of our own mortality and its significance. Death is, as the existentialist philosopher Paul-Louis

Landsberg pointed out, “an absent presence” — something that looms over our existence but because it has not occurred to us yet, it hardly ever occurs to us to scrutinize it.

The aim of our course is to remedy this inattention to death. Death has been a subject of scholarly and artistic investigation from a wide array of perspectives: philosophical, theological, literary, sociological, psychological, etc. In our course, we will draw upon a cross section of these investigations to address some of the central questions about death and dying, including the nature and ethical significance of death. You should leave our course having engaged in serious and sustained reflection about death, not merely for intellectual purposes but in order to approach the prospect of your own death and the deaths of others in a more enlightened and informed way.

Course learning objectives

Our course focuses on the following five sets of questions concerning death and dying:

1. What factors shape our attitudes toward death and dying?
2. What would a good experience of dying — a ‘good death’ — be like given the social and technological conditions present in contemporary American society, including (increasingly) prolonged senescence, chronic disease, and highly medicalized dying processes?
3. Is it possible to survive death (i.e., to become immortal)?
4. Is it desirable to survive death (to become immortal)?
5. What are the most reasonable attitudes to take toward death? In particular, should we fear death? Should we ever embrace death (by, for example, engaging in suicide)?

By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- a. Articulate a variety of historically and culturally influential answers to these five questions
- b. Critically appraise these answers as well as the arguments or evidence adduced in their favor
- c. Explain and justify the answers to these questions that they themselves find most plausible

Prerequisites and expectations

- Junior or senior standing
- Because this course satisfies the GE area C4 Humanities synthesis requirement, enrolled students must have completed GE areas C1 (Visual and Performing Arts), C2 (Philosophy and Civilization), and C3 (Literature and Foreign Languages). Students who are not majors in the humanities should anticipate that this will be the most challenging humanities course they take at the university.
- In addition, I recommend that enrolled students have completed GE area A (Oral Communication, Written Communication, and Critical Thinking) prior to this course.

I encourage students who are concerned about their readiness for this course to discuss this matter with me as soon as possible.

Expectations of You (and Your Instructor)

Respect. I will treat you with respect in this course, and expect you to do the same for me and your fellow students. What this means in practice is (at a minimum):

For me:

1. I will arrive on time and prepared for each class meeting scheduled on the syllabus.
2. I will adhere to the schedule of readings, assignments, etc., on our class syllabus. If for some reason changes to the syllabus are necessary, I will give you prior notification of these changes.
3. I will take student questions and comments seriously and attempt to engage with them as helpfully as I can within the constraints of class time.
4. I will keep my scheduled office hours, or provide advance notice if this is not possible.
5. I will evaluate your work fairly and provide an explanation of your grade.
6. I will treat you as an adult. Part of what this means is taking your opinions seriously. Taking your opinions seriously is not equivalent to endorsing them. I will assume that you have put some thought into your opinions and that I will hold you accountable (both positively and negatively) for them, praising you and challenging you as appropriate.
7. I will respect your time and not give you “busy work.”
8. I will respond to your communications in a timely manner in light of my other commitments and responsibilities.
9. I will welcome, acknowledge, thoughtfully consider, and (when feasible and warranted) act on feedback that you provide me concerning how the course can be changed to better meet your needs and better help you learn.

For you:

1. We will be discussing some difficult and weighty questions in this course, questions about which some people have strong opinions. You will respect the opinions of your classmates, and respond to them with seriousness, courtesy, and charity.
2. You will show up to class on time.
3. You will read the material assigned for class prior to the meeting at which we are scheduled to discuss it.
4. You will take responsibility for turning in assigned work on time.
5. You will respect my time and the time of your fellow students by helping to make our time together as productive and conducive to learning as possible.

Blackboard

We will be using Blackboard (<http://blackboard.cpp.edu>) in support of the in-class activities in this course. In order to use Blackboard, you will need to know your university Intranet ID and password. You should be checking the Blackboard site several times weekly for updates on course activities, etc.

Texts and materials

We'll be doing some careful reading of our texts in class, so **please have them available**.

Required texts (NOTE: all four primary texts are available in Kindle editions]

- Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (Vintage, 2012)
- Gawande, *Being Mortal* (Metropolitan, 2014)
- Cave, *Immortality* (Crown, 2012)
- Kagan, *Death* (Yale, 2012)

* *A note on this text: It's based on Kagan's course on death at Yale University. Videos of his lectures, along with a transcript of each, are available at <http://oyc.yale.edu/philosophy/phil-176>. The lectures and transcripts mirror the text closely, so you may use these in lieu of our text. But you will be responsible for the content of the book in either case.*

- Other readings, made available or referenced on Blackboard.

Optional texts:

- Cholbi, *Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions* (Broadview, 2011)

Evaluation and requirements

Your grade for this course will be determined by the following five components:

1. A *midterm exam* will be distributed via Blackboard on Friday, October 20 and due 10 am, Monday October 23. A midterm exam Q&A session will be held in my office on Wednesday, October 18, 2-5 pm. [**25% of quarter grade**]
2. By 4 pm on the day prior to each of our class meetings, I will distribute a *diagnostic* on Blackboard. These diagnostics will be brief exercises whose purpose is threefold: (1) to help you engage more fully with the course material; (2) to help you measure your progress in meeting the course learning objectives; and (3) to assist me in determining which topics or material should be stressed during our course meetings. These diagnostics are all ungraded and will take a variety of forms: quizzes, surveys, paragraph-length responses, etc. The diagnostics will be available until 10 am on the day of the subsequent class meeting. (There will be no diagnostic due on October 23 due to the midterm exam.) There will be 29 such diagnostics distributed during the quarter, and you are required to complete at least 12 of these (though I encourage you to complete as many as you can). This is a pass/fail requirement. [**10% of quarter grade**]
3. A *weekly writing assignment* will be distributed via Blackboard each week by Friday 3 pm. (NOTE: There will be no weekly assignment (a) on Friday, October 20, due to the midterm exam that week, or (b) on Friday, December 1, the final week of classes.) Each assignment will be due the subsequent Monday at 10 am. These assignments are brief essay assignments, designed to be completed in essays of around 800 words or so (3-4 paragraphs). You are to submit these via the Blackboard assignment interface. Your writing assignments will be graded on clarity, general organization, and responsiveness to the assigned question; critical reasoning, argumentation, and use of evidence; comprehension of relevant concepts, theories, course content, etc.; and linguistic style and expression. These are graded on a 25 point scale (please see the rubric on Blackboard for the exact breakdown of the grade). The grading for these is *pass/fail*, where *20 points or more constitutes a pass*. I will not provide individual comments on these assignments, but each assignment will have a grading rubric and I will provide some general feedback derived from the assignments turned in for that week (see however the note below regarding term papers). Here is the grading scale for this component of your grade [**30% of quarter grade**]:

Grade	# passing assignments
A	7+
B+	6
B	5

C+	4
C-	3
D	2
F	0-1

4. You are required to complete either
- a *term paper* of no less than 2,000 words. The majority of students (80%+) pursue this option. Nearly always, term papers develop or engage with one of the weekly writing assignments. I encourage those developing or engaging with one of the weekly writing assignments to contact me for more specific feedback on the assignment(s) being utilized. More details of the term paper expectations will be provided later.
 - a *term project*. This can take the form of original artwork, literature, poetry, music, film, scientific study, or other research that addresses one or more of the five questions listed under the Course Objectives above. Most term projects also include a written expository component. While term projects have rewards that term papers do not, it can be difficult to develop a project suited to this course. Thus, anyone interested in completing a term project is required to meet with your instructor in person and receive approval for your planned project by Wednesday, November 8.
 - All term papers and term projects are due to my office (1-319B) Wednesday December 6, 9 pm. [30% of quarter grade]

5. You are required to submit an *end-of-quarter memo*. More details about this memo will be provided later, but in the memo, you will describe your progress in meeting the course learning objectives and (if you so desire) argue for the grade you believe you should receive for the course. The end-of-quarter memo will be graded pass/fail, and will be due via Blackboard Friday, December 8, 5 pm. [5% of quarter grade]

Late work: In general, late work is not accepted. If an emergency of a medical or personal nature occurs and is responsible for your being unable to complete the assigned work, please let me know immediately. If *extraordinary* circumstances arise that make it unusually difficult for you to meet the class requirements, please contact me so we can discuss the possibility of alternative arrangements.

Your electronic prostheses

There will be some in-class activities for which an Internet-enable device (phone, laptop, tablet, etc.) will be extremely valuable. Outside of these activities, however, I generally discourage the use of such devices in class. There is ample evidence that (a) the use of such electronic devices is incompatible with your own learning (see



<http://bit.ly/1ihJUxL>), (b) nearly everyone overestimates their ability to ‘multitask’ with electronic devices (see <http://bit.ly/1ScqdoY>), and (c) the use of such devices is distracting to others and disrupts their efforts to learn (see <http://bit.ly/1Hf0ZzC>). Given these considerations, and the emphasis on respect for others outlined above, I ask that those who intend to use their devices *to sit in the last row* of the classroom so as to minimize disruption to others.

Varia

- Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to Cal Poly Pomona policies, available at <http://www.cpp.edu/~studentconduct/academic-integrity-resources/academic-integrity.shtml>
- The copyright for these course materials is held by the instructor; any attempt to distribute or sell this material without instructor authorization is in violation of that copyright.
- Students with learning or other disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss their needs and possible accommodations.

Schedule of readings and meetings

Please complete the readings for the class meetings listed below *before* the meeting.

DATE	TOPIC(S)	ASSIGNED READINGS, ETC.	EVENTS & TASKS BETWEEN MEETINGS
Fr Sept 22	Key questions about death and dying		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing assignment #1 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Sept 25	Facing up to death: Do we <i>know</i> we will die?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolstoy, <i>Death of Ivan Ilyich</i>, all • Explore “How to Tell What’s Going to Kill You” (Bb) and “35 Years of American Death” (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #1 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #1 due, 10 am
We Sept 27	Death denial and American culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West, “Pictures of death” (Bb) • Gilpin Faust, <i>This Republic of Suffering</i>, excerpt (Bb) • Mitford, “Behind the formaldehyde curtain” (Bb) • Durkin, “Death, dying, and the dead in popular culture” (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #2 due, 10 am
Fr Sept 29	Our changing ways of death and dying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande, <i>Being Mortal</i>, pp. 1-46 • Johnston, “Dying traditions, and new life, in the funeral industry” (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #3 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #2

			available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Oct 2	Aging and dependence in the life cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawande, <i>Being Mortal</i>, pp. 59-78, 92-109 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing assignment #2 due, 10 am Diagnostic #4 due, 10 am
We Oct 4	Medicalized dying in contemporary America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawande, <i>Being Mortal</i>, pp. 149-193 Wade, "Why is the way physicians want to die..." (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic #5 due, 10 am
Fr Oct 6	Facing death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawande, <i>Being Mortal</i>, pp. 193-258 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic #6 due, 10 am Writing assignment #3 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Oct 9	Terror management theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, <i>The Worm at the Core</i>, excerpt (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing assignment #3 due (Bb), 10 am Diagnostic #7 due, 10 am
We Oct 11	The mortality paradox and the search for immortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 1-28 Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 186-96 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic #8 due, 10 am
Fr Oct 13	Immortality 1: Staying Alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 29-82 Tennyson, "Tithonus" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic #9 due, 10 am Writing assignment #4 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Oct 16	Immortality 2: Resurrection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 85-137 Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 118-127 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing assignment #4 available (Bb), 3 pm Diagnostic #10 due, 10 am
We Oct 18	Immortality 3: Soul, pt 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 141-177 Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 6-23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic #11 due, 10 am
	<p><i>Midterm exam Q&A, 2-5 pm, 1-319B</i></p>		

Fr Oct 20	Immortality 3: Soul, pt 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 24-49 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #12 due, 10 am • Midterm exam distributed via Bb, 1 pm
Mo Oct 23	Immortality 3: Soul, pt 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 49-68 • Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 177-198 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midterm exam due, 10 am
We Oct 25	Immortality 4: Legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 201-250 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #13 due, 10 am
Fr Oct 27	Death and personal identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 102-118, 127-31 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #14 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #5 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Oct 30	Personal identity and what matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 132-169 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing assignment #5 due, 10 am • Diagnostic #15 due, 10 am
We Nov 1	Is death bad for us?: The deprivation account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 205-212 • Epicurus, "Letter to Menoecus" (Bb) • Nagel, "Death" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #16 due, 10 am
Fr Nov 3	Challenges to the deprivation account I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 213-33 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #17 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #6 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Nov 6	Challenges to the deprivation account II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyr, "How does death harm the deceased?" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #18 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #6 due, 10 am
We Nov 8	Immortality: Boredom and the best case scenario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 234-246 • Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 262-68 • Overall, "From here to eternity: Is it good to live forever?" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadline for approval of course projects • Diagnostic #19 due, 10 am
Fr Nov 10	Immortality: Human limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kass, "<i>L'chaim</i> and its limits: Why not immortality?" (Bb) [concentrate on pp. 9-16] • Borges, "The Immortal" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #20 due, 10 am

	and human individuality		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing assignment #7 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Nov 13	The badness of living with death?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 264-281 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #21 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #7 due, 10 am
We Nov 15	Death: Fear, anger, or ...?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 282-317 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #22 due, 10 am
Th Nov 16		WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY CELEBRATION (details to come!)	
Fr Nov 17	Suicide: Rationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 318-344 • Cholbi, <i>Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions</i>, ch. 3 (<i>optional</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #23 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #8 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Nov 20	Suicide: Morality I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, 'Suicide,' section 3 (Bb) • Cholbi, <i>Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions</i>, ch. 3 (<i>optional</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #24 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #8 due 10 am
We Nov 22	Suicide: Morality II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 344-61 • Cholbi, <i>Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions</i>, chs. 2, 4 (<i>optional</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #25 due, 10 am
Fr Nov 24	NO MEETING (Thanksgiving Holiday)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #26 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #9 available (Bb), 3 pm
Mo Nov 27	The assisted dying debate: Background and basic concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quill, "Death and dignity: A case of individualized decision making" (Bb) • UC Hastings Law School Consortium, "Understanding California's End of Life Option Act" (Bb) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #27 due, 10 am • Writing assignment #9 due, 10 am.
We Nov 29	Conflicting positions on assisted dying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brock, "Voluntary active euthanasia" (Bb) • Callahan, "When self-determination runs amok" (Bb) • Cholbi, <i>Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions</i>, ch. 6 (<i>optional</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #28 due, 10 am

Fr Dec 1	Summing up: What should we believe about death and dying?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande, <i>Being Mortal</i>, pp. 259-263 • Cave, <i>Immortality</i>, pp. 253-286 • Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 362-63 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic #29 due, 10 am
We Dec 6			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term papers and project due to my office, 9 pm
Fr Dec 8			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of quarter memos due via Bb, 5pm