

PHI 399: PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

Fall 2023

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Office: 533 Hall of Languages

Office hours: MW 10:30-11:30

DESCRIPTION:

In this class we will investigate fundamental philosophical questions about life and death. We begin with conceptual and metaphysical questions about ourselves and the nature of life and death. How can life and death be defined? What kinds of beings are we? Are we the kinds of beings that could survive death? We then move on to questions about value and the emotions: Is death bad for the one who dies? What makes life valuable or meaningful? How should we feel about our deaths or the deaths of loved ones? Finally we discuss ethical questions: What makes killing wrong? Can human lives be weighed against each other, or against other things? When are we morally obligated to save a life? Should we try to extend the human lifespan? The goals of the class will be to understand some important answers to these questions, to learn to ask good questions about proposed answers, and to carefully formulate arguments for or against views on these topics.

OFFICE HOURS: My office hours will be MW 10:30-11:30, but I am available at other times over zoom. If you want to chat with me over zoom, just send me an email with a few possible times you can meet.

TEXTS: All required readings will be available on Blackboard. If your finances permit, I encourage you to purchase a copy of Theron Pummer, *The Rules of Rescue* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

EXAMS: There will be three in-class essay exams. Your highest exam grade will count for 40% of your grade; your second-highest will count for 25%; your lowest will count for 15%. Exam dates will be September 27, October 30, and December 14. The final exam will cover only material from the third unit (it is not cumulative).

QUESTIONS: You are expected to do all the reading assignments and post questions on Blackboard each week. Questions should begin with something of the form: "On page <x>, <author> says <p>," followed by a question about, or criticism of, what they said. You will get two points per question that follows this format, for a maximum of 20 points (20% of your grade). You may get credit for only one question per reading assignment, though of course you can (and should!) ask as many questions as you want.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: You are expected to attend the class meetings, including recitations, and be ready to participate. However, you don't get points for this. You just have to do it.

GRADING SCHEME:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	0-59

All fractions are rounded up.

POLICIES AND OTHER INFORMATION:

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Please consult

<https://academicaffairs.syracuse.edu/important-syllabus-reminders/> for many university-wide policies. Policies relevant to this course are explained below.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Please do not use your phone during class; if I see people using phones I will ask them to stop. Laptops should be used only for taking notes. It is better not to use your laptop during class since it will be likely to distract you from the discussion, but you are allowed to do it. If you are using your laptop for other purposes

during class you may lose this privilege. Please arrive on time and do not leave early unless you let me know ahead of time.

MAKEUP EXAMS:

You are expected to take the exams during the regularly scheduled class period unless you have my advance permission, which normally requires some relevant documentation. Please note: permission will not be granted to take the final exam early on the grounds that you are leaving town. Do not plan to leave town before the third exam on December 11. Make your travel plans accordingly!

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit [Center for Disability Resources](#). Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

FAITH TRADITION OBSERVANCES:

[Syracuse University's Religious Observances Policy](#) recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions.

Under the policy, students are given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

ORANGE SUCCES:

Orange SUccess is the platform used to help students succeed by providing timely feedback on academic progress. Throughout the semester I may communicate with you about your progress through Orange SUccess, including via Early-semester progress reports and Mid-semester progress reports. You will receive immediate email notification of these reports.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Syracuse University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy also requires students to acknowledge their use of other peoples' language, images or other original creative or scholarly work through appropriate citation. These expectations extend to the new, fast-growing realm of artificial intelligence (AI) as well as to the use of websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam solutions or assignments. Students are required to ask their instructor whether use of these tools is permitted – and if so, to what extent – before using them to complete any assignment or exam. Students are also required to seek advance permission from instructors if they wish to submit the same work in more than one course. Failure to receive this permission in advance may violate the Academic Integrity Policy. Under the policy, instructors who seek to penalize a student for a suspected violation must first report the violation to the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS). Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Instructors must wait to assign a final course grade until a suspected violation is reviewed and upheld or overturned. Upholding Academic Integrity includes abiding by instructors' individual course expectations, which may include the protection of their intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or otherwise share instructors' course materials without permission. Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered, as outlined in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty and instructors, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

In this course, the **minimum** penalty for an academic integrity violation is a zero on the assignment or exam in question. A letter will also be sent to the dean of students. If you are not sure whether what you are doing constitutes a violation of academic integrity, please ask me immediately.

Please note that submitting work written by ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence program counts as a violation.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such it is essential that during your college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides (<https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/>) and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315-443-8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute, <https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/wellness-leadership-institute/>

CLASS SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
Aug 28	Intro Stuff; What Is Life?	
Aug 30	What Is Life?	Fred Feldman, "Life-Functional Theories of Life"
Sep 4	No class – labor day	
Sep 6	What Is Death?	Shelly Kagan, "What Is Death?"
Sep 11	What Are We and Can We Survive Death?	Rebekah Rice, Death and Persistence, Ch 1.

Sep 13	What Are We and Can We Survive Death?	Rice, Ch. 2
Sep 18	What Are We and Can We Survive Death?	Rice, Ch. 3
Sep 20	Can We Survive by Uploading Our Consciousness?	Susan Schneider, "Future Minds: Transhumanism, Cognitive Enhancement and the Nature of Persons"
Sep 25	Review	
Sep 27	Exam #1	
Oct 2	What Makes Death Bad?	Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"
Oct 4	What Makes Death Bad?	Thomas Nagel, "Death"
Oct 9	No Class – Fall break	
Oct 11	Is Death Bad for Animals and Fetuses?	David DeGrazia, "The Harm of Death, Time-Relative Interests, and Abortion"
Oct 16	Is Death Bad for Animals?	Elizabeth Harman, "The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death"
Oct 18	What is the midlife crisis?	Kieran Setiya, "The Midlife Crisis"
Oct 23	How Should We Mourn?	Dan Moller, "Love and Death"
Oct 25	Review	
Oct 30	Exam #2	
Nov 1	Normative ethics	n/a
Nov 6	What Makes Killing Wrong?	Dan Moller, "Killing and Dying"
Nov 8	How Can We Weigh Lives Against Each Other?	Judith Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"
Nov 13	When Must We Save a Life?	Pummer, "The Rules of Rescue," Ch. 1
Nov 15	Do the Numbers Count?	Pummer, "The Rules of Rescue," Ch. 2

Nov 20	Thanksgiving break	
Nov 22	Thanksgiving break	
Nov 27	The All or Nothing Problem	Pummer, "The Rules of Rescue," Ch. 3
Nov 29	Should We Try to Extend Our Lives?	Ezekiel Emanuel, "Why I Hope to Die at 75"; Nick Bostrom, "The Fable of the Dragon Tyrant"
Dec 4		Larry Temkin, "Is Living Longer Living Better?"
Dec 6		TBA
Dec 11	Review	
Dec 14	EXAM #3 (not cumulative) – during scheduled final exam period at 12:45	