



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 399.19
Nature and Fear of Death

Winter 2022
Course Outline

Instructor: Ron Wilburn (“Ron” is OK)
Lectures: Online and Asynchronous
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Land Acknowledgment: The University of Calgary resides upon the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut’ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bears paw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River; the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “Moh’kins’tsis”, which we now call the City of Calgary.

ii’ taa’poh’to’p, the Blackfoot name of the University of Calgary’s Indigenous Strategy, was bestowed and transferred in ceremony by Kainai Elder Andy Black Water on June 21, 2017. The name signifies a place to rejuvenate and re-energize while on a journey. Traditionally, these places are recognized as safe, caring, restful – and offer renewed energy for an impending journey. In a traditional naming ceremony, transitioning into the new name is a journey of transformation towards self-actualization.

Introduction: This is an undergraduate course in philosophy with no pre-requisites. Its concern is with some questions about death, both metaphysical and evaluative: Our metaphysical questions include: (1) What does death consist of when construed as the extinction of the self? (2) What is the self? (3) What is the continuity of the self over time? Our evaluative questions include: (1) Is death an evil for the decedent? (2) Is the fear of death rational? (3) Would immortality be a good thing? (4) What effect should knowledge of our mortality have on the way we live our lives?

Texts: There are two texts you need to purchase for this course.

Both are available through the campus bookstore You can also purchase them online. The Kagen book, for instance, can be purchased in the form of a Kindle edition.

1. *Philosophy and Death: Introductory Readings*, edited by Samantha Brennan and Robert J. Stainton. This is the source of most of our supplementary readings.
2. *Death*, by Shelly Kagen. This book provides a general outline for the lectures and progression of topics.

Beyond these, some supplementary readings are assigned. Most of these are available in the “Readings” module or else linked to this syllabus and the D2L course site, so you need not purchase them.

Finally, there are several films I would like you to watch. I wish that I could incorporate them all into this course in a more accessible way, but this isn’t possible due to copyright considerations. However, you should be able to get them through American Netflix or other legal downloading services. Two of them star that master metaphysician, Arnold Schwarzenegger: *Total Recall* (1990 version), *The Sixth Day* (2000). The third is a more modest, independent, but quite fascinating film: *Man From Earth* (2007). A final film, *Memento*, is one that you must view in order to take the second exam.

Other films which I would like (but do not require) you to look at include *Death: The Ultimate Enigma*, *Near-Death Experiences*, *Near-Death Experiences Change Lives Forever*, *Psychologist Theorizes on Near-Death Experiences*, *Descartes*, *Can Computers Think?* *Camus on the Absurd*. These films are accessible through the “Films on Demand” module located on the “Course Content” page of the WebCampus course site.

Links to additional short web-based video resources are in the body of this syllabus.

Grading: There are approximately twelve (12) online discussion assignments (collectively worth 25% of the course grade). Don’t get confused by the fact that the numbering of these assignments skips from 4 to 8. Your responses to these questions are visible to me as well as to all your classmates the moment you submit them. What I look for in your submissions is a reasonable and honest effort which reflects familiarity with the reading(s) and lecture material. Thus, when I ask you to give responses concerning various matters, I am not merely asking me to give me your opinions (unless this is all that I explicitly ask for in the question). Give me the considered opinions you form after doing the assigned readings and reviewing the relevant lecture material. Any sincere effort you submit will receive full credit, and once I have reviewed your original threads, “sample answers” (which give you a general idea of what I am looking for in your answers) become available for you to peruse in the “Discussion Assignments and Reviews” module. At minimum, you receive five (5) points for submitting an adequate original post. However, additional credit is available for especially thoughtful and substantive postings (more about this below).

There are also three (3) short, multiple essay exams. Each of your exam submissions (collective submissions for all questions taken together) should be equivalent to about ten (10) double-spaced pages, 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins unless otherwise specified (the third of these exams is somewhat shorter than this). All exams are of equal worth (25% of the course grade each). Each of these exams consists of several specific essay questions. There is no final exam as such. You have four hours to take each exam, but there is no “forced completion,” which means that you can start a test, then stop it, and come back to it again later (as long as you don’t spend more than four hours actively working on it online). Exams are taken through the test function. They are not to be written out as papers and submitted to me via email, for instance.

Letter grades will be assigned in accordance with the following scale:

0-45	F	71-75	B-
46-50	D	76-80	B
51-55	D+	81-85	B+
56-60	C-	86-90	A-
61-65	C	91-95	A
66-70	C+	96-100	A+

What do letter grades mean? People have pondered this question from the beginning of time. And I, for one, am not going to pretend that grading is a science. But let's say the following:

- A Range: Excellent exposition, clearly and concisely written, well-argued, and displaying good original input from the student.
- B Range: Good exposition, but lacks clarity and concision, or doesn't have much original input, or offers poor support for essential claims. (For instance, a genuinely excellent expository paper will earn you a B+; a fuzzy but accurate one will earn you a B-.
- C Range: Fails to understand some aspects of the material or is very unclearly written.
- D Range Very problematic in all aspects mentioned above
- F Range: Papers: did not submit a paper; crassly plagiarized material; made no effort to understand the material or read it.

What else to note? I'm not a grammar Nazi, but you must submit work that is intelligible and coherent. Treat the following criteria as guides in your writing (of both case studies and discussion submissions). This is taken from the Berkeley Graduate Website at <https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/grading-intro/before-you-grade/criteria/>

Organization of course: Repeating some of what I say above, for emphasis, the following schedule is organized around a simple organizational scheme. Each week you are asked to

1) Read the assigned material.

2) Then listen to and look at the correlated narrated PowerPoint presentation. In these presentations, I review and elaborate on the materials you have read. In these lectures, PowerPoint slides often contain more material than is covered in the readings. My goal in narration is to summarize the content of each slide as succinctly and smoothly as possible for the benefit of those who prefer a course lecture format. If you find the sound of my droning voice too much to bear, you may skip said voice by simply turning off the narration. However, if you do so, make sure that do so responsibly. To this end, you might want to at least run through some of the narration to see if I review stuff that you already completely understood from your reading. Ideally, I think that it is wise for you to listen to all of my lectures. However, you may use your informed editorial judgment when doing so, especially if you are pressed for time. Note: To use the lecture slides, you need the ability to download and play PowerPoint 2016 slides. You cannot stream the audio from D2L. You must download and play the ppts.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

- Broad knowledge of diverse philosophical issues, problems, traditions, and views
- Deep knowledge of one central area of philosophical inquiry
- Ability to critically digest, interpret, and analyze complex sources
- Ability to write a convincing argument that takes adequate account of alternative positions
- Ability to engage in constructive, respectful, oral and written argumentation

Important Departmental, Faculty and University Information

Academic Accommodations: It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures. The student accommodation policy can be found at ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Student-Accommodation-Policy.pdf.

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Accommodation-for-Students-with-Disabilities-Procedure.pdf. Students needing an Accommodation in relation to their coursework or to fulfil requirements for a graduate degree, based on a protected ground other than disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

Absence or Missed Course Assessments: Students who are absent from class assessments (tests, participation activities, or other assignments) should inform their instructors as soon as possible. If the reason provided for the absence is acceptable, instructors may decide that any arrangements made can take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.

Student Support and Resources: Full details and information about the following resources can be found at ucalgary.ca/current-students/student-services.

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success Centre
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

Academic Advising: If you are a student in the Faculty of Arts, you can speak to an academic advisor in the Arts Students' Centre about course planning, course selection, registration, program progression and more. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/current-students/undergraduate/academic-advising> for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit arts.ucalgary.ca/philosophy. Further academic guidance is available by contacting Jeremy Fantl (Undergraduate Program Director jfantl@ucalgary.ca) or David Dick (Honours Advisor dgdick@ucalgary.ca). If you have questions regarding registration, please email Courtenay Canivet (Undergraduate Program Administrator phildept@ucalgary.ca)

Writing Assessment and Support: The assessment of all written assignments—and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses—is based in part on writing skills. This includes correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), as well as general clarity and organization. Research papers must include a thorough and accurate citation of sources. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services for assistance. For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre,

please visit ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success.

Required Technology: In order to successfully engage in their learning experiences at the University of Calgary, students taking online, remote, and blended courses are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection.
- Most current laptops will have a built-in webcam, speaker and microphone.

Responsible Use of D2L: Important information and communication about this course will be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit <https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it> for how-to information and technical assistance.

All users of D2L are bound by the guidelines on the responsible use of D2L posted here: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/commitment-to-the-responsible-use-of-d2l/>. The instructor may establish additional specific course policies for D2L, Zoom, and any other technologies used to support remote learning. Instructional materials, including audio or video recordings of lectures, may not be posted outside of the course D2L site. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the [University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy](#).

Media Recording: Please refer to the following statement on media recording of students: https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP_FINAL.pdf

Academic Misconduct/Honesty: Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which will be an F on the assignment or an F in the course, and possibly a disciplinary sanction such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html.

Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about referencing, please consult your instructor.

University Policies: The Instructor Intellectual Property Policy is available at ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Intellectual-Property-Policy.pdf

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/access-information-privacy>. The instructor (or TA) must return graded assignments *directly* to the student UNLESS written permission to do otherwise has been provided.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Acceptable-Use-of-Material-Protected-by-Copyright-Policy.pdf>) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>).