7AAN2054 Perspectives on Death and Killing

Syllabus 2016/2017

Credits: 20

Module tutor: Dr David Galloway

Contact: david.galloway@kcl.ac.uk

Office hours: TBC

Time and place: TBC

Assessment:

- Formative assessment: one x 2,000–3,000-word essay, due by the last day of term.
- Summative assessment: one x 4,000-word essay, submission date Wednesday 26th April.

Formative essay questions

1. How, and how convincingly, does Williams argue that an indefinitely protracted life would become unbearable?

2. Motivate, explain, and critically discuss a comparativist view of the badness of death.

3. At what time, or times, is death bad for the one who dies?

4. Motivate, explain, and critically analyse the doctrine of double effect.

5. May we turn the trolley?

6. What relation, if any, holds between the badness of death (when it is bad) and the wrongness of killing (when it is wrong)?

7. Under what circumstances, if any, is suicide morally acceptable?
Teaching pattern: one weekly one-hour lecture and one weekly one-hour seminar/discussion.

For the first five weeks of the course, we will discuss some metaphysical and ethical issues concerning death and its ethical significance. For the final five weeks, we will discuss some ethical problems concerning killing.

Provisional principal readings
Here, in no particular order, is a list of the main texts that will feature prominently in our discussions.

(This article can be downloaded free on line from the Cambridge UP web site. The URL is http://ebooks.cambridge.org/chapter.jsf?bid=CBO9780511621253&cid=CBO9780511621253A012.)


Steven Luper, ed: The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death, CUP 2014

Fred Feldman: Confrontations with the Reaper, OUP 1992; Pleasure and the Good Life, OUP 2004

Thomas Nagel, Mortal Questions, CUP 2013

Thomas Scanlon, Moral Dimensions, Harvard UP 2008

Frances Kamm, Morality, Mortality, 2 vols, OUP 1993/96


Jeff MacMahan, The Ethics of Killing, OUP 2003

Jeff MacMahan, Killing in War, OUP 2009


For each lecture I give a modest amount of core reading. The core readings are all available free on line. (If in doubt, always try a simple Google search, as in, say, ‘Bernard Williams ‘Makropulos Case’

Provisional schedule of lectures with principal readings
Week 1: Some mortal questions
Reading
Thoman Nagel, ‘Death’, ‘War and massacre’, and ‘The absurd’; all in Mortal Questions
Bernard Williams, ‘The Makropulos Case’
Week 2: Death, dying, being dead
Reading

Week 3: ‘Death is nothing to us’
Reading

Week 4: Comparativism 1

Week 5: Comparativism 2--The value of a life
Reading

Week 6: The wrongness of killing
Reading

Week 7: Permissible killing?
Reading
Judith Jarvis Thomson, ‘The trolley problem’ and ‘Turning the trolley’.

Week 8: Doing, allowing, and double effect
Reading

Week 9: Self defence
Reading

Week 10: The wrongness of killing and the badness of death
Reading