

7AAN2054 Perspectives on Death and Killing

Syllabus 2016/2017

Credits: 20

Module tutor: Dr David Galloway

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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.

Bernard Williams: 'The Makropoulos Case: reflections on the tedium of immortality', in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: CUP 1973)

(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: *The Philosophy of Death*, CUP 2009.

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

Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, Penguin 1990

Jeff MacMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, OUP 2003

Jeff MacMahan, *Killing in War*, OUP 2009

Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman, Jens Johansson, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death* (OUP 2013)

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

Steven Luper, *Philosophy of Death*, Chapter 3.

Week 3: 'Death is nothing to us'

Luper, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death*, Chapters 5 and 6.

Week 4: Comparativism 1

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

Reading

Noah Lemos, 'Assessing lives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death*.

Week 6: The wrongness of killing

Reading

John Broome, 'The badness of death and the goodness of life', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*.

Week 7: Permissible killing?

Reading

Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'The trolley problem' and 'Turning the trolley'.

Week 8: Doing, allowing, and double effect

Reading

Alison MacIntyre, 'The doctrine of double effect', in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*;
Thomas Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, Chapter 1 (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP 2008)

Week 9: Self defence

Reading

Kadri Vihvelin, 'Killing in self defence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Life and Death*.

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

Reading

Matthew Hanser, 'The wrongness of killing and the badness of death', in the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*.