

MALS635: Death and Dying

Spring 2021 Professor Alan Fox
Office Hours: T/Th 11am-noon or by appt.
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REQUIRED TEXTS

- ✘ Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*
- ✘ Kubler-Ross: *On Death and Dying*
- ✘ Leary: *Design for Dying*
- ✘ Blackman: *Graceful Exits*
- ✘ Becker: *Denial of Death*
- ✘ Tolstoy: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
(available online at <http://www.classicallibrary.org/tolstoy/ivan/>)
- ✘ Rinbochay/Hopkins: *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*
- ✘ You will also need to access two movies from Amazon, information below

GRADING POLICY

✘ **RESPONSE ESSAYS**

Students will write response essays to the seven materials listed above. These essays are to be 2 - 4 pages long, involving more than just a summary of the material. I am asking you to engage some issue that you find through your reading. They must be emailed to me in Microsoft Word format before each class begins, and you will need to have them handy to refer to in the seminar.

✘ **FINAL PAPER**

Students will write a final paper in the course, with a suggested length of 15-20 pages. You will have to submit a topic by March 24th and a detailed outline by April 21st, and the paper is due on the last day of class. The paper should relate to some theme or material discussed in class, but I will expect you to do outside reading and research as well. Your goal is to formulate a thesis and then defend it.

✘ **CLASS PARTICIPATION**

The class will be run as a seminar, so regular attendance and participation is required. Consistent participation will be noticed and taken into consideration when determining final grades. If you must miss class for some reason you will still be responsible for the work you miss. You will also be expected to be prepared the next time you come to class. This means getting the notes from someone, you should probably reach out to each other in the chat to exchange emails addresses in case you need to get someone's notes. If it becomes obvious at any time that anybody is regularly missing class for any reason, the instructor reserves the right to insist upon a medical or other type of withdrawal in lieu of failure.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will consider a number of philosophical responses to the "problem" of death and dying. Our premise is that there is such a thing as a good death, that many traditional philosophies consider the good life as the one that ends in a good death, and thus the highest practice in life prepares one for a good death. We will not address the question of an afterlife per se, but rather we will focus on the meaning of death and the meaning of a life that ends in death. We will look at representatives of Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Western philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions, and religious viewpoints, from epistemological, phenomenological, ethical, medical, legal, and other cultural perspectives. Students are invited to form their own conclusions and seek their own coherence. We will try to draw on the cultural background of the class to a large extent. In general, emphasis will be placed on critical thinking, clarity, and argumentation. That is, the process is as important as the content.

PLANNED SCHEDULE

#	DATE	TOPIC	READING	FINAL PAPER DEADLINES
1	2/16	Introduction and Overview, Introduction to Plato		
2	2/23	Plato	Introduction, <i>Euthyphro</i> , <i>Apology</i>	
3	3/2	Plato	<i>Crito</i> , <i>Phaedo</i>	
4	3/9	Tibetan Buddhism	<i>Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism</i>	
5	3/16	Tibetan Buddhism	<i>Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism</i>	
6	3/23	Cross-cultural and Historical Perspectives	<i>The Last Dance</i> , ch. 2 (available on Canvas site)	
7	3/30	Kubler-Ross	<i>On Death and Dying</i> , Preface, ch. 1-6	
8	4/6	Kubler-Ross	<i>On Death and Dying</i> , ch. 7-12	Final paper topic due
9	4/13	Literary approaches:	Tolstoy: <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i> http://www.classicallibrary.org/tolstoy/ivan/ MOVIE: IKIRU (available to rent for \$2.99 at Amazon.com)	
10	4/20	Psychoanalytic approaches	Becker: <i>Denial of Death</i> , Preface, ch. 1-6	
11	4/27	Psychoanalytic approaches	Becker: <i>Denial of Death</i> , ch. 7-11	Final paper outline due
12	5/4	A Good Death	Leary, <i>Design for Dying</i> : intros, pt. 1, 2, 3 MOVIE: HAROLD AND MAUDE (available for free on Amazon Prime, or to rent for \$1.99 on Amazon)	
13	5/11	A Good Death	Blackman: <i>Graceful Exits</i>	
14	5/18			FINAL PAPERS DUE