HON 209 **Death, Self and Society** Dr. B. McGrane

Fall 2021 Office: Roosevelt #216

Office Hours: TBA Phone: (714) 997-6564

McGrane@Chapman.edu

Our Death course in its entirety: a highly condensed thumbnail over view:

1. My own death. Principle readings: Morrie Schwartz (Mitch Albom), Leo Tolstoy, Sogyal Rinpoche, Steven Levine, Ikiru (film by Kurosawa). Essay #1.
2. The death of others. Principle readings: Kubler Ross, Atul Gawande, Phillip Aries, John James (grief). Essay #2
3. Death as the foundation of human civilization. Principle reading: Ernest Becker.
4. Death in non-Western views. Principle readings: Sogyal Rinpoche, Thich Nhat Hahn, Steven Levine, Carlos Castaneda. Essay #3 (final)
5. Two Projects: 1. Arrange Your Funeral/Visit a Cemetery; 2. Loss History/Relationship Graph

SYLLABUS

(THIS IS MY ‘TRADITIONAL’ IN-PERSON CLASSROOM SYLLABUS ARRANGED BY BOOKS & TOPICS. ONCE WE ARE “INSIDE” CANVAS FOR A WHILE, THINGS MAY SHIFT A BIT)

**“Everybody knows they’re going to die, but nobody believes it.”** Morrie Schwartz

**“You have 2 lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one.”** Confucius

“**In modern society death is denied rather than prepared for.”** (Chapman Student ’16)

**Required Texts**:

A: FIRST, **THIS SYLLABUS**. Later, all “*Sample Quality Papers*” on our Canvas that I alert you about throughout the semester. (It is vital that you read your classroom peer’s work.)

B) Bernard McGrane – The Un-TV and the 10 MPH Car (Amazon.com prices: $6.00-17.50. We only use a small portion of this text as well as the Inge Bell text, This Book is Not Required, so I recommend using the Lib. Res. Copies or the **digital** **copies on Canvas**.)

C) Inge Bell – This Book Is Not Required (Revised, or 3rd, 4th or 5th Edition) (Amazon.com prices: $2.45-44.95. Again, I recommend Lib. Res. Copies, or the **digital copy on Canvas.)**

1. Leo Tolstoy – The Death of Ivan Illich (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
2. Mitch Albom – Tuesdays with Morrie (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
3. Randy Pausch – The Last Lecture (Recommended only, not required)
4. Jessica Mitford – The American Way of Death (Revised Edition) (digital copy on Canvas)
5. Caitlin Doughty –Smoke Gets in Your Eyes & Other Lessons from the Crematory *(*digital copy on Canvas*)*
6. John James and Russell Friedman – The Grief Recovery Handbook (Revised Edition) (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
7. Philippe Aries – Western Attitudes Towards Death (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
8. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross – On Death and Dying (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
9. Atul Gawande – Being Mortal (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
10. Ernest Becker – The Denial of Death (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
11. Stephen Levine – Who Dies (digital copy on Canvas)
12. Carlos Castaneda – Journey to Ixtlan (digital copy on Canvas)
13. Sogyal Rinpoche – The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)
14. Thich Nhat Hahn – No Death, No Fear, Comforting Wisdom for Life. (**not** on Canvas, must be purchased)

**“Man not only knows he will die, he *is* the consciousness of his death.”** Alexander Kojeve

Recommended Texts:

Recommended: Andrew Holecek- Preparing to Die (digital sections on Canvas)

Recommended: Samuel Scheffler – Death and the Afterlife (on Canvas)

Recommended: Jana Baldridge Vargas (former student of the class) – The Promise of Death, The Passion of Life (Available on our Canvas)

Recommended: Reader: “Bardo” [Library Reserve, also on Canvas]

Recommended: Joan Didion – The Year of Magical Thinking

1. Philippe Aries – The Hour of Our Death
2. Michel Foucault – Madness and Civilization
3. Norbert Elias – The Loneliness of Dying
4. R. Kastenbaum – Death, Society and Human Experience: Is There Life After Death
5. Jacques Choron – Death and Western Thought
6. Richard Selzer – Mortal Lessons
7. Audrey Gordon – They Need to Know, How to Teach Children About Death
8. Philip Kapleau – The Wheel of Death
9. Da Free John – Easy Death
10. Trungpa and Freemantle – The Tibetan Book of the Dead
11. Herman Feifel – The Meaning of Death
12. Edwin Schneidman – Voices of Death
13. George Bataille – Death and Sensuality
14. Colin Wilson – Afterlife
15. Avery Weisman – The Coping Capacity
16. Joel Whitton – Life Between Life
17. Stephen Levine – Healing Into Life and Death
18. John Robbins – Diet for a New America
19. P. Sargent, I. Watson – Afterlives
20. Marie-Louise von Franz – On Dreams and Death
21. Robert Bosnak – A Little Course in Dreams

Course Statement:

*“If a man has learned to think, no matter what he may be thinking about he is always also thinking of his own death.” Tolstoy*

*“The fact is, those who apply themselves correctly to philosophy are simply and solely practicing dying and preparing for death…” Socrates (Plato)*

*“Today approximately 200,000 people died…. We live in a society conditioned to deny death. It may be for this reason that many, at the time of their dying, feel so confused and guilty. Like sex, death has been whispered about behind closed doors. We feel guilty for dying, not knowing how to live.” Stephen Levine*

*“How can anyone feel so important when we know death is stalking us?… The thing to do when you’re impatient is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death.” Don Juan (Castaneda)*

*“Our greatest fear is that when we die, we will become nothing. Many of us believe that our entire existence is only a life span beginning the moment we are born or conceived and ending the moment we die. We believe that we are born from nothing and that when we die we become nothing. And so we are filled with fear of annihilation.” Thich Nhat Hahn*

*“Remembering that we will die reminds us to live.” Michaela Brown (student ’08)*

We live in a society conditioned to deny death. We are conditioned to relate to it indirectly, in terms of hope and fear, hope in our survivorship, that we can postpone or avoid death, and fear that we will not. Historically, when the Western world was “flat” we lived in fear of exploring it because we might “fall off”; when it became “round” we became encouraged and empowered to explore it. Similarly, today, though we subconsciously fear that we are all to be “victims” of death, we are not yet “explorers” of death. This course will be an exploration of and an expedition into that dark, uncharted, tabooed territory conventionally labeled “death”. Sociologically speaking, what are the prescribed social attitudes toward “my own death” and how and why are these prescriptions supported and maintained? What social functions do they serve? Existentially speaking, what are the possible available attitudes toward “my own death” (for with death, as with suffering, it is not whether one dies and suffers or not, but how one lives one’s suffering, how one lives one’s dying). What is the relationship between one’s idea of death and one’s idea of oneself, between awareness of mortality and awareness of identity?

How do humans learn of death (a philosophical-epistemological question and also a psychological question of child development)? What is death? Is it a natural phenomenon or does it require explanation in non-natural terms (a metaphysical and religious problem)? What does the history of death, of the idea of death, look like? Historically, when did the encounter with the finality of death become more socially certain than a transition to immortality (when death was just a change in life-style)? What of the atomic and ecological situations? How has the concept of death as the end of my world been affected by apocalypse as the end of the world?

How has contemporary society provided us with a framework to ignore death? How has it trained us to cultivate a fantasy mentality, a perpetual forgetfulness towards the realities of old age, death and dying. When and how did death become denied and repressed? Is it possible to re-discover the ordinariness of death? Gurdjieff has Beelzebub remark in All and Everything. “The Sole means now for saving beings of the planet Earth would be to implant again into their essences a new organ, an organ like Kundabuffer, but this time of such properties that every one of these unfortunates during the process of existence should constantly sense and be cognizant of the inevitability of his death as well as of the death of everyone upon whom his eyes or attention rests.”

Are there significant variations in the experience and interpretation of death from epoch to epoch (an historical question), from culture to culture (an anthropological question)? Are there great differences in the quality of death? (How a society conceives of and treats death deeply reflects how it conceives of life.) Are there great differences in the awareness and fear of death from epoch to epoch (historically viewed), from culture to culture (anthropologically viewed)? If so, how are these variations to be explained? What specific social conditions tend to heighten the awareness of death? The denial of death? The fear of death? The ordinariness of death? How has death-related behavior, mourning customs, burial rites (burying, burning, embalming, etc.) changed historically?

“All disease is a socially created reality.” (Ivan Illich) What does it mean to say disease or, for that matter, death is socially created? We will examine the medicalization of death and disease perception and the medicalization of the struggle against death, as well as the possibilities of a de-medicalization of these phenomena. We will examine to what degree we are prisoners of the medical ideology in which we were brought up and socialized. What is the value of our medical values and how well founded is our overwhelming belief in the progress and superiority of modern medicine?

**NOW A WORD FROM CHAPMAN:**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*CHAPMAN GENERIC PORTION FOR ALL CHAPMAN SYLLABI\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

The Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy, Chapman University’s students with Disabilities Policy, and Equity and Diversity policy has been modified. The following is the revised text:

**Chapman University’s Academic Integrity Policy:**

Chapman University is a community of scholars which emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith.  Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university.

**Chapman University’s Students with Disabilities Policy:**

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Disability Services Office, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

**Equity and Diversity**

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlines in Chapman’s Harassment and Discrimination Policy: <http://tinyurl.com/CUHarassment-Discrimination>. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

**Course Learning Objectives for Course on Death**

At the conclusion of this course each student will be competent to discuss and authentically apply the values of the existentialist teachings about “my own death” and human mortality; the psychological stages involved in the dying process; the changing experience of dying in the Western world from the Middle Ages to the present; the processes of grieving and loss during all stages of life and hospice; the different views of death in a variety of non-Western indigenous cultures as well as some of the major teachings in the Eastern Paths of Liberation (especially the Tibetan).

**Learning Objectives**

Students will display the ability to state and support a thesis; apply knowledge of critical reasoning, accurately interpret philosophic, literary and scientific sources, and clearly communicate a balanced account in writing. They will further display an ability to construct and analyze complex arguments, and distinguish good reasoning from bad as well as demonstrate knowledge of some of the most important figures and theories in the History of Reflections on Death and also demonstrate knowledge about and skill in logical reasoning. Further they will demonstrate an ability to understand and critically evaluate philosophies from cultures and world views besides one’s own, and see our culture from outside perspectives

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*END OF GENERIC PORTION OF SYLLABUS\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Optimistic Calendar and Detailed Road Map**:

**(You are absolutely responsible for *everything that occurs in class whether you are present or not.*  Many assignments *only given orally* (I suggest you get 2 classmates to contact in case you miss class). For in-person class, all cell-phones and computers must be put away. This syllabus is a guide for an educational journey, not a legal document. Please relate to it accordingly.**

Week 1 - (August 31) –*1ST* ***READING***: THIS (rather complex and ‘busy’) SYLLABUS; then Inge Bell – This Book Is Not Required, Chs. Grades, Support Your Local Teacher, An Academic Question, Questions of Academic Integrity.

*2ND*: THE **SEQUENCE** OF YOUR READING SCHEDULE—1st Tolstoy – Death of Ivan Illich (read the complete short story *AFTER WHICH* read Chs. 5, “Models” in Levine – Who Dies, *followed then by* Levine’s Preface and Chs. 1. Then pgs. 3-55 in Sogyal Rinpoche – The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying;)

INSTRUCTIONS RELATING TO THE McGrane book, The Un-TV and 10MPH Car: For all of the McGrane book and the “exploriments” that we as a class will be doing, the *proper procedure* is FIRST you *do* the exploriment yourself and THEN you read about it in The Un-TV.

INSTRUCTIONS RELATING TO THE James and Friedman book, The Grief Recovery Handbook entire (begin looking at it now. We will be reading the entire book *over the course of the semester especially when you are assigned* your “Lost History Graph” and your “Relationship Graph.”) Also recommended: Joan Didion’s The Year of Magical Thinking.

**Optional** Course READER: “Bardo” Chs. 1-9; Pascal, Montaigne, Dickey, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Huxley, Malinowski, Freud, On Heidegger; Mark and Dan Jury – Gramps, A Man Ages and Dies (This book of photograpy is on Library Reserve Only)

**In Class Films** – *The Karmen Line*; Akira Kurosawa’s *Ikiru,* Part 1

*"It sounds paradoxical: by excluding death from our life, we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death in our life, we enlarge and enrich it."*— Etty Hillesum in *God-Birthing* by Michael Dwinell

ON IGNORANCE AND EGO

There could be no bigger mistake than to think that ignorance is somehow dumb and stupid, or passive and lacking in intelligence. On the contrary, it is shrewd and cunning, versatile and ingenious in the games of deception. Ignorance is the binding factor in the development of ego, but it also has a subtle relationship with the basic intelligence of awakened nature. Ignorance is not solid but is based on sparks or flashes of ignorance operating on some ground. Between two sparks of ignorance is the ground of intelligence on which this process of ignorance is operating. Sometimes, ignorance forgets for a moment to maintain itself, so that the awakened state comes through. So an awaked, meditative state of mind occurs spontaneously when, occasionally, the efficiency of ego’s administration breaks down (Chogyam Trungpa)

Week 2 - (Sept 7) – Reading – Continue reading from the above Week 1 assignments and also begin Mitch Albom – Tuesdays With Morrie (entire);

Jessica Mitford. The American Way of Death pp. ix-xix; 3-101; 188-206; 256-275

Caitlin Doughty. Smoke Gets in Your Eyes, and Other Lessons from the Crematory. Required selections on our Canvas.

(You will be reading these *as background context* for doing your Project #1: arrange a funeral and visit a cemetery)

Today, the average North American traditional funeral costs between**$7,000** and **$10,000**. This price range includes the services at the funeral home, burial in a cemetery, and the installation of a headstone. Aug 29, 2015 (Google search)

**In Class Films** – *Ikiru*, Parts 2, 3; 20/20 Interview with Morrie Schwartz; YouTube Randy Pausch- The Last Lecture; (I’d also recommend the book, The Last Lecture )

Film - Greg Palmer*: Death-The Trip of a Life Time*; *Wit*

A wave in the sea, seen in one way, seems to have a distinct identity, an end and a beginning, a birth and a death. Seen in another way, the wave itself doesn’t really exist but is just the behavior of water, “empty” of any separate identity but “full” of water. So when you really think about the wave, you come to realize that it is something that has been made temporarily possible by wind and water, and is dependent on a set of constantly changing circumstances. You also realize that every wave is related to every other wave. [Morrie Schwartz, on ‘the wave’ theory of life/death]

Week 3 - (Sept 14) – Reading – Continue reading as above. (Highly recommended short book from a former student of this class, Jana Baldridge Vargas – The Promise of Death, The Passion of Life (digital copy on Canvas)

**THE WORLD IS A GREAT FAMILY**

The moral teaching of individualism with all its significant corollaries is very fine indeed, but we must remember that the individual is nonexistent when he is isolated from other individuals and cut off from the group to which he belongs, whether the group be biological or political or cosmological. Mathematically stated, the number one can never be one, never be itself, unless it is related to other numbers which are infinite. The existence of a single number by itself is unthinkable. Morally or spiritually, this means that the existence of each individual, whether or not s/he is conscious of the fact, owes something to an infinitely expanding and all-enwrapping net of loving relationship, which takes up not only every one of us but everything that exists. The world is a great family and we, each one of us, are its members. The Awakening of Zen by D. T. Suzuki, pages 66–67

Week 4 - (Sept 21) – Reading – As Above. MID-TERM #1 INTEGRATIVE ESSAY DUE Sept 23 PROJECT #1 DUE Sept 30th.

.

Week 5 - (Sept 28) – Reading – Kubler-Ross, On Death & Dying (entire); Aries – Western Attitudes Towards Death (entire); Atul Gawande-- Being Mortal (entire). READER: *Optional* “Bardo”: Chs. 12, Kubler-Ross pieces; Selzer, Tisdale, (Chps. 10-11).

We understand death for the first time when he puts his hand upon one whom we love. -Madame De Stael, writer (22 Apr 1766-1817)

**In class films** – A Family in Grief; Some Babies Die; Time Flies When You’re Alive; Death-The Physician’s Perspective; Facing Death; Being Mortal; Pioneers of Hospice; Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Men come and they go and they trot and they dance, and never a word about death. All well and good. Yet when death does come—to them, their wives, their children, their friends—catching them unawares and unprepared, then what storms of passion overwhelm them, what cries, what fury, what despair! . . .To begin depriving death of its greatest advantage over us, let us adopt a way clean contrary to that common one; let us deprive death of its strangeness, let us frequent it, let us get used to it; let us have nothing more often in mind than death. . . . We do not know where death awaits us: so let us wait for it everywhere…*To practice death is to practice freedom. A man who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave.*

MONTAIGNE (1533-92)

Week 6 - (Oct 5) – Reading – Same As Above. (Kubler-Ross, Aries, Gawande)

Week 7 - (Oct 12) – Reading – Same As Above. (Kubler-Ross, Aries, Gawande)

Week 8 - (Oct 19) – Reading – Same As Above – MID-TERM #2 – INTEGRATIVE ESSAY DUE Oct 21.

***Very few beings really seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask.*** *On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds – justifications, confirmations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on.* ***To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind. The answer may annihilate*** the ***question and the questioner****.”*

– Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*

Week 9 - (Oct 26) – Reading – Becker, The Denial of Death (pgs. 1-125)

(Together with 15 Min TED talk: “The 4 stories we tell ourselves about death.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB7xs7UpIfY>. Published 12/12/13 This is closely related to Becker’s ‘denial of death’ argument and the perspective of “terror management” that we will see in the documentary inspired by Becker called *Flight from Death* ( In the TED talk, the philosopher Stephen Cave begins with a dark but compelling question: When did you first realize you were going to die? And even more interestingly: Why do we humans so often resist the inevitability of death? Cave explores four narratives -- common across civilizations -- that we tell ourselves "in order to help us manage the terror of death.");

McGrane, The Un-TV, pgs. 259-338 in connection with our “eat/shit/kill” exploriment.

Films – Earthlings; The Animal Film; Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality

Week 10 - (Nov 2) – Reading – As Above and Thich Nhat Hahn – No Death, No Fear (selections on Canvas) Sogyal Rinpoche – The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying (pgs. 56-256); Carlos Castaneda – Journey to Ixtlan (selections on Canvas); Steven Levine (selections on Canvas)

**PERSPECTIVES ON MULTIPLE BIRTHS**

*After all, it is no more surprising to be born twice than it is to be born once.*

VOLTAIRE

“If we have lived before,” I’m often asked, “why don’t we remember it?” But why should the fact that we cannot remember our past lives mean that we have never lived before? After all, experiences—of our childhood, or of yesterday, or even of what we were thinking an hour ago—were vivid as they occurred, but the memory of them has almost totally eroded, as though they had never taken place. If we cannot remember what we were doing or thinking last Monday, how on earth do we imagine it would be easy, or normal, to remember what we were doing in a previous lifetime. (SOGYAL RINPOCHE)

“I died as a mineral and became a plant,

I died as a plant and rose to animal,

I died as animal and I was Man.

Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?

Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar

With angels bless’d; but even from angelhood

I must pass on: all except God doeth perish.

When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,

I shall become what no mind e’er conceived.

Oh, let me not exist! For Non-existence

Proclaims in organ tones,

To Him we shall return.

RUMI.

Week 11 - (Nov 9) – Continue Reading – Same As Above (Castaneda, Sogyal Rinpoche, Thich Nhat Hahn, Steven Levine)

RECOMMENDED: Andrew Holecek – Preparing to Die and Samuel Scheffler – Death and the Afterlife

Week 12 - (Nov 16) – Required Reading – Stephen Levine – Who Dies (pgs. vii-100, 233-291 selections on Canvas); Carlos Castaneda – Journey to Ixtlan (selections on our Canvas); “Bardo” Recommended– The Wisdom of the West and the Wisdom of the East, (Chp. 14)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*THANKSGIVING BREAK\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Week 13 - (Nov 30th) – Continue Reading – Same As Above (Castaneda, Sogyal Rinpoche, Thich Nhat Hahn, Steven Levine,)

Week 14 - (Dec 7th) – Reading – Same As Above (Castaneda, Sogyal Rinpoche, Thich Nhat Hahn, Steven Levine)

FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM DUE Scheduled exam date.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**:

**2 COPIES** OF ALL TAKE HOME ESSAYS MUST BE SUBMITTED. ONE PAPER COPY PHYSICALLY IN CLASS AND ONE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY *TO OUR* ***CANVAS ASSIGNMENTS, TURNITIN.COM****.* --NO CREDIT GIVEN IF THESE PROCEDURES ARE NOT FOLLOWED. For the in class essays your name *will not go on the front as usual but rather on the back of the last page.*

Warning: Safari really won't work with submissions to Turnitin.  The item (Word or pdf) will SEEM to upload, so a student is fooled.  But when the student (or teacher) goes to Turnitin later, the item is NOT there. *Chrome and Firefox DO work with TurnItin.*

1. Mid-Term #1 take home essay – (*20% of grade*)
2. Mid-Term #2 take home essay – (*20% of grade*)
3. Final take home essay – (*20% of grade*)
4. Project #1: First read sections in: The American Way of Death and Smoke Gets in Your Eyes then; (a) Call and visit—not merely online--a “funeral home” and find out all the details for arranging a funeral (preferably your own). Find out the least expensive funeral you could arrange. *NOTE—BECAUSE OF PANDEMIC CONCERNS WE WILL MOST PROBABLY NOT DO THIS PHYSICALLY IN PERSON.* (b) Also, please visit a cemetery. Arrange to experience this alone even if you go with a group. Spend at least half an hour and “see what you can see.” More details and instructions provided in class. Results should be typed up: 1 to 2 typed pages. (*10% of grade)*
5. Project #2: First read James and Friedman’s The Grief Recovery Handbook . Then construct your personal Loss History Graph and Relationship Graph. More details and instructions provided in class. Results will be typed up: 1-?? pages. (*15 % of grade*)
6. Various “exploriments” will be assigned from time to time. (15*% of grade*)
7. Any “extra-credit” papers, projects, experiments, film-responses, etc., happily accepted.
8. To work on and improve your reading and writing skills, I recommend you use Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg, How to Read a Book by Mortimer Adler, and Ira Progoff’s At a Journal Workshop.
9. Categories of evaluating take-home integration essays: a) power of integrating theme, continuity, and comprehensiveness; b) use of materials, range and depth of reference; c) creativity, boldness and originality; d) writing style, communication skillfulness.

**Death, Grief and Loss Dr. B. McGrane**

**COURSE READER: BARDO**

Pg.

1. Blaise Pascal - Man’s Disproportion (from Pascal’s Pensées) 4

2. M. Montaigne - That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die (from Essays) 7

3. James Dickey - Falling 17

4. Fydor Dostoevsky - Death as a Certainty (from The Idiot) 21

5. Jean Paul Sartre - The Wall 23

6. Aldous Huxley - Death Scene (from Island) 33

7. B. Malinowski - Death and the Reintegration of the Group 46

8. S. Freud -Our Attitude Towards Death 50

9. On Heidegger’s Analysis of Death and Dasein:

a. Alan Paskow - The Meaning of My Own Death 57

b. William Smoot - The Social Dimension of Death Anxiety 67

c. Kenneth Bryson - Being and Human Death 70

10. Richard Selzer - The Corpse (from Mortal Lessons, Notes on the Art

of Surgery) 75

11. Sallie Tisdale - The Sacred and the Dead—Autopsies, Embalming,

and the Spirit 82

12. a. Kubler-Ross - Talks with Students at Laguna Beach 90

b. Kubler-Ross - Playboy Interview on Near Death Experiences 94

c. Rosenbaum - Critique of Kubler-Ross: Turn on, Tune in, Drop dead 114

13. Ernest Becker and Sam Keen - Death Bed Interview 123

14. The Wisdom of the West (from Great Books of the Western World)

a. Life and Death 131

b. Immortality 136

15. The Wisdom of the East

a. Philip Kapleau - The Wheel of Death 142

b. Judith Lief - On the Tibetan Book of the Dead 156

c. Antonio Wood - Matters of Life and Death 158

d. Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche - Karma and Rebirth; on the Tibetan Book

of the Dead: Guiding the Dead 159

e. Da Free John - Easy Death 194

f. Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche - The Tibetan Book of the Dead 214

16. Animals, Death, and Diet

a. John Robbins - Diet for a New America (sections) 228

b. Peter Singer - Ethics and Animals 240

c. Harriet Schliefer - Images of Death in Life 246

17. Orange County: The cost of Leaving Chart 252

18. Donald Richie - IKIRU (from The Films of Akira Kurosawa) 253

19. S. Weimer, F. Lu - IKIRU and Personal Transformation 264

**SYLLABUS SUPPLEMENT #1**

I. *Tolstoy related novels and works*: Herman Broch - The Death of Virgil (“Broch’s Death of Virgil, the only fiction to move any distance inward from Joyce, concentrates its fantastic means of realization and expression on a single vanishing point, the instant of the passage into death, of the momentary transition into what cannot be narrated because it lies a breath beyond language.” George Steiner, Language and Silence); Thomas Mann - Death in Venice; Simone de Beauvoir - A Very Easy Death; James Agee - A Death in the Family; John Guenther - Death Be Not Proud.

II. “I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.” Mark Twain

“Man sacrifices his health in order to make money, then sacrifices his money in order to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as though he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.” The Dalai Lama

Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon. -Susan Ertz, author (1894-1985)

**SLOGANS TO WORK WITH:**

**SECTION 1: EXISTENTIALISM AND MORTALITY; IVAN ILLICH ET AL.**

1. “I’m not afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” (Woody Allen)

2. “Death destroys man, but the idea of death saves him.” (E.M. Forster)

3. “The fear of death shapes a man’s life long before the fact of death destroys it.” (Schroeder)

4. “One can no more look steadily at death than at the sun.” (La Rochefoucauld)

5. “It is not that knowledge of death is repressed, but that the awareness of death is superficial.” (Freud)

5a. “Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators. Hence at bottom no one believes in his own death, or to put the same thing in another way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality. “ (Freud)

5b. “Lives are spoiled and made rotten by the sense that death is distant and irrelevant.” (Walter Kaufman)

6. “Everyone is immortal...until they die.” “In this class we try to practice being mortal...until we die.” (Eric Nusbaum)

7. “Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. Learning how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint.” (Montaigne)

8. The anti-existentialist approach: “So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.” (Epicurus). Or, a more modern statement: “A live body and a dead body contain the same number of particles. Structurally there’s no discernible difference. Life and death are unquantifiable abstracts. Why should I be concerned...” (Dr. Manhatten, Watchmen)

9. “Does facing one’s death give to one’s life a special dimension that is absent in those who suppress the fact that they will die?” (Paskow)

10. “Angst” (Heidegger): We are not cultivating a feeling regarding nothingness and annihilation, rather we are uncovering a feeling already there.

11. Death teaches us to become who we are. As Thoreau said about his Walden experiment: “I went into the woods to taste directly of the marrow of life itself, undistracted by anything. I wanted to see life itself directly so that I would know what it truly was. Why? Because I did not want to live what was not life, living is too dear.” Stephen Levine: “You have to let go of who you think you are to become who you really are.”

12. Illich and Watanabe see themselves through the eyes of society. Illich and Watanabe lived life by the “instruction manual” they were given by their culture at their birth. They never exceeded the manufacturer’s specifications for performance. By following the directions of society Illich and Watanabe didn’t live their lives, they “behaved” them. (Chuck Post, former student)

13. “The meaning is that Watanabe has discovered himself though DOING... he behaved as though he believed that it is action alone which matters; that a man is not his thoughts, nor his wishes, nor his intentions, but is simply what he does.” (Donald Richie) A man IS what she DOES. To be is to do.

14. Rather than living our lives unconsciously, or living our lives based merely on the pleasure-principle, our own death engages us in a “re-evaluation of all values”. (Nietzsche)

15. Heidegger: We don’t experience being-at-an-end but rather we experience being-toward-the-end. Wittgenstein: Death is not an event in the world. “...at death the world does not alter but comes to an end. Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience it. Our life has no end in just the way our visual field has no limits.” (Tractatus)

16. Ted Rosenthal (the poet of the film “How could I not be among you”): “Get glass in your feet if you must people—but take off your shoes.” Stephen Levine: “To open to our original nature, to the truth of being, we must stop postponing death...Life becomes immense when we start recognizing that there is no assurance that we will live out this day.”

17. “The function of art is to make understood that which in the form of argument would be incomprehensible.” (Leo Tolstoy)

18. IF YOU REMEMBER DEATH, YOU REMEMBER LIFE. IF YOU FORGET DEATH, YOU FORGET LIFE. TO DENY DEATH IS TO DENY LIFE.

19. IF LIFE IS SO PRECIOUS, WHY THEN DO WE TAKE IT SO FOR GRANTED?

**SECTION 2: THE HISTORY OF DEATH IN THE WEST: ARIES**

1. 500 years ago, death was “tamed”: death and life coexisted peacefully.

2. In familiar death, the dying sought to be present to it, present to the experience itself. (Contrast to Woody Allen, above)

3. “During the second half of the Middle Ages...death became the occasion when man was most able to reach an awareness of himself.” (Aries)

4. Death has been transformed into the opposite of what it was five hundred years ago. Historically we have become unfamiliar with death.

5. “There was a time when death was a part of man’s everyday being...It seems to me that life was appreciated more when death was a part of life.” (Barry Klein)

6. Modern man has lost his faith in his ability to die.

7. “It is a great question whether or not the piety and dignity with which death was met in the old religious traditions, and by the unbelievers and half-believers who lived within these traditions and shared many of their moral attitudes, can in the end persist without a belief in the survival of bodily death.” (J. M. Cameron)

**SECTION 3: THE PROCESSES OF DYING; KUBLER-ROSS, GAWANDE,**

1. “The more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death. How is this possible?” (Kubler-Ross). There is an inverse ratio between medical technology and medical caring: as the technology expands caring contracts. With advanced technology comes increased denial.

2. People who are about to die should not be feared and avoided but talked to, listened to, interacted with. The way to learn about death is by interacting with it.

3. Death is a natural part of life. Our attitudes toward it and our fear of it are not.

4. Because we fear our own death, we tend to shy away from those who are dying.

5. We, as individuals, can meaningfully talk to others about their death only if we have already (to some degree) faced and dealt with our own. Once we deal with our own death, we are free from avoidance.

6. People need to be allowed to experience their own deaths so they can die as mentally healthy individuals, without suicide and without psychosis.

7. In regards of counseling the dying, all therapy is self-therapy.

8. “Education makes you humble; it doesn’t make you proud.” (Kubler-Ross)

9. “The belief has long died that suffering here on earth will be rewarded in heaven. Suffering has lost its meaning...If we are no longer rewarded in heaven for our suffering, then suffering becomes purposeless in itself.” (Kubler-Ross). “What really arouses indignation against suffering is not suffering as such but the senselessness of suffering: but for the Christian who has interpreted a whole mysterious machinery of salvation into suffering...[there was never] any such thing as senseless suffering.” (Nietzsche)

10. We kill in order to avoid the reality and facing of our own death.

11. “Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die.” (Bumper sticker).

“He who dies with the most toys is still dead.” (Bumper sticker).

**SECTION 4: NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES, LIFE AFTER LIFE: MOODY ET AL.**

1. “I thought I was dead, and I wasn’t sorry that I was dead, but I just couldn’t figure out where I was supposed to go...My God, I’m dead! I can’t believe it! Because you never really believe, I don’t think, fully that you’re going to die. It’s always something that’s going to happen to the other person, and although you know it you really never believe it deep down...” (in Moody)

2. “It’s not denominational religion that counts, but basic spirituality—I found that God was not interested in my theology.” (in Moody)

3. “You can’t know what you don’t know.” Dianne Morrissey

4. The N.D.E. (near death experience) is so reassuring that it allows persons to more wholly focus on this life, on here and now. (Moody)

5. Student: “When you’re dead you’re dead. It’s forever...” Teacher: “Why do you think death is permanent? Everything in the cosmos is impermanent, everything changes. Why do you think death is different?” Nothing is solid, death included.

6. In many of the images and stories of the afterworld, the dead person will be walking down a lovely garden or palace and suddenly a tiger or beast will jump out and terrorize the person. “Even dying doesn’t cure the fear of death.” (Stephen Levine)

7. Death is just a change in lifestyle.

**SECTION 5: GRIEF AND THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS, JAMES & FRIEDMAN**

1. “Grieving is the most misunderstood and neglected growth process a person can go through.” (James and Friedman)

2. “We live in a society that doesn’t educate us to deal with loss but rather teaches us how to acquire and hold on to things.” “We’re taught how to acquire things, not how to lose them.” (James and Friedman)

3. “It is not surprising that many people try to deal with their pain by using their intellect rather than expressing their feelings.” (James and Friedman)

4. “Every grief experience not dealt with has a cumulative opposing effect on your aliveness and spontaneity. It’s this accumulation of grief that has kept life from being the happy and joyous experience you want it to be.” (James and Friedman)

**VARIOUS AND RANDOM ADDENDA:**

**ON THE DEATH CLASS ITSELF** **- A Student Reflects**

This class examines the way we deal with death in our society. Ironically, the existence of this class in itself shows us how our society deals with death. As investigators of the “sociology of death” we want to learn how our culture deals with it. From this we can then better cope with the death that surrounds (or is hidden from) us every day. We investigate this phenomenon from within the “Church of Reason”. And we do this by reading books. Books that are written by people who have dealt with the death and dying of others. By reading we have removed ourselves from direct experience. We learn exactly how our society deals with death without seeing that we are doing nothing difference from the rest of society. I think the experiments, discussion sections, and journals transcend this “Church of Reason” armchair approach. AS INDIVIDUALS WE CAN’T LEARN TO DEAL WITH DEATH WITHOUT DEALING WITH DEATH. (Vladimer Drndarski, ‘89)

Dr. McGrane,  
  
I found this passage from **The Fire Next Time** ( 1963) by James Baldwin while surfing the internet. As a former *Death, Self and Society* student I immediately recognized the theme and thought it could be useful for you in future classes...  
  
"Behind what we think of as the Russian menace lies what we do not wish to face, and what white Americans do not face when they regard a Negro: reality — the fact that life is tragic. Life is tragic simply because the earth turns and the sun inexorably rises and sets, and one day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the last, last time. Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. It seems to me that we ought to rejoice in the fact of death — ought to decide, indeed, to earn one’s death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. One is responsible for life: It is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we shall return. One must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible, for the sake of those who are coming after us…It is the responsibility of free men to trust and to celebrate what is constant — birth, struggle, and death are constant, and so is love, though we may not always think so — and to apprehend the nature of change, to be able and willing to change. I speak of change not on the surface but in the depths — change in the sense of renewal. But renewal becomes impossible if one supposes things to be constant that are not — safety, for example, or money, or power. One clings then to chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope — the entire possibility — of freedom disappears."  
Best,  
Nathan Zencey ‘09

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY:

The most important scientific revolutions all include, as their only common feature, the dethronement of human arrogance from one pedestal after another of previous convictions about our centrality in the cosmos. -Stephen Jay Gould, paleontologist, biologist, author (1941-2002)

August 31

Switch on the television or glance at the newspaper: You will see death everywhere. Yet, did the victims of those plane crashes and car accidents expect to die? They took life for granted, as we do. How often do we hear stories of people whom we know, or even friends, who died unexpectedly? We don’t even have to be ill to die: Our bodies can suddenly break down and go out of order, just like our cars. We can be quite well one day, then fall sick and die the next

***O Drop***

by Rumi (1207–1273)

Listen, O drop, give yourself up without regret,

and in exchange gain the Ocean.

Listen, O drop, bestow upon yourself this honor,

and in the arms of the Sea be secure.

Who indeed should be so fortunate?

An Ocean wooing a drop!

In God’s name, in God’s name, sell and buy at once!

Give a drop, and take this Sea full of pearls.

2 pedagogical statements, fyi :

“Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one's self-esteem. That is why young children, before they are aware of their own self-importance, learn so easily; and why older persons, especially if vain or important, cannot learn at all.” -Thomas Szasz, author, professor of psychiatry (15 Apr 1920-2012)

“Students learn plenty; they just don’t learn the stuff presented by teachers in classrooms. Most classroom material is forgotten immediately; students even boast about it.” (Susan Blum, *“I Love Learning; I Hate School. An Anthropology of College*. Cornell U. Press, 2016)

**THERE ARE NO NEW IDEAS. ONLY NEW WAYS OF MAKING THEM FELT**

We are not separate individual trundling along a solitary trajectory to death, as Heidegger seemed to suggest in **Being and Time** (1927). From our months in the womb to the moment of our death, we inhabit spaces formed by and shared with other people. (John Gray, NYRof B, 10/12/’17, pg23)