

College Seminar 23101-15
MW 2:20-3:35
Fall 2020

Prof. Robert E. Norton
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Zoom Office Hours
M, W 3:40-4:30
& by appt.

DEATH



This Course

Death. The end of life. It is the inescapable, inexplicable fate that awaits us all. No facet of human experience is untouched by death, it is a constant, central subject in art, literature, philosophy, religion, history. Death is omnipresent, pervasive, ineluctable—yet many feel uncomfortable talking or even thinking about it, push it away from their minds, pass over it in silence, dread, or fear. In this course, we will confront death directly through some of the greatest works humanity has produced, by Thucydides, Plato, Seneca, Boccaccio, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Mozart, Schubert, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Freud, Camus, and Ingmar Bergman.

College Seminar

The College Seminar is a unique one-semester course experience shared by all sophomores who have decided to major in the College of Arts and Letters. The

course offers students an introduction to the diversity and distinctive focus of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame. Specific sections of the College Seminar vary in their topics and texts, but all feature an interdisciplinary approach, commitment to engaging important questions, employment of major works, and emphasis on the development of oral skills.

Attendance and Participation

Given the oral-intensive nature of the course, and given that the majority of the grade you will receive will reflect your ability to communicate your thoughts clearly and effectively, it is **imperative** that you attend every class meeting. While an excellent attendance record will be rewarded, any unexcused absences (without documentation from your coach, your band director, your doctor, etc.) will affect your grade negatively. This attendance policy includes days before and after holidays and vacations. You should inform me in advance of unavoidable absences. For every unexcused absence your final grade will be lowered one step (e.g. A to A-, B+ to B, B- to C+).

Homework and Assignments

In order for the class discussions to be fruitful and well-grounded, we will be reading a substantial amount throughout the course of the semester. It is therefore **extremely important** that you come to class prepared: i.e. that you have read the **entire** assignment for class that day, if possible made notes or the like, and thought about the text before class. And given the pace of the semester, it is likewise **crucial** that you keep up with the reading; falling behind will only add to the reading burden and make it difficult, if not possible, to catch up.

In addition, there will be an **Oral Presentation** once a week by each participant of the class on the topic of that week or day. The precise nature of the topic of the presentation is to be determined in advance in consultation with me. The presentation can be given extemporaneously or from a written text (former preferred), but should be no longer than 10-15 minutes in length. The presentation will be followed by a short discussion of it by the class.

There will also be one short paper and a longer final essay.

Honor Code

Throughout all course activities, including written assignments, quizzes, and exams, the Honor Code is in effect: all of this work has to be your own and not anyone else's. To familiarize yourself with the Honor Code, please read the pertinent chapter in *Du Lac* (beginning on p. a-33): particularly section IV, entitled "Student Responsibilities under the Academic Code of Honor," points A through D; or visit http://www.nd.edu/~hnr/code/IV-Student_Resp.htm. If secondary sources are used for any assignments, these sources should be listed in a bibliography at the assignment's end, and any quoted material should be placed in quotation marks and clearly attributed in a footnote. Plagiarism (i.e., any written work presented as entirely your own and original to the particular assignment that is *not*, in fact, entirely your own and/or original to the particular assignment) is a serious matter. If you have questions about this policy and how it applies to your work for our course, and if you are in doubt about the

legitimacy of your activities with respect to this course, please don't hesitate to ask me—before any problems can arise.

Accessibility Policy

It is the policy and practice of The University of Notre Dame to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented needs. Students who have questions about or who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Center or by phone at [574-631-7157](tel:574-631-7157). Because the University's Academic Accommodations processes generally require students to request accommodations well in advance of the dates when they are needed, students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course are encouraged to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services at their earliest opportunity. Additional information about Sara Bea Accessibility Services and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at sarabea.nd.edu/accommodations-services

Inclusiveness

Commitment to Anti-Racist and Anti-Authoritarian Pedagogy

As scholars of German and Russian, we recognize our special responsibility to educate students about racism and authoritarianism in defense of liberal democracy and the universal pursuit of human flourishing. The societies we study are responsible not only for a long history of violence enacted through colonialism and ethnic exclusion, but also for some of the worst crimes against humanity committed during the past century.

We heed the call of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in [*Open Wide Our Hearts*](#) (2018) for Catholic educational institutions “to develop curricula relating to racism and reconciliation.” Therefore, in accordance with the pillars of our discipline (language, literature, and culture), we pledge to teach our students that

1. power can be wielded through language, which has the ability not only to communicate, inspire, and persuade, but also to manipulate, demean, and hurt;
2. speech plays a crucial role in preserving or eroding democracy, especially when we fail to examine it critically;
3. cultural traditions comprise countless voices, many of which are silenced but must be heard;
4. all human societies are imperfect, and our efforts to improve them gain strength when we learn about and from others.

Non-discrimination Statement:

The University of Notre Dame is committed to social justice. I share that commitment and strive to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. In this class we will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, economic class, disability, veteran status, religion, color, or national origin.

Preferred Names, Address, and Pronouns:

I expect all students to respect the choices of their peers regarding their name (what they wish to be called or how they wish to be addressed) and pronoun (he, she, singular they, etc.).

Feedback:

Students are strongly encouraged to approach me with any concerns or requests. Any suggestions as to how to further a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Misconduct and Discrimination Reporting and Resources:

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. The University of Notre Dame provides services for those who have been affected by sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating or domestic violence, stalking and any conduct that creates a hostile environment. For help and further information including contact information for both confidential and non-confidential resources, please consult

<https://titleix.nd.edu/support-resources/>

To report any form of student misconduct, harassment, or discriminatory behavior, please visit speakup.nd.edu

For information on how to report staff or faculty misconduct, please visit president.nd.edu/reporting-concerns

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

Maintaining mental health is a continuous practice, much like maintaining physical health. You do not have to be in a full crisis to benefit from mental health and wellness resources, and I encourage all students to explore the options available at Notre Dame, especially the McDonald Center (mcwell.nd.edu). Care and Wellness Consultants provide support and resources to students who are experiencing stressful or difficult situations that may be interfering with academic progress. Through Care and Wellness Consultants, students can be referred to The University Counseling Center (for cost-free and confidential psychological and psychiatric services from licensed professionals), University Health Services (which provides primary care, psychiatric services, case management, and a pharmacy), and The McDonald Center for Student Well Being (for problems with sleep, stress, and substance use). Visit care.nd.edu

Required Texts

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man (Survival in Auschwitz)*

Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

I will also send you pdfs or web links of the other texts on the syllabus.

Requirements and Evaluation:

Attendance, Class Participation	45 %
Oral Presentation	25 %
One Short Paper	10 %
Final Essay	20 %

Contacting and Meeting:

Given that I will not be on campus this semester and will be teaching remotely, the only way to meet me is via Zoom. If you wish to meet during my regular office hours, that will be fine, or if you are unable to meet me at that time you can make an appointment. I am available to discuss course issues or anything else you would like to discuss.

Week 1

Monday Aug. 10	Introduction Assignment:	"Death" and "Definition of Death" <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>
Wednesday Aug. 12	What is Death? Assignment:	"The Philosophy of Death," "The Evil of Death," in <i>Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death</i>

Week 2

Monday Aug. 17	Is Death Bad? Assignment:	"Death in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle" "Epicurus on Pleasure and Death" <i>Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death</i>
Wednesday Aug. 19	Is Death Good? Assignment:	James Warren "Fears of Death," and "Living an Epicurean Life," in <i>Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics</i>

Week 3

Monday Aug. 24	Epicurus Assignment:	Michel de Montaigne, "To Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die," in <i>Essays</i>
Wednesday Aug. 26	Montaigne Assignment:	Shakespeare and Donne poems;

Ernest Becker, "The Terror of Death," in
The Denial of Death, 11-24

Week 4

Monday
Aug. 31

Death in the Renaissance

Assignment: Listen to Mozart, *Requiem*
(I recommend [Barbara Bonney & Anne Sofie von Otter & Hans Peter Blochwitz & Sir Willard White & The Monteverdi Choir & English Baroque Soloists & John Eliot Gardiner](#))

Wednesday
Sept. 2

Death in Liturgical Music

Assignment: Listen to Franz Schubert, *Death and the Maiden*
(I recommend: [String Quartet in C Major / Death & the Maiden](#) by Schubert, Franz, Pavel Haas Quartet, et al.)

Week 5

Monday
Sept. 7

Death in Secular Music

Assignment: Dale Jacquette, "Schopenhauer on Death"

Wednesday
Sept. 9

Schopenhauer and the Will

Assignment: Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Sections 1-38

Week 6

Monday
Sept. 14

Nietzsche and the Death of God

Assignment: Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Sections 39-62

Wednesday
Sept. 16

Transvaluation of Values

Assignment: Lars Bergstöm, "Death and Eternal Recurrence," in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*

Week 7

Monday
Sept. 21

An Immanent Eternity?

Assignment: Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
(Read approximately half)

Wednesday
Sept. 23

Tolstoy, Death and Conversion

Assignment: Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
(read to end)

Week 8**Monday**
Sept. 28Tolstoy
Assignment: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (read approx. half).**Wednesday**
Sept. 30Freud, Eros and Thanatos
Assignment: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (read to end).**Week 9****Monday**
Oct. 5Is there a Death Drive?
Assignment: Thucydides, *The Plague in Athens***Wednesday**
Oct. 7What does a Plague Mean?
Assignment: Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (excerpts)
Watch Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal***Week 10****Monday**
Oct. 12Boccaccio and The Black Death
Assignment: Albert Camus, *The Plague* (read approx. half)**Wednesday**
Oct. 14The Plague as Allegory?
Assignment: Albert Camus, *The Plague* (read to end)**Week 11****Monday**
Oct. 19The Death of Europe?
Assignment: Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man (Survival in Auschwitz)* (Read approx. half)**Wednesday**
Oct. 21The Death of Humanity?
Assignment: Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man (Survival in Auschwitz)* (Read to end)**Week 12****Monday**
Oct. 26The Death of Everything?
Assignment: John Hersey, *Hiroshima***Wednesday**
Oct. 28Ground Zero
Assignment: Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (read approx. first third)**Week 13**

