

The Death Course **Spring 2009**

Though hardly new, Death is in the news over the past several years. It seems we have rediscovered or uncovered this bare-essential fact of life. While Philippe Aries could state as late as the 1970's that ours was a time in which death had become "shameful and forbidden," this order has been rapidly changing. Now governmental agencies and private foundations are spending hundreds of millions to study it. The medical literature is brimming with articles on the discontents of the hospital death and the goodness of the hospice or home death. Near-daily newspaper and popular magazine accounts bring this view to an ever-increasing audience. We listen to NPR radio programs on death and watched Bill Moyers, among others, present it to the mass television audience. Parents and children, husbands and wives, doctors and patients are speaking of the 'great matter' in a more candid fashion than anyone can remember.

This all speaks to a major change of attitudes in our culture. The course we are about to take reflects this change; it will give us the time and place to think critically about what is going on. In so doing we will look at current and past representations of death, we will consider such questions as what constitutes a 'good death' and what makes a hospital death problematic. We will spend time discussing death in and through medical literature, fiction and poetry; visual representations and music. And, if you are willing, we will share personal stories of loss. All of this is a reflection of the notion that the better we know ourselves, specifically our attitudes concerning death and dying, the better we will be able to understand and help others - and ourselves - in times of crisis surrounding the death of a patient or loved one.

Course Requirements:

- Weekly readings and discussions based on these readings. In addition, each student will be expected to write a one-half to one-page *reflection* on each week's reading – or some personal reflection on suffering/death stimulated by the reading – prior to that week's class time. This will be collected each week. (Note that a *reflection* is not meant to be a polished piece of writing; rather, it may be written within 10 to 15 minutes of concentrated effort.)
- The first 20 to 30 minutes of each class will be devoted to a student presentation/discussion of a short reading – from any source – on our topic. (Three possible sources, [Kitchen Table Wisdom](#), [How Can I Help?](#), and [The Oxford Book of Death](#), are listed below.)
- For a letter grade there will be a 10-15 page paper or a class-related project approved by course instructor due by the last day of class.

Any student who so desires will be paired with a hospital chaplaincy resident, and provisions will be made for visiting patients in the hospital together. The time commitment to, and depth of, this experience is left to each student.

The Retreat: On the weekend of April 10-12, a two-day retreat will be held at Green Gulch Zen Center, beginning with dinner Friday evening, ending with lunch on Sunday. We will engage in discussions and practices designed to give us a more keen awareness of our sense of life and death and how we deal with our own and others' suffering and mortality. The goal is to provide a structured opportunity to explore, integrate, and deepen individual learning from the class. *Attendance cannot be mandatory but is strongly requested.*

Look
Look me in the eye –

Most of
I mean all of –

Why make such a fuss

Are going to –

I mean
Look me in the eye.

-Rick Fields

The Death Course: Suffering, Old Age, Death, and Medicine

Spring 2009

Note: All classes will be held on Wednesdays from 5:30-7:30PM (or 6 to 8:00) in
104 Dwinelle

The retreat will be the weekend of April 10-12

- January 21 **Introduction** – discuss themes, writing exercise, ?show part of Marin Mosen’s film
- January 28 **What is Death?**
In class: film excerpts from Wiseman’s “Near Death,” “King Lear,” and “Stand By Me”
Reading: Joseph Fletcher, “Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man,” Hastings Center Report 2, 1-4, 1972.
Joseph Fletcher, “Indicators of Humanhood: The Enquiry Matures,” Hastings Center Report 4, 4-7, 1974.
“Controversies in the Determination of Death: A White Paper by the President’s Council on Bioethics,” December 2008.
[“A definition of Irreversible Coma: Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death,” JAMA 205, 85-88, 1968.
Robert Veatch, “The Impending Collapse of the Whole-Brain Definition of Death,” Hastings Center Report 4, 18-24, July-August, 1993.
James Bernat, “A Defense of the Whole-Brain Concept of Death,” Hastings Center Report 28, 14-23, March-April, 1998.
Youngner, Arnold, and DeVita, “When is Dead?” Hastings Center Report 29, 14-21, Nov-Dec, 1999.
Ronald Cranford, “Even the Dead are not terminally ill anymore,” Neurology 51, 1530-1531, 1998.
Alexander Morgan Capron, “Brain Death – Well Settled yet Still Unresolved,” NEJM, 344, 1244-1246, 2001.
“Pronouncing” (from “On being a doctor”)]
- February 4 **How We Die I**
Reading: Sherwin Nuland, *How We Die*
Thomas Laqueur, "Closing Time" [review essay of Nuland] London Review of Books, August 18, 1994
Joanne Lynn and Joan Harrold, “Learning about specific illnesses,” Chapter 9 in *Handbook for Mortals*
- February 11 **The Hospital Chaplaincy and Hospice**
Guest: Rev. Peter Yuichi Clark, Chaplain, Alta Bates-Summit Medical Center
Reading: on chaplaincy and hospice

Margaret Edson, *W;t* [may hold for future meeting]

Arthur Kleinman, "Illness unto Death," from Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives* (Basic Books, division of Harper Collins) pp. 148-157, 1988.

*James Wagner and Tami Hidgon, "Spiritual Issues and Bioethics in the Intensive Care Unit: The Role of the Chaplain," Critical Care Clinics 12(1), January, 1996.

*Nancy Chambers and J Randall Curtis, "The Interface of Technology and Spirituality in the ICU," Chapter 15 in *Managing Death in the ICU: The Transition from Cure to Comfort*, ed by Curtis and Rubenfeld. Oxford U Press. 2001.

*Bernard Lo, et.al., "Discussing Religious and Spiritual Issues at the End of Life: A Practical Guide for Physicians." JAMA 287, 749-754, 2005.

*Edwin DuBose, "A Special Report: Spiritual Care at the End of Life." Second Opinion 10, 4-74, 2002. The Park Ridge Center for Health, Faith, and Ethics.

February 18

Suffering and Dying

Reading: Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych" and "Three Deaths"; David Rieff, *Swimming in a Sea of Death*

Stephen Mitchell, "Trial before Pilate and the Crucifixion," in *The Gospel According to Jesus*

"The Dart," from the *Salla Sutta*

"Death of Socrates" in Plato's "Phaedo," 115b-118b

Letters of Seneca, from *Letters from a Stoic*, selected by Robin Campbell. Penguin Books. 1969.

"The Death of Hume," Wilson Quarterly, Summer 1995, 30-39

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, excerpt

February 25

The "Good Death" I – Physician-assisted suicide (PAS), euthanasia

Reading: Anon, "It's Over Debbie" and editorials, JAMA 259, 272, 1988. Letters to editor, JAMA 259, 2094-2098, 1988

Timothy Quill, "Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making," NEJM 324, 691-694, 1991. Letters to editor, NEJM 325, 658-660, 1991

Edmund Pellegrino, "Compassion Needs Reason Too," JAMA 270, 874-875, 1993

Kathleen Foley, "Competent Care for the Dying Instead of Physician-Assisted Suicide," New England Journal of Medicine 336, 54-58, 1997

Marcia Angell, "No One Trusts the Dying," The Washington Post, July 7, 1997

Roberts and Kjellstrand, "Jack Kevorkian: a medical hero," British Medical Journal 312, 1434, 1996

Joanne Lynn, "Where's the Outrage?" in The Exchange, a publication of Americans for Better Care of the Dying

U.S. Supreme Court decisions NY vs. Quill and Washington vs. Glucksberg

"California Compassionate Choices Act" - various news reports.

Richard Selzer's, "Mercy."

The Oregon experience.

[Euthanasia in the Netherlands] Daisy J A Janssen, et.al., "The last wish of a patient with end stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease," BMJ 337, December 8, 2008.

March 4

The History of Death

Reading: tba

Guest: Thomas Laqueur, Professor of History, UCB

March 11

How We Die II – of various causes, end-of-life symptoms and management of these with palliative care

Guests: Claudia Landau, MD, PhD and Sheira Freedman, MD

Reading: *Handbook for Mortals*; Rabow and Pantilat, "Care at the End of Life" (chapter from *Current Medical Diagnosis and Treatment*).

Joanne Lynn, "An 88-Year-Old Woman Facing the End of Life."

JAMA 277, 1633-1640, 1997.

Marcia Lattanzi-Licht and Stephen Connor, "Care of the Dying: The Hospice Approach," Chapter 6 from *Dying: Facing the Facts*, ed by Wass and Neimeyer, Taylor and Francis, Publishers, 3rd ed. 1995.

Gautam Naik, "Unlikely Way to Cut Hospital Costs: Comfort the Dying," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 10, 2004.

March 18

The "Good Death" II – Disability and "quality" of life; "futility"

Reading: Lonny Shavelson, "The Slippery Slope: Euthanasia for the Disabled" from *A Chosen Death*, Chapter 4 (pp.105-157), Simon and Shuster, 1995

The cases of Elizabeth Bouvia and Mark O'Brien

Terry Schiavo articles:

George Annas, "'Culture of Life' Politics at the Bedside – The Case of Terri Schiavo," NEJM 352, 1710-1715, 2005.

Timothy Quill, "Terri Schiavo – A Tragedy Compounded," NEJM 352, 1630-1633, 2005.

Pope John Paul II, "Address to the participants in the international congress on 'Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scientific Advances and Ethical Dilemmas,'" March 20, 2004.

United States Council of Catholic Bishops, "Cardinal Keeler Issues Statement on Florida Schiavo case; Stresses Church Teaching on Feeding, Hydration," March 9, 2005.

Harriet McBryde Johnson, "Hey, Wait a Minute: Not Dead at All. Why Congress was Right to stick up for Terri Schiavo," Slate, March 23, 2005.

March 25

Spring Break

April 1

Where We Die: Death in the Hospital

Guest: Sharon Kaufman

Reading: Sharon Kaufman, *And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life*, Chapter 1, Death and Hospital Culture, pp. 25–60 and Chapter 4, Moving Things Along, pp. 95–146.
Sharon Kaufman and Lakshmi Fjord, “Life Extension in an Aging Society: Medical Treatment and the Ethical Field,” submitted for publication to *The Gerontologist*, January 2009.

April 8

Truth-telling and Hope; Telling the “Bad News”

Reading: Hippocratic Corpus, “Decorum,” XVI.
Thomas Percival, “A Physician Should be the Minister of Hope and Comfort to the Sick,” from *Percival’s Medical Ethics* 1803
Thomas Addison, excerpt from *Glomerular Nephritis*, 1948
Kelly and Friesen, “Do Cancer Patients Want to Be Told?” *Surgery* 27, 822-826, 1950
Simon de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*, 62-106, 1964
Novack, et al, “Changes in Physicians’ Attitudes Toward Telling the Cancer Patient,” *JAMA* 241, 897-900, 1979
Norman Cousins, “A Layman Looks at Truth Telling in Medicine,” *JAMA* 244, 1929-1930, 1980
Judge Jacob Turkel, “Remarks on Telling the Truth or Lying,” *Medicine and Law* 4, 91-93, 1985
Antonella Surbone, “Letter from Italy: Truth Telling to the Patient,” *JAMA* 268, 1661-1662, 1992
Edmund Pellegrino, “Is Truth Telling to the Patient a Cultural Artifact?” *JAMA* 268, 1734-1735, 1992
E.R.W. Fox, “A Dream Trip to Australia,” *West J Med* 145, 555, 1986
Lawrence Grouse, “The Lie,” *Arch Intern Med* 157, 2153, 1997

Jerome Groopman, “Dying Words: How Should Doctors Deliver Bad News?” *The New Yorker*, October 28, 2002
Daniel Sulmasy, “Hope and the Care of the Dying Patient: A Catholic, Christian Perspective,” *The Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*, May 10, 2002.
Arato, et al. v. Avedon, Supreme Court of California, 1993
John Stone, “Talking to the Family”
Raymond Carver, “What the Doctor Said”
Donald Hall, *from Without*
Rick Fields, *from Fuck You, Cancer*

April 10-12

RETREAT at Green Gulch Farm

The retreat begins at dinnertime Friday, April 10 and ends with lunch on Sunday, April 12

April 15

Cultural differences in End-of-Life Care

Guest: LaVera Crawley, Research Associate, Stanford University Center for Biomedical Ethics
Reading: Crawley et al, “Palliative and End-of-Life Care in the African American Community”

Annette Dula, "The Life and Death of Miss Mildred: An Elderly Black Woman"

James Weldon Johnson, "Go Down Death"

April 22 and 29 **Imaging Death**

Guest: Beth Dungan, Art Historian, Director of Adult Education, SFMOMA

or -

On Suicide

or -

Ageing/Old Age and Death; How long do you want to live? -

Alcestis; "Fortitude;" Saramago, *Death With Interruptions*; Thomas Nagel, "Death;" Ionesco, *Exit the King*; Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality;" "What if it works?"

or -

Student presentation(s)

May 6 Wrap-up

Required Reading:

The Course Reader

Sharon Kaufman, *And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life*

David Rieff, *Swimming in a Sea of Death*

Sherwin Nuland, *How We Die*

Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych"

Margaret Edson, *W;t*

Joanne Lynn and Joan Harrold, *Handbook for Mortals: Guidance for People Facing Serious Illness*

Euripides, *Alcestis*

Ionesco, *Exit the King*

Recommended Reading:

Ram Dass, *How Can I Help*

Rachel Remen's *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

Sandra Gilbert, *Wrongful Death*

Films: Moyers on Death; Notes from the Edge; Wiseman's Near Death; Cancer in Two Voices; Wild Strawberries; The Dead; W;t; Flatliners; Ikuru; Steambath; The Deep Sea; The Diving Bell and the Butterfly; The Self-Made Man; Dying Wish; The Bridge; Fortitude