Philosophy 131B: The Metaphysics of Death

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Office hours: 332 Rabb Graduate Center
M/W 5 – 5:45, and by appt.

Principal texts:
Palle Yourgrau, Death and Nonexistence (Oxford University Press)

Handouts

The Content of the Course:

We will proceed by both articles and topics, revisiting themes as we encounter new approaches. Topics to be covered include:

a) What happens to you when you die? (Do you become a corpse? Do you cease to exist?)

b) Is dying bad for you? (How can it be, if at death, you cease to exist? Can you be harmed if don’t feel any harm? When, exactly, does your death harm you?)

c) If dying is bad for you, is pre-natal nonexistence equally bad? (If it is, why don’t we fear it? If it isn’t, why is posthumous non-existence bad for you?)

d) Is never existing, as opposed to dying, bad for you? (Is it less bad than dying? Is being aborted – never having existed – worse than never even being conceived?)

e) If dying means ceasing to exist in time, what kind of time are we talking about, here? (The time of physics, i.e. relativity? The time of ordinary experience? If the latter, does that differ from the former? If so, what do we do about this distinction? Keep both conceptions? Are they compatible? If not, which should we abandon?)

f) If dying is bad, would living forever be preferable?

Learning Goals:

Students will become acquainted with the philosophical issues surrounding the metaphysics of death and some of the most important approaches that have been taken toward these issues. They will learn to think philosophically about death, a topic about which one is not used to thinking philosophically and rigorously.
Writing assignments:

Three short papers, 3 - 5 ppg, on an assigned topic, each counting for one third of the final grade.

Note:

a) No ipads, iphones, or any such computer related device to be used in class. The only "i" I want to see in class is you.

b) Attendance in class is mandatory. Attendance will be taken. After two unexcused absences, there will be a grade penalty for each additional unexcused absence.

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodation letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you.

If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult the university webpage for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Allegations of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.

Please note: This is a Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week) Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).