

## DEATH AND AUTHENTICITY

PHI 500/REL 600, Sp. 2010

PROF. ED MOONEY, RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

HL 501, M 12:15– 3:30

Enigmas and puzzles surround our very human interest in authenticity (being true to ourselves, doing what we must) and death (its nothingness, its threats). For evoking and unraveling these enigmas and puzzles we can't do better than start with Tolstoy's short story, "The Death of Ivan Ilych," and Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. We want to know how Socrates faces death to know who he is, who he takes himself to be, what it must be for him to be true to himself as death might tempt him to be otherwise.

Between Plato and Tolstoy we find in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*, and *Cape Cod* -- two of his underappreciated works -- death's call that he rework or transfigure himself. *A Week* also gives us the *Bhagavad Gita* that ponders what a warrior and brother must be true to, whether it can be right to enter battle and kill one's relations, even when that is one's warrior duty. Thoreau takes up this question, as Gandhi will later. Heidegger learns to think of death not only from Tolstoy's story, but from Kierkegaard's talk "By a Graveside" and the graveyard moment from the center of *Concluding Unscholarly Postscript*. Robert Pippin explores Nietzsche's enigmatic summons, "Become who you are!" in terms of Proust's self-like labyrinths. Werner Herzog canvasses these issues in "The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser".

Our aim will be to let these texts, and portions of them, illuminate what living a lie or living a truth might be, how death can be both intensely particular and as universal as anything human, why the contours of self can be especially sharp in the face of death, and what it is, in such circumstance, to "know thyself", and whether death is an illusion, and whether "self" is equally illusory, and what might be the contrast between self and soul.

Readings will include:

- 1) Plato, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*
- 2) Tolstoy, "Death of Ivan Ilych"
- 3) Thoreau, *A Week*, and *Cape Cod*
- 4) Kierkegaard, "At a Graveside"
- 5) Mooney, "Intimate Agency of Death" and "In the Garden of the Dead"
- 6) Critchley: *Very Little, Almost Nothing*, and *The Book of Dead Philosophers*
- 7) Cavell, "Excerpts from Memory"
- 8) Films: *Kaspar Hauser* (Herzog) and *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman)
- 9) Mooney, "Death and the Sublime" and "What (if anything) is a Kierkegaardian Author (or Self)?"
- 10) Heidegger, "Being Toward Death"
- 11) Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*
- 12) Pippin, " 'Become who you are!' "

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## WORK BY WEEK:

### WEEK ONE:

Introduction, and Plato: *Apology, Crito, Phaedo*.

### WEEK TWO:

Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilych" and Heidegger's gloss; Are Ivan Ilych's family, friends, and associates "in-authentic"? If so, what could this mean?

### WEEK THREE:

Death in Thoreau's *A Week and Cape Cod* (passages to note); and death as a call to memorial writing. How can memorials mark truthful response?

### WEEK FOUR:

Kierkegaard's "At a Graveside" and Mooney, "Transfigurations: The Intimate Agency of Death", both on Blackboard

### WEEK FIVE:

From Kierkegaard's *Postscript*, "In the Garden of Death" & Mooney, "Johannes Climacus on Religious and Irreligious Inwardness", on Blackboard

### WEEK SIX:

Review and tying loose ends; questions: Critchley: *Book of Dead Philosophers*; xv–xxxviii, "Montaigne" and various others. "Last Words," 247–9.

### WEEK SEVEN:

Discussion of Herzog's "Caspar Hauser" and Bergmann's "Seventh Seal"

### WEEK EIGHT:

Mooney "Death and the Sublime" and "The Comic and Death", on Blackboard and in *Lost Intimacy*

### WEEK NINE:

Critchley: *Very little, Almost Nothing*, part one.

### WEEK TEN:

Cavell, "Excerpt from Memory" on Bb.

### WEEK ELEVEN:

Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*

### WEEK TWELVE:

Pippin on "Proust & Nietzsche on "Becoming who you are"" on Bb.

### WEEKS THIRTEEN THROUGH FIFTEEN:

First drafts of papers shared through in class oral presentation.

## REQUIREMENTS:

A mid-term proposal for a final paper; a draft of the final paper read the last weeks; a final paper (12 pages).

Weekly half-page reflections/questions on the reading for the week.

Wit, heart, and imagination.

**SUPPLEMENTARY:** as interest and time allow, consult themes of death and authenticity in:

Lamore, *The Romantic Legacy*

Steiner, *Errata*

Barnes, *Nothing to be Afraid of*

Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*

Guignon, *Authenticity*

Mooney, *Lost Intimacy*

*Japanese Death Poems*

*Oxford Book of Death*

Friedrich, *The Gita within Walden*

Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*

Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity*

[full bibliographic data later]