

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 Thoreau's exploration of death's call to rework himself in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*, and in *Cape Cod* -- two of his underappreciated works. *A Week* also gives us the *Bhagavad Gita*, that ponders at the start, what one must be true to, whether it can be right to enter battle and kill, even when that is one's warrior duty. Thoreau takes up this question in *A Week*, as Gandhi will later. Heidegger learns how to think of death not only from Tolstoy's story, but from Kierkegaard's talk "By a Graveside" and sketch of a graveyard moment at 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.

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 might be, why the contours of self can be especially sharp in the face of death, and what it is, in such circumstance, to "know thyself" – whether death is an illusion, whether "self" is, equally, and what might be the contrast between self and soul.

Readings will include:

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| 1) Plato, <i>Apology</i> , <i>Crito</i> , <i>Phaedo</i> | Films: Kaspar Houser (Herzog) and |
| 2) Tolstoy, "Death of Ivan Ilych" | The Seventh Seal (Bergman) |
| 3) Kierkegaard: Garden of the dead
Mooney, "Garden of the dead" | --And as time allows: |
| 4) Cavell on Plato on self-soul,
Sackville-West: death and being true,
Sebald: death and burning cities,
Rousseau: awakening to bliss,
- these and other short pieces on BlkBd | Ferrara, <i>Reflective Authenticity</i>
Lamore, <i>The Romantic Legacy</i>
Steiner, <i>Errata</i>
Barnes, <i>Nothing to be Afraid of</i>
Taylor, <i>Ethics of Authenticity</i>
Guignon: <i>Authenticity</i> |
| 5) Thoreau, selections, <i>Week</i> , and <i>Cape Cod</i> | Mooney <i>Lost Intimacy</i> |
| 6) Pippin, " 'Become who you are!' " | Harrison, <i>The Dominion of the Dead</i>
<i>Japanese Death Poems</i> |
| 8) Critchley: <i>Book of Dead Philosophers</i> | Trilling, <i>Sincerity and Authenticity</i> |

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WORK BY WEEK:

Feb 1
Plato: Apology, Crito, Phaedo: what is Socrates “true to”? Why do we believe him? Taylor Carman on “Authenticity”

Feb 8
Tolstoi’s “Death of Ivan Ilych” -- Are Ivan Ilych’s family, friends, and associates “inauthentic”? What could this mean? Guignon *Authenticity* browse

Feb 15
Death in Thoreau’s *A Week* and *Cape Cod* (passages to note); death as a call to memorial writing. How can memorials mark truthful response? See **Sebold**

Feb 22
Kierkegaard: CUP graveyard; Mooney, a graveyard (BlkBd)

Mar 1
Cavell on Plato & Proust
Sackville–West on Passion & death

Mar 8:
Review and tying loose ends; Critchley: *Book of Dead Philosophers*, xv–xxxviii, “Montaigne” and “Last Words,” 247–9. Rousseau on awakening to the world

[**Final Paper Proposal** Monday after Break]

Mar 22
Discussion of Herzog’s “Caspar Hauser” and Bergmann’s “Seventh Seal”

Mar 29
Cavell, “Excerpt from Memory” on Bb.

April 5
Pippin: “Become who you are”

April 12

First drafts of papers shared in class [oral presentation].

April 19

April 26

May 3

May 10

REQUIREMENTS:

A mid–term proposal for a final paper;

A draft of the paper read the last weeks; a final paper (12–20 pages).

Weekly 1/2 pg reflections/questions on the reading for the week.

**Wit,
Heart,
Imagination !**