PHIL 151: Arguments about Life and Death

In this class, our focus will be on critical thinking, critical reading, and argumentative writing, which are important skills both in most academic disciplines and most career paths. All these skills get us to comprehend ideas and then evaluate the legitimacy of beliefs, claims, and arguments, so that we don’t become prisoners of our own prejudices or assumptions, or of our culture’s norms and values. The ability to question, analyze, and judge the strength of claims is essentially the ability to think for yourself. Because we need a topic about which to think critically, our general theme will be the significance of mortality: what impact does death have on human life? We will examine the issues of personal identity, the meaning of life, defining what death is, and euthanasia/assisted suicide.

Course Objectives:
This class fulfills the Academic Writing II general education requirement. Students should be able to:

• accurately analyze arguments contained in prose passages concerning life and death, identifying their premises and conclusions
• distinguish between the truth of an argument’s premises and the validity or strength of its reasoning, and evaluate that strength or validity
• craft a strong argument for a position on a complex question concerning life and death
• identify and synthesize high-quality sources and use them effectively in support of an argument, and cite and document sources according to MLA guidelines
• craft prose that conforms to academic expectations regarding rhetorical effectiveness: clarity, coherence, unity, style, and meaning
• identify core concepts and positions in debates around life and death, including: whether death is to be feared, how to define death, and whether assisted suicide is morally or constitutionally justified.

Major assignments: midterm exam, two analysis papers, final paper