



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Institute of Continuing Education

Immortality and eternity: different conceptions of the afterlife

Start date 26 February 2016

End date 28 February 2016

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr. Alexander Carter

Course code 1516NRX085

Director of Programmes

Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact

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Tutor biography

Alex is currently the acting Course Director for Philosophy at the Institute of Continuing Education. Before completing his PhD in Philosophy at the University of Essex, Alex studied Philosophy and Ancient History at Swansea and Philosophy at Bristol. His various teaching posts at the University of Essex comprised classes in Ethics, Existentialism and the History of Philosophy. Alex's PhD thesis evaluated and assessed Wittgenstein's 1939 "Lectures on Freedom of the Will" and he is currently researching the philosophy of religion, in particular the theology of Simone Weil.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00

1: Introduction and outline

A brief outline of the course followed by an introduction to Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889-1951) philosophy of religion. It is Wittgenstein's religious views that shall provide the inspiration and the imperative to seek an answer to our central question of what, if anything, is ethically valuable about the notion of an afterlife.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30

2: Seeking a methodology: Bergson on time.

An exploration of Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) unconventional, yet influential, account of time. A standalone subject in its own right, this session will nonetheless provide the framework and tools necessary for our coming discussion. More than this, Bergson's account of time opens inroads into one of our key areas of interest, namely the nature of eternity.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30

3: What answers come from having *more* life?

A critical analysis of an understanding of the afterlife as "more life". Theoretical opposition as well as ethical objections will be considered.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00	<p>4: Life viewed <i>Sub Specie Aeternitatis</i>: Spinoza on necessity and eternity.</p> <p>We will move towards an alternative conception of the afterlife by first examining Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) unique form of naturalism. Shocking in his own time, Spinoza sets forth an account of nature wherein its every aspect is part of a whole. Taking note of this, we shall introduce a new conception of the afterlife as <i>this</i> life seen <i>sub specie aeternitatis</i>, i.e. under the aspect of eternity.</p>
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<p>5: What answers come from an <i>eternal</i> life?</p> <p>In this session, the alternative conception of the afterlife introduced previously will be critically assessed according to the same measures implemented in Session 3. In particular, we will critically assess a conception of the afterlife based on Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) idea of the eternal return.</p>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion
Sunday	
07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<p>6: Is an eternal life what we are looking for?</p> <p>The question we shall now try to answer is whether or not eternal life is, practically speaking, a suitable <i>alternative</i> to "more life". Does this alternative conception of the afterlife—as eternal life—offer us as much (in the way of hope) as the promise of more life?</p>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<p>7: Religion or ethics? And what, in this case, is the difference?</p> <p>A further reason why these two, differing conceptions of the afterlife might not be thought comparable is that only one appears to correspond to a strictly <i>religious</i> conception of the afterlife. We shall confront this potential shortfall and ask whether or not it is important.</p>
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The main aim of the course is to rigorously assess contemporary religious and philosophical conceptions of the afterlife in order to establish what ethical significance they have.

Content:

The course centres on a specific question, namely “what, if anything, is ethically valuable about the idea of an afterlife?” In seeking to answer this question, we shall venture into various areas of philosophy; ethics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language. Particular attention will be paid to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion which offers a refreshing alternative to dogmatic forms of both theism *and* atheism.

Presentation of the course:

The course comprises formal lectures incorporating interactive presentations and discussion sessions wherein students will be invited to reflect, comment and pass judgement on the ideas contained within the lectures. At the culmination of each session, handouts will be distributed to facilitate independent reading on the topics covered.

Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. More readily engage in and reflect on contemporary philosophical debates.
2. Demonstrate a greater understanding of the following philosophical topics:
 - i) Religion.
 - ii) Time.
 - iii) Immortality and eternity.
 - iv) Necessity.
3. Identify and better contextualise the thought of the following thinkers:
 - i) Henri Bergson.
 - ii) Baruch Spinoza.
 - iii) Friedrich Nietzsche.
 - iv) Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, **but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.**

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Robert L. Arrington, Mark Addis	<i>Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion</i>	Psychology Press, 2004
Henri Bergson	<i>Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness</i>	Martino Fine Books, 2015
Giles Deleuze	<i>Bergsonism</i>	Zone Books, 1988
A. G. N. Flew	<i>There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind</i>	HarperOne, 2008
Olli Koistinen	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics</i>	Cambridge University Press 2009 (See below re discount)
Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch	<i>Wittgenstein: A Religious Point Of View?</i>	Routledge, 2002
Friedrich Nietzsche	<i>The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs</i>	Cambridge University Press 2001 (See below re discount)
Friedrich Nietzsche	<i>Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*</i> *particularly <i>Ecce Homo</i> .	Cambridge University Press 2011 (See below re discount)
D. Z. Phillips	<i>Death & Immortality</i>	Macmillan, 1970 (Out of print and rare)

Website addresses

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: January 15, 16