

## CRAFTING LIFE'S LAST CHAPTER

**Coordinator:** Winthrop Thies

How do you want the last chapter of your life to read? What arrangements for old-age living, medical care and last days will enable you to finish out your life with grace? Society has fervently debated how best to live life's final chapter. We explore classical and modern arguments from Socrates to Seneca, to Jewish law to Augustine, Aquinas and developments in the Netherlands and Oregon and the modern Right to Die Movement. Finally, we look at how having the right documents and conversations with doctors and family can give us more control over the kind of dying we want.

### **Readings and other Required Materials:**

Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*; Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2014, ISBN 978-0-8050-9515-9, \$26.

A. Alvarez, *The Savage God--A Study of Suicide*, W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1990, 978-0393306576, \$16.95

Internet access for required online readings.

Netflix or other source for the film *Ikiru*

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### \* \* \* \* \* **Syllabus** \* \* \* \* \*

Note: Readings seem long, but pages are small, type is large; both books read swiftly.

### **Syllabus**

#### **1. Overview of study group**

Three equal parts: historical thought on death and dying from Socrates to Modern Age; how to live more abundantly in the Last Chapter; choosing how and when to die in context of new developments with Physician Assisted Dying (PAD).

Members are encouraged to present on topics of interest after consulting with the coordinator.

Subscribe (free) to ERGO Emailed updates on field. Particularly interesting

ones will be discussed.

Socrates in the *Phaedo* (read online in preparation via Google). Google "Historical Timeline--Euthanasia"— [ProCon.org](http://ProCon.org)

## **2. Natural Death and Suicide in Antiquity**

Google "Right to Die--Wikipedia"

*Savage God*: pp. 63-93

## **3. The Middle Ages, Renaissance, Romanticism**

*Savage God*: pp. 167-92; 223-34

## **4. The Enlightenment and the Modern Age**

*Savage God*: pp. 235-54

*Bring Mortal*, to p. 78

## **5. How to live near life's end**

*Being Mortal*, pp. 79-190

Cases. News reports.

## **6. Too much technology; not enough compassion**

*Being Mortal*, pp. 190-263

## **7. On completion**

View *Ikiru* (Netflix or other source). Google "Dr Oliver Sacks OpEd".

Google "Dennis Potter--excerpt from final interview"; view on You-Tube.

Cases. Google "Why I hope to die at 75--The Atlantic". (Dr E Emanuel.)

## **8. On not leaving a mess: lecture and discussion, handout of documents.**

Psychological "closure"; orderliness in records, too much "stuff", etc.

Advance directive. Gift of organs or whole body to medical school.

Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST). Review

documents. Doing those final favorite things. Gifts to family, friends,

charities. An "Ethical Will"? "Forgive me, I love you, thank you, good bye."

Cases.

## **9. The Modern Right to Die Movement**

Google Marcia Angell, "May Doctors Help You Die?" (NYRB Oct. 11, 2012).

Google all of following topics. Patient autonomy. Karen Ann Quinlan,

Nancy Cruzan, Schiavo. Hemlock Society. D. Humphry, "Final Exit".

Washington v. Glucksberg (read and discuss Rehnquist opinion, discuss

others and *Vacco v Quill*). "The Philosophers' Brief". Dr Kervorkian, Dr Timothy Quill. Hospice and palliative care movements.

#### **10. More on the Modern Right to Die Movement**

Google the following: Oregon Death with Dignity Act. ProandCon on PAD [ProCon.org](http://ProCon.org) (discuss). "Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide in Canada" Lecture on latest technology of self-deliverance. Other recent developments. Discussion.

#### **11. Other Responses and Arguments Pro and Con**

More discussion from ProandCon on PAD. Short lecture: Characterization problem: "suicide" vs "self-deliverance". Conceptual error in litigation to date: not pain but autonomy: "...liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Coordinator's essays at [compassionandchoicesnj.org](http://compassionandchoicesnj.org) -- read and discuss "On the ethical equivalence of refusal of treatment, PAD and euthanasia". Discuss Dr. Angell's final suggestion: allow voluntary euthanasia.

#### **12. On Crafting Life's Last Chapter.**

What do you personally want to do or complete in the years left to you?  
Summing up.