

## THE ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY OF PALLIATIVE CARE

Prof. Brian Stiltner, Sacred Heart University

Summer Study at Yale Divinity School

Week 1 / June 4–8, 2018 / Afternoons 1:30–4:00 pm

### Description

In this course, participants will engage in discussion, reflection, and debate about the meaning of death so as to more deeply appreciate the meaning of life, death, faith, and community. We will explore cultural, religious, philosophical, scientific, medical, and literary perceptions of death, dying, and grief. We will consider the large and growing need for holistic palliative care in the United States and the role that religious communities and chaplains can play to meet that need.

### Instructor biography

Brian Stiltner (YDS MAR '90, Yale PhD '97) is Professor of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. He is co-director the university's Hersher Institute for Applied Ethics and co-chair of its Interprofessional Palliative Care Committee. His teaching and research focus on virtue ethics, bioethics, the ethics of war and peace, and Catholic social ethics. His most recent book is *Toward Thriving Communities: Virtue Ethics as Social Ethics* (Anselm Academic, 2016). He lives in Hamden, Connecticut, with his spouse and two teenage children. Email: [stiltnerb@sacredheart.edu](mailto:stiltnerb@sacredheart.edu)

### Readings, Videos, and Resources

All the readings, videos, and resources for the course are linked on this Padlet site and organized by day: [https://padlet.com/prof\\_brian\\_stiltner/palliative\\_care](https://padlet.com/prof_brian_stiltner/palliative_care)

If you were to buy two books, I would recommend the following. I have posted several excerpts from them in the course:

- My favorite book on this topic is a highly readable collection of memoir essays by hospice chaplain Kerry Egan: [On Living](#) (Riverhead Books, 2016). It's well worth purchasing for oneself and giving out as a gift!
- Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley, [Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying](#) (Simon & Schuster, 1992; reprint ed., 2012). The authors are hospice nurses who distill, from their many experiences with dying patients, common themes and patterns in the ways these patients communicate to us.

### SCHEDULE

*A note on reading:* I selected a small handful of articles and book excerpts for each day. Most of them are fairly short and quite readable. I know that the schedule is packed and you are only getting the syllabus a week before the class starts, so don't stress about about completing all reading—do what you can and read those items that most speak to you after you skim over them.

There are also three videos that I recommend you watch before the day on which they are listed.

### **Monday: Awareness of Death**

- Main topics: Our own experiences with the dying process of loved ones. The awareness, needs, and communications of the dying. How families and others respond.
- Video to view *before* class: Lisa Caramico, MD, [“18 Months and Beyond”](#) (27 min.)
- Recommended readings: Kerry Egan, “The Stories We Tell,” “Dying is Just a Verb.” Selections from Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts*.

### **Tuesday: Religious and Literary/Medical Perspectives on Dying and Death**

- Main topics: Religious traditions and texts on the sacred art of dying. Literary reflections on dying, death, and care by doctors.
- Video to view *before* class: [“Being Mortal”](#) on PBS Frontline (54 min.)
- Recommended readings: Selection from Kenneth Paul Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying*. Selected religious texts. Selection from Sherwin Nuland, *How We Die*.

### **Wednesday: Palliative Care, Hospice Care, and the Ethics of End-of-life Treatments**

- Main topics: What is palliative care and hospice care? Misunderstandings and fears about palliative care and hospice care. Institutional gaps. Selected ethical issues in EOL treatment.
- Video to view *before* class: Robert Finton, MD, [“Palliative Care: Rethinking the Name and the Need”](#) (40 min.)
- Recommended readings: Rebecca McAteer, MD, and Caroline Wellbery, MD, “Palliative Care: Benefits, Barriers, and Best Practices.” Rachel Bernacki and Susan Block, “Communication about Serious Illness Goals.” Selection from Alastair Campbell, *Bioethics: The Basics*. The Vatican, *Declaration on Euthanasia*.

### **Thursday: Spiritual Dimensions of Dying and Death**

- Video to watch *before* class: [Dr. Eben Alexander](#), author of *Proof of Heaven*, interviewed by Larry King in 2018 (28 min.)
- Main topics: What dying patients’ need for a peaceful death. Hospice chaplaincy. Bereavement support for families. Bearing each other’s burdens.
- Recommended readings: Kerry Egan, “The Crucible of Love” and “It’s a Beautiful Life and Then You Leave It.” Selection from Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts*. Gilbert Meilaender, “I Want to Burden My Family.”

### **Friday: Congregational, Institutional, and Social Responses**

- Video to watch *before* class: [TED Talk](#) by hospice chaplain and ER doctor BJ Miller (15 min.)
- Any remaining issues from the first four days. Dealing with grief. Congregational best practices and initiatives. Needed reform in health care institutions and public policy.
- Recommended readings: C.S. Lewis, selections from *A Grief Observed*. Julie Hanlon Rubio, “End-of-Life Care: Enabling Better Practices for Dying Well.” David Belde, “Rethinking End-of-Life Care”