

# **How to Live Forever**

## **Soul, Body, and Utopia in European History**

### **(or, The History of Immortality)**

University of Wisconsin–Madison  
History 223: Explorations in European History  
Instructor: Kilian Harrer  
Class time: Tue & Thu 9:30-10:45 a.m.

Instructional modality: online (synchronous)  
Credits: 3 (or 4 in individual cases)  
Requisites for taking this course: none  
Office hours: Thu 2-4 p.m. and by appointment

Zoom link for class:

<https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/92996972770?pwd=bjdhVEN4TzQ2Ymp2dkx4bFlUaXRaUT09>

Zoom link for office hours: <https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/8179575590>

Sign-up sheet for office hours:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11P5lz333h0ZozSIbo8ISFtuSUMAcxn1UOaRfAC\\_oXE0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11P5lz333h0ZozSIbo8ISFtuSUMAcxn1UOaRfAC_oXE0/edit?usp=sharing)

Instructor email: [kharrer@wisc.edu](mailto:kharrer@wisc.edu)

#### Course description

This course explores how the quest for everlasting life and stories about life after death have shaped European history. Will we ever get the chance to conquer death? Would you even want to live forever? Do we have something like an immortal soul? These questions have a long and turbulent history: over time, different people have answered them very differently as they confronted death and sought to overcome it physically or spiritually. We will investigate how rulers and revolutionaries, theologians and philosophers, alchemists and scientists, storytellers and readers all tied their deepest dreams and fears—about body and soul, death and afterlife—to the broader historical moments in which they found themselves. We will pursue these themes all the way from medieval Europe to the world of the twenty-first century, with an emphasis on the crucial changes that occurred in the early modern period (16th-18th century). Ultimately, we will work to understand historically how culture and politics have interacted with the deep human quest to push back the boundaries of death.

### How credit hours are met by this course

This class meets for two, 75-minute sessions each week over the spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for about 3 hours out of the classroom for every class period. This description fits the 3-credit standard; if you need to take the class for 4 credit units instead, please let me know so I can assign additional work on an individual basis.

### Regular and Substantive Student-Instructor Interaction

This course meets UW–Madison’s *regular and substantive student-instructor interaction requirement* as I will engage you in teaching, learning and assessment through direct instruction, providing feedback on student work, providing information about course content, facilitating discussion of course content, and holding office hours.

### Learning Outcomes

This course aims to facilitate student progress across three primary areas: content knowledge, general skills, and critical thinking. Students will gain a solid foundation in the social, religious, and cultural upheavals that shaped Europeans’ thinking about physical and immaterial immortality from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era. Students will also hone their abilities as readers and writers. Finally, they will practice asking provocative questions, testing claims against evidence, and elaborating logical connections.

### Required Course Materials

No textbook is required for this course. Scans of or links to all required readings as well as other sources are accessible on our Canvas course page, sorted by week in the “Modules” menu. See also below (Course Schedule) for a week-by-week overview of readings and assignments.

### Assignments and grades

The components of your grade are as follows:

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| • First paper (4 pages, due Feb. 26):               | 15 % of the final grade |
| • Second paper (4 pages, due Apr. 16):              | 15 %                    |
| • Take-home midterms (ca. 1000 words, due March 29) | 20 %                    |
| • Take-home finals (ca. 1500 words, due Apr. 30)    | 25 %                    |
| • Class participation                               | 25 %                    |

A note on class participation: be prepared to discuss the weekly readings in class on Thursdays except on the weeks of midterms and finals, when we'll be skipping class on Thursday and discussing the readings on Tuesday instead. The ingredients of a good participation grade include 1) regular and productive contributions to class discussion based on each week's readings; 2) thoughtful responses to small prompts/questions I will occasionally post on our Canvas discussion board (these responses will be due on Wednesday late at night); 3) I expect each of you to come to my office hours for short, 15- to 20-minute conversations at least twice over the course of the semester.

### Grading scale

The conventional UW-Madison point/percentage scale will determine your letter grade:

100 – 93	A
88 – 92	AB
83 – 87	B
78 – 82	BC
70 – 77	C
60 – 69	D
0 – 59	F

### Two Tips on How to Succeed in This Class

1. Consider making appointments with the UW-Madison [History Lab](#) for any of the papers you will be writing this semester (see “Assignments” section above). Here’s their blurb: “The History Lab is a resource where expert PhD students work with you and your history/history of science projects 1-on-1. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, or revising your drafts—the History Lab staff will help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Visit our website <http://go.wisc.edu/HLAB> early and often to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA or to find writing tips, guides, and resources.”
2. Take care of yourself. Never hesitate to contact me if you face any issue whatsoever that risks having an impact on your learning experience in this course. If the issue is one of health and well-being, consider also reaching out to [University Health Services](#). We are living in tough times and even as I uphold the basic expectations and requirements connected to this class, I also acknowledge that life happens (sometimes in ugly ways) and when it does, flexibility and empathy are key.

### Campus Spaces for Virtual Learning

Dedicated on-campus spaces with high-speed internet are available for students to [reserve](#) during the semester. Computers can also be requested.

### Privacy of Student Information & Digital Tools: Teaching & Learning Analytics & Proctoring Statement

The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully reviews and vets all campus-supported digital tools used to support teaching and learning, to help support success through learning analytics, and to enable proctoring capabilities. UW-Madison takes necessary steps to ensure that the providers of such tools prioritize proper handling of sensitive data in alignment with FERPA, industry standards and best practices.

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) which protects the privacy of student education records, student consent is not required for the university to share with school officials those student education records necessary for carrying out those university functions in which they have legitimate educational interest. 34 CFR 99.31(a)(1)(i)(B). FERPA specifically allows universities to designate vendors such as digital tool providers as school officials, and accordingly to share with them personally identifiable information from student education records if they perform appropriate services for the university and are subject to all applicable requirements governing the use, disclosure and protection of student data.

### Privacy of Student Records & the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures

Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

### Academic Integrity Statement (aka Don't Plagiarize!)

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result

in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but are not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Plagiarism is...

- Using someone else's words or ideas without proper documentation.
- Copying some portion of your text from another source without proper acknowledgement of indebtedness.
- Borrowing another person's specific ideas without documenting their source.
- Having another person correct or revise your work. This differs from getting feedback from a writing group, or from an individual, which you then attempt to implement.
- Turning in a paper written by another person, from an essay "service," or from a website (including reproductions of such essays or papers).

Writing handbooks are excellent sources for learning how to avoid plagiarism. The UW Writing Center has an online handbook with a [section on how to properly document sources](#). Note that we will be using and practicing the Chicago documentation style in this class! And of course, you may always talk with me if you have any questions about plagiarism.

### Diversity and Inclusion Statement

[Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Statement

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#).)

### Quarantine or Isolation due to COVID-19

As you surely all know, you should continually monitor yourselves for COVID-19 symptoms and get tested for the virus if you have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Please reach out to me as soon as possible if you become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. You are strongly encouraged to communicate with me concerning your illness and the anticipated extent of your absence from the course. I will then work with you to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

Also see the [Badger Pledge](#).

### Course Evaluations

Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your confidential feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the AEFIS electronic course evaluation that will be accessible toward the end of the semester.

### Assignments

Students will write two four-page papers (each worth 15% of the final grade) and a longer final paper of 10 pages (30% of the grade). These assignments thus have a scaffolding dimension that will foster students' development not just as writers but also as editors of their own writing. The first paper will home in on the immortality of the soul and its importance to medieval and Renaissance Europeans; the second one will consider the new promises of immortality offered by the Enlightenment. The final paper will present an opportunity for students to revise, combine, and supplement the two shorter papers. The rest of the grade will come from a take-home midterm exam (20%) and participation in synchronous and asynchronous discussions (20%).

Weekly reading assignments include primary as well as secondary sources. The reading load is relatively light in most weeks because many of the primary sources are intellectually demanding, and because improvement in close reading of difficult texts is a crucial learning objective for this course. The class will meet twice a week for 75 minutes, blending full-group discussion, exercises for smaller teams (breakout groups) of two to four students, and short interspersed lectures that will establish more firmly the broader historical context of the readings.

Course schedule

## Week 1 (Jan. 26 &amp; 28). A Starting Point: The History of Death

- Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death* (1974), pp. 1-25 (“Tamed Death”) & 85-107 (“Forbidden Death”)

## Week 2 (Feb. 2 &amp; 4). A Vision of Eternal Life: Medieval Christian Belief

- Augustine, *The City of God*, book 22, ch.s 1-5, 11-21, 29-30
- Thomas Aquinas, “The Resurrection of Man,” in *Immortality*, ed. Paul Edwards, pp. 91-9
- Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (1995), Introduction

## Week 3 (Feb. 9 &amp; 11). A Struggle for Salvation: Purgatory and the Reformation

- Johann Tetzel, “A Sermon on Indulgences,” in *The Reformation in Its Own Words*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (1964), pp. 41-46
- Martin Luther, “Letter to Archbishop Albrecht and the 95 Theses,” in *Works of Martin Luther, with introductions and notes*, ed. Adolph Spaeth, vol. 1 (1915), pp. 24-38
- Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (1984), pp. 1-14 & 177-208
- Philip C. Almond, *Afterlife: A History of Life After Death* (2016), pp. 94-118

## Week 4 (Feb. 16 &amp; 18). Everlasting Human Happiness: Renaissance Ambitions

- Thomas More, *Utopia*, book II
- Oskar Kristeller, “The Immortality of the Soul,” in id., *Renaissance Concepts of Man and other Essays* (1972), pp. 22-42

## Week 5 (Feb. 23 &amp; 25). Alchemy and the ‘Quest to Cheat Death’

- Roger Bacon, “Chapter on the Second Prerogative of Experimental Science,” in id., *Opus Majus*, ed. R. B. Burke (1928), vol. II, pp. 615-27
- Didier Kahn, “Quintessence and the Prolongation of Life in the Works of Paracelsus,” *Micrologus* 26 (2018): 183-225
- **First paper due on Friday, Feb. 26, at 5:00 p.m.**

## Week 6 (March 2 &amp; 4). Spirits, Revenants, and Witches: Early Modern Popular Culture

- Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night* (1998), pp. 1-34, 82-117, 152-9

## Week 7 (March 9 &amp; 11). Spirits and Revenants continued

- Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, pp. 59-73 (“Whether the Spirits of the Dead can Appear to Men”)
- Extracts from Augustin Calmet, *Treatise on the Apparitions of Spirits and on Vampires or Revenants*
- Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The trial of the pig, the walking dead, and other matters of fact from the medieval and Renaissance worlds* (2005), ch. 4: “The Roaming Dead,” pp. 56-75

## Week 8 (March 16 &amp; 18). Body, Soul, and Afterlife in the Age of Enlightenment

- Descartes, “The Incorporeal Soul and Its Body”; David Hume, “Of the Immortality of the Soul”; Voltaire, “The Soul, Identity and Immortality”, in *Immortality*, ed. Paul Edwards, pp. 100-108; 134-40; 141-7
- Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell* (English translation of 1778), pp. 1-4, 290-314

Week 9 (March 23 only). A Discussion of Writing and Midterm Week

- George D. Gopen, *The Sense of Structure: Writing from the Reader’s Perspective* (2004), pp. 14-46
- **Take-home midterm exam:** prompt released on Monday, March 22, at 9:00 a.m. – exam **due on Monday, March 29, at 9:00 a.m.**

## Week 10 (March 30 &amp; April 1). Everlasting Human Happiness 2.0: Debates of the Revolutionary Age

- Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (1955), “The Tenth Stage: The future progress of the human mind,” pp. 173-202
- William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (edition of 1793), book 8, ch. 9
- Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ch.s 12 and 13

## Week 11 (April 6 &amp; 8). A New Imaginary of Immortality: The French Revolution

- Visual sources: façade and interior of the Paris Pantheon
- Maximilien Robespierre's report of May 7, 1794 on "Religious and Moral Ideas and Republican Principles"
- Mona Ozouf, "The Pantheon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead," in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora (1998), vol. III, pp. 325-46
- Ronen Steinberg, *The Afterlives of the Terror: Facing the Legacies of Mass Violence in Postrevolutionary France* (2019), ch. 5: "Haunting: The Ghostly Presence of the Terror," pp. 117-145

## Week 12 (April 13 &amp; 15). Utopia, Terror, Dystopia: The French Revolution and Gothic Fiction

- Mary Shelley, "The Mortal Immortal: A Tale," in her *Collected Tales and Stories*, ed. Charles Robinson (1976), pp. 219-30 + selections from *Frankenstein*
- **Second paper due on Friday, April 16, at 5:00 p.m.**

## Week 13 (April 20 &amp; 22). Conquering Death in Modernity: New Utopian Waves

- Victoria Woodhull, "The Elixir of Life; Or, Why Do We Die?," in *Selected Writings of Victoria Woodhull: Suffrage, Free Love, and Eugenics*, ed. Cari M. Carpenter (2010), pp. 172-197
- Visual sources ("Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live"; Mausoleum of Lenin)
- John Gray, *The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death* (2011), pp. 140-201 (from ch. "God-Builders")

Week 14 (April 27 **only**). Epilogue: The Dream Continues

- Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016), pp. 1-29 (part of ch. 1, "The New Human Agenda")
- Gray, *Immortalization Commission*, pp. 205-36 (conclusion)
- Video on cryonics
- **Take-home final exam:** prompt released on Friday, April 23, at 5:00 p.m. – exam due on Friday, April 30, at 5:00 p.m.