

Rel 371.001 - The Living and the Dead: On the Politics of Souls  
Department of Religious Studies – Spring 2022  
Dr. Daniel Levine

Thursdays, 3:30-5:50 pm  
210 Presidents' Hall (PRH)



Paul Alfred de Curzon (1820-95): "Psyche in the Underworld" (*Wikimedia*)

*Instructor:* Dr. Daniel Levine

*Email:* [djlevine@ua.edu](mailto:djlevine@ua.edu)

*Office:* 311 ten Hoor Hall

*Office hours:* Wednesdays & Fridays, 3:00-4:15 pm, or by appointment. To meet by Zoom, write to me at the email above.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students enrolled in this course will be expected to:

- *Read and analyze* conceptually challenging texts with an eye to their key arguments;
- *Relate those texts to one another* in terms of agreement or disagreement, whether in discussion, in formal academic writing, or through timed/expository writing (ie, exams);
- *Reflect* on the key themes of this course with specific reference to contemporary politics and political practice;
- *Formulate and sustain* original arguments based on these reflections.

Overview

Drawing on a range of literary, theological, and speculative readings, this course explores what it means to have a soul, and the politics surrounding its presence or absence. We will explore the following questions: who has a soul, what difference does it make, and how do we know? What is our relationship to souls without bodies, and to bodies without souls? Does the presence or absence of a soul change what it means to kill? What happens when the dead do not 'stay dead'? Are souls immortal, and in what sense does this matter when thinking or acting politically?

## Aims of the Course

1. to consider the role of a particular concept (the soul, as it is understood, discussed, or assumed) and its role in contemporary politics.
2. To explore the content of that concept: what does the soul *seem to be*, as a figure in political discourse and practice? (Note: this is not quite the same as asking what souls *actually are*).
3. To expose you to, and help you develop, a speculative/reflective mode of thinking, reading, and arguing – and to apply it to contemporary political life/experience/practice.

This form of thinking is quite old; it is a kind of craft. You may find it is a bit like standup comedy. Bad thinking ‘flops’ in much the way a bad joke does – but sometimes, you have to tell the joke before you see why this happens.

Like comedy, too, speculation and reflection often expose a lot of unpleasant baggage: those nasty, lazy, or otherwise unpalatable assumptions and sensibilities bound up in our everyday ideas and practices – assumptions in which we may in some way feel complicit. That said, the purpose of such reflection is not to produce shame. Rather the opposite. It is meant to make one aware of the full import of the views one holds, so that one can make an informed decision about their worth and their consequences. It is thus a key component not just in political rhetoric, but in the work of producing intellectually free citizens and durably democratic societies.

The course is built around readings and discussions, with some background/introductory material from me for context. The readings vary and include both academic writing (from history, sociology, philosophy) and imaginative literature (poetry, prose, films/TV). With that in mind:

*The main work of this class is reading and discussion: this comes before everything else. I expect you to come prepared to discuss these texts – ie, having read them carefully, reflectively, and critically.*

By this I mean: with an eye to ‘big picture’ arguments, even when details are confusing or unclear. The materials I have chosen are highly challenging. Dealing with that challenge – ‘finding your way into a text’ that you may not entirely understand – is an important skill. Draw out what you can, or pose questions: why is the text written in the manner it’s written in? What makes it difficult to read? What would you need to know to make sense of it? What pieces of it do make sense, and what can you piece together from them?

Why is this important? Because that’s what forms the ‘grist’ of our discussions: we unpack those challenges in the company of your classmates, many of whom are no doubt experiencing the same difficulties. The more you bring to class, the more we’ll have to discuss. I’m less worried that we get through all the material than that we have productive, scholarly conversations.

## Course Requirements and Assessment

### 1. *Preparation and Participation*

*First, your active preparation and participation is required.* This is a small seminar course that meets only once a week. Informed, active participation is key. Merely being present does not suffice.

Preparation and participation includes, as well, engaging with texts on ‘Hypothesis’, an online annotation app accessed via Blackboard learn. I will say more about this in class.

## 2. Writing and Revising

You will each submit two short (4-6 pp.) papers based on in-class readings. These will be returned to you with extensive comments. You will be required to revise the papers and resubmit them, after meeting reviewing these and meeting with me. If the paper is significantly improved, your grade will be revised upwards. If you fail to turn in a resubmission, I will reduce the grade assessed by *one full letter* when computing your final grade.

This is a large public university; you each bring different strengths and weaknesses. Students who have problems with the technical aspects of writing – sentence mechanics, syntax and grammar, organizing ideas around a thesis, etc. – will be expected to address themselves to these problems. Students who evince mastery of these skills early on will be pointed to additional texts or more sophisticated arguments. My aim is to meet you where you are and help you progress. I will upload a rubric to give you a sense of how the papers will be graded.

*Dates of paper assignments:*

- First Paper Topics Distributed: 2/11
- First Paper Due: 2/18
- Meet with me in office hours to discuss revisions no later than 2/25.
- Revisions due on 3/4.
  
- Second paper topics distributed: 4/1
- Second paper due: 4/8
- Meet with me in office hours no later than 4/15.
- Revisions due on 4/21.

If you have difficulty with the mechanics of writing, I strongly recommend that you avail yourself of the services offered by the Writing Center, 322 Lloyd Hall (for directions and to set up appointments: <https://writingcenter.ua.edu>).

*Third, there will be a written final.* The final will center on open-format essay questions, and will emphasize the substantive topics of the course.

### How your Final Grade Will be Calculated:

Attendance	10%
Participation	10%
Online Questions/Summary Arguments	10%
Short paper 1	25%
Short paper 2	25%
Final	20%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>

Grading Scale

A+ 99-100%	B+ 87-90%	C+ 77-80%	D+ 67-70%
A 93-99%	B 83-87%	C 73-77%	D 63-67%
A- 90-93%	B- 80-83%	C- 70-73%	D- 60-63%
			F < 60%

*There will be no rounding.*

Attendance

You are expected to attend class consistently. Given that we meet only once per week, missing more than one class will incur a penalty. There will of course be exemptions made for family emergencies, questions of public health, and university mandated travel.

Changes in Format

This course currently has an enrollment of nine, while our room has a capacity of 20. This should make social distancing unproblematic, and it is not presently my intention to offer an online/virtual option. If enrollment increases, I will work to find a larger room.

It is likely that some number of you will need to quarantine or that public health conditions necessitate moving to an online format. If that happens, I'll let you know the details as soon as possible.

Books and Readings:

The following books have been (or will be) placed on order with the Supe Store (but see the notes following):

- J.M. Coetzee: *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, 1999), ISBN 0691173907
- Kocku von Stuckrad: *A Cultural History of The Soul* (Columbia, 2022), ISBN 9780231200363

*Please note the following:*

- *Lives of Animals* can be bought used (~\$1.25) on Amazon marketplace. Gorgas Library also has electronic copies which you can download/offprint at no cost. I have placed links to both of these options on BB-L.
- *Cultural History of the Soul*: This book is due to be released in February, so you cannot buy it yet. I will keep you informed on this. *Please do not order the (very expensive) hardcover edition.* My understanding is that there will be a reasonably-priced e-book version. If this turns out not to be the case, we will make another arrangement.
- *Other readings*: All other readings have been scanned as PDFs and placed on UA Box. You should all receive an invitation link to this in the coming days, if you are registered for the course. A link will also be placed on the BB-L site.

### Changes

Every effort will be made to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as stated here. That said, I reserve the right to change and/or amend these guidelines. In such cases, I will communicate with you via email and Blackboard learn, and provide reasonable accommodations, as needed.

### **Dates, Readings, and Discussion Topics**

#### 1. January 13. Introduction

Mike Flanagan (dir.): *Midnight Mass* (Intrepid Pictures/Netflix Studios, 2021), S1Ep4 (“Lamentations”), runtime: 27:00-37:08. [streamed in-class]

#### 2. January 20. Intuitions: Time, Politics, and Mortality

Isaac Bashevis Singer: “The Spinoza of Market Street.” *Collected Stories of Isaac Beshevis Singer* (Farrar Strauss & Giroux, 1982), 12-34. [box]

Anne Norton: “Evening Land.” In Botwinick and Connolly (eds.): *Democracy and Vision* (Princeton, 2001), 161-70. [box]

#### 3. January 27. Methods: Aspects, Family Resemblances, and Language Games

Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* (Wiley, 2009), tr. GEM Anscombe *et al.*, §65-77, 35-41. [box]

Umberto Eco: “Ur-Fascism.” *The New York Review of Books* (22 June 1995). [box]

#### 4. February. 3. Ensoulment and Personhood

Lindsey Disney and Larry Poston: “The Breath of Life: Christian Perspectives on Conception and Ensoulment.” *Anglican Theological Review* 92:2 (2010), pp. 271-95. [box]

Aristotle: *On the Soul*, excerpts from book II, chs. 1-4; *infra* Michael Durant: *Aristotle’s De Anima in Focus* (Routledge, 1993), pp 21-31. [Box]

Plato: *Republic* (VII:514-519) (Princeton/Bollingen ed., 1961), pp. 747-751. [box]

#### 5. February 3. Challenging Personhood (1)

J. M. Coetzee: *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, 1999), 15-69. [Bookstore/Amazon, or download from Gorgas library]

6. February 10. Challenging Personhood (2)

J. M. Coetzee: *The Lives of Animals*, 1-15 and 75-120. [Bookstore/Amazon, or download from Gorgas Library]

7. February 17. Soul-blindness (1): Subjects

Stanley Cavell: *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford, 1979), 372-8. [Box]

Cora Diamond: "Eating Meat and Eating People." *Philosophy* 53:206 (1978), 465-79. [Box]

February 24. Soul Blindness (2): Regimes

Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen: "Soul Blindness, Police Orders, and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière." *Political Theory* (2016), 739-63. [box]

W.E.B. du Bois: "The Comet." *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Verso, 2016 [1920]), 149-60. [box]

8. March 3. Soul Blindness (3): Dis-Ensoulment?

Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958 [1988]), 22-28 and 73-78. [box]

Giorgio Agamben: *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Zone, 1999), 41-86. [box]

9. March 10. Soul Sickness (Part 1)

William James: "The Sick Soul." *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Routledge, 2008 [1902-3]), chs. 6-7. [box]

Y.L. Peretz: "Bontshe the Silent." Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (eds.): *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1955), 223-230. [box]

**March 17 – Spring Break – Classes Dismissed**

10. March 24. Collective Souls (1): Language, memory and space

Ernst Renan: "What is a Nation?" (1882) in Eley and Suny (eds.): *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford, 1996), 42-55. [box]

Rachel Katznelson: "Language Insomnia." In Benjamin Harshav: *Language in the Time of Revolution* (California, 1993), 183-94. [box]

11. March 31. Collective souls (2): Mobilizing the Soul

Kocku von Stuckrad: *A Cultural History of The Soul* (Columbia, 2022), chs. 3-4. [Supe Store/Amazon]

12. April 7 & 14. Collective souls (2): Living among the Dead

[Note: I may be away for part of this time, owing to a conference. We will either meet remotely or make an alternative arrangement for one of these class sessions.]

Nina Tumarkin: *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (Basic Books, 1994), 125-57. [box]

Jay Winter: *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), 54-77. [box]

Emanuil Kazakevich: *Star* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), tr. Robert Daglish (*entire*). [box]

Harsha Ram: *The Imperial Sublime* (Wisconsin, 2003), 3-28. [box]

13. April 21 & 28. Soul Sickness (2): Traumatic Citizenship

Emma Hutchison: *Affective Communities in World Politics* (Cambridge, 2016), 33-71. [box]

Orit Rozin: "Infiltration and the Making of Israel's Emotional Regime in the State's Early Years." *Middle East Studies* 52:3 (2016), 448-72. [box]

Elizabeth Samet: *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature through Peace and War at West Point* (Picador, 2008), pp 155-83. [box]

Lavie Tidhar: "The Time-Slip Detective." In Keret and Gavron (eds.): *Tel Aviv Noir* (Akashic Books, 2014), 70-79. [box]

University and Course Policies

*UA's COVID-19 Health and Safety Information*

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-

part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at [studentaccounts.ua.edu](http://studentaccounts.ua.edu) and [financialaid.ua.edu](http://financialaid.ua.edu).

UA students, faculty and staff are required to comply with [UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Task Force](#) guidance regarding social distancing, face coverings and other measures.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to [protect yourself and our herd](#). COVID-19 vaccines are being administered by the [University Medical Center, the Student Health Center](#) and various businesses and healthcare providers. Students who [report proof of their vaccination status](#) will receive Bama Cash as a thank you gift for doing their part.

#### *Course Accommodations*

This course is intended to be inclusive for all University of Alabama students. If you have any kind of disability – emotional, physical, cognitive, or learning-related (whether apparent or otherwise) – and you need accommodations for, or alternatives to lectures, assignments, or exams, please feel free to contact me to discuss reasonable accommodations for your access needs. Accommodations may also be made for those whose financial, legal, medical, or family situations (*inter alia*) compromise their ability to engage with the course. If you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course you are invited, *but not required*, to contact me to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services (1000 Houser Hall; [205 348-4285](tel:205-348-4285) Voice; [205-348-3081](tel:205-348-3081) TTY; [ods@ua.edu](mailto:ods@ua.edu)). If you have a diagnosis, ODS can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan for *all* of your classes without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors. Accommodations will be provided upon request and individually tailored, given the remote learning instructional method and the flexibility this entails. In order to maintain equity, certain accommodations (including, but not limited to, extensions and alternative assignments) may be extended classwide.

University policy on this matter may be obtained via the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#), as detailed in the Online Catalog.

#### *Recording Class Sessions or Course Content*

Students may not record course content and/or post course content publicly, including on social media sites. Students who record and/or post course content without instructor approval may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

It is not presently my intention to record class sessions. If it becomes necessary to do so (eg, for public health reasons), you will be notified before any recording takes place, and presented with options as regards your privacy.

All pre- and live-recorded lectures, presentations, and class discussions are for viewing by students in this course and section only, for as long as they are enrolled. They may not be posted in any public forum or shared with anyone not enrolled in this class. Any student violating these rules may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

#### *Statement on Academic Misconduct*

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog, and with the academic honor pledge.

*Severe Weather Protocol*

Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

*UAct Statement*

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website ([www.ua.edu/uact](http://www.ua.edu/uact)) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

*Pregnant Student Accommodations*

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

*Religious Observances*

Students should notify me in writing/via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. I will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities. Such accommodations must not undermine the academic integrity of the course. Full policy at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).