

## Dying Well: The Value and Meaning of Death

Dying Well: The Value and Meaning of Death Tags: Research guide for the March 12 lecture by Dr. Ira Byock, part of the Medical Humanities series presented by Visions and Voices

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### Introduction

Alfred Doebelin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* contains a number of interesting meditations on death and meaning in human life. After a lifetime of misadventures, the main character, Franz Biberkopf, finds himself at an institution for the criminally insane. When Death appears in his cell, Franz asks him why he exists. Death replies that human existence would be meaningless without Death. Man is the only animal that knows every living creature will eventually die—including loved ones, friends, and the self. Death's point is that the wise, unlike Franz, realize this and plan their lives accordingly. By contrast, Franz lived an unreflective life; accidents, rather than intentions, directed his actions.

Doebelin presents these existential themes in a naturalistic way through the novel's dialogue between Franz and Death. Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, among countless other philosophers and writers, meditate on similar themes. In this philosophical tradition, death evokes the idea of nothingness and reveals the urgency of creating meaning in human existence. As in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the confrontation with death is a necessary precondition for the self-conscious creation of meaning.

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### Perspectives from Medicine and Philosophy

*Ending Life: Ethics and the Way We Die*

By M. Pabst Battin

**Online Library**      **R726.B329 2005eb**
**Doheny Library**      **R726.B329 2005**

*What Is the Meaning of Human Life?*

By Raymond Belliotti

**Philosophy Library**      **BD431.B389 2001**

*Dying Well: The Prospect for Growth at the End of Life*

By Ira Byock

**Gerontology Library**      **HQ1073.B96 1997**

*Death and Western Thought*

By Jacques Choron

**Gerontology Library**      **BD444.45 1963B**

*The Right to Die with Dignity: An Argument in Ethics, Medicine, and Law*

By Raphael Cohen-Almagor

**Leavey and VKC Libraries**      **R726.C635 2001**

*Death and Spirituality*

By Kenneth J. Doka

**Gerontology Library**      **BT825.D37 1993**

*The Philosophy of Death*

By Steven Luper

**Gerontology Library**      **BD444.L87 2009**

*Readings in Thanatology*

Edited by Josh D. Morgan

**Gerontology Library**      **BD443.8.R43 1997**

*Facing Death: Where Culture, Religion, and Medicine Meet*

Edited by Howard M. Spiro

**Doheny and Leavey Libraries**                      **R726.8.F33 1996**

*The Quest to Die with Dignity: An Analysis of Americans' Values, Opinions and Attitudes concerning End-of-Life Care*

By Beverly A. Tyler

**Doheny and Gerontology Libraries**                      **R726.8.Q47 1997**

*The Good Death: The New American Search to Reshape the End of Life*

By Marilyn Webb

**Leavey Library**    **HQ1073.5.U6W43 1997**

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- American Journal of Bioethics*
- Death Studies*
- Ethics & Medicine: A Christian Perspective on Issues in Bioethics*
- The Internet Journal of Law, Healthcare, and Ethics*
- The Journal of Bioethics*
- The Journal of Clinical Ethics*
- The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics*
- The Journal of Medical Humanities*
- The Journal of Medical Humanities and Bioethics*
- The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*
- Medical Ethics*
- Medical Humanities*
- Omega: An International Journal for the Study of Dying, Death, Bereavement, Suicide, and Other Lethal Behaviors*
- Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*
- Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law, and Ethics*

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### Explorations of Death

There is a great deal of literature and film that explores the human experience—and meaning—of death and grieving. Below are just a few of the works that will help you continue exploring the universal themes in Dr. Byock's lecture.

#### *A Death in the Family*

By James Agee

**Doheny Library** **PS3501.G35D43 1998**

#### *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*

By Vicente Blasco Ibanez

**Leavey Library** **PQ6603.L2C813 1924**

#### *The Plague*

By Albert Camus

**Leavey Library** **PQ2605.A3734P413 1948**

#### *The Seventh Seal* (based on Bergman's play *Wood Painting*)

By Ingmar Bergman

**Leavey Library** **LVYDVD 680**

#### *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

By Leo Tolstoy

**Doheny Library** **PG3366.S6D74 2008**

#### *Our Lady of the Assassins* (based on Fernando Vallejo's novel *La virgin de los sicarios*)

By Barbet Schroeder

**Leavey Library** **LVYDVD 1165**

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