Alfred Doeblin'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.

Doeblin 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.
Death in Medicine and Philosophy

Dying Well: The Value and Meaning of Death

Last Updated: Mar 17, 2010  URL: http://libguides.usc.edu/dyingwell

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

*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.B44 1997
Recommended Journals - Dying Well: The Value and Meaning of Death - LibGuides at University of Southern California

Dying Well: The Value and Meaning of Death

To access the following e-journals, enter their titles into the search box from the E-Journals tab at www.usc.edu/libraries. From within the online journals, search for key words such as: dying, dignity, end-of-life care, death AND meaning, death AND value, bereavement, etc.

- 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
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 LYYDVD 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 virgen de los sicarios)
By Barbet Schroeder
Leavey Library LYYDVD 1165