

I am Michael Cholbi, a philosopher working on ethical theory, Kant, paternalism, the philosophy of death and dying and more. AMA!

mcholbi¹ and r/Science AMAs¹

¹Affiliation not available

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Abstract

I am Michael Cholbi, Professor of Philosophy at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I work and publish in a number of area of ethics, including ethical theory, moral psychology, practical ethics, and the history of moral philosophy. Much (though not all) of my work has a Kantian flavor – but do note I’m willing to take Kant and Kantians to task when need be! (For a good overview of my work on Kant’s ethics, check out my book *Understanding Kant’s Ethics*). Here are some more specifics about my research: I’m perhaps best known for my work on philosophy of death and dying, including my work on suicide and grief. With respect to suicide, my views are complicated: I argue that most acts of suicide violate our Kantian duty to preserve our rational agency, but precisely because this is a self-regarding duty or duty to self, then at a social level, individuals have an autonomy-based right to shorten their lives, consistent with their moral obligations to others; that medically assisted dying is not contrary to the moral norms of medicine and that the medical profession should not monopolize access to desirable ways of shortening our lives; that, all other things being equal, mental health problems provide equally strong justifications for suicide as do ‘physical’ ailments, etc.; and that non-invasive public health measures to prevent suicide are typically defensible. Grief is an understudied phenomenon among philosophers. Much of my work here is concerned with understanding how grief can makes our lives better — why we wouldn’t find it desirable to be unable to grieve, like Meursault in Camus’ *The Stranger* — despite the fact that it involves pain or mental distress. In the book I’m writing, I propose that grief represents an especially fruitful opportunity to know ourselves and understand our own commitments and values more deeply. In other areas of social ethics, I write on paternalism, defending what I call the ‘rational will’ conception of paternalism, wherein paternalism is wrong because it intercedes in our powers of rational agency in various ways; on race and criminal justice, where I argue (in a forthcoming paper in *Ethics*) that racial bias in the administration of the death penalty in the U.S. merits its de facto abolition; and on the philosophy of work and labor, a new area of research where I’m exploring universal basic income and notions of meaningful work. As you can tell, my work is very diverse, both topically and methodologically. I try to integrate empirical work from economics, legal studies, and psychiatry into my research where appropriate. I look forward to discussing any and all of my work with the reddit audience! Some of my work: My Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on suicide My review of Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin’s book on near death experiences A piece on grief in *Four By Three* A blog post on paternalism from LSE’s *The Forum*

the WINNOWER

[REDDIT](#)

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MCHOLBI [R/SCIENCE](#)

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I'm perhaps best known for my work on philosophy of death and dying, including my work on [suicide](#) and grief. With respect to suicide, my views are complicated: I argue that most acts of suicide violate our Kantian duty to preserve our rational agency, but precisely because this is a self-regarding duty or duty to self, then at a social level, individuals have an autonomy-based right to shorten their lives, consistent with their moral obligations to others; that medically assisted dying is not contrary to the moral norms of medicine and that the medical profession should not monopolize access to desirable ways of shortening our lives; that, all other things being equal, mental health problems provide equally strong justifications for suicide as do 'physical' ailments, etc.; and that non-invasive public health measures to prevent suicide are typically defensible.

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As you can tell, my work is very diverse, both topically and methodologically. I try to integrate empirical work from economics, legal studies, and psychiatry into my research where appropriate.

I look forward to discussing any and all of my work with the reddit audience!

Some of my work:

[My Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on suicide](#)

[My review of Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin's book on near death experiences](#)

[A piece on grief in Four By Three](#)

[A blog post on paternalism from LSE's The Forum](#)

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In the announcement thread [/u/sensible_knave](#) asked:

[WRITE A REVIEW](#)

Hi, Professor, thanks for joining us.

CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:

In your paper "[A Direct Kantian Duty to Animals](#)" you argue that "animal welfare, being a non-derivative

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and final good, is the basis for a direct Kantian duty," and that "these duties rest upon the regard they show for animal welfare, not the ways in which these practices brutalize our moral sensibilities or express bad moral character. The direct duty I defend here is thus analogous to our imperfect duty of beneficence toward other human beings. In Kant's terms, this means that we have a duty to make animal welfare a general end or maxim, but not a duty to promote animal welfare at every opportunity or to the utmost."

You go on to say:

"while my view would not require vegetarianism *per se*, it would certainly frown upon raising food animals in miserable conditions or in ways that inhibit their capacity to function as members of their species, and it would reject killing food animals in painful ways."

In particular, this view would seem to frown upon the practices of intensive animal agriculture (or "factory farms") which is responsible for producing the vast majority of animal food products we buy. I have two questions.

1) What does the direct duty you describe imply about our role as buyers of these products?

And 2) what does it suggest about so-called "humane" animal farming practices, according to which the animals are treated relatively well before they are killed painlessly at a young age? (Relatedly, is animal welfare, as you understand it, impacted by the deprivation of an untimely death or killing?)

Thanks again.

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

2) first: I tend to think that particular evils of death for humans rest in the fact that we can project ourselves into the future – that we can plans, have hopes or aspirations, etc. I'm not an expert in animal psychology, but I doubt that most animals have particularly sophisticated capacities in that regard. The main question regarding the ethics of killing animals this concerns the painfulness or suffering associated with the killing itself, not whatever 'loss' animals might suffer by being killed.

1) I don't think buying the products wrongs the animals, but it's morally laudatory not to buy factory farmed meat inasmuch as it serves as model to others and reduces the demand for factory farmed meat.

Hi Professor Cholbi - thanks so much for joining us today!

I have three quick questions about teaching Kant. I teach a lot of intro to ethics and love teaching Kant, but it's not easy, so maybe you can help.

1. How do you help convince students that Kant isn't crazy? Some people have already heard of Kant and know that he's a bit absolutist when it comes to some things (e.g. the axe murderer at the door, lying). How do you help students see the value in Kant? Currently I do so by introducing Kantian ethics as an opponent to utilitarianism which solves some classic utilitarian problems (that they themselves point out in class). Is there any other route you suggest?
2. I've recently decided that I'm no longer going to teach the ULF in intro to ethics courses. My reasoning is something like this: the ULF is confusing (you have to spend a long time getting students to see it's not a form of rule utilitarianism) and not as important to contemporary Kantian ethics (as compared to the HF or KoE). Am I missing something? Am I letting my students down by just giving them the HF?
3. What do you think is the best edition of the *Groundwork* for intro students? I love the Zweig/Hill Cambridge edition and students seem to find it more useful than the Hackett, but there's lots out

there.

Thanks a ton!

[A Definite Description](#)

1. He's not an absolutist in the sense often attributed to him. That's a misreading foisted upon him by his philosophical antagonists. I think a powerful way to start with Kant is by emphasizing that he's a philosopher of social harmony -- someone who wants us to act in ways that others can rationally endorse and on the basis of shared principles. A kind of Korsgaardian emphasis there.
2. It's a tough principle to explain, admittedly, and I agree that its overall importance to the Kantian ethical project has probably been exaggerated. That said, I worked awfully hard to explain in a way that students can grasp in chapter three of my book *Understanding Kant's Ethics*. I'd invite you to take a look and let me know if I've succeeded!
3. The Gregor translation with Korsgaard's intro (Cambridge UP) is my go to for students.

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1. How do you help convince students that Kant isn't crazy? Some people have already heard of Kant and know that he's a bit absolutist when it comes to some things (e.g. the axe murderer at the door, lying). How do you help students see the value in Kant? Currently I do so by introducing Kantian ethics as an opponent to utilitarianism which solves some classic utilitarian problems (that they themselves point out in class). Is there any other route you suggest?
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Thanks a ton!

[A Definite Description](#)

Let me also add: I'm not a big fan of using 'crazy' as a way of inviting students to think about a philosophical view. You could just as well haul out Harris' survival lottery paper to condemn utilitarianism as crazy. I tend to prefer first motivating students to see what's attractive or plausible about a moral theory before we invite them to consider a theory's potentially more radical implications.

What are your thoughts on Shelly Kagan's course on [Death](#)? Would you consider it a good introduction to the subject?

[Jose Orono](#)

It's excellent - I use the companion book in my death and dying class. That said, it's somewhat narrow both methodologically and topically. There's not much on the history of attitudes toward death, current

psychological theories about our death-related beliefs (e.g., terror management theory, for instance), and so on. There's also nothing about grief or the deaths of others. I've found that a more eclectic approach to the subject of death seems helpful to most students.

Professor Cholbi,

Thank you very much for this AMA! Suicide is an important topic to me; for almost a year, I kept trying to find reasons to kill myself (though, thankfully, that nightmare is seemingly adjourned). So, this question is personal as well as philosophical.

I read a couple of your articles on suicide and the justification for suicide. My understanding of your position is that suicide is morally justifiable iff the suicidal agent is a rational agent - i.e. possesses the ability to determine his own plans of life, autonomously and without foreign intervention.

My concern is that you seem to ignore the mentally ill suicidal agent's ("MISA's") reasonableness, or lack thereof. I'm sure you've considered whether the MISA is reasonable as well as rational, so I was hoping to hear your thoughts on whether you do in fact ignore reasonableness and, if so, why.

As John Rawls discusses in *Political Liberalism*, the moral agent must possess two moral powers: (1) the rational (the ability to determine a set of ends and act to realize those ends) and (2) "the reasonable" - or the capacity to appeal to others' mutual desire for fair terms of cooperation. Purely rational agents "lack the moral sensitivity" required to justify one's conceptions rigorously and publicly. Only agents who are reasonable will be able to offer terms of cooperation others can accept.

Concerning suicide, this would obviously take on a different dimension than Rawls imagines: we would have to explain why suicide by the mentally ill is permissible under fair terms of cooperation. Although I disagree with them, there obviously *are* valid arguments appealing to fair terms of cooperation, concerning suicidal agents who are in, e.g., excruciating and incurable physical pain. We can assume the suicidal agent in these circumstances *is* rational and reasonable, and the agent's justification of his/her suicide would presumably appeal to fair terms of cooperation.

As someone who has been suicidal, though, and who is clinically depressed, I am uncertain the MISA is clearly a **reasonable** agent. Mentally ill individuals are prone to gross distortions about the world. Clinically depressed persons, for example, may believe literally no one loves them even if they are very close with friends or family. (I know this from personal experience...) While the MISA may be rational in the neo-Kantian sense you assume, his public appeals may still contradict clear facts about the world.

More importantly, however, the MISA - in order to appeal to fair terms of cooperation - will have to come to terms with the fact that other people really will miss him when he is gone. The depressive argument "it doesn't matter if I die, who cares?" is insufficient. If you are right, the MISA can presumably defend his suicidal intent on rational grounds, but I do think similar public-justification problems arise even on other grounds.

To summarize: it seems to me that MISAs are not obviously reasonable. They are unable to comprehend and respond to the reality of their relationship structures (or other facts about the world). As such, although they may be rational, their public justifications will in fact be lacking and we would have no reason to consider their suicidal thoughts as consistent with fair terms of cooperation. When determining whether suicide is in fact justifiable re the mentally ill, why *shouldn't* we consider whether they are reasonable, and instead hang the question on whether they are rational? Is there a specific methodological reason you have focused on rationality? Or am I just reading you poorly (is my sample size too small)?

[AyerBender](#)

Many issues here -- I wish you the best of luck in your own struggles and hope that you have received

the support and attention you need.

I don't think I'd agree that the ways in which MISA's go awry are deficiencies in reasonableness, as Rawls understands it. I think suicide sometimes violates moral obligations to others, especially obligations owed to particular others (of the sort that parents owe to children, or spouses to one another, say). The ways in which suicidal thinking are distorted concern rationality -- our beliefs regarding our ends and they are best achieved. The individual who thinks the world will never get better and is perpetually hostile to her hopes has (probably) has a false belief regarding her ends.

You'd benefit from reading the psychologist Thomas Joiner on why people engage in suicide -- he offers a very compelling account of the 'rationality' problems you're highlighting.

In the announcement thread [/u/RealCoolDad](#) asked:

What's the most comforting thing you can say about death?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Death is a mark of our mortality, without which much of what we care about wouldn't make sense.

In the announcement thread [/u/EatyoLegs](#) asked:

Are you at all concerned that, given we know zero about what happens after death, humans don't currently have the mental fortitude to allow one the appropriate perspective to accurately quantify death, on any level?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

I don't accept the assumption of the question, that we know zero about what happens after death. I do agree that we have great difficulty imagining or conceptualizing our own non-existence. Stephen Cave's book *Immortality* is good on that topic.

In the announcement thread [/u/PM_MOI_TA_PHILO](#) asked:

Hi Professor, thank you for doing this!

What are your thoughts on the use of phenomenology to investigate grief?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Never sure how to distinguish 'phenomenology' from simply reflecting on our experience. I can't see how we'd make any headway on grief without the latter.

In the announcement thread [/u/Steelbros13](#) asked:

Thank you for the AMA. Do you believe paternalism is ever necessary? If so, where is that line drawn? I ask this because I work as a behavioral health technician for a rehabilitation center for alcohol/drug abuse and I am witness to a vast degree of rational agents. Intercession by means of education has been beneficial for many

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Not sure what you mean by 'necessary' here. If you mean 'justified', then I'd describe myself as holding that the fact that an act is paternalistic is a prima facie reason to refrain from performing it, but whether it's justified all things considered depends on how much its target stands to benefit from the act and the nature of the interference with the target's rational choosing. The "Identity threat" article listed above outlines my general stance.

Educating someone, FWIW, doesn't strike me as paternalistic at all; paternalism involves interceding in someone's rational agency for their own benefit, but education aims to modify choice or behavior by rational persuasion.

In the announcement thread [/u/The_Anda](#) asked:

Happy to see you here! I would love for you to comment on the Kantian flavor thing. What are you committed to that results in that "flavor"? I've thought of my work as having a similar thing (maybe partially because you trained me) but I've recently wondered what that really means for/to me. I'm trying to get clearer on whether I'm committed specifically to Kantian duty-based ethics or something else! - A

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Reddit community, meet one of the world's next great philosophers!

I guess I see the flavor in terms of some basic commitments that I think of as embedded very deeply in the Kantian ethical project, even if they're not always so obvious in Kant's own work. These would include the inescapability of rational agency (that we can't help but see ourselves as Kant alleged); the importance of seeing ethics as rooted in living together on shared terms despite the diversity of our particular aims and concerns; and (this might be idiosyncratic to me) self-regarding duties, that ethics requires us to be answerable to our own rational natures as well as to the concerns of other rational beings.

can you say a little more about your research into philosophy of work?

[draw_a_butterfly](#)

It's a new area for me, so I'm very excited about it. I'm interested in a lot of questions here. A big one is whether and how the introduction of an unconditional basic income (UBI) might change our relationship to work, ethically and politically. I'm also interested in whether there is an inherent and irresolvable conflict between the intrinsic goods of work (meaning, etc.) and the extrinsic goods (wages most obviously). One other issue of interest is whether we simply ask too much of work in today's "work-centered society" -- whether it's wise or realistic to expect our jobs to provide us income, meaning, social relationships, personal growth, a sense of identity, etc.

In the announcement thread [/u/thetownday1fan](#) asked:

Professor Cholbi,

Is the trend toward hiring adjunct over full-time tenured professors negatively affecting the study of Philosophy here in America?

P.S. Do you still teach with the Socrates doll?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Socrates is, well, dead but definitely still kicking philosophical ass.

As to adjuncts: Yes. Anything that makes instructors more anxious about their job security is likely to make them less effective as philosophy educators – less innovative, less daring, etc. Adjuncting also, frankly, wears people out, as they teach too many courses at too many campuses, etc. It also makes it much tougher for students to form the relationships with their professors that lead to long-term learning and success.

In the announcement thread [/u/pilgrimtohyperion](#) asked:

I agree that grief teaches us a ton about ourselves. It's the same true for kids that experience grief or does this impact them negatively going into adulthood?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Looks like a false dilemma: Children who undergo grief can attain the same self-knowledge that (I argue) is the central good of grief. But the trauma of (say) losing a parent can also affect someone's overall mental well-being into adulthood.

In the announcement thread [/u/wxavv](#) asked:

Why do you think that it is morally justifiable for people with mental health problems to commit suicide? What would be an example where the person with the mental health problems is justified in committing suicide? Thank you.

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

To be clear, I don't think all suicides undertaken by the mentally ill are morally justifiable. There will often be important questions there about whether the illness in question compromises their ability to rationally choose to end their lives. My claim is rather that mental suffering should not be dismissed for being somehow 'in the head' and therefore not serious or weighty. It's as real as the sufferings of (say) cancer.

As to an example: the Swiss patient Andre Rieder probably qualifies as someone who has a right to die due to his mental health problems.

In the announcement thread [/u/TheToadShroom](#) asked:

Hello professor,

I'm struggling to understand this statement - "most acts of suicide violate our duty to preserve our rational agency". It makes it almost into a "abducto ad absurdum", where the capabilities to make choices are valued more highly than the individual actually making those choices.

My question is, is this a fair analysis? And a more broad question, why does the ability to make choices give life value in the first place, as opposed to any other method?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

I'd argue (echoing the work of other Kantian philosophers such as David Velleman) that the duty to respect individuals' choices only makes sense if the individuals themselves are owed respect as rational agents. In order for our choices to be owed respect, we must be owed respect as rational choosers. And this extends to how we treat ourselves, so that in our own case, we are obligated to

respect ourselves as rational agents. To exercise our rational agency by ending our own lives is to make use of that agency to destroy itself – a kind of practical or ethical contradiction. In the terms you put it, respecting the capability to make choices requires respecting the individual agent making the choices. While I think this general line of argument is sound, in my “A Kantian Defense of Prudential Suicide” and “Dignity and Assisted Dying: What Kant Got Right (and Wrong)”, I argue that there are some exceptions where self-killing does not fail to respect rational agency.) (That said, this doesn't mean that others have an unlimited right to interfere with our suicidal choices. That the duty suicide typically violates is a self-regarding duty or duty to oneself implies that suicides often violate no duties owed to others and, from a social perspective, fall within the domain of personal liberty.)

In the announcement thread [/u/iwigk](#) asked:

How would you explain what philosophy is to a 5 year old?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Asking questions that human beings need to ask in order to grasp being human

In the announcement thread [/u/humble_as_a_mumble](#) asked:

If you have seen it, what are your thoughts on the character named Chidi from the comedic television show "The Good Place"? He dedicated his life to the study of ethics and philosophy and because of this found himself paralyzed in ethical dilemmas when even the most insignificant of decisions needed to be made. He was thus in a constant state of indecision.

P.S. I have no idea about your field of study or research. Have a good day!

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

"Everyone hates moral philosophers." Yeah.

Great to see a moral philosopher on TV, and adore the show. But ... I don't appreciate the show's suggestions that (1) studying moral philosophy makes you indecisive about ethical questions (it might make you more cautious or thoughtful about them, but I don't see any reason to think it leads to the kind of paralysis Chidi exhibits), and (2) that there's something obviously admirable about moral decisiveness (Why should we think it's a good thing to go with our gut? Isn't it bad for the morally ignorant to be confident and decisive?)

That said, I'm hoping the APA can get William Jackson Harper to give a keynote address at an upcoming meeting!

In the announcement thread [/u/drrocket8775](#) asked:

Hey Dr. Cholbi!

When I took my department's death and dying class, the thing that struck me the most was that there still isn't a clear definition of death, legally and metaphysically. Insofar as we don't know who's dead, we can't be certain that we'll always be making the accurate choices about who's dead, which is scary. But, it's also really weird to think that we're making legal-ethical choices based on the metaphysics of human persistence. Just because something is metaphysically true does not mean that we should use that as our guide for ethical decision making.

What do you think the best philosophical method is for coming up with a justified definition of death?

(P.S. I have the Paternalism anthology you're in right now, and I liked your talk at the BGSU UBI conference)

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

I think the best place to start is to notice that death is as much an ethical or social concept as it is a metaphysical one. Dying marks a change in someone's ethical status. Some of the rights, interests, etc. that one had while living no longer apply, and vice versa. A definition of death, then, should capture this transformation in the individual's ethical status. I'm not sure precisely what this approach implies about defining death, though my suspicion is that it would favor views appealing to cessation of consciousness or psychological continuity over views about physiological processes, organismic death, etc.

In the announcement thread [/u/420Dank069](#) asked:

What are your thoughts on non-cognitivists?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

I have a negative pro-attitude toward their position.

In the announcement thread [/u/Robotic-communist](#) asked:

Hello professor,

With technology moving so fast such as CRISPR and the increase of interest over the years to defeat ageism. Do you believe that once we defeat death, that Americans should have the right to not only live forever but that the technology should also be available to all Americans via taxpayer money? Let's test that philosophy degree of yours, shall we? You can do it!

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Thanks for your encouragement! It seems to me likely that if 'defeating death' is ever within our power, that it would begin as a technology available to a select few but would at some point come to be seen as part of the standard basket of health care to which people are entitled. On the topic of life extension/immortality, etc., and distributive justice, I strongly recommend the work of John Davis.

In the announcement thread [/u/pickwickpapers](#) asked:

autonomy - would you say that the concept of autonomy is at the core of Kantian philosophy?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

yes, though given how many different ways in which the term 'autonomy' is used in philosophy, it's easy to misunderstand what Kant meant by it (and his usage isn't entirely clear or consistent either!). I tend to prefer to speak of Kantian ethics as rooted in rational agency rather than in autonomy.

In the announcement thread [/u/Sum1_](#) asked:

Do you believe anything truly comes after death?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Non-existence

In the announcement thread [/u/wisebilly123](#) asked:

Is grief a very selfish act so therefore the only thing we learn about ourselves is that we are selfish and not selfless. As such as individuals grieve they are not adding to or able to act reasonably or rationally. So my question is ... is grieving learned behaviour or innate. Why in essence do we grieve if it doesn't help

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

I don't see any reason to think that we learn from grief that we are selfish (I'd also contest that description – most all human beings are to some extent self-interested, which isn't the same as being selfish). I argue in my work that grief is an opportunity to grasp our own character, biography, or practical identity better, which I would not classify as a 'selfish' pursuit.

In the announcement thread [/u/Klumber](#) asked:

Did Glaser and Strauss influence your work? How?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Not all that familiar with that literature, in truth.

The question which doesn't let me live is, Is there an afterlife or not? Because if there is, I might lose myself to whatever's out there. But if not, the prospect of fading into absolute nothingness scares the shit out of me. Thank you for doing this AMA though.

[PhoenixAvenger1996](#)

The key question here is why nothingness scares you. Is the state of nothingness scary to you? As many philosophers have pointed out, it's hard to understand why non-existence is a scary state to be in!

What are your thoughts on the profession of philosophy being used by some as an example of pointless majors in universities?

[lfxahab](#)

Sure, 'pointless' if you have a hopelessly cramped, unimaginative, pedestrian conception of the goals of education!

Philosophy changes the world. I'll bet the average person can name five important philosophers before they can name five important engineers, accountants, public relations professionals, etc.

Hello Professor Cholbi, thanks for doing this AMA!

I have a personal question: As a christian, is it worth thinking about studying philosophy at a university even though I believe to have the answers to some (major and minor important) questions? Have you been working with christians (at the CCEP or with christian students)? If yes, what is your experience?

[lusedtodoitto](#)

I don't see any deep incompatibility between the profitable study of philosophy and a commitment to Christianity (or to any broad belief system). Sure, philosophy can lead to questioning our deeply held beliefs, but that's equally possible for Christians and others. Only if we thought that philosophy was only beneficial to those who thought they had no answers (and who out there meets that description?!) would we think that philosophy and religious commitments are anathetical to one another.

With respect to Christianity in particular I'd add that, in my observation, many people are not aware of the very rich and deep Christian philosophical tradition -- how insightful, compelling, and even diverse it is. For instance, many of my students associate Christianity with dualism and are not aware that the orthodox view in Christianity has been that we survive death via bodily resurrection. 'Christian philosophy' is far from a non sequitur.

So everyone has something to learn from philosophy on these counts.

What do you think happens when we die?

[GaryMckinnon](#)

We cease to exist. Death is not a state we are ever in. Dying happens to us - death does not.

What do you think about Habermas' Discourse Ethics? Do you think it's possible to believe in Kant's ethics in our times?

[ImmanuelKant](#)

Tempted to ask what you ImmanuelKant think about Habermas, but ... I'm an admirer but not an expert. I tend to think that the emphasis on 'discourse' conceals that it's really a descendant of Kantian ethics -- what kinds of reasons we should treat as the basis of cooperation, etc.

Hi, thanks for doing this. On a lighter tone, and given your study of grief, did you get the chance to see the movie Manchester by the sea? It's the movie that comes to mind when thinking about it, and I was wondering if you think it's an accurate portrayal of grief. Moreover, do you believe there are lessons to be drawn from art dealing with these issues, or should we focus more on philosophy and keep art more as a means of entertainment. Thanks!

[kalenrb](#)

Hard to judge 'accuracy' -- grief experiences are pretty diverse. I thought the film was very affecting. It highlights one particular dimension of some grief experiences, namely, guilt.

On art: yes, in fact, in a chapter in my book on grief, I try to argue that when we watch tragic plays, movies, etc., that we are 'rehearsing' grief, undertaking an experience that prepares us to grieve by mirroring grief in a 'safe' way.

I was just curious if you've read Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich, and if so, what were your thoughts on the novella?

[ReefaManiack42o](#)

Of course! It's the kickoff text in my death and dying course. Somehow it pulls off the trick of being both timeless and very much of its time. For me, it's a great illustration of 'death denial' and of the need to confront our own mortality before it confronts us!

Why do you think the United States is so adverse to allowing people that are suffering from terminal illness(s) to decide they do not want to suffer anymore and elect euthanasia? We will allow our pets to forgo suffering but not our loved ones.

[SofaSpudAthlete](#)

Well, note that we're now in a legal situation where many of the most populous states (California, New York, etc.) now allow legalized assisted dying for the terminally ill, so my sense is that American attitudes are changing.

I'd say the traditional aversion to legalized assisted dying in the US stems from a combination of believing that death is in God's hands (read Hume's "Of suicide" for the most effective and vociferous critique of that claim) and the US medical establishment wanting to tailor their responsibilities so that doctors can only ever save a life, not cause a death.

In the announcement thread [/u/Relevations](#) asked:

What is the Kantian perspective to Sophie's choice?

[BernardJOrcutt](#)

Kant seemed to think that there are no genuine moral dilemmas, so there was one choice available to Sophie that was morally correct. While I respect that Kantian position, I argue for what I believe is a better Kantian position in my article "The denial of moral dilemmas as a regulative ideal."