

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-16**

**Philosophy 2006: Metaphysics & Epistemology of Witchcraft**



Albrecht Dürer's depiction of a witch, c1500. Image Credit: The British Museum

Fall and Winter  
T/Th, 1:30-2:30  
P&AB-117  
Course Section: 001

Instructor: Jon P. Marsh  
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Office hour: TBA  
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**DESCRIPTION**

European witches were terrifying. Many of them ate babies, had sex with devils, destroyed crops and, worst of all, murdered human souls. At least that is what their contemporaries believed. These are just some of the apparent reasons why tens of thousands of them were tried and executed, in many cases after being tortured, between the years 1400 and 1750.

This course aims to understand the intellectual dimensions of this disturbing but fascinating period, known pejoratively as the “Witch Craze”. To do this, we will try to get inside the minds of persecutors, judges and accusers of the Western witch by looking at medieval, renaissance and early modern literature on magic, witchcraft and the devil. A second aim will be to assess this event and the underlying worldview that helped shape it philosophically.

Sample philosophical topics include: faith and reason, skepticism and toleration, miracles and testimony, the problem of evil, the ethics of killing, the mind-body problem, free will, justice, feminist critiques of the witch hunts, sexual ethics, and the philosophy of death.

Antirequisite(s):	None
Prerequisite(s)	None

## **TEXTS**

- **Levack, B. (ed).** The Witchcraft Sourcebook. Routledge. 2003. E-book freely accessible through the UWO library site.
- **Nash, D.** Witches and Witchcraft. Shire Publications. 2014. ISBN - 10: 0747812918. Kindle edition: CAD \$ 6.36.
- **Plantinga, A.** Knowledge and Christian Belief. 2015. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. ISBN-10: 0802872042. Kindle edition: CAD\$ 9.99.
- **Sandel, M.** Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? 2010. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. ISBN-10: 0374532508. Kindle edition: CAD\$ 5.99.
- **van Inwagen, P.** Metaphysics. Fourth Edition. 2014. Westview Press. ISBN-10: 0813349346. Kindle edition: CAD\$ 21.49.

**N.B.** ISBN numbers above correspond to paperback editions, which will be made available for purchase through the UWO bookstore. Kindle edition prices are quoted from amazon.ca, solely for comparative purposes, and may change at any time.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| • Attendance/participation | 15%   |
| • Short assignments        | 25 % (detailed instructions will be provided) |
| • Midyear test             | 20%   |
| • Exam                     | 40 %  |

## **OBJECTIVES**

See above description.

## **WARNING**

Some of the visual and written material for this course is graphic and potentially shocking. This is, however, essential to understanding European witchcraft in its historical context. Student discretion is advised.

## **RECORDING**

Some of your classmates are uncomfortable having their faces, and/or voices, recorded. For this reason, recording any portion of any of our sessions, whether in video and/or audio form, is strictly prohibited.

## **AUDIT**

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.