

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

**Philosophy 2073G: Death**

**Winter Semester 2016**  
**Thursdays 6:00-9:00pm**  
**Classroom: Talbot College 309**

**Instructor: Rodney Parker**  
**Office: Stevenson Hall 1144**  
**Office Hours: TBA**  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this course, we will examine the meaning and moral significance of death, as well as the implications of being conscious of one's own mortality. Drawing upon both classical and contemporary philosophical texts, we will approach the topic of death by attempting to answer some of the following questions: When is someone considered dead? What, if anything, survives the bodily death of a person? Should death be feared? Is suicide ever rational? What are we thinking of when we try to think of no longer existing? Does the inevitability of death make life meaningless? How does the consciousness of death impact our lives? Is death something that should be avoided through the advancement of new technologies without qualification?

**TEXTS**

*Philosophy and Death: Introductory Readings*, ed. Brennan and Stainton (Broadview, 2009). ISBN: 1551119021

*The Myth of Sisyphus and other stories*, Albert Camus (Vintage, 1991). ISBN: 0679733736

*Additional required readings* will be available on the course website.

**REQUIREMENTS**

**2 Essay Assignments** (1400-1600 words each) – **35% each**

**Final Exam** – **30%**

A hard copy of all written assignments is to be submitted to the instructor in class on the due date. Students will also be required to submit electronic copies of their essays to [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com).

**Both a hard copy and an electronic copy must be submitted for work to be graded.**

LATE ASSIGNMENTS will receive a penalty of **-5%** per day (including weekends).

**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 the responsibility of the student to understand the policies set out by the university Senate and the Department of Philosophy.

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

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## **Reading Schedule** **Death – PHIL2073G, Winter Semester 2016**

*January 4<sup>th</sup> – Classes resume*

### **Unit 1 – Ancient views on Death**

January 7<sup>th</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Overview of the course, the assignments, and class objectives.

#### **Epicurean views on death**

Epicurus – “Letter to Menoeceus, 10.121-135,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.163-166.

January 14<sup>th</sup>

#### **Epicurean views on death continued**

Lucretius – *On the Nature of Things*, Bk. III, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.172-176.

#### **Platonic views on death**

Plato – excerpts from *Phaedo*, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.39-45.

January 21<sup>st</sup>

#### **Platonic views on death continued**

Plato – excerpts from *Phaedo*, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.45-64.

January 28<sup>th</sup>

#### **Stoic views on death**

Seneca – excerpts from *Letters from a Stoic*. Available on the course website.

Epictetus – *Discourses*, Book I, Ch.1-2, 24-25. Available on the course website.

February 4<sup>th</sup>

#### **Some responses to the Epicurean view of death**

Thomas Nagel – “Death,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.177-184.

Harry Silverstein – “The Evil of Death,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.185-204.

## **Unit 2 – Mortality and Immortality**

February 11<sup>th</sup>

### ***First Essay Due***

#### ***Pascal's Wager and Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence***

Blaise Pascal – excerpts from *Pensées*. Available on the course website.

Friedrich Nietzsche – “The Greatest Weight” from *The Gay Science*; “The Eternal Recurrence” from *The Will to Power*; “Of the Vision and the Riddle: 2” from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Available on the course website.

February 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> – **Reading Week**

February 25<sup>th</sup>

### **Personal Identity – Locke's stockings, and Theseus' Ship**

John Locke – “On Identity and Diversity,” Book II, Ch. 27 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book II, Ch. 27. Available on the course website.

John Perry – *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.65-75.

March 3<sup>rd</sup>

### **Immortality**

Bernard Williams – “The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.207-222.

John Martin Fischer – “Why Immortality is Not so Bad,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.224-237.

March 7<sup>th</sup> – Drop Date for second term half courses.

## **Unit 3 – The Ethics and Politics of Life and Death**

March 10<sup>th</sup>

### **Euthanasia**

Louis Pojman – “What is Death? The Crisis of Criteria,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.99-108.

James Rachels – ‘Active and Passive Euthanasia’, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.297-302.

Bonnie Steinbock – ‘The Intentional Termination of Life’, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.303-311.

March 17<sup>th</sup>

### **Abortion**

Robert Young – “What is so Wrong with Killing People?,” *Philosophy*, Vol. 54, No. 210 (Oct., 1979), pp. 515-528. **Available on the course website.**

Don Marquis – “Why Abortion is Immoral,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.266-284

March 24<sup>th</sup>

### **Abortion continued**

Judith Jarvis Thomson – “A Defense of Abortion,” in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.249-265.

March 31<sup>st</sup>

**Suicide**

***Second Essay Due***

Albert Camus – excerpts from *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Schopenhauer – ‘On Suicide’, from *Parergo and Paralipomena Vol.2*. Available on the course website.

Richard Brandt – ‘The Morality and Rationality of Suicide’, in *Philosophy and Death*, pp.312-329.

*Final class*

*April 6<sup>th</sup> – Last day of classes.*

**Final Exam: TBA**