

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2026-27
Philosophy 2073G (650):
Death

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Information including instructor contact details and course location can be found on the course OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is focused on understanding and engaging the arguments that scholars have made about death. The specific arguments we consider attempt to answer the following questions: What does it mean to say that a person or organism is dead? What, if anything, survives beyond death? Is death bad? Conversely, is immortality good? Are there any circumstances in which it is morally permissible to bring about the death of another and if so, why?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course seeks to achieve two goals. The first, and most important, is to introduce students to and/or build upon a set of standard philosophical skills. Using the readings, lectures, and assignments this course will help students to identify what it is that makes the set of reasons that support the conclusions of an argument either convincing or implausible by requiring them to formulate well-reasoned responses to the arguments made in the readings.

The second goal of this course is to introduce students to the ways in which the aforementioned philosophical skills have been applied by classical and contemporary philosophers to one of the most mysterious elements of human life, i.e., death. This goal is accomplished on the two course exams.

TEXTS

Samantha Brennan and Robert J. Stainton eds., *Philosophy and Death: Introductory Readings* (Broadview Press: 2009) The textbook costs \$71.50 according to the publisher: [Philosophy and Death - Broadview Press](#).

Students are welcome to purchase second-hand copies of this textbook. There is only one edition.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

20% - Mid-Term Exam (covering weeks 1 to 5)

50% - two 1100 – 1300 word essays, worth 25% each

30% - Final Exam (covering weeks 7 to 12)

ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE

Exams:

Mid-Term – Open from Friday Feb 5th at 9 a.m. to Friday the 12th at 11:59 p.m. EST

Final – April Exam Period, to be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar

Essays:

1. Friday February 26th, 2027 at 11:59 p.m. EDT

2. Friday April 9th, 2027 at 11:59 p.m. EDT

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 4th): Introduction to the Course - What is Philosophy?

Readings: None. Just watch the posted video lectures.

What is 'Death'? (What can we Know about Death? Part 1: Not Much/Nothing.)

Readings: Edwards (pgs. 3 – 37)

Week 2 (January 11th): (What can we Know about Death? Part 2: A Lot.)

Readings: Plato (pgs. 39 – 64)

Week 3 (January 18th): The Criteria that Define Death

Readings: Pojman (pgs. 99 – 108)

McMahan (pgs. 109 – 142)

Week 4 (January 25th): The Concept of Death

Readings: Feldman (pgs. 143 – 158)

Week 5 (February 1st): Is Death Bad? Part 1: No

Readings: Epicurus (pgs. 163 – 171)

Week 6 (February 5th to 12th):

Mid-Term EXAM (available from February 5th at 9 a.m. to February 12th at 11:59 p.m.)

Week 7 (February 22nd): Is Death Bad? Part 2: Yes

Readings: Nagel (pgs. 177 – 184)
Silverstein (pgs. 185 – 205)

Week 8 (March 1st): Is Immortality Bad? Maybe.

Readings: Williams (pgs. 207 – 223)
Fischer (pgs. 224 – 237)

Week 9 (March 8th): Gender and Death

Readings: Brennan (pgs. 239 – 246)
Thomson (pgs. 249 – 265)

Week 10 (March 15th): When is Killing Wrong? (Part 1: Abortion)

Readings: Marquis (pgs. 266 – 284)
Sinnott-Armstrong (pgs. 285 – 296)

Week 11 (March 22nd): When is Killing Wrong? (Part 2: Euthanasia)

Readings: Rachels (pgs. 297 – 302)
Steinbock (pgs. 303 – 311)
Rawls, Thompson, Nozick, Dworkin, Scanlon, and Nagel
(pgs. 331 – 344)

Week 12 (March 29th): So why is Killing Wrong?

Readings: McMahan (pgs. 362 – 379)
Brennan (pgs. 380 – 393)

**This Reading Schedule is Subject to Change Given Sufficient Prior
Notice**

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION

Essays – The first essay is due on Friday, February 26th by 11:59 p.m. EST on OWL. Any essay not submitted by that time will be **subject to a 5% per day late penalty**, weekends included, up to a maximum of 10 days, or 50% of your grade on the essay. At that point, a grade of 0 will be recorded.

Students who wish to avoid the late penalty will **need to submit formal supporting documentation** to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered. Students **cannot** submit an ‘undocumented absence’ to avoid this late penalty. A suitable alternative deadline for the submission of the essay will be established in consultation with Professor Robb once consideration has been granted.

The second essay is due on the last day of classes, i.e., Friday, April 9th by 11:59 p.m. EDT on OWL. Owing to Senate regulations barring the submission of course work after the last day of classes for the term, a failure to meet that deadline will automatically result in a grade of 0.

Essay submissions after the final day of the course will only be permitted when **supporting documentation** is submitted to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered. A suitable alternative deadline for the submission of the essay will be established in consultation with Professor Robb once consideration has been granted.

Exams – The Mid-Term and Final exams will be timed; students will have 3 hours of writing time for the Mid-Term, and 4 hours of writing time for the Final. The Mid-Term Exam will be open for students to take at any point during Week 6. The Final Exam will be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the April 2027 Final Exam period (with an anticipated 5-day writing window). Owing to the flexibility included in this exam scheduling, students who fail to complete an exam during the designated period will be unable to write a make-up without the submission of formal **supporting documentation** to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered.

The Final exam will be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the April 2027 Final Exam period. Students unable to write at the scheduled time will need to provide formal supporting documentation to the Academic Advising office of the Faculty in which the student is registered, at which point a make-up exam will be scheduled.

All requests for academic consideration for the duration of this course are to be made to the Academic Advising office of the student’s Faculty of Registration through the Student Absence Portal, NOT to Professor Robb.

GENERATIVE AI

In this course, the use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT...) is **prohibited**. If unauthorized AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for **research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines**, and other materials used in **preparing assignments**. Students are expected to **retain** these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on the use of proctoring software

Examinations in this course will be conducted using ProctorTrack remote proctoring service. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. Completion of this course will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's Remote Proctoring website at: <https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

E-MAIL POLICY

I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over e-mail (i.e., I don't have the time to discuss concepts/arguments covered in the course materials by e-mail). I will address those concerns or questions during my Zoom office hours (or by appointment) **only**. If you need to make an appointment with me or you have some private issue you would like to communicate to me, feel free to use e-mail. Otherwise, please attend my Zoom office hours (or make an appointment).

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

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://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.

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AUDIT

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

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration.pdf

The Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a substantial but temporary impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of Faculty in which the student is registered.

2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
- a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant

Requests without supporting documentation are limited to one per term per course.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner. Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term always require formal supporting documentation.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Western's Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf

f. In the case of mid-term tests, notification is to be “given in writing to the instructor as early as possible, but not later than **one week** prior to the writing of the test”.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends (24/7 availability).

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced

GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.