

The University of Western Ontario
Department of Philosophy

**Philosophy: 153F
Death**

Instructor: Robert J. Stainton

Class Days and Hours: M, W, F, 11:30 – 12:20

Office: Talbot 412

Phone: ext. 85770

Office Hours: TBA

Email: rstainto@uwo.ca

Web Site: <http://publish.uwo.ca/~rstainto/>

Students are responsible for following the Philosophy Department procedures included with this outline.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will examine the meaning and importance of human mortality. We will bring philosophical methods to bear on some of the following questions about death: What is it to be dead? Is there any possibility that persons can survive their bodily deaths? If so, under what conditions? Is death bad? We will read contemporary and some classical philosophers on the subject of death with a view to making progress on these difficult and important questions.

Prerequisite: none.

Antirequisite: Thanatology 111a/b.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

First “very short” essay (1500 words): 25% (Due date TBA)

Second “short” essay (2000 words): 35% (Due date TBA)

Final exam: 40%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Course pack

COURSE CONTENT:

Part I. Philosophical Methodology

Lecture only. No readings

Part II. Epistemology, Metaphysics and Death

1. Epistemological Issues

Paul Edwards (1969). "Existentialism and Death: A Survey of Some Confusions and Absurdities". In S. Morgenbesser, P. Suppes and M. White (eds.) *Philosophy, Science and Method*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 473-505.

2. Personal Identity and Survival

Stephen T. Davis (1988). "Traditional Christian Belief in the Resurrection of the Body". *New Scholasticism* 62: 72-97. Reprinted in J. Donnelly (ed.) *Language, Metaphysics, and Death*. New York: Fordham, pp. 320-343.

John Perry (1978). Excerpts from *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Indianapolis: Hackett, pp. 1-36.

3. The Nature of Death

Louis Pojman (1992). "What is Death? The Crisis of Criteria". In his *Life and Death*. 2nd edition (2000). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 95-101.

Fred Feldman (1992). "The Enigma of Death" *Philosophia* 21: 163-181.

Jeff McMahan (1995). "The Metaphysics of Brain Death". *Bioethics* 9(2): 91-126.

Part III. Ethics and Death

1. Is Death Bad?

(a) Ancient Reflections

Plato, *Phaedo*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Epicurus. "Letter to Menoeceus" and "Principle Doctrines". In B. Inwood & L.P. Gerson (eds) *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. Second edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, pp. 28-36.

Lucretius. Excerpts from *De Rerum Natura*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 253-265.

(b) The Badness of Death

Thomas Nagel (1979). "Death". In his *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-10.

Harry Silverstein (1980). "The Evil of Death". *Journal of Philosophy* 77(7): 401-424.

Ben Bradley (2004). "When is Death Bad for the One Who Dies?" *Nous* 38(1): 1-28.

Stephen Rosenbaum (1989). "The Symmetry Argument: Lucretius Against the Fear of Death" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50(2): 353-373.

(c) *The Goodness of Immortality*

Bernard Williams (1973). "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality". In his *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 82-100.

John Martin Fischer (1994). "Why Immortality is Not So Bad". *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2(2): 257-270.

(d) *Gender and the Badness of Death*

Samantha Brennan (forthcoming). "Feminist Philosophers Turn Their Thoughts to Death". *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*.

2. The Ethics of Killing

(a) *The Wrongness Of Killing*

Jonathan Glover (1977). "The Sanctity of Life". Chapter 3 of *Causing Death and Saving Lives*. Penguin, pp. 39-59.

Jeff McMahan, TBA

Samantha Brennan (2001). "The Badness of Death, the Wrongness of Killing, and the Moral Importance of Autonomy". *Dialogue* 40(4): 723-728.

(b) *Abortion*

Judith Jarvis Thomson (1971). "A Defense of Abortion". *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1(1). Reprinted in W. Parent (ed.) (1986) *Rights, Restitution & Risk*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-19.

Don Marquis (1989). "Why Abortion is Immoral". *The Journal of Philosophy* 86(4):183-202.

Walter Sinnott Armstrong (1999). "You Can't Lose What You Ain't Never Had: A Reply to Marquis on Abortion". *Philosophical Studies* 96: 59-72.

(c) *Suicide And Euthanasia*

James Rachels (1975). "Active and Passive Euthanasia". *New England Journal of Medicine* 292: 78-80.

Bonnie Steinbock (1979). "The Intentional Termination of Life". *Ethics in Science and Medicine* 6: 59-64. Reprinted in B. Steinbock & A. Norcross (eds)(1994) *Killing and Letting Die*, 2nd ed., NY: Fordham, pp. 120-130.

Richard Brandt (1975). "On the Rationality and Morality of Suicide". In S. Perlin (ed.) *A Handbook for the Study of Suicide*, Oxford University Press. Reprinted (1992) in his *Morality, Utilitarianism and Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

John Rawls, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, T.M. Scanlon & Thomas Nagel (1997). "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief". *The New York Review of Books* 44(5).