

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY  
College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences  
Expanded Course Outline

<b>Course Title:</b>	<b>Confrontations with the Reaper</b>
<b>Subject Area/Catalogue #:</b>	<b>PHL 345</b>
<b>Units:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CS #:</b>	<b>C2</b>
<b>Component:</b>	<b>Lecture/discussion</b>
<b>Grading Basis</b>	<b>Graded</b>
<b>Preparation:</b>	<b>May 2002</b>
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<b>Date of last revision:</b>	<b>12/22/09</b>

### I. Catalog Description

PHL 345 Confrontations with the Reaper (4)

Examination of the nature and meaning of death in literature and philosophy. Topics include defining death, understanding what, if anything, makes death something to fear, immortality, and the morality of issues pertaining to death: killing, abortion and suicide. 4 lecture/discussion. Prerequisites: Completion of General Education Area A, and Sub-areas 1, 2, and 3 of Area C. Meets General Education requirement in Area C4.

### II. Required Background or Experience

Completion of courses in Area A, and Sub-areas 1, 2, and 3 of Area C

### III. Expected Outcomes

By successfully completing the course students will be able to:

1. Identify and critically evaluate major philosophical positions on the nature of death, its purported badness, and survival of death.
2. Relate the treatment of death in literature to philosophical puzzles about death.
3. Critically analyze and evaluate ethical issues related to death from a philosophical and literary perspective.
4. Critically read and analyze complex literary and philosophical material.

### IV. Texts and Readings

#### Philosophy

*Confrontations With The Reaper: A philosophical study of the nature and value of death*, Fred Feldman (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

*The Metaphysics of Death*, John Martin Fischer, Editor (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

*Death and Philosophy*, Jeff Malpas and Robert Solomon, Editors (NY: Routledge, 1998).

*Death: Philosophical Soundings*, Herbert Fingarette (NY: Open Court, 1996).

*Life and Death: Grappling with the moral dilemmas of our time*, Louis Pojman (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1998).

*Very Little—Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, Simon Critchley (NY: Routledge,

1997).

*Thinking Clearly About Death*, Jay F. Rosenberg (Hackett Press, 1998).

### **Literature/Literary Theory**

*Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, metaphor, criticism*, Mark Turner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

*Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, John Dollimore (NY: Routledge, 2001).

*Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, Regina Berreca, Editor (London: Macmillan, 1990).

*Wit*, Margaret Edson (Dramatist Play Service, 1999).

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Tom Stoppard (NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967).

*Getting Even*, Woody Allen (New York, 1966).

*No Exit and Three Other Plays*, John-Paul Sartre (NY: Vintage Books, 1989).

*The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, Leo Tolstoy (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

*Labyrinths*, Jose-Luis Borges (NY: Modern Library, 1983).

*The Myth of Sisypheus and Other Essays*, Albert Camus, Trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, 1955).

*Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann, Trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

*White Noise*, Don DeLillo (NY: Penguin, 1991).

*Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White (Harper Trophy, 1952).

*Tuck Everlasting*, Natalie Babbitt (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975).

*How to Live Forever*, Colin Thompson (NY: Knopf, 1995).

### **V. Minimum Student Materials**

Course Textbooks

### **VI. Minimum College Facilities**

Computer Labs, Library, Blackboard

### **VII. Course Outline**

Our investigation will focus on the ways in which philosophy and literature explore and attempt to solve the puzzles discussed below.

1. Confronting the reaper
  - a. Philosophical perspectives
  - b. Literary perspectives
2. What is life? What is death?
  - a. Deceptive metaphors about life and death
  - b. Enlightening metaphors about life and death
  - c. A definition of death (and life)
3. The survival of death
  - a. Can one survive death?
  - b. Literary perspectives on the survival of death
  - c. A philosophical response
4. The purported evil of death
  - a. Literary perspectives on the evil of death
  - b. An Epicurean response: How to be dead and not care

- c. How death can be bad for the one who dies
5. Death and immortality
    - a. Narrative and the structure of a human life
    - b. Why the novelists fear immortality
    - c. Should we fear immortality as much as death itself?
  6. The ethics of death
    - a. The morality of killing
    - b. The morality of abortion
    - c. The morality of suicide

## **VIII. Instructional Methods**

A variety of instructional methods will be used to help students achieve expected course outcomes. They include the following:

1. Lecture
2. Discussion of assigned reading
3. Small group activities
4. In class and online presentations
5. Student feedback on in class and online presentations

There may be a Webct component to this course. If so, students will be expected to check the Webct site regularly, contribute to online discussions, and get course information and submit course work through the site.

## **IX. Evaluation of Outcomes**

### **A. Student Assessment**

1. Four short papers critically discussing a particular topic in relation to some of the assigned reading materials. Each paper will require students to explore philosophical themes as they manifest themselves in literature.
2. A classroom or online presentation (can be in a group or solo). Students will find and analyze a novel, short story or play about some aspect of death or immortality. Presentations will be judged in terms of their literary or artistic merit and their inclusion of relevant philosophical material.
3. Participation in discussion of the course topics and readings (both in class and online).

### **B. Course Assessment**

The course will be evaluated using the Department of Philosophy's standard evaluation tool for lecture-based courses. Other evaluative tools could also be implemented such as a questionnaire pertaining to whether the students perceived that this course fulfilled the objectives of a synthesis course in Area C or a short paper in which students assess the merits of the course as an Area C GE synthesis course.