

# PHIL 150W: The Philosophy of Life and Death

Spring 2016

James Blair Hall, room 142  
MWF 10-10:50am

## Syllabus

### Instructor

Chad Vance  
[cvance@wm.edu](mailto:cvance@wm.edu)

Office Hours: WF 11am-12:30pm  
(and by appointment)  
James Blair Hall, room 124

### What Is This Class About?

We all live and die. Life, death—these are part of being human. Everything we do is centered around these two phenomena. So, it is important that we take the time to fully understand what life and death *are*, as well as the moral implications of creating life, or ending it. This course is designed to give you the tools with which you will be able to think about such issues more carefully and clearly. We will achieve this result by way of asking the following questions:

- What is life? What is death?
- Could a machine ever be alive?
- Could there be life after death?
- What makes life good? What makes death bad?
- Does life have meaning?
- Is it morally permissible to have children?
- Is it morally wrong to end the life of a fetus? A suffering person? One's self?
- Do animal lives matter, morally?
- Do we have moral obligations to presently non-existent future generations?
- When is it permissible to sacrifice one life for another?

Throughout our exploration of these questions, our primary goal will be to make you a better reasoner; i.e., our ultimate goal is to help you to (i) be able to think carefully and critically, (ii) be able to supply *reasons* for your beliefs, (iii) acquire the necessary tools to further investigate philosophical issues on your own.

### Assigned Readings

Required Text: *A Pocket Style Manual*, by Diana Hacker & Nancy Sommers, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, or 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (2010, 2011, or 2014).

Other assigned readings will be provided as pdf files, accessible under "Assigned Readings" on our course website, here:

<http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil150/phil150.html>

## Course Requirements

1. Exams (30%). You will take a mid-term exam (15%) and a final exam (15%).
2. Papers (30%). You will write two papers. The first will be a short diagnostic paper, 600-900 words (i.e., 2 - 3 pages), consisting of a rough draft (5%) and a revised draft (10%), which you will complete after receiving instructor comments. The second (15%) will be a longer paper, 1200-1800 words in length (i.e., 4 - 6 pages), the final version of which you will turn in after receiving peer comments. *Topics and more info: TBA.*
3. Class Debate (10%). You will participate in an in-class debate. A portion of your grade will be based on a prepared 300-600 word opening statement. *More info: TBA.*
4. Informal Writing (10%). You will write 11 informal response papers, each 200-300 words (i.e., 1 page). Your lowest score will be dropped; i.e., your 10 best scores will constitute your informal writing assignment grade (1% each). *More info: TBA.*
5. Quizzes (10%). You will take a total of 11 short reading quizzes. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped; i.e., your 10 best scores will constitute your quiz grade (1% each).
6. Participation (10%). A portion of your grade will depend on your ability to come to class (on time and prepared), participate in class discussion, and refrain from being disruptive, falling asleep, sending text messages, or surfing the internet.

## Course Policies

### Academic Integrity

All students of the College of William & Mary are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity honor code policy of this institution. Violations of this policy include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, and stealing. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Council. More information about the honor code can be found at:

[wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/honorcodeandstudentconduct/honorcode/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/honorcodeandstudentconduct/honorcode/index.php)

NOTE: *Students who are found to be in violation of the honor code will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (i.e., you will automatically receive an F for the course) as well as non-academic sanctions (which include academic probation, suspension, or expulsion).*

### Student Conduct

Students and faculty each have a responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to the code of conduct may be subject to discipline. More information at:

[wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student\\_code\\_of\\_conduct/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student_code_of_conduct/index.php)

### Disability Services

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. More information at: Campus Center (room 109), 757-221-2510, or [wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/disabilityservices/](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/disabilityservices/).

### Religious Observances

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. Please let me know by the end of the drop/add period about any such conflicts, so that we can resolve them. More information at:

[wm.edu/about/administration/provost/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php](http://wm.edu/about/administration/provost/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php).

### Discrimination and Harassment

The College of William & Mary policies on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment and Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment and/or discrimination based upon race, sex, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, political belief, disability, veteran status, age, or any other category protected by the Commonwealth or by federal law should contact the Office of Compliance and Policy on the first floor of James Blair Hall. More information about discrimination and harassment can be found at:

[http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/topics/discrimination\\_overview/index.php#policies](http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/topics/discrimination_overview/index.php#policies)

[http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/sexual\\_harass/index.php](http://www.wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/sexual_harass/index.php)

## Course Schedule

Below is a schedule of the topics that we will cover, along with list of the reading(s) which you should complete before each class meeting. Please note the dates for **exams days**, **papers due dates**, and **debate days** in bold.

<b>UNIT ONE</b>		<b>The Nature and Value of Life and Death</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
Wed 1/20	Intro/Syllabus/Arguments	No readings
Fri 1/22	Material Identity	• Dupré, "The Ship of Theseus"
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Identity &amp; the Nature of Death</b>	
Mon 1/25	<b>CAMPUS CLOSED - SNOW</b>	No readings
Wed 1/27	Personal Identity	• Perry, "Dialogue on Personal Identity & Immortality"
Fri 1/29	Defining 'Death'	• Kagan, "The Nature of Death"
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>The Nature of Consciousness</b>	
Mon 2/1	No new topics	No new readings
Wed 2/3	Body and Soul	• Descartes, "Meditations 1 & 2"
Fri 2/5	Artificial Intelligence	• Searle, "The Chinese Room" • Block, "The China Brain"
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Life &amp; the Value of Existence</b>	
Mon 2/8	Property Dualism	• Jackson, "The Qualia Problem" • Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?"
Wed 2/10	Defining 'Life'	• Cleland, "Why Life Can't Be Defined"
Fri 2/12	The Non-Identity Problem	• Kripke, "On the Necessity of Origin" • Parfit, "The Non-Identity Problem"
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Good Life, Bad Death</b>	
Mon 2/15	The Harm of Existence	• Benatar, "Why It Is Better Never to Come into Existence"
Wed 2/17	The Good Life	• Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?"
Fri 2/19	The Harm of Death	• Nagel, "Death" • Broome, "What Is Your Life Worth?"
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>The Meaning of Life</b>	
Mon 2/22	Meaning in Life	• Tolstoy, "A Confession" (optional) • Craig, "The Absurdity of Life Without God"
Wed 2/24	Meaning in Life	• Nagel, "The Absurd"
Fri 2/26	Meaning in Life <b>DUE: Paper 1 (DRAFT)</b>	• Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" • Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	
Mon 2/29	Meaning and Immortality	• Williams, "The Makropulos Case" • Fischer, "Why Immortality is Not So Bad"
Wed 3/2	Review: Mid-Term Exam	No new readings
Fri 3/4	<b>MID-TERM EXAM</b>	No new readings
<b>Spring Break</b>		
3/5-3/13	Spring Break	No readings

<b>UNIT TWO</b>		<b>The Ethics of Life and Death</b>	
<b>Week 8</b>		<b>Ending Human Lives</b>	
Mon 3/14	Euthanasia	• Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"	
Wed 3/16	Suicide	• Kagan, "Suicide" (read part 1 for Wed. & part 2 for Fri.)	
Fri 3/18	No new topics	No new readings	
<b>Week 9</b>		<b>Abortion</b>	
Mon 3/21	Abortion (against) <b>DUE: Paper 1 (FINAL)</b>	• Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"	
Wed 3/23	Abortion (for)	• Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"	
Fri 3/25	Fetuses and Persons	• Warren, "The Moral & Legal Status of Abortion"	
<b>Week 10</b>		<b>The Ethics of Procreation</b>	
Mon 3/28	No new topics	No new readings	
Wed 3/30	Parent Licensing	• LaFollette, "Licensing Parents"	
Fri 4/1	Procreation & Genetic Disease	• Purdy, "Can Having Children Be Immoral?"	
<b>Week 11</b>		<b>Debates</b>	
Mon 4/4	No new topics	No new readings	
Wed 4/6	<b>Debate: Human Cloning</b>	No new readings	
Fri 4/8	<b>Debate: Savior Babies</b>	No new readings	
<b>Week 12</b>		<b>Animal Rights</b>	
Mon 4/11	Animal Rights (against)	• Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals"	
Wed 4/13	Animal Rights (for)	• Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People"	
Fri 4/15	Animal Death	• Norcross, "The Significance of Death for Animals"	
<b>Week 13</b>		<b>Future Generations</b>	
Mon 4/18	No new topics	No new readings	
Wed 4/20	<b>Writing Workshop</b> <b>Due: Paper 2 (DRAFT)</b>	No new readings	
Fri 4/22	The Value of Future Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roberts, "Discount Rates: A Boring Thing You Should Know About"</li> <li>• Parfit, "Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Social Discount Rate"</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 14</b>		<b>Life-for-Life Decisions</b>	
Mon 4/25	The Trolley Problem <b>Due: Paper 2 (FINAL)</b>	No new readings	
Wed 4/27	No new topics	No new readings	
Fri 4/29	Review: Final Exam	No new readings	
Mon 5/9	<b>Final Exam: 2pm – 5pm</b>	No readings	