DVPR 47200
Philosophical Reflections on Death

Spring term 2011
Swift Hall 400
T/Th 10:30-11:50

Instructor: Dan Arnold
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Phone: 702-8276
Office hours: Swift 401A, Fridays, 9:30-11:00 (or by arrangement with instructor); for appointments during regular office hours, contact instructor's secretary, Susie McGee (Martin Marty Center)
Teaching assistant: Pierre-Julien Harter <pjharter@uchicago.edu>

Required Readings:

All readings are available on reserve, electronic (chalk.uchicago.edu) and otherwise; the following books are (or will soon be) available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore:

– Todd May, *Death* (Acumen, 2009)
– Fred Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper* (Oxford U. Press, 1992)
– J. J. Valberg, *Dream, Death, and the Self* (Princeton U. Press, 2007)
– Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford U. Press, 2000)
– Grace Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence* (Routledge, 2004)
– Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Princeton U. Press, 2010)

Course Requirements:

In addition to exemplifying regular attendance and spirited participation in discussion, students will be required to submit two writing exercises – one shorter essay (6-8 pages), due at the beginning of the sixth week of the term (=Tue., May 3), and a longer paper (12-16 pages) due Friday, June 10. Among the ways in which Pierre-Julien Harter can be useful to you is in vetting drafts of your mid-term and/or final papers.

Week 1 (Tue., March 29 / Thur., March 31):

Introduction: "To study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one's self to die" (Cicero). **Reading (for Thur.):** Thomas Nagel, "Death"; Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" (both on e-reserve)

Week 2 (Tue., April 5 / Thur., April 7):

Some of the basic philosophical issues. **Reading:** Todd May, *Death* (Acumen, 2009); Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortals" (e-reserve)

Week 3 (Tue., April 12 / Thur., April 14):

Is death something to *put out of mind*, or something to *keep* in mind? Two ancient trends of thought (this week's classes led by Pierre-Julien Harter). **Reading:** Selections from Epicurus, Marcus Aurelius (all on e-reserve). (The complete text of

Marcus Aurelius is available online at <http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uchicago/Doc?id=10039040>.

Week 4 (Tue., April 19 / Thur., April 21):

Thoughts on the nature and value (yes, *value*) of death. **Reading:** Fred Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

Week 5 (Tue., April 26 / Thur., April 28):

Some Buddhist thoughts, from first-millennium India, on death, rebirth, and the self; Dharmakīrti's proof of rebirth, Śāntideva on oneself as another. **Reading:** Eli Franco, "Towards a Reconstruction of Dharmakīrti's Doctrine of Rebirth"; Franco, "Critique of the Materialist Position"; Franco, trans., "[Dharmakīrti's] *Pramāṇasiddhi*, verses 34-72, selections" (all on e-reserve; also recommended and on e-reserve: Richard Hayes, "Dharmakīrti on Rebirth"; John Taber, "Dharmakīrti against Physicalism"; and, for an overview, Vincent Eltschinger, "Dharmakīrti"); then, **for Thursday**, Śāntideva, "The Perfection of Meditative Absorption" (=*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 8; on e-reserve)

Week 6 (Tue., May 3 / Thur., May 5):

Death in relation to other philosophical puzzles. **Reading:** J. J. Valberg, *Dream, Death, and the Self* (Princeton University Press, 2007; focus on Part Two, "Death," pp.153-236)

Week 7 (Tue., May 10 / Thur., May 12):

Just what does it mean to be a "being towards death"? **Reading:** Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶¶ 45-53 (=pp.274-311 in the translation of Macquarrie and Robinson, on e-reserve); Gilbert Ryle, 1929 review of *Sein und Zeit* (e-reserve). Recommended: Paul Edwards, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Evaluation* (on reserve).

Week 8 (Tue., May 17 / Thur., May 19):

On the significance of the death of an *other*. **Reading:** Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), pp.1-117.

Week 9 (Tue., May 24 / Thur., May 26):

"Death and the displacement of beauty." **Reading:** Grace Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence*, = vol.1 of *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*

Week 10 (Tue., May 31 / Thur., June 2):

A *naturalist* account of what it could mean to survive death. **Reading:** Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2010)

Final papers due Friday, June 10!