

Puzzles and Paradoxes

Online

PHIL 2300

Description

The goal of this course is to get you puzzled. We will explore a number of paradoxes on a wide range of philosophical topics, including time, identity, logic, science, belief, decision, and value. Some of these paradoxes have widely accepted solutions, but many do not. We will use paradoxes as a stepping stone to deeper philosophical questions. These include questions such as: Is time real? What is a person? Does language shape reality? Is infinity coherent? Can we know anything? How do we learn from experience? Are our experiences real? Or are we just living in a computer simulation? What is it to be rational? Why do we value the future more than the past? Does God exist? And finally, why is death bad?

Instructors

Professor: Arc Kocurek
Email: awk78@cornell.edu
Office Hours: W 3–4:15pm (or by appointment)

TA: Bangxing Huang
Email: bh557@cornell.edu
Section: F 11:30am–12:20pm
Office Hours: By appointment

TA: Lavaris McCellion
Email: lm825@cornell.edu
Section: F 12:40–1:30pm
Office Hours: F 1:40pm–2:40pm

Required Materials

Required text: Clark, *Paradoxes from A to Z* (3rd edition)
All other required readings are available on Canvas.

Optional text: Sainsbury, *Paradoxes* (3rd edition)

Grades

Engagement	12%	max 4% each unit
Exercise Sets	15%	3 in total, 5% each
Reading Quizzes	20%	22 in total (+ course eval), 1% each, 20% max
Short Papers	45%	3 in total, 15% each
Peer Reviews	8%	2 in total, 4% each

Assignments

Engagement

Credit for engagement can be earned by going to section and/or posting to an online discussion.

- Each section meeting is worth 1%.
- Each post on an online discussion of at least 100 words is worth 0.25%. Posts can be (among other things) questions, comments, or replies to other posts.

The maximum you can earn for engagement each unit is 4%. There is no limit on the number of posts you can write each week. However, I ask that you don't, say, write 16 posts in the first week and then check out—the goal of this assignment is to promote sustained engagement.

Exercise Sets

There will be three exercise sets on Canvas. These are to check that you have a basic understanding of key concepts for each unit, which are covered in the first lecture of the unit. You'll have three attempts at each set. See the schedule for due dates. No late exercise sets will be accepted.

Reading Quizzes

For each paradox, there will be a 5 minute online quiz on the relevant reading about that paradox. The quiz should be straightforward if you have done the reading and viewed the lecture. Each quiz has two multiple-choice questions, each worth 0.5% (the points cumulate across quizzes). There will be 22 quizzes this term, plus a course evaluation survey at the end of the semester, which will count towards as an extra quiz (1%). The maximum you can earn for quizzes is 20%. Quizzes are due at the end of the week. No redo or makeup quizzes.

Short Papers

There are three short paper assignments (900–1200 words \approx 3–4 pages double-spaced) about one of the paradoxes from each unit. These will be submitted to Canvas as a PDF. Very roughly, you will be asked to choose a paradox discussed in that unit and to defend your preferred solution to it. See the schedule for deadlines. Details about the paper will be posted closer to the due date. See below for the policy about extensions on paper assignments.

Peer Review

After the first and second paper, you will be randomly assigned to two papers written by your peers to provide feedback once they're submitted. This will require reading each paper and answering a few questions about it. Peer review will be anonymous. You will receive full credit for the peer review so long as you provide timely and sincere feedback. See the schedule for deadlines.

Lectures

Lectures will be prerecorded and posted on Canvas. You can access videos in the "Pages" tab. The second of the two lecture times (W 3–4:15pm) will be used as an open Q&A to discuss the material for that week. If you need additional assistance from me, you can schedule a separate appointment to meet with me.

Policies

Paper Extensions

If you need an extension on a paper assignment, just ask. While I reserve the right to not grant an extension, I will typically grant one if a student asks (especially if they ask *in advance*, i.e., at least 48 hours *before* the deadline). However, paper assignments will not be accepted more than a week after the deadline. Exceptions will only be made in extreme circumstances (e.g., family or medical emergency) and may require documentation.

Academic Integrity

We strictly adhere to the University Policy on Academic Integrity, as outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity (<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited. Any violation of this policy will be reported immediately. Violations will, at the very least, result in an F on the assignment, but may also lead to an F in the class, suspension, or even expulsion.

Schedule

PAZ = *Paradoxes from A to Z*

Readings listed in recommended order

Metaphysics & Logic

Week 1: Logic and Argumentation

09/02 | A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation

Week 2: Time

09/07 | PAZ: Achilles and the Tortoise, The Racecourse, The Arrow

09/09 | McTaggart, "Time" (excerpt)

09/11 | **EXERCISE SET 1 DUE**

Week 3: Parts & Identity

09/14 | Sider, "Constitution"

09/16 | PAZ: The Ship of Theseus

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (excerpt)

Week 4: Time Travel & Vagueness

09/21 | Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"

09/23 | PAZ: The Heap

Week 5: Self-Reference & Infinity

09/28 | PAZ: The Liar, Heterological, Curry's Paradox

09/30 | PAZ: Galileo's Paradox, Hilbert's Hotel, Russell's Paradox, Cantor's Paradox

Knowledge & Inquiry

Week 6: Probability

10/05 | Strevens, "Notes on Bayesian Confirmation Theory" (sections 1–3.3, 4.1–4.3, and 5.1; all boxed paragraphs are optional)

PAZ: The Monty Hall Paradox

10/07 | PAZ: The Preface, The Lottery

Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (sections 1.1 and 1.4–1.5 up through page 41)

10/09 | **PAPER 1 DUE**

Week 7: Induction

10/12 | Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpt)

10/14 | PAZ: Grue

Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction" (excerpt)

10/16 | **EXERCISE SET 2 DUE**

Week 8: Confirmation & Anthropic Reasoning

- 10/19 | PAZ: The Paradox of the Ravens
Sainsbury, "Paradoxes of Confirmation" (sections 5.1.1–5.1.2)
- 10/21 | Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Week 9: Self-Location & Higher-Order Knowledge

- 10/26 | PAZ: Sleeping Beauty
Elga, "Self-Locating Belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem"
- 10/28 | PAZ: The Unexpected Examination, The Designated Student
Sainsbury, "The Unexpected Examination" (sections 5.2–5.3)
- 10/30 | **PEER REVIEW 1 DUE**

Decision & Value

Week 10: Rationality

- 11/02 | Schwarz, "Modelling Rational Agents" (Chp 1 of *Belief, Desire, and Rational Choice*)
- 11/04 | PAZ: Pascal's Wager
Hájek, "Pascal's Ultimate Gamble"
- 11/06 | **PAPER 2 DUE**

Week 11: Dominance Reasoning

- 11/09 | PAZ: Prisoners' Dilemma
Schwarz, "Game Theory" (Chp 10 of *Belief, Desire, and Rational Choice*)
- 11/11 | PAZ: Newcomb's Problem
- 11/13 | **EXERCISE SET 3 DUE**

Week 12–13: No Class (Semi-Finals and Thanksgiving)

Week 14: Morality

- 11/30 | PAZ: Moral Luck
Nagel, "Moral Luck"
- 12/02 | PAZ: The Trolley Problem
Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"
- 12/04 | **PEER REVIEW 2 DUE**

Week 15: Value

- 12/07 | Greene and Sullivan, "Against Time Bias" (pages 947–961)
- 12/09 | Nagel, "Death"

Week 16

- 12/18 | **PAPER 3 DUE**