

PHIL 2300: Puzzles and Paradoxes

TR 10:10–11:25am · Goldwin Smith 142

Professor: **Arc Kocurek**

Email: awk78@cornell.edu

Office Hours: R 2–3pm · Goldwin Smith 237

TAs: **Alejandro Vesga**

Email: ajv79@cornell.edu

Section: F 11:15am–12:05pm · Rockefeller 132

Office Hours: W 1–2pm · Goldwin Smith 344

Lu Zhou

lz446@cornell.edu

F 9:05–9:55am · Goldwin Smith G24

M 1–2pm · Goldwin Smith 223

Description

The goal of this course is to get you puzzled. We will explore a number of tough philosophical questions about the nature of time, identity, logic, science, belief, decision, and value. Some of these questions have widely accepted answers, but many do not. Questions such as: Is time real? What is it to survive? Is infinity coherent? How is science possible? Are we living in a computer simulation? What is rational? Why do we value the future more than the past? Are we rationally compelled to believe in the existence of God? And finally, why is death bad? By examining these questions, you will become better acquainted with the aims and methodology of contemporary philosophy and hone the analytic skills required to engage with these questions.

Required Materials

Clark, *Paradoxes from A to Z* (3rd edition).

All other required readings will be made available online through Canvas.

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

Grades

Discussion	10%	12 in total, 2 skips
Exercise Sets	15%	3 in total
Reading Quizzes	20%	24 in total, 2 points each, 40 points max
Short Papers	45%	3 in total, 900–1200 words
Peer Reviews	10%	2 in total
Participation	3%	bonus

Academic Integrity

In this course, we will strictly adhere to the University Policy on Academic Integrity, as outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity (<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>). Any violation of this policy will be reported immediately. Violations will, at the very least, result in an F on the assignment in question, but may also lead to an F in the class, suspension, or other penalties.

Assignments

Discussion

Each week, you will have an opportunity to submit a response to that week's material for discussion section. A response can be a question or comment about any of the readings, lectures, or quizzes. You will receive 1 point for submitting an acceptable response before the deadline, which is always **Friday 8am** of that week. For a response to count as acceptable, it must show you were actively engaging with the material. (A rough guide: a response is unacceptable if it could have been written without attending any of the lectures or doing any of the readings.) There is no word limit, but an acceptable response need not be longer than a sentence or two. You may earn up to 10 points for submitting responses for discussion section. You will have 12 opportunities to submit responses. No late responses will be accepted.

Exercise Sets

There will be three exercise sets assigned throughout the semester. They will be submitted online. The goal of the exercise set is just to check that you understand very basic technical concepts needed to understand the paradoxes discussed in each unit. See the schedule for due dates. No late exercise sets will be accepted.

Reading Quizzes

Two days before each lecture on a paradox, there will be a 5 minute reading quiz for you to take online about the reading *for that lecture*. The purpose of the quiz is to check that you have done the reading *prior* to the lecture. Each quiz is worth 2 points. You may earn up to 40 points for reading quizzes throughout the semester. There will be 24 reading quizzes overall.

Short Papers

There are three short paper assignments in this course, one for each major unit (Metaphysics, Epistemology, Decision and Value). Each paper must be between 900–1200 words and must be submitted online as a PDF. See the schedule for deadlines. Late papers will incur a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for each day after the deadline the paper is late. Papers submitted more than a week late will not be accepted without written permission from the instructor.

Peer Review

After the first two papers are submitted, you will be randomly assigned to two papers written by your peers to provide feedback online. The feedback will take the form of answering a few questions about the paper, as well as giving general comments and suggestions for future improvement. Peer review will be anonymous. You will receive full credit for the peer review so long as you provide timely and sincere feedback.

Participation

You may receive up to 3 bonus points throughout the semester for actively participating in the course. You can receive bonus points either by going to section regularly, creating/posting to discussions online, coming to office hours, or asking questions during lecture.

Schedule

PAZ = *Paradoxes from A to Z*

Readings listed in recommended order

Optional readings available on Canvas

Week 1

01/22	introduction, no reading
01/24	"A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation"

Metaphysics

Week 2

01/29	PAZ: Achilles and the Tortoise, The Racecourse, The Arrow
01/31	McTaggart, "Time" (excerpt)
02/01	EXERCISE SET 1 DUE

Week 3

02/05	PAZ: Heraclitus' Paradox
	Sider, "Constitution"
02/07	PAZ: The Ship of Theseus
	Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (excerpt)

Week 4

02/12	Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"
02/14	PAZ: The Heap

Week 5

02/19	PAZ: The Liar, Heterological, Curry's Paradox
02/21	PAZ: Galileo's Paradox, Hilbert's Hotel, Russell's Paradox, Cantor's Paradox

Epistemology

Week 6

02/26	———— No class (February break) ————
02/27	***PAPER 1 DUE***
02/28	Strevens, "Notes on Bayesian Confirmation Theory" (sections 1–3.3, 4.1–4.3, 5.1; all boxed paragraphs are optional)
	PAZ: The Monty Hall Paradox

Week 7

03/05	Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (excerpt)
03/07	PAZ: Grue
	Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction" (excerpt)
03/08	EXERCISE SET 2 DUE

Week 8

03/12	PAZ: The Paradox of the Ravens Sainsbury, "Paradoxes of Confirmation" (sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2)
03/14	PAZ: The Preface, The Lottery
03/15	PEER REVIEW 1 DUE

Week 9

03/19	Leslie, "Is the End of the World Nigh?"
03/21	Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Week 10

03/26	PAZ: Sleeping Beauty Elga, "Self-Locating Belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem"
03/28	PAZ: The Unexpected Examination, The Designated Student Sainsbury, "The Unexpected Examination" (sections 5.2 and 5.3)

Week 11: Spring Break!

Decision and Value

Week 12

04/08	***PAPER 2 DUE***
04/09	Schwarz, "Modelling Rational Agents" (Chp 1 of <i>Belief, Desire, and Rational Choice</i>)
04/11	PAZ: Prisoners' Dilemma

Week 13

04/16	PAZ: Newcomb's Problem
04/18	Greene and Sullivan, "Against Time Bias"
04/19	EXERCISE SET 3 DUE

Week 14

04/23	PAZ: Pascal's Wager Hájek, "Pascal's Ultimate Gamble"
04/24	PEER REVIEW 2 DUE
04/25	PAZ: The Two-Envelope Paradox, The St. Petersburg Paradox

Week 15

04/30	PAZ: Moral Luck Nagel, "Moral Luck"
05/02	PAZ: The Trolley Problem Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"

Week 16

05/07	Nagel, "Death"
05/14	***PAPER 3 DUE***