

Philosophy 20229: Paradoxes

Professor Jeff Speaks

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205 Malloy Hall

631-6468

office hours: Tuesday 10-11,
and by appointment

Most courses in philosophy are unified by their subject matter: for example, courses in ethics, or political philosophy, or philosophy of religion.

This course is not like that. This course is unified only by the fact that we will discuss in class each day a different paradox.

What is a paradox? We will discuss this in more detail next time, but, basically, a paradox is a set of claims which all seem to be true, but also seem to be inconsistent - so that they can't all be true.

Paradoxes of this sort arise in virtually every subject matter. We will be discussing paradoxes of space and time, metaphysical paradoxes, theological paradoxes, paradoxes of rationality, as well as some purely logical and mathematical paradoxes.

In each case, our aim will be, first, to understand the paradox and, second, to do our best to solve it.

Our focus on paradoxes, rather than on an extended treatment of a single subject matter, makes this class in one way easier than your average philosophy course, and in one way much harder.

It is easier because each day will deal with a different paradox, and hence a different topic; rarely, if ever, will understanding what is going on in class require remembering the results of a previous class. (An exception is Thursday's class, which will lay out the key terminology needed for our discussion of various paradoxes.)

It is harder in that each individual topic is more technical, and more challenging, than is usual in a 200-level course in philosophy. Serious work on the paradoxes which we will discuss requires both the ability to understand various abstract claims made in physical science, mathematics, theology, and decision theory, and the ability to carefully evaluate the logical relations between these claims.

If you do not like thinking logically through problems, it is very likely that you will find this course both extremely difficult, and extremely frustrating.

- Teaching this class with me will be two of our most talented graduate students in philosophy, Kenny Boyce and Scott Hagaman. They will be responsible for grading your written work, and will also be available during office hours (which will be posted on the course web site) to help you with your written work. I'll of course be available during office hours, and by appointment, as well.
- The written work for the course will include two 5-7 page papers.
- In addition, there will be a midterm and (non-cumulative) final exam.
- We will talk more about the papers and exams when they get closer. But preparing for them is pretty simple. You should do three things: (1) do the readings before class; (2) pay attention in class; (3) after class, spend some time thinking about the arguments discussed in the readings and in class, and form your own view about whether those arguments are good arguments, or not, and why.
- It is easiest to forget (3). The point of this course is not for you to memorize a bunch of material, but for you to form your own views, informed by the readings, lectures, and discussions, of the topics we will be covering. In class, you should not be scribbling everything I say -- I will post the lecture notes to the course web site. You should be thinking about the arguments, and trying to figure out what you ought to believe about them.
- There is one required text: Sainsbury's Paradoxes, 3d edition.
- However, most of the readings for the course, as well as the lecture notes, due dates for the assignments, the formula for determining final grades, and other useful information, are available on the course web site. I have had each of your print quotas raised so that you can print out all of the readings for the class free of charge.

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Syllabus

PHIL 20229: Paradoxes

Tuesday & Thursday, 12:30-1:45
217 DeBartolo

spring office hours: Tuesday 10-11 & by appointment

[syllabus & readings](#)

[course description & grading policy](#)

[how to access readings](#)

[grading scale](#)

contact

email
205 Malloy, 631-6468

some useful links:

- The Department of Philosophy's guidelines regarding plagiarism
- Jim Pryor's guide to writing philosophy papers
- Some links to other online philosophy resources

Date	Topics	Reading green=optional
Tuesday, January 12	Introduction to the course	none
Thursday, January 14	What is a paradox?	none
Paradoxes of space and time		
Tuesday, January 19	Zeno's paradoxes	Sainsbury, <i>Paradoxes</i> , ch. 1
Thursday, January 21	McTaggart's proof of the unreality of time	McTaggart, "Time"
Tuesday, January 26	Kant's antinomies	Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> (excerpt) Kant, "The antinomy of pure reason"
Thursday, January 28	Paradoxes of special relativity & quantum mechanics	Einstein, <i>Relativity</i> (excerpt) Albert, "Superposition"
Tuesday, February 2	The doomsday argument & living in a computer	Leslie, <i>The End of the World</i> (excerpt) Greenberg, "Apocalypse not just now"
Metaphysical paradoxes		
Thursday, February 4	Material objects	Sider, "Constitution"
Tuesday, February 9	Personal identity	Parfit, "Divided minds and the nature of persons" Zuboff, "The story of a brain"
Thursday, February 11	Is meaning possible?	Kripke, <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> (excerpt)
Tuesday, February 16	Free will, determinism, and indeterminism	van Inwagen, "The powers of rational beings: freedom of the will"
Thursday, February 18	class canceled	
Theological paradoxes		
Tuesday, February 23	The problem of evil	Mackie, "Evil and omnipotence" Plantinga, "The free will defense"
Thursday, February 25	Midterm exam: covers paradoxes of space & time and metaphysical paradoxes	

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Tuesday, March 2	Free will, fatalism, and divine foreknowledge	Edwards, <i>Freedom of the Will</i> (excerpt) Zagzebski, "Foreknowledge and free will"
Thursday, March 4	Paradoxes of omniscience and omnipotence	Aquinas, "The power of God" (<i>Summa la q25</i>) Frankfurt, "The logic of omnipotence"
Spring break		
Tuesday, March 16	The trinity and the incarnation	
Thursday, March 18	Petitionary prayer & heaven and hell	
Paradoxes of rational belief and action		