

# First paper assignment

PHIL 20229: Paradoxes  
Due: 11:59 p.m., Friday, February 21

A late penalty of 3 points per day, including weekends, will be assessed for any papers which are handed in late. You should submit your paper to your TA as an email attachment.

Plagiarism is a serious and growing problem at Notre Dame and other universities. It is your responsibility to acquaint yourselves with the University's honor code, as well as with the philosophy department's guidelines regarding plagiarism. Both are linked from the course web site and you should contact me or your TA if you should have any questions.

The following paradoxes have no uncontroversial solution: Zeno's argument against the reality of space and time, Kant's antinomy, McTaggart's proof of the unreality of time, the problem of the statue and the clay, and the problem posed by 'split brain' patients.

You should pick one of these paradoxes to discuss. Your first paper will include the following four parts, which must be clearly numbered, and separated from each other:

1. A statement, in your own words, of the paradox. This may be given in paragraph form, or in premise/conclusion form. (< 350 words)
2. A clear statement of your solution to the paradox. (At least one sentence; at most one short paragraph.)
3. An argument in favor of your solution. (<500 words)
4. State one objection to your proposed solution, and respond to that objection. (<500 words)

Do not include an introduction or conclusion. The focus is on clear, concise argument, with no extra bells and whistles.

There is no need to consult any outside sources, and I recommend that you do not. But any source you look at in connection with the paper, whether web or print, must be listed in a bibliography. If you consult no outside sources, a bibliography is not necessary.

As an alternative to doing this assignment, you may come up with your own topic, though you must get the written approval of me or your TA by email first. If you do this, the question that I or your TA approves should be on the first page of your essay.

## **F.A.Q.**

### **1. Why no introduction and conclusion?**

Why an introduction and conclusion? More seriously, the reason is that they are irrelevant. What I care about is the quality of your thinking about these topics, and your ability to clearly express that thinking in the form of argument. Intro and concluding paragraphs are fillers.

### **2. Do you really expect us to solve paradoxes which have gone unsolved for hundreds of years?**

No. (Though if you did, that would be great!) I expect you to understand the paradox, think for yourself about what the right solution to the paradox is, and make the best case you can for that conclusion.

### **3. Is there a special way of writing philosophy papers?**

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that you should forget some of the 'rules of writing' you may have unfortunately acquired in your academic career. (E.g.: Never use first person pronouns; don't repeat terms; begin with a general 'funnel' introduction; make learned references where possible.) No, in the sense that there are no tricks. I want you to write as simply and clearly as possible about what you think and why you think it.

### **4. How will I be graded?**

Good question. Papers will be judged according to the following nine criteria:

- (1) explains paradox clearly;
- (2) explains paradox in his/her own words;
- (3) clearly states the solution to paradox to be defended;
- (4) makes a strong argument for that solution;
- (5) clearly presents the most (or one of the most) challenging objection to that solution;
- (6) gives a clear and (relatively) plausible reply to that objection;
- (7) in accomplishing one or more of the above, makes substantial original points which go beyond material discussed in lecture & discussion sections;
- (8) is free of grammatical and spelling errors;
- (9) has the name of the author on it.

An A paper accomplishes all 9. A typical A- paper would accomplish (1)-(6) and (8)-(9), but not (7); but in general an A- paper is one which fails to meet one of the above criteria. A B+ paper is typically one which fails to meet two of the above criteria, or egregiously fails to meet one. A B paper is one which fails to meet three of the above criteria, or fails to meet two, one of which it egregiously fails to meet. And so on. Obviously meeting or failing to meet these criteria is a matter of degree, and we will take that into account; but this should give you an idea of how you will be evaluated.