

Philosophy 395P: Philosophical Paradoxes

Fall, 2015

TuTh 4-5:15 Bartlett 209

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Course website: blogs.umass.edu/bricker/teaching/phil-395p-philosophical-paradoxes/

Office Hours: Thursday 2-3, and by appointment

Course Prerequisites. None. But a course in introductory logic would be helpful, as would a course (or two or three) in analytic philosophy.

Course Requirements. Two three-page papers, an in-class midterm exam (90 minutes) and an end-of-term exam (90 minutes). (The end-of-term exam will be administered at the scheduled final exam time for this class: Dec. 14 at 3:30.) Questions for the midterm and final will be selected from questions distributed in advance. Each paper will count 20% and each exam 30% of the final grade. Class participation can boost your grade up to one step (e.g., from a B to a B+, or an A- to an A).

Readings. All readings are either available on the internet (links will be provided), or will be put on my course website, whose address is above. The readings are password protected: you can e-mail me for the password. Some of the readings come from a book by RM Sainsbury, *Paradoxes*. It can be ordered through the UMass Amazon bookstore.

Brief Course Description. This course will be an introduction to the most influential and mind-boggling philosophical paradoxes, from ancient times to the present. Included will be paradoxes of space and time (Zeno's paradoxes, Twin and Ladder paradoxes in relativity, McTaggart's paradox, Grandfather paradox for time travel), paradoxes of decision-making (Prisoner's Dilemma, Newcomb's paradox, St. Petersburg and Two Envelope paradoxes), paradoxes of belief and knowledge (the Lottery and Preface paradoxes, Surprise Exam, Sleeping Beauty paradox, the Doomsday argument, Fermi's paradox), and paradoxes of logic and set theory (Cantor's paradox, Russell's paradox, Liar paradox, Sorites paradox).

Plagiarism. The UMass Amherst Academic Regulations defines plagiarism as follows: "Knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise." All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the academic honesty office. The penalty for plagiarism ranges from a zero on the assignment involved (in less severe cases) to an F for the course (in the most severe cases). All students are expected to be aware of the University policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

Course Schedule (tentative).

9/8: Introduction.

9/10, 9/15: Zeno's Paradoxes: Achilles and the Tortoise, the Arrow. Infinity Machines.

9/17: **NO CLASS**

9/22, 9/24: "Paradoxes" of Einstein's theory of relativity: Twin paradox, Ladder paradox.

9/29, 10/1: McTaggart's paradox: the unreality of time. Grandfather paradox: time travel.

10/6, 10/8: Cantor's Paradox. Russell's Paradox: the set of non-self-membered sets.

10/13: **NO CLASS, Monday Schedule**

10/15, 10/20: Liar Paradox: the logic of contradiction.

10/22, 10/27: Sorites Paradox: theories of vagueness.

10/29: **MIDTERM EXAM, IN CLASS**

11/3: Surprise Exam.

11/5, 11/10: Lottery and Preface Paradoxes: degrees of belief.

11/12, 11/17: Prisoner's Dilemma and Newcomb's Paradox: causal vs. evidential decision theory.

11/19, 11/24: St. Petersburg Paradox, Two Envelope Paradox: infinite expectations.

12/1, 12/3: Sleeping Beauty Paradox, branching worlds interpretation of Quantum Mechanics.

12/8, 12/10: Doomsday argument, Fermi's paradox.

12/14: **FINAL EXAM 3:30**