

Puzzles and Paradoxes

TTh 9:30–10:50 · Ridge Walk 426

PHIL 2

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? Is the future fixed? Or can we change it? What is a person? Do we have free will? How can we learn from experience? Are our experiences even real? Or are we just living in a computer simulation? What is it to be rational? Is it rational to believe in God? Can morality be rationalized? How can we be fair in an uncertain world? And finally, what is the value of life?

Instructors

Professor: Arc Kocurek
Email: akocurek@ucsd.edu
Office Hours: Th 1–2 (or by appointment) · Ridge Walk 445

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

Attendance	10%	0.5% per lecture
Exercise Sets	15%	3 in total, 5% each (unlimited attempts)
Reading Quizzes	30%	16 in total (+1 for course eval), 2% each
Short Papers	45%	3 in total, 15% each

Assignments

Attendance

You earn 0.5% for each lecture you attend. Absences may be excused on a case by case basis at the discretion of the instructor (e.g., for illness, extracurricular commitments, family or medical emergencies, etc.). Documentation may be required depending on the circumstances. To the extent possible, advanced notice of any absences is expected.

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 an unlimited number of attempts at each set. See the schedule for due dates.

Reading Quizzes

For each paradox, there will be a 5 minute online quiz on the relevant reading about that paradox. Each quiz has two multiple-choice questions, each worth 2% (the points cumulate across quizzes). There will be 16 quizzes this term, plus a course evaluation survey at the end of the quarter (worth 1 quiz grade). The maximum you can earn for quizzes is 30% (meaning if you complete the course eval, you can skip up to 2 quizzes without penalty). Quizzes are due at the end of the week. No redo or makeup quizzes will be offered.

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.

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.

Email

For wellness-related reasons, I will be turning off email notifications after 5pm on weekdays as well as on weekends and holidays. Please keep this in mind when you email me with questions about assignments with deadlines.

Academic Integrity

We strictly adhere to the University Academic Integrity Policy (<https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/process/policy.html>). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this policy 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*

Language & Reality

Week 1: Introduction + Logic & Argumentation

- 01/07 | no reading (introducing the course)
- 01/09 | A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation

Week 2: Time

- 01/14 | PAZ: Achilles and the Tortoise, The Racecourse, The Arrow
- 01/16 | Conee, "Fatalism" (excerpt)
- 01/17 | **EXERCISE SET 1 DUE**

Week 3: Identity

- 01/21 | Sider, "Constitution"
- 01/23 | Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (excerpt)
PAZ: The Ship of Theseus

Week 4: Vagueness & Freedom

- 01/28 | PAZ: The Heap
- 01/30 | Sider, "Free Will and Determinism" ("Interlude: Quantum Mechanics" is optional)

Belief & Uncertainty

Week 5: Probability

- 02/04 | 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
- 02/06 | Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpt)
- 02/07 | **PAPER 1 DUE**

Week 6: Simulations & Self-Location

- 02/11 | Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?"
- 02/13 | ——— Asynchronous lecture (Arc is away) ———
PAZ: Sleeping Beauty
Elga, "Self-Locating Belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem"
- 02/14 | **EXERCISE SET 2 DUE**

Week 7: Fairness & Law

- 02/18 | PAZ: The Red Taxi Paradox
Thomson, "Liability and Individualized Evidence" (skip pp. 209–12 and section 6)
- 20/20 | Angwin et al., "[Machine Bias](#)" (*ProPublica*; optional follow ups [here](#) and [here](#))
Corbett-Davies et al., "[A computer program used for bail and sentencing decisions was labeled biased against blacks. It's actually not that clear](#)" (*Washington Post*)

Decision & Value

Week 8: Rationality

- 02/25 | Schwarz, "Modelling Rational Agents"
- 02/27 | PAZ: Pascal's Wager
Hájek, "Pascal's Ultimate Gamble"
- 02/28 | **PAPER 2 DUE**

Week 9: Consequences

- 03/04 | PAZ: Newcomb's Problem
- 03/06 | PAZ: The Trolley Problem
Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"
- 03/07 | **EXERCISE SET 3 DUE**

Week 10: Life & Death

- 03/11 | PAZ: The Paradox of Future Generations
Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life" (section 4 optional)
- 03/13 | Nagel, "Death"
- 03/18 | **PAPER 3 DUE**