

# Course Description and Syllabus: Philosophical Paradoxes

Andrew Bacon

This course will be focused on philosophical paradoxes as a way to introduce concepts and ideas in metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of language.

A paradox is a set of jointly inconsistent claims each of which is individually plausible. While sometimes appearing frivolous on the surface, paradoxes frequently have a habit of leading to deeper philosophical questions and have historically played an important role in the development of philosophy. The paradoxes that we will encounter in this course will serve as an introduction to (among other things) the philosophy of space and time, the nature of infinity, vagueness, the foundations of logic and the theory of knowledge.

Questions you should expect to encounter will include:

- Can two things be in the same place at the same time?
- Is backwards time travel possible?
- Is it possible to do an infinite number of things in a finite space of time?
- Could a single hair make the difference between a bald and a non-bald person?
- Could there be a set which contained all and only those sets which do not contain themselves?
- Is it possible to know every truth?
- Is it possible to know both that you will die before you are eighty, and that on each day before that you won't know whether it's the day of your death?

COURSE GOALS: upon completing this course students will have been introduced to a number of core topics in metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of logic and language. Students will also have learnt how to present an argument in premise and conclusion form, evaluate whether it is valid and to apply this method to analysis the texts they have read.

# 1 Course details

CLASSES: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3.20, VKC 260

OFFICE HOURS: 15-17.00 Tuesdays, 224 Stonier Hall

WEBSITE: TBD

PREREQUISITES: There are no prerequisites for this course.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Everyone will need copies of

Mark Sainsbury, '*Paradoxes*', 1995, Cambridge University Press (first hand price around \$29.)

Earl Conee and Ted Sider, '*Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics*', 2007, Oxford University Press (first hand price around \$24.)

GRADING: two five to seven single-spaced page papers 25% each, a midterm at 20% and a final at 30%.

PLAGIARISM/CHEATING: Cheating in exams or plagiarism while writing a paper results in automatic failure of course.

Papers may contain work that is not your own in two instances.

- Direct quotation. The relevant text is put within quotation marks or indentation, and the source is properly cited.
- Paraphrase. You will often be asked to put the ideas in the texts you read into your own words. In these cases you should always make it clear what you are doing and whose ideas you are paraphrasing.

Any other instances of work that is not your own in papers is counted as plagiarism.

PHONES: Phones must be on silent and out of sight during class.

STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect ones own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using anothers work as ones own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic

dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

## 2 Topics and Reading

### Paradoxes of infinity:

Zeno's paradoxes

- Sainsbury Chapter 1
- Thomson, James F. 'Tasks and super-tasks.' *Analysis* 15.1 (1954): 1-13.
- Further reading: Benacerraf, Paul. 'Tasks, super-tasks, and the modern eleatics.' *The Journal of Philosophy* (1962): 765-784.

Infinity (Benardete's paradox, the Ross-Littlewood paradox.)

- Benardete, José Amado. 'Infinity: An essay in metaphysics'. Clarendon Press, 1964. p259
- Ross-Littlewood's paradox: Victor Allis and Teunis Koetsier 'On Some Paradoxes of the Infinite', *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, v.42 n.2, Jun 1991, pp. 187-194
- Further reading: Laraudogoitia, Jon Perez. 'A beautiful supertask.' *Mind* 105.417 (1996): 81-83.

### Time

McTaggart's paradox

- Sider 'Time' in Conee and Sider
- McTaggart, J. Ellis. 'The Unreality of Time.' *Mind* 17.4 (1908): 457-474.
- Prior, Arthur N. 'Some free thinking about time' *Logic and reality: Essays on the legacy of Arthur Prior* (1996): 47-51.
- Further reading: Mellor, D. H. 'The unreality of tense.' *The Philosophy of Time* (1993): 47-59.

Time travel

- Lewis, David. 'The paradoxes of time travel.' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13.2 (1976): 145-152.

Time's beginning

- WH Newton Smith 'Time's Beginning' *The Philosophy of Time* (1993): 47-59.

## Fatalism

- Taylor, Richard, 1962, 'Fatalism', *Philosophical Review*, 71: 56-66.

## Persons and objects

### Personal identity

- Sider, 'Personal Identity' in Conee and Sider
- Parfit, Derek. 'Divided minds and the nature of persons.' *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence* (2009): 91.

### Puzzles of constitution

- Sider 'Constitution' in Conee and Sider

## Language

### The Sorites paradox

- Sainsbury Chapter 3
- Further reading: Keefe, Rosanna, and Peter Smith, 'Introduction' in 'Vagueness: A reader', eds Keefe and Smith, MIT press, 1999.

### The Liar paradox

- Sainsbury Chapter 6

## Epistemic paradoxes

### The knowability paradox

- Brogaard, Berit and Salerno, Joe, 'Fitch's Paradox of Knowability', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/fitch-paradox/>

### The surprise examination paradox

- Sainsbury ch5.
- Hall, Ned. 'How to set a surprise exam.' *Mind* 108.432 (1999): 647-703.??
- Further reading: Kripke, Saul. 'On two paradoxes of knowledge.' *Philosophical Troubles*, 2011

### The paradox of the preface

- Makinson, David C. 'The paradox of the preface.' *Analysis* 25.6 (1965): 205-207.