# Paradoxes FS21 PHL 225-001

## Course Information

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| **Instructor:** | Dr. John Grey |
| **Email:** | greyjohn@msu.edu |
| **Office:** | 536 South Kedzie Hall<br>Department of Philosophy |
| **Student Hours:** | Wednesdays from 2:00-3:00pm, and Fridays from 11:00am-12:00pm<br>*I set aside these hours to discuss class material, assignments, and pretty much anything else with students, and **I encourage you to visit**. Due to the pandemic, these are by appointment: just **email me to schedule a meeting**.* |
| **Class Time:** | Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:40-2:00pm |
| **Classroom:** | 314 Berkey Hall |
| **Textbooks:** | • Sainsbury. *Paradoxes*. 3rd edition. (Cambridge University Press, 2009).<br>• Paul. *Transformative Experience*. (Oxford University Press, 2014). |

## Course Description

Paradoxes arise in almost every domain of inquiry: concepts such as truth, identity, infinity, rationality, evidence, and obligation all involve surprising and difficult paradoxes. In this course, students will analyze and address a number of these paradoxes, exploring a wide range of philosophical subjects along the way.

**Space, Time, and Motion:**
Given that space and time are infinitely divisible, how is it possible to move between any two points?

**Vagueness:**
How much money does a person need in order to be rich? How many parts of you could be replaced before you would cease to be the same person?

**Rational Choice:**
Can a series of rational choices lead to an outcome that it is rational to avoid at all costs? If an action will lead to an outcome that changes your values and preferences, is there a rational way to decide to do it?

**Knowledge and Evidence:**
If you know something to be true, should you discount all evidence against it as misleading? Is the fact that *this table is white* evidence for the fact that *all ravens are black*?

**Logic, Truth, and Self-Reference:**
If I say that *I am lying right now*, is my statement true or false? Could it be *neither* true nor false?

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## Learning Outcomes

The goals of the course are threefold:

1. To practice thinking creatively about problems involving contrary or contradictory claims;
2. To practice giving explanations, both in speech and in writing, that are clear, precise, but succinct;
3. To explore a wide range of philosophical subject matter.

By the end of the course, students will have honed their ability to think critically and creatively about open-ended problems, and to explain and motivate their solutions to those problems.

## Class Policies

- **Participation**: The participation grade for the course will be determined via your contributions to our weekly in-class discussions. (Note that although attendance is not required, it will be difficult to contribute to the class discussion if you do not attend class.)
- **Screens**: There's lots of experimental evidence that laptop, tablet, and phone screens distract students who are in line of sight of them. At the same time, many find them to be of great benefit. So: students using screens in class should sit near the back, where fewer will be distracted by them.
- **Late papers:** Papers have their grade demoted by 10 percentage points (e.g., 85% to 75%) for each 24-hour period after the due date. Better to turn in a later paper than not to turn in anything at all!
- **Academic Misconduct:** It should go without saying, but here it is: Violations of MSU's academic conduct code will result in immediate failure of the assignment, and in more serious cases, of the course. Don't cheat. See Student Regulation 1.00 for more information about what constitutes academic misconduct: http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations

## Assignments

There are three types of assignment you will undertake in this course:

1. **Paradox Summaries.** A 150-300 word description, in your own words, of a paradox or puzzle discussed in the readings for the coming week. Upload to D2L before Monday's class each week.
2. **Short Papers.** These are 800-1000 word papers on prompts that will be posted to D2L a week in advance. They will require you to propose a solution to a specific paradox, raise an objection to the solution, and then reply to that objection.
3. **Final Exam.** A comprehensive exam consisting of a series of short essay questions.

## Grading

Grade Component Weights

| Grade Component | Weight |
|---|---|
| **Participation** | 10% |
| **Paradox Summaries** | 30% |
| **Short Papers** | 40% |
| **Final Exam** | 20% |
| **Total** | 100% |

Grade Point Values

| Final Score | Grade Point |
|---|---|
| 92-100% | 4.0 |
| 86-91% | 3.5 |
| 80-85% | 3.0 |
| 74-79% | 2.5 |
| 68-73% | 2.0 |
| 63-67% | 1.5 |
| 58-62% | 1.0 |

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## Class Schedule

Students should complete each reading assigned sometime before the week listed. Each Monday, you'll have to submit a **one-paragraph summary**, in your own words, of one of the paradoxes discussed in the readings for the upcoming week. These are to be submitted via D2L sometime before our first class meeting each week. For example, the paradox summary for Week 3 is due by 12:40pm on September 13, the date and time of our first meeting of that week.

The due dates for the **three short papers** and the **final exam** are also given in this schedule. Prompts for the short papers will be posted one week in advance of the due date, and more information about the final exam will be posted after Thanksgiving Break.

**Week 1 (Sep 1). Course Introduction & Examples**

- Read syllabus. Mark your calendar. Plan.

**Week 2 (Sep 8). Zeno's Paradoxes**

- Sainsbury Ch. 1 (pp. 4-21)
- Aristotle, *Physics* $\mathbb{Z}$.2 selection (online)

**Week 3 (Sep 13 & 15). Paradoxes of Vagueness**

- Sainsbury Ch. 3 (pp. 40-66)
- Gareth Evans, "Can there be vague objects?" (online)

**Week 4 (Sep 20 & 22). Paradoxes of Vagueness**

- Delia Graff Fara, "Shifting Sands" (online; focus on sections 1, 4, and 6)
  **[Paper 1 due Wednesday, Sep. 22]**

**Week 5 (Sep 27 & 29). Newcomb's Paradox**

- Robert Nozick, "Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice" (online)
- Sainsbury Ch. 4 (pp. 69-89)

**Week 6 (Oct 4 & 6). The Self-Torturer**

- Michael Huemer, *Paradox Lost*, Ch. 4 (online)
- Diana Raffman and Sergio Tenenbaum, "Vague Projects and the Puzzle of the Self-Torturer" (online)

**Week 7 (Oct 11 & 13). Transformative Choice**

- Laurie Paul, Chs. 1-3

**Week 8 (Oct 18 & 20). More Transformative Choice.**

- Paul, Ch. 4 (esp. pp. 105-123)
- Agnes Callard, *Aspiration*, Ch. 1 (online)
  **[Paper 2 due Wednesday, Oct 20]**

**Week 9 (Oct 27). Paradoxes of Knowledge**

- Kripke, "On Two Paradoxes of Knowledge" selection (online)

**Week 10 (Nov 1 & 3). Paradoxes of Evidence**

- Sainsbury Ch. 5 (pp. 90-120)

**Week 11 (Nov 8 & 10). Logic, Truth, and the Liar**

- Sainsbury Ch. 6 (pp. 123-149)

**Week 12 (Nov 15 & 17). Logic, Truth, and the Liar**

- Huemer, *Paradox Lost*, Ch. 2 (online)
  **[Paper 3 due Wednesday Nov 17]**

**Week 13. Thanksgiving Break (No class)**

**Week 14 (Nov 29 & Dec 1). Time Travel**

- Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" (online)

**Week 15 (Dec 6 & 8). General Lessons.**

- Sainsbury Ch. 7 (pp. 150-159)
- Huemer, *Paradox Lost*, Ch. 12 (online)

**[Final Exam: 12:45-2:45pm, Dec. 14, in normal classroom.]**