

PHIL2511 Paradoxes

Course description

A paradox is a set of premises which are individually very plausible, but which together entail a very implausible conclusion. Important philosophical paradoxes don't just raise intellectual puzzles, but also reveal something wrong with our most fundamental ways of understanding the world. This course will study three paradoxes that have perplexed philosophers for over 2000 years: the Liar paradox, which concerns truth; the Sorities paradox, which concerns vagueness; and Zeno's paradox, which concerns space and infinity. In addition to these paradoxes, we will also be looking at several more recent paradoxes concerning knowledge and morality.

Instructor

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Mode of delivery

There will be 10 two hour seminars and 5 one hour tutorials. Seminars will take place on Fridays at 12.30pm-2.30pm in room CPD 2.14, with the first seminar on January 25, 2013. The dates and times of tutorials will be organised in the first two weeks of semester.

Required Text

All students must have a copy of R. M. Sainsbury's *book Paradoxes*, which can be bought in the HKU bookshop. A copy will be available in the Philosophy Office for short term loan.

Course website

To find the course website, go to the philosophy department website and click on courses.

The course website will contain:

- i) Seminar handouts,
- ii) Readings,
- iii) Essay questions,
- iv) Important dates
- v) Other important information.

Provisional Course Schedule

Date of Seminar	Topics	Required Reading
25 January	Paradoxes about Knowledge	Olin, 'Believing in Surprises'
1 February	Paradoxes about Knowledge	Sainsbury, Sec 5.4
8 February	Zeno's Paradox	Sainsbury, Ch 1
15 February	Chinese New Year – No Seminar	
22 February	Zeno's Paradox	Sainsbury, Ch 1
1 March	Moral Paradoxes	Sainsbury, Ch 2
8 March	Moral Paradoxes	Sainsbury, Ch 2

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15 March	Reading Week – No Seminar	
22 March	Vagueness	Sainsbury, Ch 3
29 March	Vagueness	Sainsbury, Ch 3
5 April	Easter – No Seminar	
12 April	The Liar Paradox	Sainsbury, Ch 6
19 April	The Liar Paradox	Sainsbury, Ch 6

The details of the above course schedule may change. Any changes will be announced in seminars and on seminar handouts available on the course website

Course objectives

This course aims to introduce the central debates in contemporary meta-ethics.

It also seeks to provide training in:

- i) Critical thinking and problem solving,
- ii) Interpretation and evaluation of arguments and texts, and
- iii) Spoken and written expression and argumentation.

Student Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- i) Understand and describe some of the most important paradoxes in the history of philosophy,
- ii) Critically examine a range of views and arguments, and formulate responses to them, and
- iii) Demonstrate critical argumentative and problem-solving skills in both verbal discussions and in two written essays.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on one 1500 word essay (contributing 32.5% towards the overall mark), one 2500 word essay (contributing 52.5% towards the overall mark) and class participation (contributing 15% towards the overall mark). The first essay will be based on the first four seminars of the course, while the second essay will be based on the last six seminars of the course.

The provisional due date for Essay 1 is Thursday 7 March 5pm (Hand in to Philosophy Office). The due day for Essay 2 will be announced during semester and will be sometime during the examination period at the end of the semester.