

HUM 1XX Philosophical Paradoxes

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Office hours: TBD

1. **Course Description:** Paradoxes are fun and can be teasers in a party. Some of them also raise serious questions and their solutions are highly controversial, and this will be the focus of this course. We will discuss influential paradoxes including paradoxes of Infinity (e.g., Zeno's paradox), paradoxes of time (i.e., the grandfather paradox), paradoxes of action (e.g., Newcomb's problem), paradoxes of belief and knowledge (e.g., surprise test, doomsday) and others.

Core course statement: Reasoning, argumentation, and critical thinking are core skills for both academic and everyday life (especially in a world of information overload). A good argument is logically rigorous and has plausible premises; in addition, its conclusion needs to be less obvious than its premises. In this sense, a serious paradox is an argument in its perfection: its premises are usually well-accepted or even trivial, yet its conclusion is often outlandish or preposterous. But unlike a typical argument, the goal of a paradox is usually not to convince us of its conclusion, but to reveal the unexpected weaknesses in our commonly held beliefs and force us to re-examine them. This leads to another valuable set of skills or perspectives: a healthy skepticism against indoctrination, the attention to the devil in the details, and an appetite for the bizarre and unusual in the mundane and ordinary. These can contribute to our intellectual flourishing.

Course Objectives: Learn influential paradoxes and the challenges they pose; learn possible ways to address them in the literature; learn argumentative skills (e.g., how to identify premises, how to object to an argument); improve creative and critical thinking through the attempts to solving the paradoxes.

2. Tentative Reading schedule:

Week 1	Welcome! INTRODUCTION In-class Readings Only
Week 2	ZENO'S PARADOX Readings: Thomson, James F. 'Tasks and super-tasks.' <i>Analysis</i> 15.1 (1954): 1-13. (Optional: Benacerraf, Paul. 'Tasks, super-tasks, and the modern eleatics.' <i>The Journal of Philosophy</i> (1962): 765-784.)
Week 3	BENARDETE'S PARADOX Benardete, Jose Amado. <i>Infinity: An essay in metaphysics</i> . Clarendon Press, 1964. p259 Ross-Littlewood's paradox: Victor Allis and Teunis Koetsier 'On Some Paradoxes of the Infinite', <i>The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science</i> , v.42 n.2, Jun 1991, pp. 187-194. Problem set 1 is assigned.
Week 4	UNREALITY OF TIME McTaggart, J. Ellis. 'The Unreality of Time.' <i>Mind</i> 17.4 (1908): 457-474. Prior, Arthur N. 'Some free thinking about time' <i>Logic and reality: Essays on the legacy of Arthur Prior</i> (1996): 47-51. Problem set 1 is due.
Week 5	TIME TRAVEL; TIME'S BEGINNING

	<p>Lewis, David. 'The paradoxes of time travel.' <i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i> 13.2 (1976): 145-152.</p> <p>Newton Smith 'Time's Beginning' <i>The Philosophy of Time</i> (1993): 47-59.</p>
Week 6	<p><i>Catch up</i></p> <p>FATALISM</p> <p>Taylor, Richard, 1962, 'Fatalism', <i>Philosophical Review</i>, 71: 56-66.</p> <p>Problem set 2 is assigned.</p>
Week 7	<p>PERSONAL IDENTITY</p> <p>Parfit, Derek. 'Divided minds and the nature of persons.' <i>Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence</i> (2009): 91-98.</p> <p>(Optional: Nagel, "Brain bisection and the unity of consciousness")</p> <p><i>Problem set 2 is due.</i></p>
Week 8	<p>NEWCOMB'S PROBLEM</p> <p>Robert Nozick (1969). "Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice". In Rescher, Nicholas (ed.). <i>Essays in Honor of Carl G Hempel</i>. Springer.</p>
Week 9	<p>TWO-ENVELOPE PARADOX</p> <p>In-class readings</p> <p>Optional: Arntzenius & McCarthy, "The two-envelope paradox and infinite expectations" <i>Analysis</i> Vol. 57, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), pp. 42-50.</p> <p>Problem set 3 is assigned.</p>
Week 10	<p>PARADOX OF CONFIRMATION</p> <p>Hempel. <i>Aspects of Scientific Explanation</i> (1965): 20-40.</p> <p>Problem set 3 is due.</p>
Week 11	<p>SURPRISE TEST</p> <p>Hall, Ned. 'How to set a surprise exam.' <i>Mind</i> 108.432 (1999): 647-703</p> <p>(Optional: Kripke, Saul. 'On two paradoxes of knowledge.' <i>Philosophical Troubles</i>, 2011)</p>
Week 12	<p>SLEEPING BEAUTY</p> <p>Elga, "Self-locating belief and the sleeping beauty problem," <i>Analysis</i>, 60(2): 143-147, 2000.</p> <p>Lewis, "Reply to Elga" <i>Analysis</i> 61.3, 2001. 171-176.</p> <p>Dorr C. (2002). Sleeping beauty: in defense of Elga. <i>Analysis</i> 62(4): 292-296.</p>
Week 13	<p>DOOMSDAY; SIMULATION UNIVERSE</p> <p>Leslie, John. <i>The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction</i> (1996)</p> <p>Excerpt</p> <p>Nick Bostrom. "Are You Living In A Computer Simulation?" <i>Philosophical Quarterly</i> (2003) Vol. 53, No. 211, pp. 243-255</p>
Week 14	<i>Catch up</i>
Week 15	Final Exam

Grade:

20% Class activities

50% Problem sets (4 sets; 2-4 pages)¹

30% Final Exam

Requirements:

1. **Class activities:** including in-class writings and exercises that are associated with (for example) small-group discussions, individual reflections, small exercises (e.g., filling in a missing premise), quizzes, mini debates, and surveys. Your participation in those activities will be evaluated holistically over the semester. If you miss some in-class activities due to absences, you can send me notes (official ones whenever possible) to possibly excuse some missing work. You can also make up the missing work outside the class if you manage to learn the tasks. (A warning in advance: I won't return your email if you randomly miss a class and ask me for what you miss.)

Notebook: you should purchase a notebook for all your in-class writings. Your writings will prepare you for class activities, and your notebook will be evidence for your participation, collected during the semester and will be returned. Your writing will not be graded individually, but be one important basis for evaluating your participation. Please use this notebook only for this purpose and not mix your class notes in it.

Note: Your attendance is *expected*, but it is *not* independently recorded and evaluated. Their influence on your grade will be indirectly manifested in your participation in class activities and other assignments. (If you need to miss a class, make sure that you ask your classmates about important announcements made in class, and if possible, borrow notes from them.)

Classroom courtesy: our class is highly interactive, and I welcome you interrupt me with questions, comments and challenges any time. But before you speak, please raise your hand first.

Email courtesy and policy: for guidance and advice on how to write an email, you can find resources online such as <https://academicpositions.com/career-advice/how-to-email-a-professor> and <https://medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-afcf64ae0e4087>. Please follow the advice² to make the email exchanges more fruitful and smooth. I will usually get back to you in a day or two during workdays. Feel free to send me a reminder if you haven't heard from me for a few days (and it is also a good idea that you check whether you have followed the email courtesy).

2. **Reading assignments:** You are expected to read the assigned readings before class. The readings will be posted to Blackboard (or otherwise be made available). You are encouraged to print a copy, jot down notes while reading, and take the copy to the class (although our class will not critically depend on it, having your own copy is always handy). The amount of reading for a class is typically around 10 pages. Sometimes we will have in-class reading assignments that typically reduce your burden of reading before class. If you have difficulty in completing a reading, please contact me or

¹ Note: all page numbers mentioned are based on excluding all headings and using double spacing. Shorter lengths are likely indicators of not being substantial enough and should be avoided. Longer lengths will not be punished except when the extra content is added to the detriment of your essay/answer.

² You don't need to follow it robotically or over-do it with too much formality. For example, it is not necessary to introduce yourself every time, or say which section you are from when there is only one.

our TA (or both) as soon as possible. Some readings are challenging, but if you do not turn that into a learning opportunity, the challenges will be meaningless.

Note: The reading for a class will be assigned at the end of the previous class, so please leave enough time between classes for that. There might occasionally be homework other than reading, in which case, it will count towards the class activities grade. You can also read in advance according to the tentative schedule.

3. **Problem sets:** There are four problem sets on four topics respectively. Each assignment is due in ten days. (Ideally, a problem set should be completed or at least started within two to three days of its assignment when your memory of the lectures and class discussions is fresh; but life is not ideal, thus the ten days' time.)

Late Policy: Slight delays in submission (e.g., a few minutes or an hour late) can be tolerated without punishment, though not encouraged. A longer delay will lead to 1/3 of a letter grade deduction per day after the due date (e.g., B+ → B) up to two days. After two days, unexcused late assignments are not accepted. (This is partly because I might talk about solutions a few days after the due time.)

If you are unable to complete the assignment in time, I will need an official document (e.g., from doctors) specifying the period you are unable to do the assignment, and I will give you an extension accordingly. If you don't have an official document, then it's unlikely for you to get a substantial extension. Last minute requests will not be considered. You can communicate with me or our TA regarding extensions.

I know many of you are taking many courses, and will be very busy when due days clash, but unfortunately this is not a valid ground for a substantial extension. So please assess the risk and be ready to use your time management skills.

4. **Final Exam (tentative plan):** Final exam consists of a few short essay questions, each of which will take about a page to answer (excluding the prompt). The exam is accumulative, but with an emphasis on the second half of the semester. I will release the pool of questions at the end of the semester, from which your exam questions will be selected. Your answers will be evaluated anonymously to ensure fairness. Other logistics of the exam will be determined later.
5. **Academic honesty policy:** A first-time offense of plagiarism will result in a warning and a request for resubmission (unless it happens in the final exam, which results in a failing grade). A second-time offense will lead to a failing grade of the course. You should also review Koc University's policy on academic honesty, which is available on <https://apdd.ku.edu.tr/en/academic-policies/student-code-of-conduct/>.