

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Puzzles and Paradoxes
Course Code	: PHI1118
Recommended Study Year	: 1st Year
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours/week
Category in Major Programme	: Free Elective
Prerequisite(s)	: None
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course aims to provide an introduction to some major themes in philosophy through the examination of paradoxes and puzzling thought experiments. By thinking about these puzzling cases, students will get a sense of what philosophy is and what sorts of problems it aims to solve. We will discuss the nature of time and space, and we will discuss the nature of ourselves and our minds. We will discuss how to think rationally, and how to act rationally. We will discuss what it means to be ethical. We will discuss God, death, language, and logic. By the end – if things go well – students will have more questions than answers, and have found mysteries to ponder for years to come.

Aims

The aim of the course is to introduce basic topics and methods in philosophy through use of vivid, exciting examples that illustrate some of the central problems philosophy aims to address. In particular, through introduction to cases that seem puzzling or paradoxical, students will find themselves trying to think up solutions long after class has ended. Ultimately, the goal is to introduce students to the joy of philosophical thought.

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn to:

- 1) Develop analytic and critical thinking skills through gaining familiarity with philosophical method
- 2) Understand and be able to utilize basic philosophical vocabulary
- 3) Demonstrate understanding of some of the core problems of philosophy

Indicative Content

- 1) Introductory
 - a. The Unexpected Examination
 - b. Zeno's paradoxes
- 2) Paradoxes of time travel
 - a. Grandfather Paradox
 - b. Bootstrap Paradox
- 3) Puzzles about the self
 - a. Mind-body swaps
 - b. Fission and fusion
 - c. Self-locating belief
- 4) Puzzles about the mind

- a. Other minds – Inverted and absent qualia
- b. Physicalism – Mary’s Room
- c. Artificial intelligence – The Chinese Room
- 5) Puzzles about morality
 - a. Killing and letting die – The Trolley Problem
 - b. Paradoxes of utilitarianism – Mere Addition, Utility Monster
 - c. Hedonism – The Experience Machine
 - d. Abortion – The Violinist
 - e. Charity – The Vintage Sedan
- 6) Paradoxes of rational action
 - a. Prisoner’s Dilemma
 - b. Newcomb’s Problem
 - c. Intransitive preferences
- 7) Paradoxes of rational thought
 - a. Cartesian Skepticism
 - b. Confirmation and Induction – Hume
 - c. Confirmation and Induction – Paradox of the Ravens
 - d. Confirmation and Induction – Grue
 - e. Sleeping Beauty
- 8) Puzzles about God and death
 - a. The Problem of Evil
 - b. Pascal’s Wager
 - c. Epicurus on death
- 9) Paradoxes of logic and language
 - a. Sorites Paradox
 - b. Self-reference Paradoxes

Teaching Method

The course will be in lecture format, with emphasis on discussion.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

- 1) Performance in class discussions will be a measure of LO1. Students will be encouraged to offer explanations and elaborations of the reasoning in the readings, as well as possible replies to the difficulties raised. This will be encouraged by targeted discussion questions. For example, the students may be prompted to respond to questions like ‘what are some differences between the situation described in the violinist case and standard cases of abortion? Do any of those differences affect the success of the moral analogy the paper attempts to draw?’
- 2) A series of short ‘reaction essays’ of one page will be assigned to measure all three learning outcomes, in which students are expected to summarize problems and explore possible solutions or personal thoughts. A successful paper on Pascal’s wager, for example, would describe why Pascal believes religious faith to be required by good practical reasoning; it might then discuss considerations that Pascal ignores in his argument, or speculate on whether Pascal’s reasoning undercuts genuine religious faith.
- 3) A midterm and a final examination will be used to measure LO2 and LO3. Both exams will employ multiple choice and short answer questions which will be designed to check the student’s comprehension of the concepts and vocabulary introduced during lectures. Example question: “The ethical position which claims that actions should maximize overall happiness is called _____”.

Assessment

Mid-term paper: 30%

Final paper: 50%

Participation and attendance: 20%

Required Readings

Required Text: Clark, Michael, *Paradoxes from A to Z*, London: Routledge, 2002.

Supplementary Readings

Excerpts from:

Brook, Andrew, and Stainton, Robert, *Knowledge and Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*, MIT Press, 2001.

Descartes, R., *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1640/1996.

Elga, Adam, "Defeating Dr. Evil with self-locating belief," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 69, 383-396, 2004.

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in *Greek and Roman Philosophy after Aristotle*, ed. Jason L. Saunders. New York: Free Press, 1966.

Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Charles Hendel. New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1748/1955.

Hume, David, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N. Kemp Smith. Edinburgh: Nelson, 1779/1947.

Jackson, Frank, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32, 127-136, 1982.

Lewis, David, "The paradoxes of time travel," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 13, 145-152, 1976.

Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

Parfit, Derek, *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées*, trans. AJ Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin Books, 1670/1966.

Perry, John, "Can the self divide?" *Journal of Philosophy*, 69, 463-488, 1972.

Searle, John, "Minds, brains, and programs," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3, 417-457, 1980.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "A defense of abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1, 47-66, 1971.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis, "The trolley problem," *Yale Law Journal*, 94, 1395-1415, 1985.

Unger, Peter, *Living High and Letting Die*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Williams, Bernard, "The self and the future," *Philosophical Review*, 79, 161-180, 1970.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>