PHIL 222: Analytic Philosophy (Paradoxes)

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30–10:52AM | 54 Coleman Hall
Course Blog: http://bucknell-paradox.blogspot.com/

Description of Subject Matter & Methods of Instruction

Analytic Philosophy is a rich and diverse philosophical tradition that grew up around developments in the philosophy of logic and language at the turn of the last century. Its importance and influence persists to this day. One can get to know this tradition in a variety of ways: for example, by studying its historical development or by surveying the topics on which analytic philosophers have focused. We are going to do something a little different: we are going to develop an understanding of Analytic Philosophy by focusing on a particular phenomenon that occurs throughout the history of philosophy (from the very get-go, in fact): the paradox. Roughly speaking, a paradox occurs when apparently good reasoning from innocent starting points leads us into contradiction. Paradoxes played a particularly important — and constructive — role in Analytic Philosophy. They are complicit in two of the most significant developments in logic and mathematics in the twentieth century; they are a common thread binding Analytic Philosophy to the larger corpus of philosophical thought; many of them remain unsolved; they are at once fascinating and infuriating!

Class meetings will be a blend of lecture and discussion. I will not ask you to read many pages, but I will ask you to read them carefully (as Alastair McIntyre put it, “You haven’t read a philosophy paper until you’ve read it twice” — he’s right). I will also give you questions/assignments that will guide your reading and analysis. Your course grade will be based on your contribution to the discussion, your performance on regular short writing assignments, and the quality of longer essays (which we will workshop). The prerequisites for the course are PHIL 98, 100, 103, or 201; I recommend both an introductory philosophy course and a logic course as ideal preparation for this course. All students need to be willing to work at a certain level of abstraction.

Learning Goals

In successfully completing this course, you should:

• Gain a general understanding of the history, methods, and significance of Analytic Philosophy;

• Gain a deep knowledge of the importance, resolution, and occasional intractability of philosophical paradoxes;

• Become familiar with several important topics and fields in philosophy (including ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of logic);

• Continue to develop your critical/analytical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Instructional Materials and Sources

R.M. Sainsbury, Paradoxes (3rd Ed.) and supplementary readings distributed in PDF from the course blog. I have also ordered copies of Logicomix: An Epic Search for Truth (a graphic novel about Bertrand Russell, one of the chief architects of Analytic Philosophy) as an optional "text".

Methods of Evaluation

Your final grade will be based on three components as described below. Please note that half of your grade will be determined by your regular, everyday effort. It will thus be quite important to stay current. Note as well what the different letter grades represent. According to the Course Catalog (http://www.bucknell.edu/catalog.xml), an ‘A’ means ‘Superior achievement’, a ‘B’ means ‘High pass’, a ‘C’ means ‘Pass’, a ‘D’ means ‘Low pass’, and an ‘F’, of course, stands for ‘Failing work’. Unless you’re some kind of savant, it’s highly unlikely that you can produce ‘superior work’ (or even B-level, good, but uninspired work) without putting time and effort into your studies.

Participation & Preparation (20%). Since much of our time in class will be spent discussing rather difficult problems and concepts, it will be crucial that you come prepared. What does "coming prepared" mean? It means not only passing your eyes over the reading assigned for that day, but making a serious attempt to critically engage with it and coming to class ready to share the fruits of your labors (questions, reactions, remaining confusions, &c.). The short response papers (see below) are designed to help stimulate this preparation. During class, I expect you to be a willing participant. Break the ice. Ask questions. Respond to your peers. Offer your considered opinions. In short: be ready to do some philosophy!

Short Writing Assignments (30%). For each of our twenty-seven remaining meetings, I will post some sort of short writing assignment. These will often be tightly connected with the reading for that class and will be due either in paper at
the beginning of class (one typed sheet only) or in the body of an email sent before class (preferred). Grades will be assigned on a simple 0-3 basis (0= “not done”/“insufficient”, 1=“decent/acceptable”, 2=“good”, 3=“excellent!”). I will count only your best twenty submissions, so if you want to simply not attempt some (you might be busy with other work or ill or what have you) that won't hurt your grade.

**Longer Essays (50%).** Your grade for this portion of the course will be based on the success of one or more essays totaling 6,000 words. You may choose how to divide these words into separate essays, down to minimum chunks of 1,500 words and so long as at least one of these essays has an at least modest research component (i.e., draws on several scholarly texts that have not been assigned and which are not reprinted in our text). If you want to write one 6,000 word essay or four 1,500 word essays, that’s fine. Or you could write two 3,000 word essays, or one 1,500 word, and one 4,500 word essay, and so on. . . . And you may decide to write more than this: I will count only your best 6,000 words.

I will not assign specific topics or deadlines during the term. Instead, I will ask you to consult with me in office hours or during/after class about what you would like to write on. I’ll also make available weekly/topical suggestions for potential essay projects. When you have completed a draft, we will schedule some of a class meeting to “workshop” it: you will email it around, we will read it, and then discuss it constructively. I will also complete a rubric for it (including a tentative grade). On the basis of this discussion, you will have the opportunity to revise your essay.

At the end of the term, I will take your best 6,000 or so words worth of essays and produce a weighted average that will be your grade for this component of the course. So, for example, if you write an 1,824 word essay which gets an 82% and a 4,432 word essay that gets 94%, I will ask my grading spreadsheet to compute 1824/6256 x 0.82 + 4432/6256 x .94 = 90.5%.

**Other Course Policies & Information ✉️ READ THIS, PLEASE!**

**Office Hours.** You are invited and encouraged to supplement your learning in this course by visiting me in my allotted office hours or at some other time that suits us both. You do not need to have any specific mission to accomplish.

**Electronic Distractions.** You may use a cell phone or computer in class up to four times; each time, your course grade will go down one letter grade. Thus, I strongly suggest you remove the temptation for making this trade-off by turning off your various gadgets before our class meetings. Class time is special time. If you have any questions about this policy, please let me know.

**Policy on Late Work.** Late submissions of the short writing assignments will not be accepted (unless you have an extended illness or condition that warrants a letter from the Dean). You have seven freebies; I fully expect that you’ll use some of them. The longer essays are all due by the first day of final exams (December 8th). Late work will be docked 5% per day late.

**Sources and Academic Honesty.** Unless otherwise instructed, you must include a Works Consulted/Cited page even if your only source was the primary source upon which your essay focuses. Cite correctly all materials used including primary sources, textbooks, materials from the internet, and lectures. I will not hesitate to refer students who plagiarize or commit any other form of academic dishonesty to the University Board of Review (http://www.bucknell.edu/x1337.xml).

**Accommodations for the Disabled.** If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please talk to me (either by email or in person) at your earliest convenience and I will make every effort to accommodate your needs. If you have not yet spoken with the appropriate Associate Dean about your disability (http://www.bucknell.edu/x7759.xml), please do so as soon as possible. Accommodations will need to be sanctioned by their office.

**Topic Schedule**

This schedule is subject to change as our progress and interest dictates. Please stay current with the course blog for specific assignments.

**Weeks 1–2 (August 25th–September 1st)**
- Introductory: What are Paradoxes?
- Logical Background
- Moral Paradoxes

**Week 3 (September 6th–8th)**
- Zeno’s Paradoxes of Space and Time

**Week 4 (September 13th–15th)**
- Paradoxes of Opacity: The Hooded Man, Morning Star/Evening Star
- Problem of the Criterion

**Weeks 5–6 (September 20th–29th)**
- The Problem of Change / Identity Through Time
- Antinomies of Ordinary Objects

**Week 7 (October 4th–6th)**
- Paradoxes of Vagueness
- Vagueness in Metaphysics (Paradox of Increase, Ship of Theseus)

**Fall Recess**

**Weeks 8–10 (October 13th–27th)**
- Paradoxes of Self-Reference (Russell’s Paradox, the Heterological Paradox, the Liar Paradox)
- Gödel’s Second Incompleteness Theorem

**Week 11 (November 1st–3rd)**
- Paradoxes of Rationality (Newcomb’s, The Prisoner’s Dilemma)

**Weeks 12–14 (November 8th–22nd)**
- The Problem of Free Will
- Paradoxes of Moral Responsibility

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Weeks 15–16 (November 29th–December 6th)**
- The Paradoxes of Time Travel (Information ex nihilo; The Grandfather Paradox, Probabilistic Paradoxes of Time Travel)
- All Essays Due by December 6th