

## PHIL 4372: Theories of Knowledge and Reality

Sam Houston State University  
Spring 2026 | CRN: 22298  
M/W 3:30 - 4:45 PM | CHSS 242A

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**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Brommage  
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**Course Description:** Students examine issues concerning the basic categories of reality, which may include individuals and universals, time and change, and mind and body. Further, students explore issues in the theory of knowledge, which may include the distinction between knowledge and belief, the criteria of knowledge, and the justification of knowledge claims.

**Course Narrative:** “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” This cliché question represents a very troubling feature of human rationality. Reasoning is a very powerful tool for understanding the world. But there are times when reason seems to undermine itself—where one can argue apparently well and from apparently good premises, to two inconsistent conclusions or to a conclusion that seems to defy what we know about the world. This course will survey some of the most famous (or perhaps infamous) paradoxes: a philosophically troubling and intellectually stimulating set of problems that have been formulated throughout time, from the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno to twentieth century thinkers such as Russell and Einstein. Some of the problems to be discussed include the Liar Paradox, the Prisoner’s Dilemma, Russell’s Paradox, various paradoxes of belief and knowledge, paradoxes of personal identity, paradoxes of space and time, and selected “paradoxes” of physics.

**Prerequisites:** Six hours of philosophy and sophomore standing.

### Required Textbooks:

1. Michael Clark, *Paradoxes from A to Z* (Routledge, 2012), 3rd ed. ISBN: 978-0415538572, \$23
2. R. M. Sainsbury, *Paradoxes* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3rd ed. ISBN: 978-0521720793, \$31

### Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

1. *Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, and theories.* Through reading and lecture, the student will come to understand the arguments of key figures in the Western Philosophical tradition.
2. *Developing skill in expressing oneself orally and in writing.* Through the papers, the student will develop skills explaining and evaluating the ideas of the various philosophers studied.
3. *Learning to analyze and critically examine ideas, arguments, and points of view.* The student will come to have a more examined approach to questions concerning issues such as free will and determinism, the nature of God, and how knowledge is formed.

**Course Outline:** The course winds through several groupings of problems. First, paradoxes which deal with the nature of space and time, causation and paradoxes of physics such as the twin paradox and Schrödinger’s Cat. The second deals with sorities problems (vagueness) and paradoxes of identity. The third moves on to paradoxes of decision, including Newcombe’s Problem and the Prisoner’s Dilemma. Then we cover paradoxes of knowledge and belief, including problems of inductive confirmation. The last phase deals with paradoxes which deal with logical inference and truth, including Russell’s paradox and the liar paradoxes.

**January 12** ..... *Syllabus and Course Introduction*

**January 14** ..... *What is a Paradox?*

*Readings:* Clark, “Paradox”; Sainsbury, Introduction; Quine, “Ways of Paradox”; Olin, “The Nature of Paradox”

**January 19** ..... *Martin Luther King Jr Day - Holiday*

**January 21** ..... *The Riddle of Origin*

*Readings:* Clark, “The Chicken and the Egg”; Sorensen, “Anaximander and the Riddle of Origin”

**January 26** ..... *Zeno’s Paradoxes of Motion*

*Readings:* Clark, “Achilles and the Tortoise,” “The Arrow,” “The Racecourse”; Sainsbury, Chapter 1

**January 28** ..... *The Infinite and Infinitesimal*

*Readings:* Black, “Achilles and the Tortoise”; Thomson, “Tasks and Supertaks”

**February 2** ..... *Scrutinizing the Infinite*

*Readings:* Clark, “Galileo’s Paradox.” “Cantor’s Paradox” and “Hilbert’s Hotel”

**February 4** ..... *Paradoxes of Causation*

*Readings:* Heinlein, “By His Bootstraps”

**February 9** ..... *Paradoxes of Physics*

*Readings:* Einstein, selection from *Relativity: The General and Special Theory*; Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?”

**February 11** ..... *The Sorities Paradox*

*Readings:* Clark, “The Heap”; Sainsbury, Chapter 3.1-3.2 (pp. 40-46)

**February 16** ..... *The Sorities Paradox*  
*Readings:* Unger, “There are No Ordinary Things”; Sainsbury 3.3-3.7 (pp. 48-68); **Paper #1 assigned**

**February 18** ..... *Paradoxes of Identity*  
*Readings:* Clark, “Heraclitus’ Paradox,” “Ship of Theseus”; “Paradox of the Many”

**February 23** ..... *Paradoxes of the Divine*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Paradox of Foreknowledge,” ”The Paradox of Omniscience”; Augustine, *Confessions Book XI*

**February 25** ..... *Berkeley’s Master Argument*  
*Readings:* Berkeley, selection from *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonos*; **Paper #1 due**

**March 2** ..... *Newcombe’s Problem*  
*Readings:* Clark, “Newcombe’s Paradox”; Nozick, “Newcombe’s Problem and Two Principles of Choice”; Sainsbury 4.1 (pp. 69-82)

**March 4** ..... *The Prisoner’s Dilemma and The Tragedy of the Commons*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Paradox of Democracy,” “The Prisoner’s Dilemma,” “The Paradox of Voting”; Sainsbury 4.2 (pp. 82-88)

**March 9-11** ..... *Spring Break: No class!*

**March 16** ..... *Paradoxes of Induction*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Paradox of the Ravens”; Hempel, “Studies in the Logic of Confirmation II”; Sainsbury 5.1-5.1.2 (pp. 90-92)

**March 18** ..... *Paradoxes of Induction*  
*Readings:* Clark, “Grue”; Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”; Sainsbury 5.1.3 (pp. 99-107)

**March 23** ..... *The Prediction Paradox*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Unexpected Examination”; “The Designated Student”; Olin, “Believing in Surprises: The Prediction Paradox”; Sainsbury 5.2-5.3 (pp. 107-115); **Paper #2 assigned**

**March 25** ..... *The Prediction Paradox*  
*Readings:* Quine, “On a So-Called Paradox”; Ayer, “On a Supposed Antinomy”

**March 30** ..... *Moore’s Paradox and The Knower Paradox*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Knower” and “Moore’s Paradox”; Sainsbury 5.4 (pp. 115-120)

**April 1** ..... *The Preface Paradox*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Preface Paradox”; Makinson, “The Paradox of the Preface”; Hoffman, “Mr. Makinson’s Paradox”; Lacey, “The Paradox of the Preface” **Paper #2 due**

**April 6** ..... *Russell’s Paradox and Paradoxes of Self-Reference*  
*Readings:* Clark, “Grelling’s Paradox”; “Russell’s Paradox”; Sainsbury 6.1 (pp. 123-127)

**April 8** ..... *The Liar Paradox*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Liar”; Sainsbury 6.2-6.9 (pp. 122-145)

**April 13** ..... *Self-Reference and the Theory of Types*  
*Readings:* Russell, “Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types”; **Paper #3 assigned**

**April 15** ..... *Paradoxes of Fiction*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Paradox of Fiction”; Lewis, “Truth in Fiction”

**April 20** ..... *Paradoxes of Inference and Validity*  
*Readings:* Clark, “The Paradox of Entailment,” “The Paradox of Validity”; Carroll, “What the Tortoise said to Achilles”

**April 22** ..... *Contradictions and Paraconsistency*  
*Readings:* Sainsbury, Chapter 7; Priest, “What’s So Bad About Contradictions?”; **Paper #3 due**

**April 27** ..... *Are Paradoxes Inevitable?*  
*Readings:* Kant, “Antinomies of Pure Reason”

**April 29** ..... *Review for Final*  
*Readings:* TBA

**May 5 (12:45-2:45 PM)** ..... *Final Exam*

**Important Dates:**

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| First Day of Classes .....           | Tuesday, January 12th                  |
| Martin Luther King Day holiday ..... | Monday January 19th                    |
| Add/Drop Deadline .....              | Thursday January 22nd                  |
| Spring Break (no class) ....         | Monday, March 9th – Friday, March 13th |
| Q-Drop Deadline .....                | Wednesday, March 25th                  |
| Course Final .....                   | Monday, May 4th (12:45–2:45 PM)        |

**Course Evaluation:** The main point of evaluation will be three mid-length to critically analyze the readings for that set of texts. Each of the papers should be 1250-1500 words (about 5-6 pages double-spaced), and relevant to a topic in the respective grouping of texts. In addition, there will be a comprehensive final exam. More details on due dates and assignment guidelines are posted on Blackboard.

The following weighting will be used to calculate your grade:

|                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Response Papers ..... | 3 x 15% = 45% |
| Attendance .....      | 15%           |
| Participation .....   | 15%           |
| Final Exam .....      | 25%           |

Your rounded average of these assignments will determine your grade, based on the following scale:

|         |               |
|---------|---------------|
| A ..... | 100% - 89.5%  |
| B ..... | 89.4% - 79.5% |
| C ..... | 79.4% - 69.5% |
| D ..... | 69.4% - 59.5% |
| F ..... | 59.4% - 0%    |

**Attendance and Participation:** An attendance sheet will be distributed most class days. It is your responsibility to sign-in on the official roll sheet, otherwise you will be considered absent. Your attendance will be judged as a percentage of the number of days that you attend class. Everyone will have two (2) absences that will not count against his or her grade (should you not use these two absences, your grade will be adjusted up accordingly). For example, if I take attendance 22 times in the semester, and you have attended 18 of those meetings, your attendance grade would be a 90% (18/20). Aside from the absences automatically excused as per this policy, *no additional absences will be considered excused except when required by law or University policy.*

**Writing Enhanced:** This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. Writing in this course is one of the tools your instructor will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor feedback. Others may not receive a grade but are designed to assist you in critical reflection of the course material. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning. Written work constitutes 75% of the course grade.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Please be aware that plagiarized work and any form of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on the assignment and possible university disciplinary action.

[SHSU Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) outlines academic honesty and related disciplinary procedures. You should also familiarize yourself with [Academic Policy Statement 900823](#), which outlines procedures for students to file an academic grievance should you wish to appeal your grade for reasons other than academic dishonesty.

**Classroom Conduct:** Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Cell phones must be turned off before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result in a directive to leave class. Students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

**Course Evaluations:** In accordance with University policy every student will have an opportunity at a specified date and time near the end of the semester to complete a course evaluation form from the IDEA course evaluation system.

**Pregnant and Parenting Students:** Pregnant and parenting students fall under Title IX equal educational opportunities that “prohibits educational institutions from discriminating against students based on pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions.” Resources are available on the [SHSU Pregnancy & Parenting](#) page.

**Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom:** Students submitting work entirely or substantially generated through AI is unethical and a mix of plagiarism, collusion, and abuse of academic resources. Doing so will result in a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

For University policies on Student Absences on Religious Holy Days, Students with Disabilities, and Visitors in the Classroom you may view to the official statements on the SHSU Website, <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

### **Expectations, Suggestions and Mandates for an efficient class:**

1. Please arrive to class on time and expect to stay the entire duration of the class. If this is an impossibility, please make every attempt to notify me in advance of tardiness or absence.
2. Especially true in philosophy more than most other subjects, diligence is important. Some of the reading will be difficult since we are looking at some of the most profound ideas in the history of the world. The difficulty of the subject is indirectly proportional to the amount of work put into the course.
3. This is a senior level philosophy class, so prepare for a lot of reading and writing. Expect to have up to ten hours a week of reading and thinking about the material in order to get an “A” for the course. Additionally, for these reasons, attendance is of vital importance. *If you do not attend class or keep up with the reading, do not expect to pass this class!*

4. Please come to class prepared (i.e., any reading assigned read, any questions concerning exercises or lectures prepared, etc.)
5. Please be respectful of each other in the class. There will be times when students disagree about a topic discussed in class. This is a didactic process, not a combative one.
6. Due to the great excess of material and limited time in which we must cover ground, please do not create a disruption for those people who are attempting to learn. Disruptions include blurting out answers, name calling, chiding each other, snoring, etc. Laughing at the Instructor's jokes is obviously exempted from this policy. In addition, personal audio devices (except those in use to record lectures) and loud crunching snack foods are prohibited from the classroom.
7. Please feel free to make mistakes. We all will from time to time—even your omniscient instructor.
8. Please feel free to make an appointment to discuss the material you do not understand. Waiting until the last moment in the semester to catch up is not advisable. I am excellent at fixing small problems, but horrendous at fixing large ones. The only difference between small and large problems is time.
9. Have fun! The material is only as dry as you make it out to be. Sharpening one's mind can be an exhilarating process.