Focus
This course focuses on four classic puzzles, one from each of four subfields of philosophy: the trolley problem in ethics, the puzzle of the statue and the clay in metaphysics, the Sorites paradox in the philosophy of language, and Goodman’s riddle of induction in epistemology. Each puzzle is simple to state, but raises complex issues at the center of contemporary philosophical debates. Our aim in the course will be to engage with these puzzles and to reflect on how contemporary philosophers go about solving them.

Grading
Six in-class quizzes: 30%
Two 7-page papers: 40%
Final exam: 20%
Class participation: 10%

Quizzes will be challenging assessments of your understanding of readings and lectures. Important concepts that we cover in class before the date of the quiz are fair game. Papers assigned to be read by any date up to and including the date of the quiz are also fair game.

Please note that each quiz is worth a significant fraction of your grade. You may drop the lowest of your six quiz grades. If you miss class when a quiz is given and you would like to make up that grade so that you can drop another one, you can write a 5-page paper related to material covered by the quiz that you missed. But your life will be easiest and your grade will be best if you simply keep up with the reading and come to class on time every day.

Schedule
1/6 Introduction
1/11 Shaw 2005: "The Consequentialist Perspective"
1/13 Harris 1975: "The Survival Lottery"
1/18 Quinn 1989: "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences…"
1/20 Thomson 1985: "The Trolley Problem"
1/25 Pryor 2006: "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
1/27 Singer 1972: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
2/1 Thomson 1971: "A Defense of Abortion"

Material constitution
2/3 Sider 2005: "Constitution" from Riddles of Existence

rough draft of first paper due in class
Schedule

2/8  Chisholm 1976: Person and Object, Chapter 3
2/10 first paper drafts discussed
2/15 Merricks 2001: Objects and Persons, Chapter 2
2/17 Sider 2001: Four-Dimensionalism, §§5.1–5.2
2/22 Lewis 1976: "Survival and Identity"
2/24 final draft of first paper due

Vagueness

3/8  Sorenson 2009: "Vagueness"
3/10 Sainsbury 1986: "Degrees of Belief and Degrees of Truth"
3/22 Williamson 1994: Vagueness, Chapter 7
3/24 Lowe 2005: "Vagueness and Endurance"

Inductive skepticism

3/29 Williams 2001: Problems of Knowledge, Chapter 17
4/1 rough draft of second paper due
4/5 Wittgenstein 1953: Philosophical Investigations, §§185–242
4/7 second paper drafts discussed
4/14 Kripke 1982: p.23–54
final draft of second paper due
4/19 Review session
all outstanding papers due