Our primary goal will be to assess answers to the following two questions, which have been discussed in contemporary philosophical discussions of time travel:

**What’s possible?** I wish I hadn’t lost my paycheck in last night’s roulette game, but there’s no fix for it now. What if I had a time machine? On the one hand, it seems that I can travel back in time and prevent my younger self from placing the bet. After all, it’s not hard to prevent even committed gamblers from placing bets (especially if you have the element of surprise on your side). On the other hand, it seems that I can’t travel back in time and prevent my younger self from placing the bet. After all, there’s nothing I can do to make a contradiction true. If it’s true that I lost my paycheck in last night’s roulette game, it’s not true that I didn’t. So, scenarios involving time travel to the local past bring out a puzzle about what’s possible; can I, or can’t I, change the past?

**What’s probable?** What happens if I try to prevent my younger self from placing the bet? Since I don’t make a contradiction true, I fail. What stops me? No matter how carefully I plan, no matter how many times I try, no matter what extremes I go to, something always goes wrong. On the one hand, it seems improbable that there would be such long strings of repeated failures, and so improbable that there will be time travelers who repeatedly attempt to change the past. On the other hand, long strings of failures are as probable as can be since it’s a necessary truth that all attempts to change the past end in failure. So, scenarios involving time travel to the local past bring out a puzzle about what’s probable; do the strange coincidences required by time travel show that we shouldn’t expect there to be time travel into the past?

Our secondary goal will be to assess whether the answers to these questions have philosophical implications that stretch beyond the recherché topic of time travel. For example, answers to the first question arguably undercut arguments for fatalism. And, I’ll argue that answers to the second question tell us something interesting about the relationship between prediction and explanation.

**Schedule**

All readings are posted on our website.

**Week 1: March 30th**

Week 2: April 6th


Week 3: April 13th


Week 4: April 20th
Vranas, Peter B. M. (2010). What time travelers may be able to do. Philosophical Studies 150 (1):115 - 121


First Paper Due

Week 5: April 27th


Week 6: May 4th


Week 7: May 11th

Week 8: May 18th

A thing I'm working on

Week 9: June 1st

Meeting with John Roberts

**Paper Proposals Due**

Week 10: Thursday, June 11th, 12-3

**Class Presentations**

**Final Paper Due July 1st**

**Grading**

Students enrolled for regular credit will write a 5-7 page exegetical paper, a 3-page paper proposal, and a final paper (approximately 15 pages). Students enrolled S/U will write a 5-7 page exegetical paper. See schedule for due dates.