THE ZENO CONTEST
2014

All Roanoke College students are invited to compete in the 18th annual Zeno Contest, a critical thinking competition sponsored by the Religion and Philosophy Department. A modest cash prize and a gaudy trophy will be awarded to the student with the best solution to the following puzzle:

NEWCOMB’S PARADOX

Imagine a person (the Predictor) who has a well-deserved reputation for being able to predict the future with a high degree of accuracy. The Predictor offers you a choice involving two boxes, A and B: specifically, he will let you choose either Boxes A and B together, or Box B by itself. Box A is transparent and contains $1000. Box B is opaque, but while you can’t see whether it has any money in it, in fact the amount of money in Box B will vary in the following way:

If the Predictor decides that you will choose both boxes, he will leave the opaque box (Box B) empty, and you will end up with $1000.

If the Predictor decides that you will choose the opaque box (Box B) by itself, he will put $1,000,000 in it, which you will keep.

The Predictor is not lying, and will not change his mind once he makes his prediction.

Which box or boxes would you choose, and why?

Papers should be 1-3 pages, typed and double-spaced, written in standard English with a minimum of errors in spelling or grammar. The usual rules regarding academic integrity apply.

Successful papers should explain as clearly as possible the reasoning that generates the paradox itself and its resolution. Submit entries to Hans Zorn, Religion and Philosophy Department, at zorn@roanoke.edu.

The Deadline for submissions is Friday, February 28. Good luck!