

# THE ZENO CONTEST 2012

All Roanoke College students are invited to compete in the sixteenth 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 paradox:

## THE PARADOX OF THE KNOWER

Sam's professor keeps telling him that a college paper is supposed to ask an important question and provide a reasoned answer to it. Sam, however, is struggling to formulate meaningful questions, let alone answer them. His papers come back with comments like "It's not clear what you are trying to prove"; "Find a more interesting thesis"; and, on his latest draft, "Your conclusion does not seem to be in any way related to the question you raised in your thesis paragraph." As Sam trudges across campus to talk with a professor about his latest paper, it suddenly occurs to him that the problem may not lie with him, but with what he is being asked to do. He reasons that he either knows what he is inquiring after or he does not. If he knows it, then inquiry is pointless, since it makes no sense to inquire after what he already knows. But if he does not know it, how will he recognize the answer to his inquiry if he runs across it? In this case, too, inquiry seems to be pointless.

Sam feels relieved: his bad grades are not his fault! Best of all, he now knows what to say to his professor.

**You are Sam's professor. How do you respond to Sam?**

*Adapted from Plato, Meno.*

Papers should be brief: anywhere from 1-3 pages, typed and double-spaced. Concise, elegant solutions are encouraged. Papers should be written in standard English with a minimum of errors in spelling or grammar. Papers must be individual, not collaborative efforts. The usual rules regarding academic integrity apply.

A panel of distinguished faculty will judge all entries by the clarity and rigor of their analysis. **Successful papers should explain as clearly as possible the reasoning that generates the paradox itself and its resolution.**

Entries should be submitted to Dr. Hans Zorn, Religion and Philosophy Department. Electronic submissions are welcome, and should be sent to [zorn@roanoke.edu](mailto:zorn@roanoke.edu). Please direct any questions to that address or call x2024.

**The deadline for submissions is Friday, March 2. Good luck!**