Paradoxes from A to Z

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Eleclyah says

Un bel compendio di paradossi, ma non riuscirete ad affrontarlo se non avete già di vostro una passione per l'argomento o un'infarinatura matematica, perché ogni paradosso è presentato nel modo essenziale… se volete delle spiegazioni esaurienti vi consiglio *Il libro dei paradossi* di Nicholas Falletta.

Mishek says

A nice read. The book boasts 84 paradoxes (with 10 new ones having been added for this edition). Each paradox is discussed and resolved— or explained why it cannot be resolved— all within about three or four pages. Most of the classic paradoxes are here, such as 'Achilles and the Tortoise,' 'The Prisoners Dilemma,' 'The Liar,' and 'The Chicken and the Egg' (to name just a few).

I wanted to read this book to check out the discussion of the Monty Hall Problem (here called the Monty Hall Paradox). Named after the game show host, the problem involves a contestant who is given three doors to choose from. The contestant is told that behind one of the doors is the coveted prize, and that there nothing behind the other two doors. The contestant then chooses one of the doors that she believes the prize is behind. Monty Hall would then choose another door and show that it had nothing behind it. The game show host then offers the contestant the option to switch doors or keep the door she chose initially.

The paradox or problem then arises: should the contestant keep the door she initially chose or switch? Stated another way: does contestant have a higher probability of getting the prize by keeping the door she initially chose or by switching?

The solution was famously proposed by the columnist Marilyn vos Savant, who writes a weekly column for Parade magazine called "Ask Marilyn." Back in the day, vos Savant was listed as the person having the highest IQ by the Guinness Book of World Records. Vos Savant told readers that the contestant should always switch.

The solution brought the ire (and letters) of many a PhD in mathematics. Even the famous number theorist, Paul Erdos, (bio: The Man Who Loved Only Numbers) refused to believe that to switch doors gives a higher probability of winning the prize (Erdos was finally convinced of it when shown a computer program using the Monte Carlo method, which ran repeated trial simulations).

This chapter, however, smacks of sexism. Chapters on other paradoxes seem to go out of their way to mention the history of the paradox, who came up with the paradox, and/or how the discussion of it evolved. The author, Michael Clarke, doesn't even mention vos Savant by name— only the column 'Ask Marilyn.' If one knows a little about the history of this problem and the invective targeted at vos Savant, one can't help but feel that Clark has been dismissive of vos Savant's prowess in the whole affair.

Finally, the paradox of the 'Chicken and Egg' is discussed using basics from biology and the theory of evolution. It is satisfactorily resolved and one goes away knowing what came first: the chicken or the egg (Sorry, you'll have to read the one and a half page solution on your own).

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Siri Livingston says

Read a paradox a day from Clark's accessible and lucid A-Z and prepare to feel frustrated and stimulated.

Kylie Young says

This book was written simply but not.

It was confusing in that you feel like you are constantly keeping track of mathematical equations and theories, so if you're not paying attention it is quite easy for it to go over your head and in other ways it was written too simply, as much of the data is not explained and has no reference points to where this data was found, so while it's going over your head, you're also feeling confused because there's no links or explanation to the information being discussed and used in his arguments and theories.

Phoenix says

A Straightforward Catalog

And that is the problem. The picture of the chicken and the egg on the cover is the most entertaining aspect of the book. The explanations are alphabetical, easy to understand, the collection reasonably complete - and reading it is boring.

Paradoxes are supposed to be fun. The contradictions should gobsmack you at the back of your head and turn you upside down looking for a way to get out. This is more like the guidance councilor talking to you about sex - after listening to her talk you wonder what all the fuss was about and you lose all interest.

A useful reference for schools or public libraries. Since I love self referential conundrums I'll keep it around, but for more fun try Vicious Circles and Infinity: an Anthology of Paradoxes, This Book Does Not Exist: Adventures in the Paradoxical, ParadoxesParadoxes (by Sainsbury), Martin Gardiner's Aha! Gotcha: Paradoxes to Puzzle & Delight or anything at all by Raymond Smullyan .

Maurizio Codogno says

I paradossi sono antichi come la filosofia greca: basta pensare a Zenone che amabilmente descrive la gara tra Achille e la tartaruga. Qualcuno magari ha anche sentito parlare di Bertrand Russell e del suo barbiere. Quello che in genere non si sa è che il ventesimo secolo ha inventato una sfilza di frasi che a prima - e seconda... - vista sembrano logicamente impossibili. In questo libro vengono presentati tutti i paradossi, dai più antichi a quelli contemporanei: a ognuno di essi viene dedicato un paio di pagine, con l'esposizione del paradosso stesso e un suo esame, e una possibile spiegazione per sciogliere i dubbi sul suo significato pratico e su come funziona.
Fin qua tutto bene. Purtroppo mi pare che il libro, non saprei dire se già in originale o per la traduzione,

promette tanto ma mantiene poco. L'esposizione dei paradossi è fatta bene, ma nella loro spiegazione ci si avvita in discussioni che mi sembrano sviare il lettore dalla comprensione, e lo rendono ancora più dubbioso. Forse il guaio maggiore del libro è che non è né carne né pesce, oscillando tra la filosofia e il cognitivismo. Insomma, interessante più come raccolta che per imparare qualcosa di nuovo.

Amber says

When I picked up this book from BookMooch, I suppose I was hoping more for math and/or science paradoxes -- I wouldn't even have minded a philosophy-type paradox as long as it was drawn with something real in mind. Instead this is more of a book of logical paradoxes, based on initial fallacies and misunderstandings which the book unravels for you. In other words, paradoxes that are not really paradoxes once you look at them more closely.

I'm often frustrated by logic problems that set sterile preconditions, which seem to have no basis in experience. They are probably useful for understanding mistakes that our minds make when evaluating experience but I suppose I was hoping to unearth some real "unsolved mysteries" (like Newtonian vs. Einsteinian physics, for example) and so was disappointed. :-(

If anyone has read a book like the one I seem to have created in my head, please let me know?

Maurizio Codogno says

Avevo letto la traduzione in italiano della prima edizione di questo libro e non mi era piaciuta. Dopo quasi dieci anni ho preso la terza edizione rivista e ampliata, e almeno in parte devo rivedere in positivo il mio giudizio: decidete voi se con gli anni mi sono addolcito, se la traduzione avesse peggiorato le cose o se la revisione di Clark abbia migliorato il risultato. Ad ogni buon conto, il libro raccoglie un gran numero di paradossi - l'indice ha 94 voci, ma alcune sono dei semplici rimandi - da quelli greci classici ai contemporanei più o meno oscuri, da quelli matematici a queli filosofici, dai più prettamente linguistici a quelli legali. Ogni paradosso ha la sua bibliografia il che è utile, anche se bisogna ricordare che il compito di Clark è stato facilitato dal suo essere l'editor della rivista *Analysis* che tratta anche di questi temi. Paradossalmente :-) ho trovato meglio spiegata la parte matematica, mentre spesso la trattazione dei paradossi linguistici mi continua a parere un certo quale avvitamento su sé stesso. Tanto per essere chiari: il problema non è che il paradosso venga o no "risolto", qualunque significato si dia alla parola: del resto, su alcuni di essi ancora oggi si discute aspramente ad altissimo livello. Però se metti una soluzione deve essere comprensibile, e nel caso dei paradossi autoreferenziali certe spiegazioni non erano alla mia portata. In definitiva il libro non vi cambierà la vita, ma può essere utile come testo di riferimento.