

Phil 1: Introduction to Philosophy

UC San Diego—Spring 2014

Dr. Theron Pummer

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Office Hours: W, 11:30am – 1:30pm, in H&SS 7093

Class: MWF, 2:00pm – 2:50pm, in Thurgood Marshall 102

Course Content:

The questions we will study in this course span three major areas of philosophy:

Metaphysics—In general: What, ultimately, *is* there? What is reality like? In particular: Does God exist? Are our choices causally determined? What is the nature of conscious experience? What is it for a person to exist at different times?

Ethics—In general: What *should* I do? What makes something good or bad, right or wrong? In particular: Should I donate most of my money to charities fighting extreme poverty? What makes death bad, insofar as it is bad? When we are uncertain about what will happen, how much risk can we rationally accept?

Epistemology—In general: What, if anything, makes a belief *knowledge*? What makes some beliefs more reasonable, or more justified, than others? In particular: What, if anything, justifies your belief that you are not the only mind in existence? How, if at all, should your confidence in your beliefs be affected by what others believe?

Our Approach:

In this course, you will be introduced to some of the most important, fascinating, and difficult problems. We will not be surveying the history of philosophy, nor will our primary concern lie with what past thinkers have already thought. Instead, we will actively debate philosophical issues ourselves. *You* will become a philosopher in this course; you will *do* philosophy.

While the readings span a wide range of issues, there is a recurring theme in this course: the power of arguments to *challenge ordinary beliefs*. Ordinary beliefs are the beliefs about metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology that most of you (implicitly) hold right now, prior to taking this course. For example, most of you believe that death would be bad for you. But there are strong arguments for the view that we can explain death's badness only if we claim that nonexistence is bad for those who could have existed but never will. Yet, few are prepared to make this latter claim.

I have selected a set of readings that I suspect will surprise, upset, or simply bamboozle you, and I have often deliberately omitted defenses of ordinary beliefs against the arguments these readings contain. I have done so for the reason that I want *you* to grapple with these puzzles and figure out how best to respond. Whether in light of the course readings you defend ordinary beliefs or abandon them, you will grow philosophically: you will become more careful, more creative, more systematic, and more accurate in your thinking. Or so I hope.

Grading:

Over the quarter, you will receive a total of three paper prompts (in weeks 2, 5, and 8). Each will ask you to offer what is according to you the most plausible response to a

philosophical puzzle. Each paper will have a 1,500 word limit. Each will make up 25% of your overall course grade.

The remaining 25% of your grade will be a function of attendance and participation. I will not take attendance officially, but since there will be at most 40 students enrolled, it will be obvious to me whether you are present regularly. To receive a *passing* participation grade, you must attend class regularly and participate in class discussions, office hours, or over email, and you must attend one mandatory 15-minute meeting with me. To receive an *excellent* participation grade, in addition to doing what is necessary for passing, you must regularly make insightful and thoughtful contributions during class, office hours, or over email (and not exclusively over email). Beware: you can earn yourself *negative* participation points if you are disrespectful toward others, or if you talk when you do not have the floor.

Lectures, Discussions, and Mandatory Meetings:

Normally two days per week will be *lecture days* and one day per week will be a *discussion day*. While on lecture days I will prepare a structured lecture for the class, you are nonetheless strongly encouraged to interrupt me and raise any questions or comments you might have; occasionally on lecture days there will be brief 5-minute peer activities. However it is on discussion days that you will be *especially* encouraged to come to class prepared with questions and comments pertaining to the recent readings and lectures. If needed, discussion days may be used to play catch up.

Each of you will be required to attend one 15-minute meeting with me and one of your fellow students. This mandatory meeting is for me to hear what you think about the problems and topics in the course and to help you feel more comfortable and confident in an office hours setting. These meetings will take place between 11:30am and 12:30pm on Wednesdays (the first half of my office hours), during the first 6 weeks of the course. A sign-up sheet will be distributed via email during the first week; time slots will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. If you are absolutely unavailable between 11:30am and 12:30pm on Wednesdays, you must contact me within the first week in order to set up an alternate time to meet.

Electronics Policies:

Unless you have a legitimate reason and you discuss it with me in advance, you are not permitted to use laptops in this class. They can very easily distract you and those around you, and often taking notes by hand is more useful anyhow – you can type up your hand-written notes once you get back home. Also, please turn your cell phones and other electronic devices *off* during class. Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to do your own work as outlined in the UCSD Policy on Academic Integrity (<http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>). Acts of academic dishonesty are unethical and will not be tolerated, and any student who engages in suspicious conduct will be confronted and subjected to the disciplinary process. Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the entire course, and it may result in expulsion from UCSD. Plagiarism often occurs when students are worried about making deadlines. If you think you will need to turn in an assignment late or

incomplete, please talk to me. I would rather have you ask for an extension or turn in an incomplete assignment than engage in academic dishonesty.

Moreover, if you cheat on your paper assignments, it is very likely you will get caught. Each paper assignment must be uploaded to turnitin.com. And since I will be talking with each of you in class and in office hours, it will not be too difficult for me to detect whether the person I've been talking with is the *same person* as the one writing the papers!

Reading and Lecture Schedule:

All of the readings are available on electronic reserves:

<http://reserves.ucsd.edu/eres/default.aspx> (go to Students, select the Philosophy Department, then select Phil 1, password is **tp1**). You are responsible for the material covered in the readings and in the lectures. Often the lectures will go beyond any of the assigned readings.

Week 1

- Monday, March 31st. Logic and Arguments. How arguments can raise *puzzles*—e.g., the Sorites Paradox.
- Wednesday, April 2nd. Does God Exist? The Design Argument and the Problem of Evil. D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.
- Friday, April 4th. Discussion.

Week 2

- Monday, April 7th. The Cosmological Argument. W. Rowe, "An Examination of the Cosmological Argument."
- Wednesday, April 9th. God and the Brain. P. S. Churchland, "Religion and the Brain," in *Brain-Wise*.
- Friday, April 11th. Discussion.

Week 3

- Monday, April 14th. Pragmatic Reasons for Religious Belief. A. Hájek, "Pascal's Wager."
- Wednesday, April 16th. Consciousness. T. Nagel, Chapter 1 of *The View From Nowhere*.
- Friday, April 18th. Discussion.

Week 4

- Monday, April 21st. Consciousness. P. M. Churchland, "Chimerical Colors: Some Phenomenological Predictions from Cognitive Neuroscience."
- Wednesday, April 23rd. The View from Now, Here. C. Hare, "Realism About Tense and Perspective."
- Friday, April 25th. Discussion. **Paper #1 due!**

Week 5

- Monday, April 28th. Personal Identity. D. Parfit, pp. 199-209 and pp. 229-243 of *Reasons and Persons*.
- Wednesday, April 30th. Personal Fission. D. Parfit, pp. 253-266 of *Reasons and Persons*.
- Friday, May 2nd. Discussion.

Week 6

- Monday, May 5th. Is Death Bad? When? For Whom? S. Kagan, Chapter 10 of *Death*.
- Wednesday, May 7th. The Symmetry Argument. F. Kamm, "Why Is Death Bad and Worse than Pre-Natal Non-Existence?"
- Friday, May 9th. Discussion.

Week 7

- Monday, May 12th. Determinism and Responsibility. D. Pereboom, "Determinism al Dente."
- Wednesday, May 14th. The Lazy Argument. R. Holton, "From Determinism to Resignation; And How to Stop It."
- Friday, May 16th. Discussion. **Paper #2 due!**

Week 8

- Monday, May 19th. Extreme Poverty and Our Illusion of Innocence. P. Unger, pp. 8-13 and pp. 24-54 of *Living High and Letting Die*. (& please visit: <http://givingwhatwecan.org/>)
- Wednesday, May 21st. How Much Must I Give to Be Decent? P. Unger, pp. 133-143 of *Living High and Letting Die*.
- Friday, May 23rd. Discussion.

Week 9

- Monday, May 26th. Memorial Day (no class).
- Wednesday, May 28th. The Morality Delusion? S. Street, "Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?"
- Friday, May 30th. Radical Skepticism. M. Huemer, Chapter 2 of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*.

Week 10

- Monday, June 2nd. Radical Skepticism. M. Huemer, Chapter 3 of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*.
- Wednesday, June 4th. Discussion.
- Friday, June 6th. Disagreement. D. Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy," and Plato, *The Apology*.

Paper #3 is due on Friday, June 13th, by 3pm, in my office!

Important Phone Numbers:

UCSD Campus Police: 858-534-HELP / 858-534-4357

Campus Security Officers / Escort Program: 858-534-WALK / 858-534-9255

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Central Office: 858-534-3755 (Galbraith Hall 190)