

PHI 171 – PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY – FALL 2014

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ASSIGNMENT #1 – DUE MONDAY SEPTEMBERS 29TH

1 SUMMARIZING, ASSESSING AND COMMUNICATING ARGUMENTS [60%]

We examined a number of arguments about time and change:

- (a) Augustine's argument that time exists in the mind;
- (b) Einstein's argument about the relativity of simultaneity;
- (c) Parmenides' argument that change is impossible;
- (d) Zeno's paradox of the dichotomy; and
- (e) Aristotle's sea-battle argument.

First, summarize one of the above arguments very simply and very clearly. Your summary should be roughly half a page, no more. Use the slides if they're helpful, but do not copy exactly what's written in the slides. Use your own words. Show me that you've understood what the argument says.

Second, once you have written down your summary, assess the argument. Do you agree? Do you disagree? If you disagree, please say why. For example, you can say that a step in the reasoning is questionable or unclear. Do not simply say that you disagree without offering a reason for why you disagree.

Finally, grab a friend or a person you know and explain to him or her the argument. Write down the observations that your friend made. Was he or she surprised? Did he or she not believe the argument? What was the most difficult part for him or her to understand?

2 DOES THE WORLD HAVE A BEGINNING? [40 %]

Does the world have a beginning or not? Consider the following argument:

Let's suppose that the world has a beginning. The beginning of X consists in the existence of X which is preceded by a time in which X does not exist. If

there is a beginning of the world (i.e. the totality of the things that exist), then there must have been a time in which the world did not exist, that is, there must have been a time in which nothing existed. Call it an *empty time*. But in an empty time the generation (i.e. coming into being, coming into existence) of a thing is impossible, because an empty time contains nothing, and when there is truly nothing, it is impossible that a new thing is generated. If so, the world would not be generated and the world would not exist, but this is clearly false. Consequently, we must deny our initial supposition that the world has a beginning, and we must conclude that the world cannot have a beginning, and is, therefore, in relation to past time, infinite.

- (a) Are you convinced by the above argument? Is there any mistake in this argument? Please explain.
- (b) Questions such as ‘does the world have a beginning?’ were questions which the Buddha declined to answer (see slides Week 1). Do you think that this is a wiser attitude than trying to figure out—by means of abstract philosophical arguments—whether the world has a beginning or not?