**Philosophical Method Day 2: Being a (Nice) Philosopher**

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| **Content:**  What’s Your Reason? (30 minutes)  Being a (Nice) Philosopher (20 minutes) | **Method:**  1. Class activity  2. Lecture |

***Instructor’s Introduction***: This lesson is a continuation of the overview given in day one. The first activity reinforces that doing philosophy is all about providing thoughtful reasons for (or against) a particular claim. The second of part of the lesson moves away from doing philosophy into what it means to be a philosopher in terms of standards and expectations for discourse. If you have a school honor code (or something similar), this lesson provides a nice opportunity to connect that with the course.

# *Goals and Key Concepts*

1. 1. To reinforce that doing philosophy means providing *reasons* for claims.
2. To introduce standards of academic discourse.

**1. What’s Your Reason?**

Students should have their four note cards from the previous day. Each note card will have a claim written on one side and three reasons supporting the claim written on the other.

Divide the students into two teams. (A fun way to do this is by birthdates—everyone born before June 30th on one side, everyone born after on the other. Then tweak the date up or down to get even numbers.) After the teams have formed, collect their index cards, making sure to keep the cards from either side separate.

The exercise now proceeds sort of like a game of charades. The goal is for students to be able to guess what the claim is from the reason(s) cited for believing it.

Starting with the first team, I pick the first student in line and read him or her one of the three reasons from the first card in my pocket. If the student can guess the claim from the first reason, his or her team gets 3 points. If not, I read a second reason. If the student can correctly guess from the first and second reasons, his or her team receives 2 points. If the student isn’t able to guess after the first two reasons are read, I read the third reason. If all three reasons are needed, 1 point is awarded to that student’s team. If the student can’t guess after the three reasons are read, the other team gets one chance to guess; if they do, their team gets 1 point.

After Student One from Team One has guessed, I pick a new card and move to Student One, Team Two. And so on until all of the students have had the chance to guess at least once.

**Note:** Sometimes disagreements arise about whether a reason offered for a claim is a good one. This can be a good opportunity for discussion, but will of course make the activity last much longer. For instance, when this game was played previously, a student wrote the claim that “stealing money from your mom’s purse is wrong.” One of the reasons given was “it’s against the law to do so.” Other students objected to this on two grounds. First, they argued that it wasn’t against the law to steal from your parents. This was (more or less) resolved by other students pointing out that most parents probably wouldn’t press charges against you if you did steal from them but that, if they did, you could go to jail. Second, and more interesting from a philosophical standpoint, several students pointed out that something’s being illegal doesn’t necessarily make it wrong. As an example, one student said that if he had to steal a car to drive his injured friend to the hospital, it would be illegal—first because it was car theft and second because it would be driving without a license—but that, as far he was concerned, anyway, it wouldn’t be wrong. Another student observed that killing is wrong but that in war, for instance, it isn’t illegal. This led to a discussion about the difference between something being illegal but not wrong versus wrong but not illegal; (at least some) students were able to see that the former, but not the latter counted as an objection to the evidence that the original student had cited in favor of her claim.

This activity will help students to develop a better sense of how we employ reasons to defend our beliefs.

**2. Being a (Nice) Philosopher**

Have the students read the handout titled *Commandments from a Philosopher*. If your school has an honor code or something similar, you may be able to tie it into the discussion. After they have had a couple of minutes to read the list, ask them why they think that the characteristics described are important characteristics for a philosopher or anyone engaged in academic discourse? Encourage them to pick one of the commandments and explain why it is important.

There are a few important points that you should be sure to cover with the class:

1. In this class we are all philosophers and should abide by the highest standards of academic respect and integrity. In our community of philosophers, everyone should feel safe sharing their ideas.
2. Disagreement of the right kind is important. The questions of philosophy are both contentious and difficult. It is by discussing and disagreeing that as philosophers we will make progress toward answering some very challenging questions.
3. As philosophers we talk about ideas and not people. We need to be careful to make sure we are talking about ideas and not making discussions personal attacks. On the other hand, we have to be open to criticism of ideas that we offer and not take such criticism personally.
4. Some of the material that we will discuss will be highly controversial in nature. In fact, we will discuss several topics (the existence of god for example) about which many in the class will have very strongly held personal beliefs. We need to be sensitive to those beliefs in others and open to reflecting critically on those beliefs within ourselves. Again, we are evaluating arguments, not judging people.

**Assignment**

Pick one of the *Commandments from a Philosopher*. In a paragraph or two, explain why it is important and give an example of how it might be applied in class.