

USING GAMES IN THE PHILOSOPHY CLASSROOM

1. What the Presentation Will Cover

Our presentation occurs in three parts.

First, in the first five minutes, we provide a general overview of why we think that philosophical games are pedagogically effective:

	Rationale	Description
1	Motivation	Game environments motivate students to engage class material in a more direct manner than is often occurs in abstract or theoretical discussions. Effective games make students engage with the underlying concepts of the material being taught in order to be successful in that game.
2	Entertainment	Students often report having a great deal of fun during games. This helps to break the monotony of normal classroom procedure and reenergizes the class for further discussion.
3	Engage Different Learning Styles	Games can often engage a variety of learning styles which may not be possible in a normal lecture style class. Gerwin (1996) has argued that his own Hobbesian prisoner's dilemma style game is capable of providing something for any of the learning styles described by Kolb (1984). According to Kolb there are four different learning orientations which, in various combinations, result in four distinct learning styles. Following Gerwin, we believe that philosophical games are capable of engaging each of these styles in some way.
4	Interactive	Classroom games cause students to learn in a more interactive manner in two respects. First, they interact more directly with the material such that the students can now draw upon some concrete experience to bring up in later discussion. Second, students have to interact with each other during game play which facilitates sharing of ideas.

Second, we ask participants to play a game that has been used in our philosophy classrooms. This game is a role playing game designed for use with Hobbes state of nature. The game involves ten players, each of whom has varying resources and abilities, who attempt to meet their survival needs and gain as many resources as possible. The game combines the underlying logic of the prisoner's dilemma as found in John Immerwahr's Hobbes Game with advantages of situating players in unequal positions as found in Christina M. Bellon's state of nature role playing exercise. The result is a game capable not only evaluating Hobbes' reasoning about whether people in the state of nature would enter civil society, but also of evaluating Hobbes' view of justice. Namely, it is capable of exposing some potential issues with basing justice upon actual agreements made those in the state of nature who may be unequal regarding their capabilities and resources. Thus the game can also be used for explaining, and motivating, Rawls appropriation of the social contract tradition which eliminates such differentiating information.

Game time usually extends over a period of 45 minutes, but will be limited to 30 minutes for this presentation.

Third, we finally provide a general template for a game that can be adapted to a number of different philosophical topics. In outline, the game begins by dividing students into ‘sellers’ and ‘buyers.’ Sellers are tasked with creating a brochure and ‘sales pitch’ that outlines various *pros* for their particular philosophical position/argument and *cons* for all other positions. Sellers rotate among the buyers, delivering their sales pitch. Buyers are tasked with critically evaluating each sales pitch, and then choosing with one they think is best. One instantiation of the game involves buyers, realizing that they have died and God exists, and having to choose between which argument best proves God’s existence (ontological, cosmological, teleological). The game encourages a variety of different learning styles, critical thinking, organizational, and rhetorical skills, and we think can be used as a segue into motivating students into writing a paper.

2. What Participants Will Do

Participants will play a state of nature game.

3. Goals of the Session

Our session has three principal goals. First, we want to introduce the rationale for using philosophical games in the classroom and encourage participants to incorporate game dynamics into their classrooms. Second, we offer two different philosophical games that provide a concrete example of these dynamics. Third, we offer the participants a template of a philosophical game so that participants have the means to create their own game by tailoring the template to their preferred subject matter.

4. Description of Handouts to be Provided

For the State of Nature Game: a handout with a complete sheet of the rules which the students have access to during the game.

For the Selling Philosophical Arguments Game: a handout with a complete sheet of rules which sellers and buyers have access to during the game.

5. List of Equipment Needed

We will provide all equipment. None is needed.

6. References

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