

# A Quick Overview of Philosophy Scholarship

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## 1 Parable of the Squirrel

Start with James's parable of the squirrel: we'll see whether they fight about it. I can ask which interpretation they think is true, and reveal a great deal of what I want them to learn in so doing. This is a super important moment, as the story conveys some simple but crucial aspects of philosophical thinking and should make people question how they argue.

Might as well take this opportunity to apologize for name dropping. Talk about Bad History and when Philosophy turns into that, then about seminar style classes and how you want to follow that model. Notes aren't like math class! The nature of knowledge... will come up later.

## 2 Philosophical Method

Encourage them to write in their books, if they own them. Philosophical reading should be not a passive reception but an engagement with the work, the thought, and the thinker. Maybe urge them to find a more up-to-date framing of this idea for their generation because wow am I being precious here.

Talk about arguing and respect: when someone argues a point with you, this means they consider you and your point important enough to engage it and include it in the discussion. Indeed, the highest expression of disrespect in a philosophy classroom is to deem someone's position not worth arguing against. This does not, of course, override the need for personal respect or prohibition of disruptive behavior.

Talk about Sophism and how it is an amusing but ultimately intellectually disrespectful distraction.

If you feel like everyone disagrees with you it means the conversation needs your help! Baird and Boomer: on certain topics our entire class would agree, so one of us got very good at playing devil's advocate so that we would be forced to defend our positions. This wasn't always enough, and we learned to cherish the really intelligent people whom we most strongly disagreed with. One time someone made a position that nobody agreed with but nobody bothered challenging and we all felt terrible later.

Some "rules":

**The importance of changing your mind.** I get restless if I've believed the same thing for too long.

**No hot takes.** Explain reasoning behind view and be willing to reply.

**Don't be rude or hostile.** Be nice, duh.

**No echo chambers or shouting down.** Don't just agree or disagree, give reasons and detail.

**Include.** Going back and forth for too long between same people can derail; make sure the discussion includes quiet voices.

Talk about Dan and hitting in the art studio. Philosophy as method, as the everyday. It's always on, and this is a simple example of what this looks like. (Dan mentioning that he's trying to be less violent, and my reaction of suddenly seeing my violence and wondering why and why not, eventually stopping).

## 3 Definition of “Philosophy”

### 3.1 The Divide

Don't dwell on this part, but:

**Analytic Philosophy:** logic, math, deductive and symbolic analysis as core methodology

**Continental Philosophy:** experiential, contemplative, more concerned with facts of human experience than objective view

Now they know the distinction but hopefully won't let their thinking be colored by it. I can talk about my double major and the different ways people react to it.

### 3.2 The Three Branches

Now it's time go over the old Ethics, Epistemology, Metaphysics model but explain that it's not absolute and can be dangerous to reduce to (indeed, they are interconnected and usually codeterministic).

**Ethics:** Philosophy of action and meaning. What is good? What is the right thing to do or way to act? Ring of Gyges!

**Epistemology:** Philosophy of knowledge and experience. How do we know things? Can we know everything? What is experience? Allegory of the Cave!

**Metaphysics:** Philosophy of “stuff”, of what everything is made of and how it relates. Is the universe one or many? What is a person? What is real? Why is “stuff” a technical term? Ship of Theseus! Melting wax!

Questioning is the piety of thought.

Truth is a common thread, so ask where it fits in. Make clear that it's a constant theme, and needs some kind of definition in order to even get started. Remember Sophia's purely ethical understanding of it. And we're off...

## 4 Truth

Write these three words on the board:

- Real
- True
- Fact

Ask what these words imply, whether there is a difference, and what relationship they have. Students will reveal whether these are different amounts of truth, different types of truth, or different shadows cast in different directions from the same “truth”. Maybe the difference is merely emotional association. Maybe they think one takes priority. Maybe they completely shock us with some brand new insights! It seems apparent to me that the colloquial understandings of these terms are congruent, but when you roll up your sleeves there is a lot more to discuss.

Speaking of congruence, for the mathematically inclined it may help to present the idea of equivalence relations and how buck wild they can get. Geometric congruence ( $\cong$ ), equality ( $=$ ), biconditionals ( $\Leftrightarrow$ ), approximate equality ( $\approx$ ), one-to-one and onto, bump equals ( $\simeq$ ) all these signs that resemble the  $=$  sign but convey a different angle on it. Ask if anyone knows what bump equality is because you forgot.

Give them an example truth claim and explore how problematic it is. Maybe a statement comparing intelligence, then you trace it back to IQ, and then you have some real questions to ask about why we use these terms and what they presuppose. This is a good way to apply James's intended point, but I feel like I need a less on-the-nose example.

Oh, well: "It's not right that Hylas is working as a laborer under Philonus's supervision because they have the same I.Q."

1. What is "I.Q."?
2. Why should it determine the relationship between these two people?
3. What is the moral imperative here?

## 5 Ideas for Extra Topics

If this isn't enough to fill the time, you can start talking about existentialism. Build into authenticity off of an understanding of truth, but asking what kids think authenticity means and then turning it back to the word itself and to philosophy feels like a good method.

You could also spend some time talking about Kant's hypothetical and categorical imperatives, but try not to make it sound like Kant was on to something.