Cirque du Socrates

The crowd gathers around the circus ring to see a most spectacular thing: philosophers claiming to be psychics! They call for participants from the audience, and before your eyes they begin to transmit knowledge from one mind to another. But will this trick work? And if so, who is the best of the psychic philosophers?

Overview

This is a cooperative studying game for 3-5 players who play as psychic philosophers and members of the audience. The philosophers take turns trying to transfer knowledge to the participants, trying to maintain the illusion that they are actually psychic, until the grand finale when the opposing philosophers will test how well their psychic transfers worked!

15 minutes to learn; 30 minutes to play.

Note: This game works better for flashcards about ideas rather than rote memorization, unless memorization includes mnemonics and other elaboration techniques. Essentially, the more you can elaborate on a topic, the better!

Materials Needed

- Deck of Truths (flashcards of some material that everyone is partially familiar with and the group would like to learn better)
    - For an example flashcard deck, see the materials included with the print-and-play version of these rules
    - Depending on how detailed the cards are, a game should consist of somewhere between 10-40 cards (or 30-60 facts per game). For your first (short) game, try playing with ~10 facts per player (or 3 cards per player of the example deck)
- A pile of Strike Tokens (such as coins or paper clips) enough to have 5 per player

Setup

Assign each player to be a Philosopher or a Participant. For your first game, the Philosophers should be more knowledgeable about the Deck of Truths than Participants. See the table below for how many of each role to have.

Players	Philosophers	Participants
3	2	1
4	3	1
5	3	2

Deal out the Deck of Truths evenly to the Philosophers, so that only they can see the cards.

Main Act

(When playing with 5 players, alternate who is the Active Participant every turn.)
Choose a Philosopher to go first. On their turn, they draw the top card of their Deck of Truths and hold it so that other Philosophers can see what's on the card but the Participants can't. The Philosopher then reads one side of the card and tries to get the Active Participant to say what is on the other side ("Hidden"), primarily through the use of the Three Psychic Techniques:

1. **Priming** - the Philosopher can talk about anything that isn't directly on the Hidden side of the card
2. **Choosing** - the Philosopher can offer a choice of (two or more) possible truths and let the Participant come to their own conclusion from those options
3. **Answering** - The Philosopher can answer a Participant's question, as long as the answer isn't Hidden, or confirm that what they said is on the card.

Once the Participant says a satisfactory amount of the Hidden information, the turn is over and the Philosopher hands her card to the Philosopher to her left, which he puts in his Finale pile. Turns proceed clockwise. Continue until every card has been seen and all cards are in someone's Finale pile. Then each Philosopher shuffles her Finale pile and play proceeds to the Grand Finale.

While the Philosopher and Active Participant discuss, the other Philosophers listen to try to interrupt the conversation, proving themselves as the best Philosopher. There are Four Interruptible Failings they are watching out for:

1. **Telling** - the Philosopher said exactly what was on the card, or tried to say it with a simple obfuscation (like "rhymes with...")
2. **Leading** - the Philosopher tried to give the Participant a Choice, but only offered one option, or it was obvious which option the Philosopher was hinting at.
3. **Guessing (a Failing of the Participant)** - the Participant asked a question which tried to directly get at what's on the card, or they asked a question that the Philosopher couldn't answer without Telling.
4. **Belaboring** - the Philosopher continued to engage the Participant about the card after the turn was over. (*Some players may want to ignore this rule, see Suggested House Rules.)

When an Interruptible Failing is called, the rest of the players (excluding the accused) can veto it and cancel the Interruption. Otherwise, the accused player is given a Strike token. If any player receives their sixth Strike Token, the show falls apart and everyone loses. (But the player who failed loses the most for ruining the show!)

Grand Finale

For the Grand Finale, turns proceed similarly to the Main Act. On their turn, a Philosopher will draw from their Finale pile to quiz the Active Participant. Unlike the Main Act, the Philosopher's goal is now to ask the hardest question possible about the card's contents, giving no assistance to the Participant. The Philosopher can ask a question about either side of the card, and does not need to include information about both sides of the card. If the Active Participant gets the question right, give them the card to keep. Otherwise, give this card to the Philosopher to your right (the one who originally prepared the Participants on that card).

Once all Finale cards have been played through, it's time for the audience to rate the show with their applause. If the Participants collectively have at least as many cards as the Philosophers (collectively), everyone wins! If the Participants have at least twice as many cards as the Philosophers, it was a great show. If the Participants have more than three times as many cards as the Philosophers (or the Philosophers have no cards), the audience gives a standing ovation for an amazing performance!

Additional accolades are given to the best Participant, whoever has the most cards among them, and the best Philosopher, whoever has the least cards among them. In the case of a tie, the better player is the one with fewer Strike Tokens.

Suggested House Rules
- You may give someone a Strike Token from the pile if they are rude, condescending, or make someone feel embarrassed for their ignorance.
- If a Participant finishes a turn but believes they still don't understand the card, they may ask for a Psychic Reading, in which case a Philosopher reads to them, word for word, the contents of the card, or shares some additional information which they were not allowed to convey during the turn.

Play Examples
For these examples, there are 3 players: Socrates, the active Philosopher; Diogenes, the inactive Philosopher; and Plato, the Participant. Any game rules, such as Psychic Techniques and Interruptible Failings, will be shown in *<angle brackets>*. The card they are considering is Agnosticism - the belief that it is impossible to know whether or not deities exist.

Example of a turn without Failings, using all 3 Psychic Techniques
Socrates: I will now psychically convey to you the meaning of Agnosticism.
Plato: Okay, it sounds like a belief.
Socrates: Yes! Perhaps it is a belief about gods, or a belief about nature. *<**Choosing**>*
Plato: I think it is more likely a belief about gods. But I know the root "-gnos-" to refer to knowing, and "a-" to refer to a lack of… I don't know what to make of that.
Socrates: Indeed! Imagine, for a moment, that the gods did not exist… *<**Priming**>*
Plato: Okay…? Oh! But if agnosticism is about a lack of knowing, perhaps you don't know if the gods exist?
Socrates: Yes, exactly! *<**Answering**>*
Plato: So, perhaps agnosticism is the belief that one cannot be sure if the gods exist or not!
Socrates: Correct! (Socrates hands Diogenes the Agnosticism card)

Example of the same turn, but with all 4 Failings instead
Socrates: I will now psychically convey to you the meaning of Agnosticism.
Plato: Okay, it sounds like a belief.
Socrates: Yes! It is a belief about the gods. *<**Telling**>*
Diogenes: Hey! That's Telling! (Socrates takes a Strike token)
Socrates: Fine. But what I said is true. Now… do you think it's a belief about the gods' *existence*? Or… I don't know… a belief about the gods' dietary preferences? *<**Leading**>*
Plato: Well, when you put it that way…
Diogenes: You may think you are being clever, Socrates, but you are Leading the poor man! (Socrates takes a Strike token)
Socrates: Alright, alright! How about this: is it a belief about whether the gods exist, or a belief about in what way the gods exist?
Diogenes: You are Leading again, sir!

Plato: If I may interrupt, I don't know if he is Leading. I certainly don't know which is correct. *<**Veto**>* However, I believe agnosticism is a belief about whether the gods exist. But what does the belief say about the gods' existence? *<**Guessing**>*

Diogenes: Now is it *you* who are faulting, Plato! Socrates could not possibly answer that without Telling you the truth! (Plato takes a Strike token)

Plato: Oh! Well, that's alright anyway, because I've just remembered! Agnosticism is the belief that one does not know whether the gods exist or not.

Diogenes: Excellent. Socrates, hand me that card. Now I believe it is my turn.

Socrates: Yes, Plato, but hold on, is it a belief about one not being sure, or that it is *impossible* to know? *<**Belaboring**>*

Diogenes: Socrates! You are Belaboring the point! The man has said his piece, it was close enough! (Socrates takes a Strike token)

Plato: I agree with Diogenes here. Perhaps this distinction will come back to hurt me, but I believe what I said was sufficient.

Socrates: Very well, you have the floor, Diogenes. (Socrates hands Diogenes the Agnosticism card)

Later, during the Grand Finale, Diogenes may ask one question about this card
Diogenes: Alright Plato, according to an agnostic, is it possible to prove that the gods exist or do not exist?

Plato: Hm, well I know that an agnostic would be unsure, but… oh, I'll say no. An agnostic would not think it possible.

Socrates: Haha! He's right you know! (Diogenes hands Plato the Agnosticism card)

FAQ
- *Can a Participant ask an open question?* Yes.
- *Who decides whether the Participant correctly answered a question during the Grand Finale? What if the card is ambiguous?* The group of players decide together by discussing what is right and wrong about their answer. If you cannot reach a consensus after discussion, the Participant is declared correct.

Printable Rules References

DO	DON'T
Priming - Say what's **not** on the card	**Telling** - Say what's on the card, even through obfuscation
Choosing - Offer a set of choices	**Leading** - Suggest a particular idea among choices
Answering - Answer with information **not** on the card or confirm correctness.	**Guessing (for Participants)** - Ask a question that the Philosopher can't respond to without Telling.
	Belaboring - Continue speaking after the turn is over. (*Some players may want to ignore this rule, see Suggested House Rules.)