

Spring 2026 Introduction to Philosophy DND

Addendum

Overall Course Setup

- **Group Structure:** By the second week, students form small groups of **5 members** each.
- **Rotating Dungeon Master (DM) Role:** Every group member gets **one turn** to act as the Dungeon Master (DM) for a full session/day.
 - This distributes workload fairly—no one is stuck doing all the prep.
 - The DM takes ownership of that day’s reading/topic, transforming it into a D&D-style adventure.

Session Format (When a Student is DM)

1. Presentation of the Reading

The DM presents the assigned philosophical text (e.g., a reading on justice, legal positivism, natural law, authority, rights, punishment, or core intro topics like knowledge/reality) **structured as a D&D adventure**.

- Think narrative framing: The group is a party of adventurers (or avatars embodying philosophical positions).
- The reading becomes the “quest” or “dungeon” backdrop—e.g., a moral/legal dilemma in a kingdom, a trial in a courtroom-cave, or a riddle posed by a sphinx representing a philosopher.

2. Challenges Presented One at a Time

The DM introduces **several challenges** sequentially (like encounters in a dungeon).

- Each challenge draws directly from key concepts, arguments, objections, or thought experiments in the reading.
- Examples:
 - A village demands obedience to an unjust law → Debate duty to obey.
 - A trial with conflicting evidence → Explore legal interpretation or epistemology of testimony.
 - A trolley-like scenario in a fantasy context → Apply ethics/law theories.

3. Group Interaction & Participation

For each challenge:

- Any group member can respond by:
 - Asking a clarifying question about the challenge (probing the text/concept).
 - Offering a suggestion/solution (proposing a philosophical position, argument, or counter).
- The DM evaluates the response in character (as the “world” reacting).
 - The responding player rolls dice (typically a d20 + relevant modifier, like “Intelligence for reasoning” or “Charisma for persuasion”) to determine the outcome/strength of their idea.
 - Success → Advances the “quest,” strengthens the argument, or reveals new insight.
 - Failure → Complication, objection, or setback (e.g., a logical fallacy is exposed).

4. Collaborative Input & Multiple Rolls

After the first response/roll:

- Other group members get turns to offer their own responses or build on/counter the previous one.
- They also roll dice to suggest “other considerations” (e.g., alternative interpretations, edge cases, or objections from the reading).
- This creates a back-and-forth discussion, with dice adding chance, excitement, and stakes—mirroring how philosophical debates involve risk, uncertainty, and persuasion.

5. Resolution & Reflection

- The DM adjudicates the collective outcomes (like a traditional DM).
- The session ends with debrief: How did the “adventure” illuminate the reading? What arguments won/lost? How does this apply to real philosophy of law or intro questions?

Why This Works for Philosophy (Especially Philosophy of Law)

- Turns abstract texts into experiential “living” philosophy—students defend positions, face consequences, and see ideas clash.
- Dice rolls simulate uncertainty in reasoning (e.g., a brilliant argument might “fail” due to poor delivery, or a flawed one succeed by luck—prompting reflection on persuasion vs. truth).
- Rotating DM role builds skills in presentation, facilitation, and creative application of ideas.
- Small groups (5) ensure everyone participates actively.

This structure is innovative but aligns with existing experiments in using D&D/RPGs to teach philosophy (e.g., ethics courses with group quests or

embodying philosophers as characters). It keeps sessions engaging, hands-on, and true to the spirit of philosophical inquiry as a shared adventure in reasoning! If you'd like examples of challenges for specific topics (e.g., Hart vs. Fuller on law, or Plato's Republic as a dungeon), let me know.

Examples

Examples of D&D-Style Challenges

These are **concrete examples** of challenges the DM for a given week may use. Each is designed for a **5-player group session** (45-60 minutes), drawing directly from key readings. The DM narrates in an immersive, fantasy voice, presents challenges **one at a time**, and adjudicates dice rolls (e.g., d20 + "Wisdom" for insight, "Charisma" for persuasion).

- **Success thresholds:** DC 10-15 (easy for basic grasp, hard for nuance). High roll = insight/reward; low = complication/objection.
- **Player actions:** Ask a question (probe text) or suggest a solution (defend position). Others chime in with counters/considerations.
- **Pre-gen characters:** Assign avatars like "The Skeptic" (epistemology focus) or "The Judge" (law focus) for roleplay.

I've structured them for **Philosophy of Law** (Hart vs. Fuller) and **Introduction to Philosophy** (Plato's *Republic* as a dungeon). Use a simple cheat sheet for DM notes.

Introduction to Philosophy: Plato's *Republic* (Justice & the Cave as Dungeon)

DM Setup Narrative: "You awaken chained in the Cave of Shadows—*Plato's Republic* unfolds as your prison. Flickering firelight casts puppet illusions on the wall: 'thrones,' 'wars,' 'gold.' A voice (Socrates) whispers: 'What is justice? Break free or stay comfy?' Your pre-gen avatars (Guardian, Philosopher, Artisan) must navigate to the sunlight exit."

Challenge #	Description (DM Presents)	Player Responses & Dice Outcomes
1: Defining Justice (Book I)	“A shadowy ‘thief’ steals from the ‘rich man’ illusion. The cave echoes: ‘Is justice helping friends or the stronger ruling?’ (Thrasymachus taunts).”	- Question: “What did Polemarchus/Cephalus say?” (Wisdom roll: 10+ → “Justice as repayment?” Low → Tricked by illusion.)- Suggestion: “Justice is soul harmony” (Plato tease). (Constitution roll: Success → Break one chain; Fail → Headache debuff.)- Others: Debate counters → Roll Perception for “shadow flaws.”
2: The Ideal City Escape (Books II-IV)	“To flee, build a ‘just city’ in the cave: Guardians train, producers craft. But corruption spreads—luxury tempts!”	- Question: “Why ban poetry/myths?” (Intelligence roll: 13+ → Purify city; Low → Demoralized party.)- Suggestion: “Philosopher-kings rule!” (Charisma roll: Success → Unlock tunnel; Fail → Faction revolt.)- Others: Add classes (waves, auxiliaries) → Group rolls scale city “health.”
3: Sunlight Revelation (Books VI-VII, Cave Allegory)	“You reach the exit: Blinding sun! Puppets were lies. Return to free others? They mock you as mad.”	- Question: “Forms vs. shadows—what’s real?” (Insight roll: 15+ → Vision quest boon; Low → Blinded retreat.)- Suggestion: “Descend as educators.” (Strength roll: Success → Convert prisoners; Fail → Stoned as heretic.)- Others: Resistance rolls → “Allegory boss”: High total → Party ascends enlightened.

DM Tips: Use printed “shadow puppets” (simple drawings) as props. Debrief: How does the Cave mirror epistemology? Link to course: “Roll d20: What is reality?”

These are **plug-and-play**—scale difficulty by reading depth. For more (e.g., Descartes’ evil demon as a trap room or Mill’s utilitarianism trolley trap), specify topics! This keeps sessions fun, fair, and deeply philosophical.