Activity 1: Philosophical Interviews
InterQuest: Introducing Philosophy - PHL201

The major objective of these activities is to provide a real-world context for practicing skills of philosophical dialogue. Some educators observe that online education lacks the face-to-face component of the classroom taught course. To an extent this is so, but online learning does not preclude face-to-face interaction. After all, it is not essential that the face with which you interact need be *mine*! Even better when you take what you are thinking and learning about so to apply it to the people and relationships in your real environments.

Please bear in mind that by participating in these activities at your request, other people are doing you an honor. Respect that and treat them with dignity and compassion throughout the activity. Make sure that you are capable of respecting and protecting the privacy of others, that you let them know so, and that you stay true to that committment.

Not a single one of these activities can be successfully performed by debate, clever speech, or winning points. You are not trying to win a debate, prove a point, promote your position, or show someone else to be wrong. My guess is that you already know how to do all that. We have plenty of models for the *communication as combat* approach. Politics, talk radio/tv, and even our own families shows us many ways to attack and defend. Here we are trying something different. Techniques based in the aims of analysis, investigation, and clarity. Understanding someone else's beliefs with greater clarity does not require you to give up your own.

So here is the task for this activity:

1. Go back to the 7 Philosophical Frameworks that you examined, choose from, and discussed in the beginning of the course. Re-read them thoughtfully. Select the one that you choose and at least two others (you may use all seven, or any combination that works best for you).

2. Do your best to extract the main beliefs of each of the frameworks that you will be using. Do your best to be fair and to present these beliefs in their strongest, clearest, and most plausible form

3. Construct an interview format (i.e. a set of questions) based on your interpretation of the frameworks that you are using. In addition to the questions, you may choose to let your participants read the original philosophical framework statements. This is open to your creativity. Some folks perform this with a group. Others choose a variable range of ages, professions, and other variables. Some go with people they know well, others with complete strangers. The questions that you produce will guide the information that you gather in a systematic manner. Please note that this is a philosophical interview on philosophical topics. Question of insufficient depth or relevance (e.g. what is your favorite color. Who did you vote for President, etc.) yield little. I am hoping that by now, you have at least a basic idea as to what

philosophical issues, questions, and dialogues are like. Follow those models that you have in the course. When in doubt, contact me (your instructor) and I'll give you feedback.

4. Conduct your interviews and gather your information. In the interview, your prepared questions are guides. Yet you should be ready to go deeper into the discussion as the situation calls for. Lead the dialogue with conceptually connected and deeper inquiry. When stuck, it is often valuable to ask folks to clarify the main concepts that they use (you can tell which are main to them by paying attention). They may not know how to do so. Try to avoid asking for a "definition." Instead, ask for examples see if you can draw from those examples some primary characteristics of the concept. Try to find out what folks regard as standards of evidence for their own beliefs and for the beliefs of others. When discussion beliefs that they do not hold, try to find out what they think the world would be like if that were true (and why they think so). Go as deep as you can, but don't exhaust them. If you do this well, many people will have a unique experience: a discussion of ideas in depth that does not result in winners and losers. Be grateful to them. Perhaps, give them an opportunity to make clarifications in the future if other thoughts arise (wouldn't that be interesting? If a brief and structured dialogue that you initiate resulted in continual thought on the part of another? That's philosophy in action).

You are not merely seeking answers to the questions, you are investigating the real and genuine philosophical beliefs of other people.

Write up a brief (1-3 page) report in which you analyze and evaluate the results. Do you see any patterns (might be hard, given the sample size). Do you detect any assumptions - spoken or unspoken? How do you justify that inference? Did you discover anything about these people, these ideas, or your self? If you were to do this again, what would you do different? These are all suggestions. Your honest creativity is the best guide, given that you imbue it with a philosophical character.

Post your report on the course site Dialogue area in the Philosophical Interviews forum. Start your own thread to post the report. You may include your interview questions as a separate document in the thread and anything else that you deem relevant. Just keep your sources confidential (i.e. no last names, phone numbers, etc.)