

## THE SELFISH SESSION

This is the 'seminar' session where you will present at least one position (argument) relating to selfhood. Use the Sibelius Model for doing so: in other words, present a stimulus, run a PhiE then look for an opportunity to present an argument. Once the argument has been presented and written up make sure the discussion focuses (so anchor them to it) on the argument presented. Use Andy West's method where each premise is numbered and the conclusion is presented as an equation (see below). You may want to teach a little about premises, conclusions, connectedness, validity and soundness as briefly as you are able.

Present stimulus.

TQ and TT.

Enquiry.

[Possibly] EQs and further enquiries.

Present argument.

Enquiry in which the group critiques and defends the arguments.

[Possibly] present further argument(s) and say something about arguments.

Enquiry.

### Session guidance

Begin by asking the children to sit with their backs straight, feet flat on the ground, shoulders relaxed and eyes closed, ask them to breathe slowly and steadily, then tell (better!) or read 'The Elusive I' from Julian Baggini's book *The Pig That Wants To Be Eaten*:

Find your self. I don't mean say your name. I mean catch hold of that which is you, rather than just the things that you do or experience or your body. To do this, focus your attention on yourself. Try to locate, in your own mind, the 'I' that is you, the person who is feeling hot or cold, thinking your thoughts, hearing the sounds around you and so on. I'm not asking you to locate your feelings, sensations and thoughts, but the person, the self, who is having them.

It should be easy. After all, what is more certain in this world than that you exist? So, if you turn your mind inwards and try to become aware only of yourself, it should not take long to find it. Go on. Have a go. Any luck?

(slightly adapted)

Alternatively, you could use 'Who do you think you are?' in *The Philosophy Shop* (page 103).

### Task Question 1:

- ✓ Can you identify yourself?

#### Nested Questions:

- ✓ What is the self?
- ✓ Where is the self?
- ✓ Is the self the body?
- ✓ Is the self distinct from the body?
- ✓ Is the self something you can see or perceive?
- ✓ Can you identify a self in others?
- ✓ Is that harder or easier to do?
- ✓ Can others perceive your self?
- ✓ Is that easier for others to do?
- ✓ Is the self unified?
- ✓ Does the self exist? (See arguments below.)

Expect some puzzlement and consternation at this task. It is not easy to understand or do. That's the point. Use this to explore their notions of what the self is, allowing a wider enquiry to begin with and then try to narrow it as the enquiry progresses. Make a mental (if not on the board) note of different ideas of the self that come up.

At some point in the discussion you must present a position or positions. In other words, present an argument or arguments explicitly. You may present any

argument you like, by whichever philosopher, but try to make it come out of ideas given by the children. Here are two positions to go in with. I have included these because they are counter-intuitive (thesis: the self does not exist) and therefore more likely to generate a controversy within the group, making conversation easier.

### **Hume's argument:**

All we can know is what we experience;

We cannot experience the self separate to our bundle of passing experiences;

+ (2) = Therefore, there is no self.

### **Buddha's argument:**

If there were a self, it would be permanent;

Nothing about us, either physically or psychologically, is permanent;

+ (2) = Therefore, there is no self.

As much as possible, try to get the group doing the attacking and the defending, however, it is a good idea to be prepared to step in, if necessary, to either attack or defend a position simply to allow things to move on. In this respect, the 'seminar' session is different from the PhiE we all learn about on Stage One.

### **Preparation**

To prepare, as well as familiarizing yourself with the lesson plans, have a look at Wikipedia and Stanford entries on 'selfhood'. Also, have a look through personal identity material from our own resources to draw upon, if necessary: The If Machine 'Ship of Theseus', 'Can you step in the same river twice?', 'You on another planet' etc., The Philosophy Shop 'Metaphysics – Personal Identity', Thoughtings 'You, Me, Aliens and Others' and even The If Odyssey 'The Storyteller' and 'The Stranger'. Also see my recent memo on planning and pace.

### **Other resources:**

Plato Was Wrong! By David Shapiro

Philosophy For Teenagers by Kaye and Thompson