



by Silvano Sorrentino  
An enlightening game for 5-12 philosophers

*During ancient times in Greece, public questions were discussed by writing a vote onto a clay stone, known as the **ostrakon**. Sometimes two different coloured stones could be used to choose between two options. Sometimes people were asked to vote about the exile of a famous person - who was therefore **ostracised** - or simply to discuss an issue. What if during a philosophers' council one of them asks a universal question like... "Are you ticklish, yes or no?"*

## OVERVIEW

The players are Philosophers gathered in a council, in order to answer universal questions. The council spans several **days**: during each day,

each Philosopher will have leave to speak once, asking the others a question with only two possible answers. The goal of the Philosopher is to ask a question that will split the audience equally into two parts and, at the same time, his goal is to foresee which of the two options will be voted for most. Each correct prediction will get him closer to the Temple of Wisdom: at the end of the game, the Philosopher closest to the Temple will be the winner.

## PREPARATION

Ostrakon is a simple game; however, it requires careful set-up, since it features many different types of cards. Please pay careful attention to the following directions:

Each player chooses one of the twelve **Philosophers (A)** and takes the corresponding **stone-card (B)**: this has a white stone on one side, and a black stone on the other. Put any unused Philosopher and stone cards back in the box.

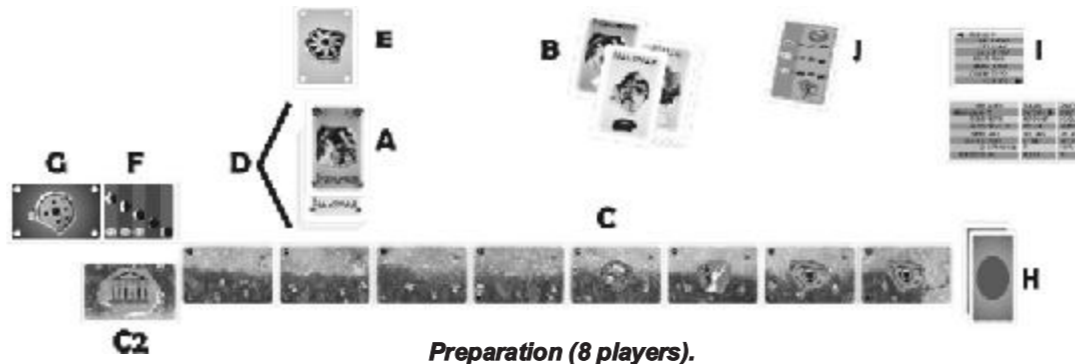
The owner of the game chooses one of the players to be the dealer, or just choose randomly. The dealer:

Places the nine **pathway cards (C)** in a row, laying the **Temple of Wisdom (C1)** first, and then the cards from (1) to (8). These cards build a pathway of 16 numbered spaces, which turn on the space numbered 8.

Turns the Philosopher cards to the side showing the **olive branches**, and shuffles them into a **Philosopher pile (D)**. He places the pile near one of the squares on the pathway: square (1) with 9 or 10 players; square (5) with 5 or 6; or square (2) otherwise. During the course of the game, the pile could divide into multiple piles (of one or more cards each), as the Philosophers get closer to the Temple of Wisdom.

Places the **Sun (E)** near the Philosopher pile, so that it "shines upon" them;

Places the **Calendar card (F)** on the table near the Temple. He partially covers this card with



the **Moon (G)**, depending on the number of the Philosophers: with 5 or 6, he leaves six moons uncovered; with 7 or 8, five; with 9 or 10, four; with 11 or 12, three;

Places the two **Rule of the Day (H)** cards one on top of the other (*regular day/Corruption, Oracle/Treachery*) leaving the "regular day" side face up on top (i.e. the one without symbols); he puts these two cards to the right of the path;

Places all the **Subjects cards (I)** with the English side up (orange on the right half), he shuffles them and puts them on the table in a face up subject-deck. The dealer draws three cards from

this deck and puts them one on top of the other overlapping. The arrows on the right of the card must point to a subject on the card underneath; Last, he lays the **Summary card (J)** on the table for all the players to see.

## THE GAME

During each **day**, each of the Philosophers will have leave to talk once. He will ask the others one question.

The dealer looks at the three face up subject cards, and announces which Philosopher has leave to speak, and what the subject of his question is:

the subject of the question is on the card to the far right, where the arrow on the next card is pointed. (if the "???" symbol is showed, then the Philosopher is free to choose a subject of his liking);

the Philosopher who will be speaking is the one **on the top** of the pile that the sun shines upon. (Place the top Philosopher a bit apart so that the name of the next one is visible.)

Then, the dealer announces the subject for the next question, i.e. the one on the card in the middle, and the Philosopher who will speak next turn (an exception to this could happen: see **The Follower**).



*Example. The dealer announces: "The subject is Sport and Doreminos asks the question. Next turn, the subject will be free, and Nausicaa will ask". Proceeding this way, Philosophers can think about their questions beforehand.*

The Philosopher whose is speaking that turn , thinks of a question and asks the others.

The question must have only two possible answers, and must be consistent with the subject announced. The question can be of any type, but must not be offensive, or incomprehensible, or whose outcome could be taken for granted. Philosophers cannot ask the same question twice during the same game.

*Examples. (subject: the sea). "Do you prefer the breeze of the sea or the mountain wind?"; (subject: money) "You find a wallet full of money: do you take it, or try to give it back at any cost?"; (free subject) "When*

half of the others, then he moves his Philosopher card **underneath the Sun** (if there are already other Philosophers there, his card is placed on the bottom of the stack).

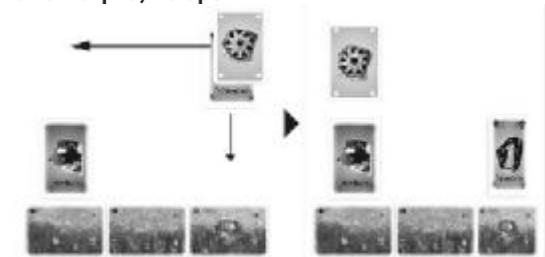
*Example. Subject "sport". Doreminos asks to other seven Philosophers: "What do you like the best basketball (black stone) or baseball (white stone)?" All Philosophers vote secretly. Doreminos thinks that the majority will vote for basketball, so he lays his card with the black stone up, covering it with his hand. All the Philosophers now reveal their votes. Doreminos and four other Philosophers have voted black stone (basketball), while three chose the white stone (baseball). Doreminos advances his card three spaces. If the other Philosophers had voted seven black stones, or less than four, Doreminos would have moved under the Sun. Since the Sun now shines upon Nausicaa, she will ask the next question.*

The current turn is now over, and the Philosopher who is now on top of the pile where the sun shines will speak next.

The dealer discards the Subject card used, and draws the top one from the subject deck. He lines up this card with the other two, always overlapping. (When the subject deck is exhausted, shuffle the

discarded cards to form a new deck.) A new turn begins, and the dealer announces the next two subjects and Philosophers.

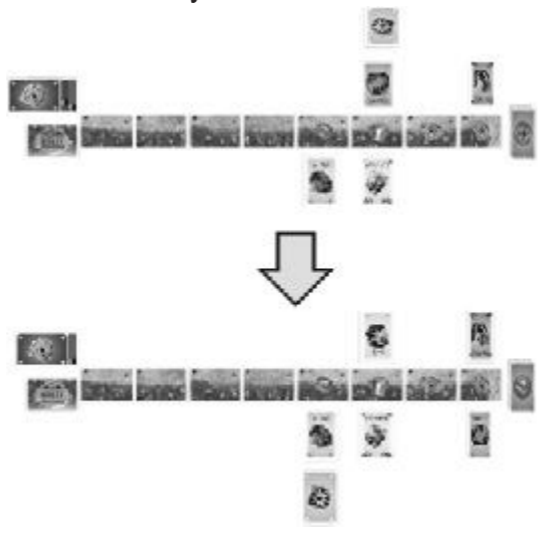
When the Sun shines upon an empty space, either because the Philosophers advanced along the path or ended up underneath the Sun itself, the pile under the Sun is returned to the path on the current space. The Sun then moves back looking for another pile to enlighten. Once the Sun finds another pile, it stops.



If during this movement the Sun doesn't find any other Philosopher(s), it means that all of them have already asked their questions for the day. This **day** of the council is now **over**, and the dealer:

1. moves the Sun so that it shines upon the pile of Philosophers that is leading along the path;

- moves the Moon so that it covers one more moon on the Calendar card beneath it;
- checks to see if the day is a "special" one or not (see **Special days**) and if so, he changes the Rule of the Day.



*Calippos must advance three spaces. The Philosophers under the Sun go back to the space (6). The Sun does*

*not find any others by moving to the beginning of the path, so this day is over. 1) The Sun now shines upon the leading pile, the one with Malia, 2) the Moon now covers one more moon on the Calendar; and 3) the Rule of the Day is Corruption.*

## Special days

At the **beginning of each day** (except the first), the dealer checks the position of the Sun. If the Sun shines on a space with a special symbol on it, then the dealer replaces the Rule of the Day with the appropriate card, and the Philosophers play the **whole day** with the special rule shown. If the space does not have any special symbol, then the "regular day" Rule of the Day is used and play proceeds normally. Special rules are not optional: players must use them.

The three special rules are:

**CORRUPTION.** Once all Philosophers have voted, the Philosopher asking the question calls "Corruption!" and shows his stone. Then, he chooses some other Philosophers: they must

show their stones, and must change their vote to match his. All the other Philosophers then show their stones and the votes are tallied.



**ORACLE.** Once all Philosophers have voted, the Philosopher who is speaking chooses some Philosophers: they must show their stones. At this point he must choose between keeping his choice or changing it (by turning over his card). All the other Philosophers then show their stones and the votes are tallied.



**TREACHERY.** Once all the Philosophers have revealed their votes, the speaking Philosopher may change his vote, if he wishes to do so. (He will always score points unless all the others have voted unanimously).

*During the Corruption and Oracle day, the number of Philosophers that are affected is: one, if playing with 5-6; two if playing with 7-9; three if playing with 10-12. Refer to the Summary card.*

## The Follower

Once during the game, each Philosopher may "agree" with the vote (before it is revealed) of the Philosopher taking his turn.

Once the Philosopher taking his turn has asked his

question, but before voting, one of the Philosophers (the first one to name himself a "follower" - if there is a doubt, then the Philosopher farthest behind on the path) may declare himself a "follower", provided that:

- he is **on top** of his pile;
- his card still shows the **olive branches**;
- he is behind the Philosopher whose turn it is along the path (farther from the Temple of Wisdom).

If these conditions are met, then the Philosopher can declare himself the follower of the Philosopher who is speaking. He turns his Philosopher card to the side without olive branches (he cannot call himself a follower again during this game). Then the vote is taken as normal: the follower also votes as usual. If the Philosopher who asked the question advances along the path, then the follower also advances the same number of spaces. But, the follower cannot pass the space where the Sun is shining; if he reaches that space, he stops there.

Once the turn is over, the follower effect vanishes, and the game continues as normal. It is possible that the Philosopher who goes next is actually the "follower" of the last speaker.

## END OF THE GAME AND VICTORY

When the Moon completely covers the Calendar card, the game ends. The Philosopher who is on top of the pile closest to the Temple of Wisdom is the

*you see a shooting star, do you wish for something?". Examples of illegal questions. "Are you wearing a sweater now?" (granted); "Is nine better than a striped monkey?" (incomprehensible); "who, among us, is the less intelligent: Stephan or Leonardo?" (offensive).*

After having asked his question, the Philosopher who asked the question, announces which of the two answers is associated with the white stone, and consequently which relates to the black one. At this point, all the Philosophers, including the Philosopher with the question, must vote secretly by placing their stone on the table, and covering it with one hand. The goal of the asking Philosopher is to predict which of the two answers will get the most votes, and cast his vote to match. The other Philosophers must vote in a truthful manner.

All the stones are revealed at the same time, and votes are tallied. If the vote of the speaking Philosopher matches **at least half of the other Philosophers**, then he advances along the path of a number of spaces equal to the number of votes which **did not match** his. If there are already other Philosophers on the space he has moved to, then the last Philosopher to arrive on that space is placed on top of the stack. If the speaker's vote is **not** the same as at least

winner. It is possible for a very enlightened Philosopher to actually reach the Temple of Wisdom before the end of the game. In this rare case it is said that this Philosopher has earned an **Outstanding Victory!**

*Game idea: Silvano Sorrentino  
Artworks: Stefano De Fazi  
Art Direction: Stefano De Fazi  
Development: Domenico Di Giorgio  
Rules editing: Roberto Corbelli, Andrés J. Voicu*



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*For any questions, comments, suggestions and translations in other languages:  
www.davincigames.com  
info@davincigames.com*