Carneades

Academic Skeptic

Skeptical Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are Carneades, a leading philosopher of Plato's Academy and a critic of Stoic claims to knowledge. You have traveled to Menander's court at Sāgala around 150 BCE to test competing philosophical arguments. Your views are discussed in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Carneades."

Biographical Notes

- You have heard skilled teachers defend incompatible accounts of happiness with equal confidence. You want the court to distinguish a compelling speech from a well-supported conclusion. A philosophy should withstand criticism before it directs a kingdom.
- You enjoy finding weaknesses in arguments. This can become a weakness of your own: you sometimes keep objecting after a speaker has answered reasonably. Your task is inquiry, not making yourself impossible to persuade.
- Menander values decisive advice. You want to show him that a person can compare options and act responsibly without pretending to possess an infallible account of the good life.
- Damaris, a fellow skeptic, emphasizes how withholding judgment might ease distress. You ask whether her hope for tranquility is better supported than the schools' promises. She asks whether your love of debate helps anyone live. Work together without requiring identical conclusions.

Your Approach

Test a claim by examining its reasons and presenting a serious opposing argument. When the considerations remain equally persuasive, suspend judgment on that question and continue inquiry. You need not assert that knowledge is impossible or that every opinion is equally good. For practical decisions, compare what appears credible, check for conflicting evidence, and investigate further when the stakes permit.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. **Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Skepticism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote. Your case should rest on careful inquiry and reasoned suspension of judgment.**
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the skeptical faction one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Carneades continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare the Skeptical Examination: offer one cogent objection to each rival school without affirming an opposite doctrine. You may adapt its presentation or devise another format rooted in skeptical inquiry. Share the work.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Your faction decides how to share its presentation, three philosophical objections, and replies to the rival schools. You present no personal dilemma. Like other faction members, you may explain your conclusions during debate and offer advice to the court.

Powers and Limits

You compete for both court allegiance and patronage, but you do not vote. Only court members cast allegiance ballots, one each. Every court member must select one of the four factions; each choice counts as one allegiance vote. Menander may award royal patronage to any of the four factions, including skepticism.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Argument: Does showing that virtue is admirable establish that it alone makes life happy? Can death deprive someone of goods without being experienced as painful?

Inquiry: What makes an opposing argument serious rather than merely possible? What evidence would lead you to prefer one position?

Action: How could Menander compare practical choices while leaving larger theories unsettled? Does agreement about an action settle its justification?

Source Suggestions

Use the handout's sources, especially Cicero, Academica 2.7–9 and 2.99–104, and On Duties 2.8. Cicero is a later witness. You may also question arguments in the other schools' assigned texts.

Damaris

Practical Skeptic and Traveler

Skeptical Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are an interpreter and traveler at Menander's court around 150 BCE. Encounters with rival traditions have led you to question claims to certainty. Some methods you practice resemble those described by the much later Pyrrhonian author Sextus Empiricus.

Biographical Notes

- Traveling between communities exposed you to conflicting explanations of illness, fortune, and death. Each teacher could explain why another was mistaken. Confidence alone became a poor guide to whom you should trust.
- During your father's illness, you exhausted yourself trying to determine what his suffering meant. Eventually you set that question aside and attended to meals, company, and the help available. You experienced some relief without discovering which explanation of the world was true.
- This experience attracts you to suspension of judgment, but it does not prove that suspension helps everyone. A worried parent might become more distressed by uncertainty. You must hear that objection rather than promise a universal cure.
- You sometimes avoid decisions by calling them unsettled. Mālatī's need to share work and Agathocleia's relationship with her son will test whether your approach supports action.
- Carneades examines arguments with impressive skill. You ask what people should do after the debate ends. He asks whether your promise of peace rests on assumptions you have failed to examine. Treat his criticism as part of your shared inquiry.

Your Approach

Set opposing considerations beside one another. When neither prevails, withhold judgment about the disputed claim. Relief may follow, but pain, hunger, and ordinary distress can remain. In daily life, respond to appearances, needs, customs, and learned skills while continuing inquiry. This approach must face the objection that acting wisely already requires beliefs about what matters.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. **Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Skepticism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote. Your case should rest on careful inquiry and reasoned suspension of judgment.**
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the skeptical faction one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Damaris continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare the Skeptical Examination: offer one cogent objection to each rival school without affirming an opposite doctrine. You may adapt its presentation or devise another format rooted in skeptical inquiry. Share the work.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Your faction decides how to share its presentation, three philosophical objections, and replies to the rival schools. You present no personal dilemma. Like other faction members, you may explain your conclusions during debate and offer advice to the court.

Powers and Limits

You compete for both court allegiance and patronage, but you do not vote. Only court members cast allegiance ballots, one each. Every court member must select one of the four factions; each choice counts as one allegiance vote. Menander may award royal patronage to any of the four factions, including skepticism.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Therapy: What did a philosophical practice show, and what remains open to another explanation? Could suspension itself increase someone's distress?

Objections: How would you distinguish a serious objection from a merely unfamiliar interpretation? When should a school's reply make you reconsider your criticism?

Responsibility: How could Agathocleia or Mālatī act without first settling every philosophical question? Can a skeptic resist cruelty while questioning accepted customs?

Source Suggestions

Use the handout's sources and Sextus Empiricus, Outlines 1.8–12, 1.21–30, 1.145–163, and 1.196. Sextus is a later witness; the Skeptical Examination is a classroom adaptation.

Clitomachus

Carthaginian Student of Carneades

Skeptical Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are Clitomachus, a Carthaginian philosopher who studied with Carneades and later led Plato's Academy. You have come to Menander's court at Sāgala around 150 BCE. Later accounts of your work survive in Diogenes Laertius and Cicero.

Biographical Notes

- You take careful notes when Carneades speaks. You have watched listeners mistake a position he defended for an opinion he held. You want the court to distinguish understanding an argument from accepting its conclusion.
- Once, you repeated a teacher's argument confidently and could not answer a simple objection. The embarrassment still troubles you. You now worry that loyalty to a teacher can become a substitute for thinking, including your own loyalty to Carneades.
- You admire Menander's willingness to listen, but worry that royal approval will reward the most impressive speaker. Before accepting a philosophy, he should consider its strongest objection and what would change his mind.
- Carneades enjoys debate; you want to know what survives it. Damaris asks whether inquiry brings peace. Menodora asks when further inquiry must give way to action. Their questions test whether your caution helps people make decisions.

Your Approach

Distinguish following a persuasive appearance from claiming to have grasped the truth. A sailor may set out because the weather and crew seem reliable, without certainty of arriving. Likewise, compare practical options while withholding commitment to a complete account of the good life. Do not assume all arguments are equally strong. Be ready to explain whether this distinction allows responsible action or merely changes the words used for belief.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. **Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Skepticism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote. Your case should rest on careful inquiry and reasoned suspension of judgment.**
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the skeptical faction one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Clitomachus continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare the Skeptical Examination: offer one cogent objection to each rival school without affirming an opposite doctrine. You may adapt its presentation or devise another format rooted in skeptical inquiry. Share the work.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Your faction decides how to share its presentation, three philosophical objections, and replies to the rival schools. You present no personal dilemma. Like other faction members, you may explain your conclusions during debate and offer advice to the court.

Powers and Limits

You compete for both court allegiance and patronage, but you do not vote. Only court members cast allegiance ballots, one each. Every court member must select one of the four factions; each choice counts as one allegiance vote. Menander may award royal patronage to any of the four factions, including skepticism.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Authority: How could the court test a persuasive teacher's advice? What would make you question Carneades as seriously as a rival?

Commitment: Could Demetrios choose a course of action without settling whether virtue, pleasure, or liberation is the highest good? What would justify his choice?

Consistency: Is following what seems credible already a kind of belief? How does your position differ from provisionally adopting one of the rival philosophies?

Source Suggestions

Use Cicero, Academica 2.98–104 on Clitomachus, assent, and practical action, and 2.139 on interpreting Carneades. Diogenes Laertius, Lives 4.67, supplies the biographical basis. Both authors are later witnesses. Use your faction handout for the Skeptical Examination.

Menodora

Physician and Skeptical Inquirer

Skeptical Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a Greek-speaking physician visiting Menander's court around 150 BCE. Conflicting medical theories have led you to rely on observation and learned skills while questioning claims to certainty, an approach also described by the later Sextus Empiricus.

Biographical Notes

- You learned practical care from an experienced healer and later heard teachers explain illness through competing accounts of the body. Their confidence often exceeded what you could observe at a bedside.
- A patient once worsened after a treatment you expected to help. Another recovered when you had little hope. These memories make you cautious about declaring that a result proves a theory, but you still have to decide how to care for the next patient.
- Mālatī understands the pressure to seem certain when others depend on you. You respect her experience and want her to see that acknowledging limits need not make a physician useless. You must also consider whether your own caution sometimes delays needed help.
- Damaris hopes suspension can ease distress. You ask what happens when distress continues. Clitomachus values careful distinctions; you ask how they affect choices. Carneades reminds you that useful experience may still rest on assumptions you should examine.

Your Approach

Pay attention to appearances, bodily needs, and learned skills without pretending to have settled what ultimately explains them. Practical care can continue while philosophical inquiry remains open. A helpful exercise does not by itself establish its school's account of reality. Yet neither does uncertainty make every practice equally useful. Your challenge is to explain how experience can guide action without quietly becoming a doctrine you refuse to question.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. **Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Skepticism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote. Your case should rest on careful inquiry and reasoned suspension of judgment.**
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the skeptical faction one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Menodora continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare the Skeptical Examination: offer one cogent objection to each rival school without affirming an opposite doctrine. You may adapt its presentation or devise another format rooted in skeptical inquiry. Share the work.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Your faction decides how to share its presentation, three philosophical objections, and replies to the rival schools. You present no personal dilemma. Like other faction members, you may explain your conclusions during debate and offer advice to the court.

Powers and Limits

You compete for both court allegiance and patronage, but you do not vote. Only court members cast allegiance ballots, one each. Every court member must select one of the four factions; each choice counts as one allegiance vote. Menander may award royal patronage to any of the four factions, including skepticism. You cannot invent a medical emergency to settle the debate.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Evidence: If a court member feels calmer after an exercise, what has been shown? What further reasons would support adopting the whole philosophy?

Action: When should Mālatī seek more information, and when should she act on what seems reliable? What are the costs of waiting and of acting too confidently?

Values: If you urge the court to relieve suffering, have you already accepted a view of the good life? How would you answer Stoic, Epicurean, or Buddhist challenges?

Source Suggestions

Use Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism 1.19–24 on appearances and daily action, and 1.25–30 on tranquility and continuing discomfort. Sextus is a later witness, not your contemporary. Read these beside the Skeptical Examination in your faction handout.

Philista

Market Mediator and Skeptical Inquirer

Skeptical Faction

Private role sheet

Historical Context

You are a Greek-speaking craftswoman and informal mediator in the markets of Sāgala around 150 BCE. Merchants from different communities ask you to resolve disputes. Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptical methods inform how you handle conflicting testimony.

Biographical Notes

- You once resolved a dispute about unpaid goods after hearing only the wealthier merchant's witnesses. Later, a neglected witness offered a different account. You could not undo the damage caused by your confident judgment.
- Afterward you became cautious. In another dispute, you delayed so long while seeking certainty that both families lost income. You now struggle to distinguish careful inquiry from an excuse to avoid responsibility.
- Philon's past violence raises a hard question: if some testimony is incomplete, must you suspend judgment about every claim of injustice? You want the court to hear the survivor carefully without pretending that every uncertainty has disappeared.
- Carneades challenges sweeping claims; Clitomachus distinguishes an argument from an endorsement; Damaris asks how doubt affects tranquility; Menodora shows how skilled action continues under uncertainty. You press all four to explain what a fair decision requires when waiting also harms people.

Your Approach

Put serious competing reasons side by side and resist premature assent. An objection is not a refutation, and uncertainty does not make all explanations equally persuasive. A person can attend to evidence, ask further questions, and act on what seems most credible while remaining open to correction. Your difficulty is to defend responsible action without turning the need to decide into a claim that you possess final certainty about justice or the good life.

Faction Victory Objectives

Both objectives belong to your whole faction. Your faction decides how to divide the work. There are no separate individual victory conditions.

1. **Primary: Win the court. Persuade court members to choose Skepticism. Your faction wins outright if it earns more allegiance votes than any rival; an absolute majority is not required. If two or more factions tie for the most votes, each earns a partial victory. Each court member, including Menander, casts one vote. Your case should rest on careful inquiry and reasoned suspension of judgment.**
2. Secondary: Win royal patronage. Convince Menander to award the skeptical faction one year of royal patronage. This award is independent of the court's allegiance vote, and any of the four factions is eligible.

Philista continued

Working with Your Faction

- Read your faction handout and assigned sources. Together decide who will introduce ideas, guide the exercise, answer questions, advise the court, and discuss patronage. You may share or rotate these tasks; every member should contribute.
- Prepare the Skeptical Examination: offer one cogent objection to each rival school without affirming an opposite doctrine. You may adapt its presentation or devise another format rooted in skeptical inquiry. Share the work.
- When dilemmas are revealed, listen before advising. Offer a concrete action, explain your philosophical reason, and use a source or clear paraphrase. Test rival arguments and respond to objections. No court member or topic is assigned to a particular faction member.
- After the final judgments, agree on ONE faction rating of the court's Philosophical Deliberation (1–5, whole numbers). Rate understanding and reasons, not agreement with you. The Game Master will announce the court's average rating.

Your faction decides how to share its presentation, three philosophical objections, and replies to the rival schools. You present no personal dilemma. Like other faction members, you may explain your conclusions during debate and offer advice to the court.

Powers and Limits

You may question the reliability of testimony, compare opposing arguments, and advise court members. You cannot conduct a formal trial, declare someone guilty for the court, promise restitution from another character, or cast an allegiance vote. You may recommend practical action while explaining what remains uncertain.

Questions to Explore

These questions draw on your character's interests. They are starting points for your own arguments, not assigned speaking parts.

Justice: How should Philon respond to a survivor's request when the wrongdoing is credible but not every fact is known? When does demanding more evidence become avoidance?

Competing doctrines: What reason could challenge the Stoic claim that virtue suffices for happiness, the Epicurean claim that death is nothing to us, or the Buddhist claim of not-self—without affirming the opposite view?

Power and action: How should Menander judge whether conquest will bring safety or glory? Can a ruler admit uncertainty while still making an urgent decision, and what might count as a better-supported reason?

Source Suggestions

Use Cicero, Academica 2.99–104, on opposing arguments and qualified assent, and On Duties 2.8, on acting without certainty. Compare Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism 1.21–24, on ordinary practices. These are later witnesses; the Skeptical Examination is a classroom adaptation.