

Philosophy in Lincoln-Douglas Debate

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Branches of Philosophy

- Ethics- the branch of philosophy that attempts to determine right and wrong actions.
- Metaphysics- the branch of philosophy concerned with explaining the nature of being. The makeup of existence.
- Epistemology- the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of knowledge. Answers questions like “how does one distinguish belief from truth?” and “what does it mean for something to count as knowledge?”

Ethics is common in Lincoln Douglas debate. This is because arguing a metaphysical or epistemological position usually gets a debater no closer to proving/disproving the resolution.

Ethics

- Normative Ethics- Evaluates ethical actions. Attempts to determine how one ought to act, determining right from wrong action. (Kant, Rawl's, Aristotle, Locke)
- Meta-Ethics- Attempts to understand the nature of an ethical proposition. So rather than attempting to prescribe what one should or should not do, Meta-ethical theory asks questions such as “what is justice?” (Plato, moral relativism, nihilism)
- Applied Ethics- an examination of particularized moral issues. Applied theories are often specific applications of Normative ethical theory, such as Utilitarianism or Categorical Imperative. Examples of applied ethics are business ethics, environmental ethics, medical/clinical ethics.

Time Periods in Western Philosophy

- Ancient Philosophy- Plato, Aristotle, The Milesian School.
- Medieval Philosophy- St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Neo-Platonism.
- Renaissance Philosophy- Galileo, Machiavelli.
- Early Modern Philosophy- Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Spinoza, Kant, Hume, Jefferson, Paine.
- Modern Philosophy- Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Smith.
- Contemporary Philosophy- Sartre, Rand, Russell, Heidegger, Camus, Freud, Foucault, Adler, Nozick, Rawls.

Rationalism v. Empiricism

- Rationalism- the appeal to reason as the source of knowledge, or the determinant of truth value.
- Empiricism- the appeal to sensory experience to determine knowledge
- What determines truth? Is it what we observe or what we reason?
- Importance in LD- while these terms are clearly epistemic, it is important for a debater to understand what it takes to qualify as truth for their given philosopher, as well as their opponents philosopher. If a debater is advocating an empiricist such as Locke, Hobbes, or Mill yet appeals to reason in his/her analysis of the round, they have effectively abandoned their philosophic position.

Absolutism v. Relativism

- Absolutism- The theory that morality is absolute rather than relative; that is, that there are absolute moral truths to which we must adhere and which particular situations, people or places do not alter. (often associated with Kant)
- Relativism- The opposite of absolutism in that those who hold this point of view believe that there are no absolutes in morality, but rather that morality is relative to particular cultures, groups, or even individuals, and further that everyone must decide upon his or her own values and ethics because there are no absolutes. (commonly associated with Nietzsche)

Consequentialism Vs. Deontology

- The ethical dispute between consequentialism and deontology is one of the longest running debates in the field of ethics.
- Consequentialism- holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the consequences of that action. (Bentham, Mill, Mozi, Egoism, Altruism.)
- Deontology- holds that the rightness or wrongness of actions is based on consistently following a rule or set of rules. Rather than claiming an act is good based on its results, deontology asserts that actions must be good in themselves. (Kant, Descartes)
- In many debate rounds both debaters will be arguing for consequential philosophy without realizing it. When this happens debaters often get confused and inadvertently advocate the wrong philosophy. Knowledge of which philosophers are consequentialist and which deontologists can help avoid that situation.

Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham (1748- 1832)

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

- Utilitarianism is generally held to be the view that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good. There are many ways to spell out this general claim.
- The Classical Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, identified the good with pleasure, so they were hedonists about value. They also held that we ought to maximize the good, that is, bring about ‘the greatest amount of good for the greatest number’.
- One thing to note is that the theory is a form of consequentialism: the right action is understood entirely in terms of consequences produced.
- Utilitarianism is also distinguished by impartiality and agent-neutrality. Everyone's happiness counts the same. When one maximizes the good, it is the good *impartially* considered. My good counts for no more than anyone else's good.

The Trolley Problem

- A common response to Utilitarianism, authored by Phillipa Foot.
- If it is permissible to divert a trolley so that it runs over one person rather than five people, then why is it not morally acceptable to push one passerby in front of a trolley in order to save the lives of five people?
- Typically ran in LD rounds beginning in the CX period, and becomes a compelling argument against an opponents utilitarian criterion for the remainder of the round.

Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804)

- This concept is authored by Immanuel Kant in Groundwork for the Metaphysics of morals. Kant, who did not agree with his utilitarian contemporaries, claims that a moral action is good inherently, not good due to the effects it produces.
- Debaters commonly use the phrase “the ends never justify the means” when referring to the categorical imperative.
- In order for a debater to successfully uphold the categorical imperative, they must achieve all four formulations of the categorical imperative. (a problem for many debaters)
- In order for a debater to effectively utilize this argument, they must limit their analysis of the round to means of the resolution. At the point in time that they debate the consequences of the resolution, they have contradicted the categorical imperative.

Kant's four formulations

- Universality- an action must be right in every circumstance.
- People are ends- never treat another person merely as a means to your own end.
- Autonomy- Act as if everyone is obeying this moral code.
- Kingdom of Ends- It combines the others in that (i) it requires that we conform our actions to the maxims of a rational agent. (ii) that we as a maxim creator lay down universal laws, binding all rational agents including ourselves, and (iii) that those laws are of 'a merely possible kingdom' each of whose members equally possesses this status as legislator of universal laws, and hence must be treated always as an end in itself.

Social Contract Theories

- A philosophic ideal that addresses the origin of society, and provides a groundwork for the legitimacy and extent of governmental power.
- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) - Presents his social contract theory in the Leviathan. He claims that the state of nature is nasty, brutish, and short. Because the state of nature is terrible, individuals form a society, give up their rights in order to regulate social interaction. In the state of nature individuals are sovereign, the social contract makes the state sovereign. This contract essentially gives the state total control.
- John Locke (1632-1704) - Presents his social contract in the Second Treatise of Government. He believes that the state of nature is not nearly as terrible as Hobbes believes it to be. Locke believes individuals form societies in order to provide protection and security for themselves, and that the social contract amounts to conceding natural rights in exchange for life, liberty, and property.

Social Contract continued

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712- 1778) - Is decidedly less concerned by the state of nature, although believes it was generally positive. He calls for a total merger in which each individual gives up the right to control his life in exchange for an equal voice in setting the ground rules of society. Rousseau appeals to people to surrender their individual rights to a new moral and collective body with one will. The public person formed by social contract, the republic, has a will he calls the "general will." What it wills is the true interest of what everyone wants whether they realize it or not. When you are forced to obey it, you really are obeying yourself, the true and free you.
- Rawls (1921-2002) - Presents his social contract in A Theory of Justice. He claims that the social contract amounts to the cooperation of rational individuals to establish rules of conduct for society that are guided by the veil of ignorance. For Rawls the end goal of a social contract is to achieve justice.

General Will

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

- The idea of the general will is at the heart of Rousseau's philosophy. The general will is not the will of the majority. Rather, it is the will of the political organism that he sees as an entity with a life of its own.
- The general will is key to understanding Rousseau's social contract theory.
- Society for Rousseau is coordinated and unified by the general will. This, consequently means that the general will demands complete obedience by all members of the society, even if the general will runs contrary to the will of the individual.
- Believes that each individual truly desires to be a good person. Consequently, they would want to obey the general will set forth by society. Disagreeing with the general will would actually be contrary to that person's own interest.
- This argument surfaces in LD rounds when a debater is attempting to support social welfare, particularly when that welfare comes at the cost of disenfranchising some minority member of society.

Pragmatism

- Pragmatism was a philosophical tradition that originated in the United States around 1870. The most important of the ‘classical pragmatists’ were Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952).
- This philosophic idea holds that ethical acts are grounded in practicality.
- It is a form of consequentialism.
- Each pragmatist philosopher offers a maxim to clarify how to determine pragmatic action. This maxim is a distinct rule or method for determining what is pragmatic.
- The largest distinction between pragmatic philosophers is their pragmatist maxim, which varies by philosopher.

Egoism

- A philosophic position that claims that each person has an ultimate aim at his/her own welfare.
- Psychological Egoism- claims that human beings psychologically develop with one ultimate aim: their own welfare.
- Ethical egoism- claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right that it maximize one's self-interest.
- Rational egoism- claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be rational that it maximize one's self-interest.
- Each subdivision of egoism claims that human beings will favor their own welfare over anything else. The distinction comes from why people pursue their own interest.

Justice

- Justice is one of the most discussed concepts in philosophy, in all branches of ethics.
- Plato thinks that justice is an overarching virtue of both individuals and societies, and that most ethical considerations are a dispute over justice. He spends the majority of the Republic inquiring into the nature of justice, yet never ends up giving a definition for the term.
- Most philosophers believe that justice is an essential virtue, but there is vast dispute over whether justice is determined by individual sentiments, or determined by society as a whole.
- Ethical philosophers that discuss justice at length include: Aristotle, Jeremy Bentham, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Lawrence Kohlberg, and John Rawls.

Veil of Ignorance

John Rawls (1921-2002)

- Is an argument that surfaces in John Rawls account of justice.
- Rawls believes justice to be fairness, and that the aim of a just society is to create a situation that is fair among all parties in the social contract.
- The veil of ignorance claims that in order for a rule to be truly just, the rules of society should be made independent of knowledge about personal circumstances.
- Rawls is a believer in egoism, and feels that parties would rationally tailor the principles of justice to favor their personal circumstances if given the opportunity.
- Therefore, the veil of ignorance achieves justice for Rawls, because it ensures that rules are made objectively.

Maslow's Hierarchy

Abraham Maslow (1908–1970)



Aristotle's Politics (384-322 BC)

- The highest good for a human being is to achieve eudaimonia, which means well being.
- Therefore the primary duty of a state according to Aristotle is not to protect the populace, nor secure property, but to foster a society that allows its citizens to have the possibility of a good life, to experience beautiful things.
- This means that Aristotle has a very different conception of founding a society than other philosophers. Whereas many philosophers believe people enter a society for protection or fear, Aristotle believes people join state's for the opportunity to live the good life.
- Aristotle's Politics are a viable alternative to social contract arguments, because a debater can argue the purpose of a state is to foster intellectual development or arts, as opposed to protection.

Ethic of Quantity

Albert Camus (1913-1960)

- An existentialist writer, best known for his philosophic fiction and pioneering Absurdism.
- Ethical writings can be viewed as relativistic.
- Ethic of quantity- Rather than claiming that certain actions are moral and others aren't, Camus proposes that what is truly valuable in life is the quantity of experiences.
- Camus believes that the true meaning of life is to enjoy living in spite of absurdity, this is best achieved by the quantity of experiences accumulated.
- Ethic of quantity can work in an LD round. A debater must demonstrate that accumulating life experiences is a good thing, and that whichever debater can provide the most experiences for society, or the individual, best achieves the ethic of quantity.

Master Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844- 1900)

- Nietzsche does not believe in the existence of objective morality. Rather, that what is socially perceived as moral is viewed that way due to historical precedence. Yet he also believes that morality is not static, and needs to be subject to evaluation and reevaluation.
- Nietzsche coins the morality of the strong willed ‘Master Morality.’
- Nietzsche believes that historically strong willed individuals determine for themselves what is moral, and do not seek approval for that moral determination.
- His account of master morality calls for each individual to examine values for themselves, and not accept any “one size fits all” type of moral system.

Wu Wei

Lao Tzu 400 AD

- Wu Wei is a Chinese philosophical concept that is a prominent component of Taoism.
- Wu wei translates into non-action, although the concept does not literally mean to do nothing.
- Wu wei more closely means to yield to nature and the universe, and to actively seek to act in such a way as work harmoniously with nature and society. To put it plainly Wu wei means to go with the flow. Wu wei holds that when an individual attempts to exert their will against the world, they will disrupt harmony and meet opposition.
- Wu wei can be applied to LD debate; a debater may use Wu wei to advocate a position that does not disrupt the environment or cause hostility with other people. The writings of Lao Tzu will help support that acting with wu wei will achieve harmony, while opposing nature will result in destruction.

Ideas for new Western philosophy

- Plato
- Mortimer J Adler
- Bertrand Russell
- Thomas Aquinas
- George Berkeley
- Edmund Berke
- Rene Descartes
- Michael Zimmerman
- Michel Foucault
- Georg Hegel
- Martin Heidegger
- Edmund Gettier
- Edmund Husserl
- Karl Popper
- David Hume
- Soren Kierkegaard
- Saul Kripke
- Willhem Leibniz
- Karl Marx
- Robert Nozick
- Ayn Rand
- Jean Paul Sartre
- Adam Smith
- Gottlob Frege
- Albert Schweitzer
- John Searle
- Benedict Spinoza
- Alfred Whitehead
- Ludwig Wittgenstein
- Nicolo Machiavelli
- John Dewey
- Arthur Schopenhauer
- Heraclitus
- Zeno
- G.E. Moore
- Francis Bacon

Ideas for Eastern Philosophy

You may find that adding Chinese Philosophers into your team's repertoire may help younger debaters. Chinese philosophy is easier to read, and far more concise.

- Confucius
- Zhuangzi
- Mozi
- Shang Yang
- Lao Tzu
- Sun Tzu

Philosophy Links

- <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>
- www.sparknotes.com