Debate 101:
10 Steps to Successful Debating
1968 - 1990
Debater & Coach
Life After Debate
Step 1: Analyze the type of proposition you are debating

- Claims are the starting point of argument.
- Different types of claims entail different obligations and require different types of support.
- Compare “You should believe X” to “Everyone believes X.”
Deconstructing Argument:
Types of Claims

• Fact: X is Y, X was Y, X will be Y.
Deconstructing Argument: Types of Claims

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• Value: X is good, X is more valuable than Y. Normally includes an ethical dimension.
Deconstructing Argument: Types of Claims

• Fact: X is Y, X was Y, X will be Y.
• Value: X is good, X is more valuable than Y. Normally includes an ethical dimension.
• Policy: We should or should not do X.
Your Topics

• Topic A, B: Humans will eventually grant civil rights to robots. *Future Fact*

• Topic C, D: Robots should be developed to replace humans in the performance of dull, dirty and dangerous jobs, even if such development means that many humans will lose their jobs. *Policy*
• Topic E, F: People should grant robots the ability to autonomously discharge deadly weapons. *Policy*

• Topic G: Deliberative robot architectures are more likely than reactive robot architectures to enable reliable performance of real-world tasks. *Fact*
Topic H, I: The robotics community should curtail its research activities in order to prevent the emergence of robots that are as capable as humans. Policy

Topic J: Given two proposals with comparable peer reviews, U.S. funding agencies should favor proposals for research on embodied intelligence over proposals for research on disembodied intelligence. Policy
Step 2: Define Relevant Terms

• Provide definitions of key terms if there is risk of misunderstanding.
• For policy claims, you can operationally define terms with a specific proposal.
• Do not try to be tricky or evasive. Normally Pro side (or “Affirmative”) has right to define, but Con (or “Negative”) can challenge if definitions are unfair.
Step 3: Organize & Number

• Debate is an analytical process. It is persuasion through *reasoning*. Aristotle named 3 kinds of persuasive appeals: Ethos, Pathos, Logos. You = Logos.

• Your responsibility is to advance clear, supported arguments to support your side. Numbering/outlining is key.
Step 4: Go with the Flow

- “Flowing” is debate terminology for taking notes of debate interaction.
- Divide your note pad into 4 columns:
  - Pro → Con → Pro → Con
- Flowing is just a way of tracking how arguments “flow” in the debate: What is said (or not said) in response to what.
Debate Flow

• Allows your audience to track the interaction between the debaters.
• Allows you to note which of your arguments have been answered, which have been “dropped.”
Sample Flow (partial)
Step 5: Know Your Speaker Duties

• 6 minutes (3+3) Pro side presentation
• 6 minutes (3+3) Con side presentation
• 3 minutes Pro side's rebuttal
• 3 minutes Con side's rebuttal
• 3 minutes Q&A and audience vote
Constructives

• 6 minutes (3+3) Pro side presentation. Pro debaters should divide up their case, not repeat each other.
• 6 minutes (3+3) Con side presentation. Con debaters should *both* present their own objections to the proposition *and* answer the Pro arguments.
Rebuttal Speeches

- 3 minutes Pro side's rebuttal
- 3 minutes Con side's rebuttal

Can have one speaker or divide up time, but argumentatively, important both to extend your original arguments & reply/rebut those of your opponents.
Step 6: Construct Your Case

- A “case” is simply your set of arguments pro or contra the proposition / topic.
- Should be organized into numbered points; each point should be supported by reasoning and evidence.
Forms of Reasoning

- Though the topics about which we argue may be infinite, the ways in which we think and reason are not.
- There are recurring *forms of reasoning* that are found in almost all contexts.
- Humanity’s reasoning is formally similar, whether Scientists, Doctors, Lawyers, Art Critics, Teachers, Mechanics, Engineers, or Relatives are arguing.
We will review a few briefly…

• Argument by Example: X is ex. of Y.
  Fallacy: Hasty Generalization
• Argument by Analogy: X is like Y.
  Fallacy: False Analogy
• Argument from Authority: X is an Expert on Y
  Fallacies: False Authority, Tradition
• Argument From Definition: X is subset of Y.
  Fallacy: Disputed Premise in Syllogism
Evidence

• Quality of evidence is key: Whether quoting expert opinion or data provided by researchers, be sure to explain why your source is credible.

• Resolving an evidential dispute is a valuable skill: Explain why your source is superior to your opponent’s.
Step 7: *Rebut* your Opponent

- Rebuttal speeches require double duty: You need to defend your case but also reply to your opponents.
- Various ways to reply, but the two most common are to *Refute* their point as false; or *Admit* their point but claim it doesn’t support their overall case.
Step 8: Provide Criteria

• By “criteria” we mean a way to resolve the issue. A heuristic for argument analysis & resolution.

• Factual Claims: Historical precedent, agreement of experts, thought experiments, “weight of the evidence.” Both Pro & Con can offer these.
Policy Case Approaches

• Two primary approaches:
  • Problem $\rightarrow$ Solution
    Show a need that your policy meets.
  • Comparative Advantages:
    Show how your policy offers a better situation than we have without it.
Contra / Negative Approaches

• Policy is not really needed.
• Policy does not really provide the advantages or meet the needs claimed.
• Policy would cause disadvantages that would outweigh any good the policy might provide.
Step 9: Recognize the Role of Values

- All policy propositions involve underlying values.
- There are many ethical and value-oriented theories & norms. The challenge is getting on the same page.
- The key is to identify your ethical framework and be ready to defend it.
Value v. Value

1) One value maximizes another agreed-upon value; i.e., one value is a key to another (Economic justice *facilitates* peace).

2) One value is a prerequisite for the other; i.e., X is a necessary condition for Y.

3) One value is more important than the other, due to magnitude, frequency, or precedent.
Step 10: See Debate as a Means to Truth

• Since the ancient Greeks started to formalize the process of philosophical discussion known as *dialegesthai*, we have understood dialogue & debate as a *cooperative* exercise in seeking the truth.

• Give it your best shot, but be prepared to let you mind be changed!
Legal Analogy

• Both sides in legal disputes must provide full disclosure of the arguments & evidence they will provide. That is because the goal is Truth.

• Similarly, full disclosure should be your goal as well. See your counterparts as collaborators, not “the enemy.”
Resources

