An LDer’s Guide to Philosophy
And its application to Lincoln-Douglas debate.
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Acknowledgement

This presentation draws heavily from the text *Philosophy in Practice: Understanding Value Debate* by R. Eric Barnes.

It can be ordered through *Perfection Learning*.

I have found it to be the most valuable Lincoln-Douglas text available to my competitors.
Philosophy sounds scary to most people.

Philosophy frequently features complex and contradictory ideas and terms that are often used to confuse people.

In a debate round, debaters seem to enjoy using philosophy to make arguments that seem to be designed to confuse.
But you don’t need to let philosophy scare you, as a judge, coach, or competitor.

In fact, most philosophical ideas are easy to understand once you have a grasp of some terms, and learn the reasoning behind the ideas.
Today’s Goals:

► First, we want to discuss some specific terms applicable to many types of philosophies,

► Second, we want to discuss particular theories and their authors, and

► Third, we want to show how these work in a debate round as arguments and elements of cases.
What is philosophy?

- Philosophy is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline.”

- Worldnetweb, operated by Princeton, defines it as “doctrine: a belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school.”
That’s what makes it useful in Lincoln-Douglas debate – it can be used as an authoritative source to support arguments.

In particular, the “value-criterion” aspect of LD debate benefits from a strong foundation of philosophy.
An Assumption

► Today’s discussion is going to assume that:

► A value is a large, abstract idea which a particular position, either affirmative or negative, wants to present as the most important idea in a round, and

► A criterion (sometimes called a standard) is a more narrow, concrete method or system used weigh or achieve the value, and

► There is a credible link between these two.
Theories

- Theories of Rights
- Theories of Justice
- Theories of Morality
- Additional Theories
Theories of Rights

- A right is a claim that you are entitled to something. Rights are divided into certain categories:
  - Natural
  - Societal
  - Moral
  - Legal
  - Positive
  - Negative
Natural Rights

► These are rights that a person possesses simply because they are people.

► These are often called “human rights.”

► The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, spelled some of these out.

► Article 3 says, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”
Societal Rights

- These are rights a person possesses due to membership in a particular society, and only apply to people in that society.
- There is usually, but not always, a document that specifies these rights.
- In the United States, a person must be a 18 years of age, a legal citizen, and meet his/her state’s residency requirements to vote.
Moral and Legal Rights

► Usually, natural rights = moral rights.
► Usually, societal rights = legal rights.
► However, an argument can be made that not all moral rights are natural rights.
► Likewise, an argument can be made that even though legal rights are always societal rights, not all societal rights are legal rights.
Positive and Negative Rights

► Positive rights are claims that other people must help you in some way; the right to health care at a hospital, for example.

► Negative rights are claims that other people not interfere with you in some way, such as the right to not have your money stolen.
Confused?

► Why do we care about rights, and whether they are natural, legal, or positive?
► Because virtually all interpretations of rights include the discussion of whose duty it is to provide or protect that right, and the questions of duty is key to many debate rounds.
► Frequently, that duty belongs to the government.
Examples

► A right to a fair trial implies a judge and jury have a duty to be impartial, or

► A right to live implies someone has a duty not only to protect you, but also not to kill you, or

► A right to free speech implies that someone has a duty to not silence your speech.
Rights and Governments

- This is important since debates frequently question what a government’s role or responsibility is, or what a citizen’s role or responsibility is.

- This leads us to the foundation of theories of rights – the state of nature, and the social contract.
State of Nature

- The state of nature is simply a situation where people live without any government.
- That isn’t the same as anarchy, which is actually a rejection of government.
- A state of nature is more akin to the idea that “might makes right.”
- There are no rights in a state of nature, only freedoms, which are not guaranteed.
Social Contract

- Because the state of nature is undesirable, rights theorists say that governments form to protect the rights of its citizens.
- This government agrees to protect its citizens in return for obligations placed upon those citizens.
- This reciprocal relationship is the social contract.
Social Contract

► These are never written down, and are not signed by anyone. Constitutions are NOT social contracts.

► Instead, this is an informal and understood agreement where a government justifies its existence and authority because the citizens implicitly give it that authority.
A social contract is a common criterion, supporting some larger value, such as justice, equality, or societal good.

It is not necessary to define your social contract by any particular philosopher, though you may want to in order to avoid particular arguments, or make others.
There are three important people who contributed to the discussion of the social contract:

- Thomas Hobbes (1651)
- John Locke (1690)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762)
Hobbes

- The most important thing to know about Hobbes is that he originated the idea of state of nature, and that he valued any government, even a tyranny, over the state of nature.
- He feared that, without government, man would wage perpetual war upon his fellow man.
Locke

- Locke’s ideas are the foundation for what we consider Jeffersonian Democracy and is the guiding principles for our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

- Locke believed that if citizens found their government to be unjust, that rebellion was a justified action.
More Locke

- Locke believed that a social contract was a group of citizens agreeing to a civil society, not just a governmental institution like Hobbes.

- Locke also believed all persons had the right to life, liberty, and property, and that a social contract was the best way to protect these rights.
Rousseau

► The most important thing to know about Rousseau is the idea of general will.

► The general will is whatever is best for people as a whole, which may not be the will of the majority.

► In addition, Rousseau states the general will takes everyone’s rights and well-being into account, and therefore is equal and fair to all.
Theories of Justice

► Justice is one of the most common values in LD debate.

► So, a theory discussing how something can be just is important to know.

► The two most important theories of justice in LD are those of American philosophers John Rawls (1971) and Robert Nozick (1974).
Appealing to the ideas of the social contract, Rawls argues that there are two principles which make a society just:

- The difference principle, and
- The principle of equal liberty.
The Difference Principle

“Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they both (a.) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b.) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls).

This means that all economic positions should be available to all members of society, i.e. no one is barred by social rules.
The Principle of Equal Liberty

► “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others” (Rawls).

► This means citizens should be given basic rights and everyone should have the same amount of rights.
Rawls argues that his ideas on justice are rational, and he backs them up with his idea of the “veil of ignorance.”

The veil of ignorance is a theoretical device where a person steps behind an imaginary barrier and loses all personal characteristics.

This means decisions made behind the veil are just since they are free of bias.
Rawls in LD

- Rawls is common in LD, but frequently misunderstood.
- In concept, this is a narrow philosophy on justice.
- In reality, debaters stretch Rawls to argue virtually anything connected to justice.
- Rawls only meant his theory to address how to structure a just society.
Nozick

- Nozick is actually a contemporary of Rawls, and makes a particular argument against Rawls.
- Nozick argues that Rawls' theory of justice does not account for morality; interestingly, Rawls does not deny this.
- Nozick says that there are moral "side-constraints" on justice.
Nozick

► No societal goal can violate certain inviolable individual rights and still be just.

► Nozick argues that rights are not weighable – that makes an unrealistic assumption, and implies rights can be transferred.

► Therefore, a just society has limited power to enforce its laws and rules, and cannot infringe upon the individual.
This means two things.

First, theories of justice have to account for individual as well as societal good, and

Second, theories of justice can limited by theories of morality.

Which is a good transition to...
Theories of Morality

► What is a moral theory?

► According to R. Eric Barnes in Philosophy in Practice, “a moral theory tells you what you should do, i.e. what is right, what is good, or what you ought to do.”

► Moral theories are important in LD because so many resolutions contain the word “ought.”
Ought

► A current trend in LD argues that the word “ought” is defined as “morally right” and implies an obligation to take a moral action.

► In addition, many LD rounds feature morality as a value.

► This is a questionable link because it is both vague and circular.

► However, it is argued, and must be debated.
Morality

- Morality is frequently defined as “a standard of conduct that is generally accepted as right or proper” (Encarta Word English Dictionary).

- Be careful to question the basis for morality. There are different standards as to what constitutes moral behavior; morality always needs additional explanation to be effective.
Morality

- It is frequently argued that though beliefs about morality may be different, the concept of what morality is fairly universal.
- That’s certainly debatable, and you need to be prepared to engage in this debate.
- That’s why the choice of a criterion has such an impact on a debate round.
Before we talk about specific theories, we need to talk about two misunderstood terms. Consequentialist theory, and Deontological theory.

Note: Debaters sometimes call consequentialist theory “teleological.” That’s not entirely accurate. Teleological theories are more concerned with virtue, not morality, which isn’t the same thing.
Consequentialist versus Deontological

▶ A consequentialist theory argues that an action is right if it leads to the best possible consequence. So, the ends matter most, and justify any means to achieve them.

▶ A deontological theory argues that an action can be right even if it leads to an outcome that isn’t the best one. So, the means to the end matters most.
Theories of Morality

The two most important theories of morality are:

- Utilitarianism, advocated by John Stuart Mill (1863), and
- The Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant (1785).
Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory. It claims the morally right action is the one which maximizes utility. Utility is defined as happiness, and happiness is pleasure minus pain. It is sometimes called “the greatest good for the greatest number of people,” but that is inaccurate and oversimplified. Happiness could be said to be overall well-being, not just physical joy.
Utilitarianism

“Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse of happiness” (Mill).

Utilitarianism argues that the best situation is one which has the most goodness in it.

It is not intended to be a mathematical calculus on how to make a decision.
Utilitarianism

► In LD, utilitarianism is a common criterion (and sometimes, even a value).
► As a criterion, it often supports values of justice and societal good.
► The most common objection to utilitarianism is that it justifies actions that may be questionable or difficult to defend.
The Categorical Imperative

- The Categorical Imperative is a deontological theory.
- It claims that a right action is determined by the duty of the person acting.
- Kant wanted the categorical imperative to be a universal principle that would apply in any situation.
The Categorical Imperative

The Categorical Imperative has three parts which state virtually the same thing (today, we are going to discuss the second formulation:

“Act in such a way that you always treat people, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant).
The Categorical Imperative

► This means basically two things:

► First, don’t treat people as a means to achieve something else, i.e. treat people as tools, and

► Second, do treat people as an end, a consequence, and something significant in and of themselves. This also means you have to try to understand them and their goals.
The Categorical Imperative in LD

- This is a difficult theory that requires additional readings, so it is often not used correctly in a debate round.

- Kant’s moral theories are really meant to address the duties a person has to another person.

- This is an important distinction to understand, because...
LD debate features discussion on what is a moral agent. This is not just limited to people; some resolutions ask if governments are moral agents.

A good argument is that Kant does not apply to governments as they are not moral actors.

Of course, this is debatable.
Other Theories

- Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) is a commonly used moral, or ethical, theory.
- Problem is, it is really a theory of psychology.
- It proposes the way in which a person can achieve “self-actualization.”
- It does not specify how to achieve “self-actualization,” nor does it address moral behavior.
Other Theories

► Other theories you might want to research are:

► Karl Marx’s theories on labor
► Ayn Rand’s Objectivism,
► Friedrich Nietzsche’s rejection of morality,
► Aristotle’s theory of civic virtue, and
► St. Augustine’s Just War theory.
But there is more to advanced LD than just various philosophies.

In more progressive areas, certain arguments are gaining popularity, and even if you disagree with them, you should be prepared to debate them.
Presumption

Presumption is the concept that each position in a debate round has certain burdens.

The affirmative has the burden to affirm and support the resolution.

The negative has the burden to clash with and negate the resolution.

Of course, this is debatable, right?
Advanced Theories

Some of the more progressive arguments and concepts in LD act upon interpretations of presumption, or to alter the presumption in a round.

These include:

- Counterplans
- Observations
- Disadvantages
- Kritiks
- No Value or Criterion
Counterplans

► Ok, so counterplans normally appear in CX, or policy debate.
► But more and more, they are appearing in LD.
► They work the same way in LD as in CX; they allow the Negative to access Affirmative ground and arguments.
Counterplans

What a counterplan allows for in LD is a chance to the Negative to avoid a potentially damaging argument, circumvent a difficult argument, adapt a strong affirmative position, or take advantage of an unsuspecting opponent.
Counterplans

► I’m not certain how a counterplan would apply to the current UIL topic, but it certainly has an impact on the current NFL/TFA topic:

► Resolved: The United States ought to extend to non-citizens accused of terrorism the same constitutional due process protections it grants to citizens.
Counterplans

► For this topic, a common Negative counterplan has the United Nations act to offer due process rights to non-citizens, rather than the United States federal government.

► This allows the Negative to avoid discussing the status quo, such as military tribunals, and offer rights just as an Affirmative.
Answering Counterplans

► So, how do you answer this argument?
► I think you can argue that counterplans skew presumption in a way that is unfair, since it gives Affirmative ground on the value or criterion to the Negative.
► But this is a defensive argument, and won’t necessarily win you the round.
Answering Counterplans

► It is far better to argue that a Negative offering a counterplan does not fulfill their burden of clash. This allows you to pull over most of the Negative arguments, since the Negative has basically agreed with large portions of your Affirmative advocacy – counterplans essentially agree with the resolution.

► This is an offensive argument.
Observations

Observations are arguments offered by both positions in an effort to either shift a burden in the round or to limit the round in a favorable manner.

They often act as side constraints, meaning they place additional burdens on an opponent.
Answering Observations

► Just like framework arguments in CX, the best way to deal with observations is to answer them. Answer them in the same order they appeared in your opponent’s case.

► Observations are defensive in nature, but become offense against you if you don’t answer them.
Disadvantages

► In CX debate, a disadvantage is an off-case argument designed to show a negative impact of the affirmative policy.

► In LD, it works in a similar way to show the negative impact of the affirmative advocacy.

► For example, they might point out a downside of democracy, such as inefficient governance.
Answering Disadvantages

- A disadvantage should have several parts:
  - A argument called Uniqueness, which states how the status quo currently is
  - A Link to the affirmative position
  - An Internal Link explaining how the Affirmative will upset or change the status quo
  - An Impact of the Affirmative, which leads to something really bad – in CX, this is usually nuclear war or some other scenario that results in extinction
Answering Disadvantages

- Just like in CX, if you attack or answer individual parts of the disadvantage, you can take out all of it.
- The Link and Impact are the two best parts to attack.
- It is important to engage and answer the argument; it isn’t enough for most judges to say it doesn’t belong, and should be ignored.
Kritiks

- Kritiks function in a similar manner to a disadvantage – they offer an unforeseen consequence from Affirmative advocacy.

- But kritiks also feature lengthy and dense warrants from post-modern philosophers to justify the position and why the affirmative should be rejected.
Answering kritiks

► These arguments are gimmicks designed to take advantage of unwary debaters.

► Answer the arguments, and always point out the lack of clash.

► In addition, most post-modern philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, write in an obtuse and confusing manner, which makes the argument difficult to understand.
Answering Kritiks

► Some kritiks also attack solvency mechanisms.

► Point out that in LD, the Affirmative is not offering a specific policy, and has no burden to do so; this reduces the link with the kritik.

► Finally, some kritiks argue for inaction; this lack of clash should be discussed.
A Lack of a Value and Criterion

► Some progressive regions feature both Affirmative and Negative cases that do not have either a value, a criterion, or both.

► This straight model of argumentation may be a strategy of time, as it is fewer arguments a debater has to read and defend.

► Or it may be part of the strategy for a counterplan, disadvantage, or kritik.
A Lack of a Value and Criterion

► Always point out the importance of having a value to advocate in LD, and the necessity for having a criterion to weigh, judge, and/or evaluate the value in the round.

► Don’t just say LD needs a value and criterion; always stress why these are critical components of a case.

► That makes your arguments stronger and more persuasive.
Advanced Arguments

- You should always answer an argument in a round.
- Don’t be afraid of the complexity or unusual nature of these arguments.
- Use your cross-examination period to ask questions. Ask your opponent to explain the argument and how it links to your position or the resolution.
What does all of this mean?

► An understanding of these various theories means that, in a debate round, you will have the best opportunity to engage in real, constructive debate and understand your opponent’s case and arguments supporting it.