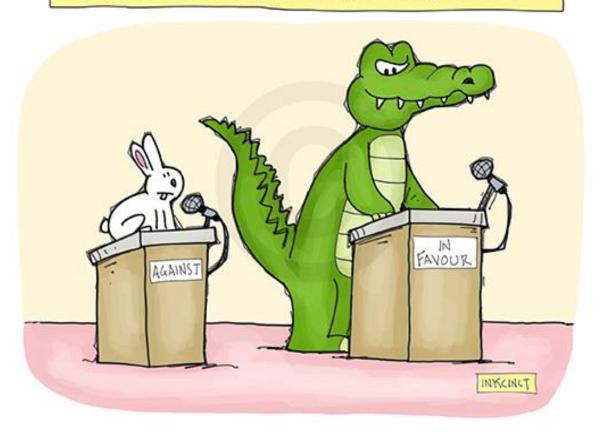# Academic Debate Project

ANIMAL FARM DEBATE: SHOULD ANIMALS HAVE THE RIGHT TO BITE OTHER ANIMALS THEY DON'T AGREE WITH?..

AGAINST

IN FAVOUR

INKCINCT

List of Content

I
Project Description

"It's better to debate a question without settling it
than to settle a question without debating it"

Joseph Joubert

Debating skills are an important aspect of academic life. Students should be able to defend their own position and to dispute opposing positions with regards to a particular topic, by providing substantial arguments, based on a sufficient number of reliable sources. The goal of this debate project is learning how to do that, with a focus on content as well as delivery.

In this project, students prepare, present and defend a position for an academic debate. The topics for debate have emerged out of a broad range of UCM courses from different concentrations. By the end of this project, students should be able to convince an audience of their tutors and peers of the correctness of their position, by presenting a coherently structured case, based on informed arguments, which are delivered both clearly and confidently.

At the start of the project, the group discusses their general topic and selects and clarifies two propositions; one for the practice debate and another for the final debate—the propositions should be similar in their relation to the general topic, but different enough to avoid overlapping arguments in the two debates. Next, the group splits up into a pro ("yes") and a con ("no") side. The pro side will argue in favor of and the con side against the proposition at hand. The two sides prepare their cases for each debate separately. A crucial part of the collective preparation for the final debate consists of writing individual position papers.

Students will have to conduct individual (library) research, finding important literature on the topic and constructing comprehensive arguments based on the most important sources.

Students are expected to work together outside of the scheduled group meetings. Building a strong case and planning a strategy for a group debate requires considerable teamwork; being able to collaborate with people not of your own choosing is an important skill to learn.

Course Coordinator:

Dr. Dave Vliegenthart
dave.vliegenthart@maastrichtuniversity.nl

II
Project Schedule

This is a *fulltime* project, so students are expected to work on it for 40 hours a week for 4 weeks. This schedule includes mandatory lectures, workshops, tutorials, and all deadlines:

Week 1	
Introduction Lecture	Basic *theoretical* introduction on: (1) How to debate; (2) How to write a position paper.
Introduction Workshop	Basic *practical* introduction on how to "do" a debate. Students will prepare and participate in a short debate and get feedback afterwards.
First Tutorial	The group discusses the topic. Together, they decide on a proposition for the practice debate and a proposition for the final debate. They determine the *precise* formulation of each proposition; this means all unclear and/or ambiguous words have been deliberated and defined in unbiased terms. Apart from the practice debate and the final debate, tutorials from here on take place in separate pro- and con-groups, with 1 hour for each side.
Self-Study	*Reflect (together) on arguments in favor of and against your position.*
Second Tutorial	Brainstorm about arguments in favor of and against your position. Divide your arguments (for the position papers) among each other.
Deadline: Submit Topic Position Paper	E-mail your paper topic to your tutor *before Friday 18.00*, in which you: (1) elaborate on why this topic/argument is relevant for your final debate, (2) provide a list of at least 5 relevant academic sources you will include (max. 500 words).
Self-Study	*Conduct research on the topic/argument of your position papers.*

Week 2	
Self-Study	*Write your individual position papers.*
Third Tutorial	Presentations: Each student gives a 10-15 minute "work in progress" presentation of their position paper argument and receives feedback on its content and delivery from their tutor and the other members of their group. Slide-ware or other visual aids are not allowed. Do not read from paper and do not talk *about* your argument, but present it as you would in a real debate—consider this a practice session for your debate performance. This is a pass/fail assignment.
Position Paper Peer Feedback Workshop	Students form pairs and provide feedback on each other's draft paper. First hour for all the PRO groups, second hour for all the CON groups.
Fourth Tutorial	Presentations (continued): Each student gives a 10-15 minute "work in progress" presentation of their position paper argument and receives feedback on its content and delivery from their tutor and the other members of their group. Slide-ware or other visual aids are not allowed. Do not read from paper and do not talk *about* your argument, but present it as you would in a real debate—consider this a practice session for your debate performance. This is a pass/fail assignment.
Deadline: Submit Final Position Paper	Submit your position paper *before Friday 18.00*, both as a (1) safe assignment and (2) hard copy.
Self-Study	*Create the framework of your collective case based on your individual position papers: reflect on which three to five arguments you will use to defend your position and on rebuttals to possible counterarguments.*

Week 3	
Fifth Tutorial	Brainstorm about arguments in favor of and against your position on the proposition for the practice debate. To ensure a level playing field, students should not consult other sources. Also determine a strategy and divide roles for the opening speech, rebuttal, and closing speech. Students are highly encouraged to practice for their practice debate, if possible in the lecture hall. Both the verbal and non-verbal delivery of arguments significantly improves with practice, which greatly adds to their impact, which, in turn, raises your chances of convincing your audience of your position. In a word, practice helps you win a debate.
Rhetorica Lecture	An introduction to common argumentation fallacies and strategies by the student debate club, with very useful debating tips and tricks.
Sixth Tutorial	The pro- and con-side hold a 45 minute practice debate in the lecture hall. The goal of this practice debate is to familiarize students with the setup of the final debate and to provide constructive feedback on their delivery. This will noticeably improve the quality of the final debate. The practice debate is structured as follows: Opening Speech (2 x 5 min) 10 min Preparation for Rebuttal 5 min Rebuttal (2 x 5 min) 10 min Open debate 10 min Closing Speech (2 x 5 min) 10 min **In total** **45 min** Afterwards, the group collectively reflects on their performance in the debate and on which lessons they take away from this exercise. Students do not receive a grade for this debate. Do note that active participation will significantly benefit the quality of the final debate.
Self-Study	*Refine your arguments and rebuttals to counterarguments for the final debate. Rehearse (e.g. the opening and the closing speech).*

Week 4	
Seventh Tutorial	Practice (the opening speech, rebuttal, closing speech) for the finale debate. Refine (the formulation of) your arguments and responses to anticipated counterarguments. Rehearse. Consider making cue cards. Tip: Do not alter or add to your arguments; fine-tune what you have.
Self-Study	*Practice for the final debate, if possible in the lecture hall.*
FINAL DEBATE	The pro- and con-side hold a 75 minute final debate in the lecture hall. The goal of this final debate is for students to convince an audience of their tutors and peers of the correctness of their position, by presenting a coherently structured case, based on informed arguments, which are delivered clearly and confidently. The focus is on content *and* delivery. The final debate is structured as follows: Opening Speech (2 x 10 min) 20 min Preparation for Rebuttal 10 min Rebuttal (2 x 7,5 min) 15 min Open debate 20 min <u>Closing Speech (2 x 5 min) 10 min</u> **In total** **75 min** Students receive a *collective* grade for the *content and delivery* of their own arguments and of their replies to the counterarguments of the opposition. This grade contributes 50% to their final grade.

III
Project Assessment

Student performance is assessed based on three tasks, one pass/fail and two graded tasks:

1. Presentation Position Paper (Pass/Fail)
Give a 10 to 15 minute presentation of the *preliminary* content of your position paper (see below). This is work in progress, so the form and content may require more attention, but you should present at least three arguments against one counterargument for your group's position on the topic for the final debate, based on at least five relevant academic sources.

Do not use slideware or other visual aids such as a whiteboard. Do not read from paper or from a screen. Do not talk *about* your arguments, but deliver your arguments as you would in an actual academic debate. Do not improvise your talk on the spot. Not abiding by these guidelines, for instance, due to a lack of proper research or preparation, will result in a fail.

> *Deadline*: Third/Fourth tutorial second week (check planning with your tutor)
> *Grading*: Individual, Pass/Fail

2. Position Paper (50%)
Write a 2500-word paper in which you refute an argument against your group's position in the final debate with at least three counterarguments, based on at least five relevant academic sources in English. For every 100 words or part thereof above or below the margin— i.e. less than 2400, more than 2600 words—one point will be subtracted, up to five points.

> *Deadline*: Before Friday 18.00 second week (safe assignment and hard copy)
> *Grading*: Individual, 50%

3. Practice Debate
Prepare, present and defend with your group your position on the preselected proposition for the practice debate. You should not rely on external sources, but solely on reason and ready knowledge. The purpose of this practice debate is to acquaint you with the setting of the final debate in the lecture hall and to provide constructive feedback on your delivery.

> *Deadline*: Sixth tutorial third week
> *Grading*: Individual, focus on delivery, no grade

4. Final Debate (50%)
Prepare, present and defend with your group your position on the preselected proposition for the final debate. The goal of this final debate is to convince an audience of your tutors and peers of the correctness of your group's position, by presenting a coherently structured case based on academically informed arguments that are delivered clearly and confidently.

> *Deadline*: Debate Day fourth week
> *Grading*: Collective, focus on content and delivery, 50%

Attendance
This project has a 100% attendance requirement. If you miss one tutorial, you will have to request the course coordinator for an additional assignment. If you miss two tutorials, you automatically fail the course. The introduction lecture and workshop in the first week are mandatory. The Rhetorica lecture in the third week is not mandatory, but highly recommended; you will take away practical tips. Active participation in the practice debate will significantly improve your performance in the final debate, which, in turn, is likely to lead to a good grade. If you are absent during the final debate, you automatically fail the course.

IV
Appendices

CATEGORY		EVALUATION
Planning Genuine attempt completed paper submitted on time		**1**
Content A clear, concise, and concrete thesis statement One (robust) counterargument to own position Correct representation of this counterargument Three arguments against this counterargument Arguments are accurate, relevant, and coherent Arguments supported by references to sources References to five relevant academic sources References consistent and according to APA		**1 – 2 – 3 – 4**

Structure
Clear and functional title and subtitles
Recognizable (transitions) intro, body, conclusion
 	
The introduction includes a(n)
        background and relevance of the topic
        thesis statement
        outline of paper
 	
The body includes a(n)
        counterargument (1x)
        well-informed arguments (3x) to rebut it
        transitions between sentences/paragraphs
 	
The conclusion includes a(n)
        summary of the body
        claim(s) that follows from the summary
        discussion section (for further research)
		1 – 2 – 3

Presentation Appropriate (formal/academic) style Attractive and varied wording Clear and succinct formulation Accurate spelling, grammar, punctuation Orderly, appealing, and functional layout		**1 – 2**
Word Count (max - 5) - 1 point for every (part of) 100 words below 2400 or above 2600		**– …**
Final Grade		

Comments on Position Paper e.g. remarks on formulation, argumentation, paragraphing, writing style, referencing etc.	
Content	
Structure	
Presentation	

CATEGORY		EVALUATION
Opening Speech Definition of position is clear Arguments are varied (e.g. use of ethos, pathos and logos) Coherence and transitions between arguments is/are clear Evidence arguments is convincing (references, examples) Delivery arguments is convincing (gestures, intonation etc.)		**1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**
Rebuttal Listens to opposition Represents opposition's claims accurately and fairly Attacks flaws in opposition's arguments Defends old arguments with new proof Does *not* bring in new arguments to defend position		**1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**
Open Debate Listens to questions/comments from audience/opposition Answers questions from audience/opposition appropriately Presents opposition with relevant questions and comments Displays enthusiasm, while remaining calm and collected		**1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**
Closing Speech Recapitulates own position Summarizes key arguments Concludes on a strong note		**1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5**
Final Grade (points/2)		

Comments on Final Debate e.g. remarks on use of references, examples, metaphors, eye contact, (body) language etc.	
Opening Speech	
Rebuttal	
Open Debate	
Closing Speech	

Topic 1
Religion in Modern Western Culture:
On Secularization, Gurus, Cults, Spirituality

Tutor: Dave Vliegenthart

In the wake of the Enlightenment, it seemed that modern Europe and North America were increasingly secularizing. For many, this meant that the progress of "rational" science was making "irrational" religion obsolete. Others argued that religion was not so much fading as transforming, in that long-established religions were giving way to non-institutionalized religiosity. Much of this discussion revolves around the interpretation of "secularization."

After periods of social crisis, such as the American Civil War and the First and the Second World War, more and more people in the West considered modern western culture bankrupt. They began to question the dogmatism of organized religion and the rationalism and materialism of mainstream science and to seek for alternative sources of meaning instead.

During the late nineteenth and twentieth century, many of these western "seekers" turned to alternative—occult and oriental—"gurus" to find exciting new answers to old existential questions they deemed conventional western science and religion unable to answer. Some scholars criticize this development as a "flight from reason," whereas others criticize these labels again as an outdated remnant of Enlightenment biases. Yet other scholars consider this development an "easternization" of western quests for meaning, but their critics consider it strange to draw boundaries between East and West at all in today's globalized world.

Together, seekers and gurus formed "cults." Though such new religious movements were always around, they became more visible in the countercultural Sixties. Both insiders and outsiders described them collectively as the "New Age movement." However, as New Age gurus and cults were increasingly perceived as dangerous and/or superficial, seekers took more distance from them. Today, most identify themselves as "spiritual, but not religious."

Contemporary "spirituality" is a contested term, though. Is it religious or secular, or both? Is it contributing to or replacing religion in modern western culture? How and why (not)?

These topics may be tackled by different fields in the humanities and social sciences. They are most interesting for students who want to learn more about religion and secularization, gurus and cults, and contemporary spirituality, but, of course, everyone is welcome to join.

Proposition 1:   Modern western culture has become secular

Proposition 2:   Modern western religion has been secularized

Proposition 3:   Modern western religion has been "easternized"

Proposition 4:   New religious movements are a danger to society

Proposition 5:   Contemporary spirituality is a form of religion

Topic 2
A UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights

Tutor: Stephanie Bijlmakers

Should business care about human rights? Recent developments have raised the stakes for companies. On 26 June 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) created an open-ended intergovernmental working group with a mandate to elaborate an international legally binding instrument to regulate, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

The group of States and 600+ civil society organizations promoting this initiative view the elaboration of a legally binding framework as essential to resolve the legal account-tability gap that leaves victims of corporate human rights abuses without an adequate legal remedy. Negotiations have begun and run parallel with the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

The author of the UNGPs, John Ruggie, argues that a traditional top-down approach and the creation of an all-encompassing international treaty is not the right way to move forward. One reason is the complexity of the business and human rights field. Negotiating a treaty would take too long time and risk undermining more immediate and effective measures to address corporate related harm that can deliver short-term benefits to victims.

The debate on the proposed treaty raises interesting legal, political and moral/ethical questions. Is international binding law an appropriate way of fostering human rights compliant conduct by business enterprises? Is it feasible? Is the power, influence and responsibility of the UN overstated? Is a treaty a last resort, and an acknowledgement of failure of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and voluntary approaches?

Students are invited to explore the issues surrounding the introduction of the proposed treaty, including an analysis of its prospective benefits and drawbacks. The topic is inter-disciplinary and can be approached from various angles, such as international law, human rights, political science and business ethics. Students from all disciplines are welcome.

Proposition 1:   The world needs a UN Business and Human Rights Treaty

Proposition 2:   The power, influence and responsibility of the UN is overstated

Proposition 3:   CSR and voluntary approaches can best advance human rights

Proposition 4:   Respect for human rights is good for business

Proposition 5:   Business enterprises are not responsible for human rights

Topic 3
The Organization of Superdiversity:
Language and power in globalized societies

Tutor: Veronica Lifrieri

Globalization has heightened the cross-border interaction between peoples and their socio-cultural systems. While the development of mass tourism and communication technology has allowed for intermittent interaction with other socio-cultural systems, migration has brought those systems into closer and more permanent contact. In the globalized era, migratory patterns have become more varied and complex in terms of, for example, migrants' backgrounds, origins, itineraries and motives. This 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2007) has enriched host communities, but only through processes of assimilation and integration fraught with power struggles.

In the context of superdiverse communities, language is at the center of heated debates about the reconfiguration of the social space. Deeply-felt matters of human rights, identity, education, discrimination, cognition, economic insertion and cultural heritage, among others, saturate the interactions between newer and older inhabitants as well as between inhabitants and the state.

The state ideally plays a major role in ensuring that all inhabitants' rights are fully and equally recognized and protected. The state is thus confronted with the question of whether access to public services (including education) in another language, e.g. in the newer inhabitants' mother tongue, will be guaranteed as a human right. The allocation of public space and resources to additional languages can help create a multilingual society, a potential resource for a nation-state. Some, however, consider this option utopian given the problems that may arise, especially when a wide range of mother tongues cohabit within the same national borders.

An alternative to the inclusion of mother tongues is adopting a second language of wider communication (usually known as lingua franca) like English. Branded as the language of globalization, English is gaining ground in many public and private areas and institutions around the world. Yet, adopting English as part of a country's language policy has implications for the preservation of minority languages used either by migrants or indigenous populations. Because of their subordinate status, minority languages (and worldviews, some would argue) can be in danger of disappearing unless protective measures are taken to revitalize the use of those languages in society.

This debate project is relevant for students in either the social sciences or humanities, in particular (but not limited to) those with interests in sociology, political science, public policy, cultural studies, sociolinguistics and communication.

Proposition 1: Having access to public services in one's mother tongue is a basic human right

Proposition 2: Multilingualism is a problem for nation-states

Proposition 3: The spread of English is destroying cultural diversity in non-English speaking countries

Proposition 4: Dying languages are worth saving