

principles I: introduction to principled arguments



'Non-principled' debates

- what is **utilitarianism**?
 - a theory that says that an action is morally correct if the consequence of it is maximising net **happiness**
- debates where no 'principled arguments' are made operate under utilitarianism - implicit agreement that what matters is maximising utility
 - **BUT** sometimes debaters make principled claims without thinking of them as 'principles' - e.g. '*the most vulnerable actor*' → not utilitarian but is expected enough not to be perceived as a scary principle
- judging 'non-principled' debates
 - the average intelligent voter is not a utilitarian by default
 - these debates can be judged because the teams all implicitly agree on utilitarianism as the underlying principle → e.g. all teams agree that 'Person X is happy' is valuable



principles in debating logic

- what “principled” arguments generally do is to **question the assumption that the maximisation of utility is the desirable outcome of the debate**
 - e.g. reparation principles, special obligations to one's own children
- as a consequence:
 - how do you **weigh up** principles versus practical arguments?
 - you don't → assuming that the principle connects, then the goal of it was to show that the ‘practical’ arguments in the debate do not have any value of their own
 - **BUT** principled arguments are not always completely independent of the practical outcomes of the motion
 - not all principles explain that certain action is unacceptable, some just explain which actors should be valued more or exclusively → in these cases, the debate can still be contested on practical grounds about **who achieves that the best**
 - e.g. in a reparation debate, OG makes a well-connected principled claim that we owe certain obligation to women
 - OO can still win without contesting that the obligation exists, just arguing that they are **better able to meet that obligation** - if they succeed, they win
 - **BUT** unless opp contests that the obligation **exists** or at least is **the primary obligation**, even if they make a brilliant argument about how this will cause a lot of harm to men, it will not win them the debate

the place of **thought experiments** i

- judges need to be explained what it is that the average informed voter should be finding valuable
 - this is often difficult to do in an analytic sense → we use thought experiments to establish common premises by appealing to the judge's intuitions
- **how to use thought experiments?**
 - give a thought experiment and point out to the judge why they have that intuition
 - claim that the situation in the motion is analogous to the situation in the thought experiment → the judge should apply the same intuition
 - e.g. *Imagine you are a professor who believes that he has a wife who loves him, children who look up to him and students who value his lessons. In actuality, his wife is cheating, kids find him embarrassing and his students do not respect him. Even though the professor is living a happier life under the SQ, the intuition is that you'd wanna know* → **radical honesty**



the place of **thought** experiments ii

- formulate the thought experiment as clearly as possible to avoid possible objections and highlight the intuition that you need
 - e.g. *Imagine that there are a brother and sister who have sex with one another. They do not know that they are related, have never met before, and one was in fact adopted. Both are infertile. Is this wrong?*
- sometimes this is best done by giving **multiple** thought experiments
 - a thought experiment X → arrive at **intuition 1**
 - give essentially the same thought experiment, changing the exact factor you are trying to highlight → arrive at **intuition 2**
- **limitations**
 - it is often unclear what exactly drives the intuition behind the thought experiment → hard to derive consequences (easy for opp to claim that the intuition derives from some other factor)
 - e.g. *does the professor thought experiment necessarily mean that our intuition is that lying is bad?*
 - you often find contesting thought experiments





rebutting principles

- **four methods**

- **co-opting** - sometimes, you might not want to rebut the principle, but explain why you are fulfilling it better
- **question** the **thought experiments** → exploit all the weaknesses
- provide a **contesting** principle
 - consider what the outcome of the principle X is - sometimes → 'we owe an obligation to group X'
 - counter that by making your own principled argument, suggesting that there are other obligations and explaining why these are more important
 - e.g. the Trinity IV 2021 final
- **direct rebuttal** - looks a lot like rebuttal you might otherwise provide - missing pieces of mechanisation / weak link
 - the reason why debaters find this hard is because they are not used to it and have not built up the intuitions yet

principles as performances

- the role of emotions
- not just trying to convince judges that you are logically proving things in the debate → saying they should find something so intuitive that no one would contest it
 - this is why often the words you use or the way you deliver them matters
- not good enough to just copy principles word for word from a different debate - instead, adapt to the debate
- principles are not things you tag on to the end of an argument

