Debate
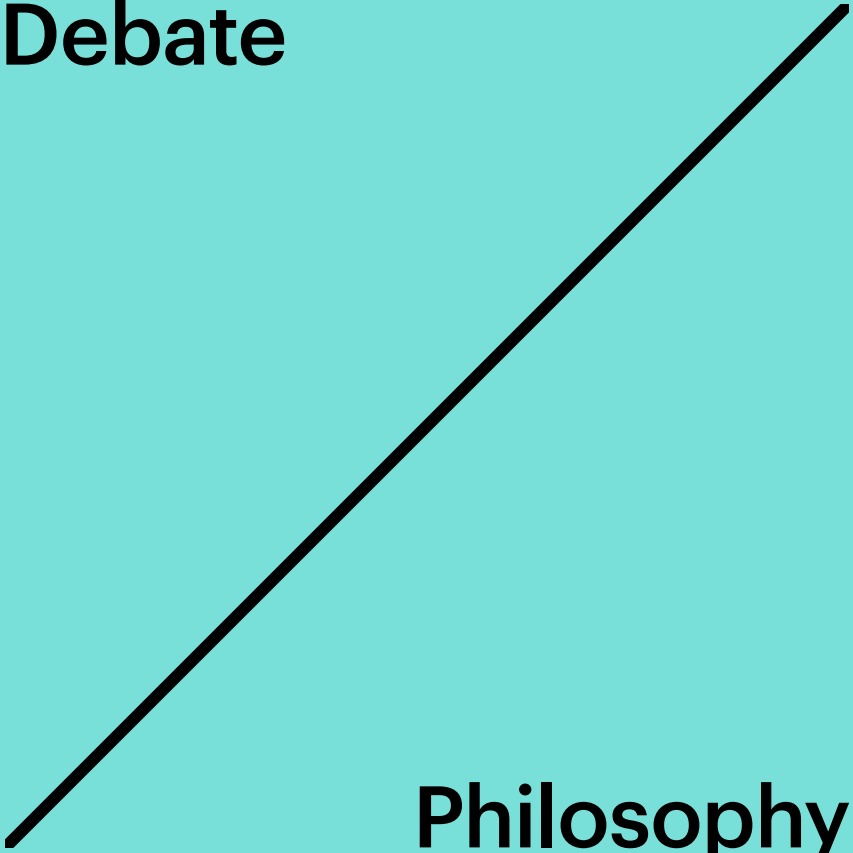
Philosophy

How to start debating in the philosophy classroom

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Preface
Floris Velema

In the days of the Athenian *polis*, public speaking, debate and philosophy were the cornerstones of democratic life. Philosophy had the form of a dialogue between people with contrasting views, and philosophers taught the art of persuasion to citizens attending the *ekklēsia*—the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens. In contemporary secondary schools however, debate clubs and philosophy classrooms have become separate worlds that, regrettably, seldom interfere. This state of affairs leads to a waste of knowledge and skills, and lowers the potential impact that debating skills and philosophical thinking could have on strengthening democracy.

The Erasmus+ project with the title *A Debate And Philosophy Typology* (ADAPT), coordinated by Natascha Kienstra from Tilburg University, aims at overcoming the divide between debate clubs and philosophy classrooms by developing innovative educational materials and researching their effectivity.[1] This book is one of the "intellectual outputs" of the ADAPT project, which is developed by a consortium of four secondary schools (Wolfert Bilingual School, Rotterdam; Gimnazija Ledina, Ljubljana; Privatna klasicna gimnazija, Zagreb; ITE Enrico Tosi, Busto Arsizio), two universities (Tilburg University and Erasmus University Rotterdam), and three associations (Za in Proti, Slovenia; Hrvatsko Debatno Drustvo, Croatia; The Noisy Classroom, UK).

In this book, we present a set of key concepts that offer philosophy teachers a clear and comprehensive approach to debating.[2] These concepts are visualized with the following set of symbols:

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1   A Debate And Philosophy Typology (ADAPT). Programme: Erasmus+; Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices; Action Type: Strategic Partnerships for school education; Start: 01-09-2019; End: 31-08-2022; Project Reference: 2019-1-NL01-KA201-060287.
2   See Appendix I for a short description of each concept.

Key concepts in debate

☰	Definition	∣	Assumption
⊨	Model	∈	Relevance
∀	Context & characterization	⊕	Exclusivity
∥	Clash	◇	Impact
∴	Principled argument	⊥	Contradiction
∵	Practical argument	¬	Refutation
⊢	Statement	∅	Omission
⊃	Analysis	∧	Rebuilding
∃	Illustration		

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We have chosen to link debate concepts to logic symbols for three reasons. Firstly, philosophy teachers might already be familiar with these symbols, making their implementation intuitive and user-friendly. Secondly, the symbols consist of simple strokes, which lends them to be used in note-taking once they are internalized by teachers and their students. Thirdly, the original meaning of the logic symbols is often very close to their meaning in our proposed debate methodology. For example, the symbols for *definition*, *model*, and *contradiction* have the same meaning in logic as they do here. Other concepts are more loosely affiliated: the universal quantifier is used to depict *context*, in the sense it deals with "all" concrete characterizations of the subject matter of the debate motion. The vertical bar can express the

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⊨
⊥
∀

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notion "given" and is connected in that way to *assumption*. The double vertical bar, or disjunction, is used to for *clash*, as either the Proposition "or" the Opposition wins a clash. At the same time, the double bar visualizes a "stand-off" between (single bar) assumptions, which is often the underlying reason for a clash.

$\in$
$\diamondsuit$
$\exists$
$\oplus$

$\wedge$
$\neg$
$\varnothing$

Other logic symbols explain the meaning of the debate concept: a remark is *relevant* if it is an "element" of a valid argumentation; the *impact* deals with the "possible" implications of the debate motion; an illustration is a description of an "existing" situation that elucidates the statement (the existential quantifier). With *exclusivity* one ensures that the argument cannot be put forward by both sides of the debate (an exclusive disjunction), while in *rebuilding* one "adds" to the debate case (a conjunction). A *refutation* shows how something is "not" the case, and an *omission* can be seen as something left empty (the empty set).

$\therefore$
$\because$
$\vdash$
$\supset$

For the *principled* and *practical argument*, we have used the symbols for "therefore" and "because." The turnstile for *statement* can here be interpreted as "I know to be true that." For *analysis*, we have chosen the symbol for material implication while avoiding the use of the arrow, as the arrow might already be used frequently in note-taking for various, less specific, purposes.

The symbols described above have been materialized into a collection of 3D-printed stamps, which we have given the name *Debaticons*. The 3D models for these stamps can be downloaded from the website https://debaticons.com, along with a set of worksheets that contain debate exercises with the symbols and stamps. The 3D-printed stamps can also be used on their own while (a) brainstorming and preparing for a debate, (b) taking notes during a debate, or (c) evaluating these notes within a jury.

This book consists of seven chapters. In chapter 1, Han van Ruler describes the intimate historical relationship between debate and philosophy—from the earliest stages of Greek philosophy to the present day. In chapter 2, Tomislav Reškovac describes various approaches to teaching philosophy, based on a comparison between the curricula of Croatia, Italy, The Netherlands, and Slovenia. Floris Velema argues in chapter 3 that debate as a classroom activity is congruent with each of the approaches to teaching philosophy described in the

previous chapter. Then, Debbie Newman describes various formats and exercises to start debating in the philosophy classroom in chapter 4. In chapter 5, Gijs van Oenen elaborates on central concepts in political philosophy, in order to help students and teachers to effectively approach debate motions that address social issues. Chapter 6, written by Devin van den Berg, offers an in-depth tutorial on argumentation and engagement with the arguments of the opposing debate team. Miha Andrič wraps up our collective endeavor in chapter 7, with an explanation of how various conceptions of freedom can be implemented in a debate context.

We hope that our new methodology teaches students how to apply philosophical concepts to question the status quo, and to discuss social issues in a respectful way with their peers. As such, we hope that this book will contribute to the development of high school students into engaged, critical and active citizens, and that you, as a teacher, will find in it an effective tool to facilitate this process.

Chapter 1

Debate and Philosophy in History

Han van Ruler

Chapter 1
Debate and Philosophy in History
Han van Ruler

Despite a likelihood for mutual distrust, the art of debate and the dis-
cipline of philosophy share important characteristics. Debaters and
philosophers may not form a single species, but in practice they end
up dealing similarly with similar hurdles. To illustrate this point, the
present chapter will take the development of argumentative strategies
in Western philosophy as its guiding thread, offering a chronology of
the manifold ways in which philosophical and debating techniques
have conflicted, as well as mutually enriched each other in the past.
Yet far from simply recounting the relationship between philosophy
and debate as a series of confrontations and collaborations, our aim
will be to understand the links between the two practices. Indeed,
on the basis of the series of historical examples that follow, I hope
to indicate that philosophy and debate have much more in common
than might at first be expected, and are actually closely related. On
the basis of their role and function in human communication, both
the practice of debate and the practice of philosophy share important
points of agreement where it comes to the uncovering of truth.

   What may be remarked in advance, is that both debate and philos-
ophy link up with social questions and collective ideals. Obviously,
the freedom to debate and to develop a sense of public self-awareness
is very much dependent on historical circumstance and political con-
ditions. Today, people who live in more or less "open" societies tend
to regard as self-evident the notion that everyone may have his or her
stake in an open discussion concerning matters of morals, politics,
and even religion. At the same time, we accept that in certain debates,
freedom has its limits. Specific contexts may lend themselves to the
authority of specialists, for instance, so that not just anyone may con-
tribute to the discussion of some thesis. At times, we may also become
aware that rules, norms and taboos about what can or cannot be said
may change, or fluctuate according to the values and vulnerabilities

of our conversation partners. The margins of open debate may then become the object of dispute and philosophical deliberation themselves.

A further thing to notice is that, in this ongoing process of developments and transformations, age-old stand-offs between debate and philosophy may suddenly resurface. In our own day and age, the emergence of social media has accustomed us to the idea that accepted norms of truth and probability may change, even to the degree that we seem to be living in an era of "post-truth"—a situation some have found reason to make instrumental use of and other people fear. Either way, the question of establishing the width and margins of our freedom to speak out may seem to be more topical than ever: new media force us to rethink the role of public debate, its function within science and politics, and its relation to human social life and individual experience. Yet these are things that were seen long before. To argue that science itself is "only a set of opinions," may at first sight strike us as an extremist position typically represented on Twitter, but the problem itself of what may count as an opinion or a fact links up with a long history of human adaptations to new intellectual and political developments.

1   Testing the Limits of Discussion

Truth and opinion go back a long way. Indeed, to learn how to deal with what should and should not be considered as fruitful claims in a debate has been part and parcel of the development of philosophy and science themselves. The very beginnings of Western metaphysics were the outcome of an intellectual debate over the difference between fact and opinion. Driven by an interest in offering natural causes for everyday phenomena, the earliest stages of philosophy in Greece had given rise to a series of competitive opinions all aiming for acceptance on the grounds of their apparent plausibility. What was the *archē*, the base, or the origin of things? Thales had claimed it was water, Anaximander had said it was the *apeiron*, or the "boundless," Anaximēnes claimed it was air, and Xenophanēs (c. 570-c. 470 BC), the last of the Ionic naturalist philosophers, that it was air and water
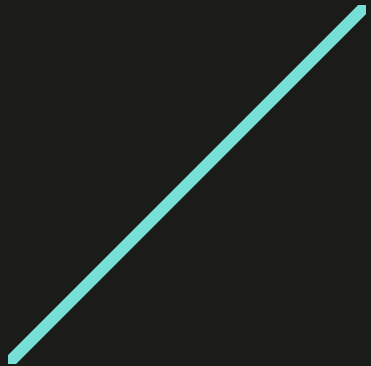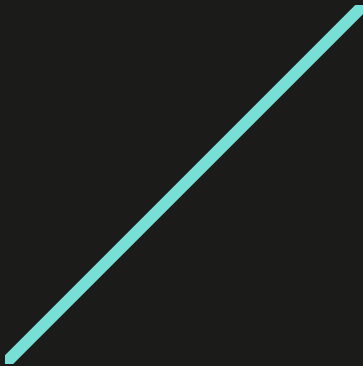
Plausibility distinguished from truth

Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Philosophy

Tomislav Reškovac

Chapter 2
Approaches to Teaching Philosophy
Tomislav Reškovac

1   The Status of Philosophy in Secondary Schools in Europe

There is almost no school subject that has been part of the high school curriculum for so long and whose position in that curriculum is so often called into question. This contradictory status of philosophy as a school subject seems to be largely due to the internal duality of that type of school of which philosophy is a natural part, and that is *gymnasium*.

The gymnasium[1] is a type of secondary school whose purpose initially included two: liberal education, which aims to provide an environment for development of a cultured and autonomous person (*Bildung*), and general education, which aims to prepare young people for university education leading to some profession. This second aspect of the gymnasium, its general educational character, resulted traditionally in a very broad curriculum with a large number of subjects, in order for the gymnasium to prepare young people for a very wide range of possible studies.

While in certain periods of its history these two goals were perceived only as two different, but still well balanced and harmonized aspects of the same educational ideal, in the last fifty years the relationship between these two aspects has turned into a kind of troublesome internal tension. This is, of course, particularly evident in changes in the gymnasium's curriculum. As the perspective from which the gymnasium is primarily "pre-tertiary education provider"

1   In most countries of continental europe the term for this type of school is the same: gymnasium (Germany, Austria, Denmark), gymnázium (Czech Republic, Slovakia), gymnasieskola (Sweden), gimnazija (Slovenia, Croatia), etc. In France, the name used for these schools is *lycée général*, while in Italy it is called *liceo*. The approximate equivalent in English would be *grammar school*. In the Netherlands, the term gymnasium has a somewhat narrower meaning, while the name of the educational program whose primary purpose is preparation for university education is VWO.

began to dominate over the humanistic (Bildung) perspective, so the subjects whose importance for continuing education was assessed as more or less negligible began to lose their significance and even to disappear from the gymnasium's curriculum. Thus, philosophy (as well as, for example, the arts) in some countries changed its status from compulsory to an elective subject, while in some others it turned into an alternative subject to some kind of religious education[2].

In the Anglo-American educational tradition, there are in fact no *gymnasia* in the strict sense of the word. Its general education aspect is covered by general secondary schools, while the space for liberal education is provided within undergraduate studies, in the form of liberal arts study programs or even colleges. That is why philosophy in high school is relatively rare, and where it exists it is not part of the national core curriculum, but one of the electives that might be offered by some schools as part of the school curriculum.

However, in most European countries, philosophy is still present in some way in high schools. There are two dominant models and they reflect a certain understanding of the role of philosophy in education. The first of these two models includes philosophy as a compulsory subject and it is characteristic of countries where the legacy of the traditional *gymnasium* is very strong. This is the case with *gymnasia* in certain German states, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, but also in countries such as France (in *lycées généraux*), Italy (in *licei*) or Spain (in *Bachillerato*). Within this model, philosophy is typically perceived as contributing to the *general goals* of education such as cultural literacy, contextual knowledge for better understanding of other disciplines and areas of human knowledge, or critical thinking and other academically and socially relevant skills. Besides that, it is typically assumed that philosophy could contribute to the development of an autonomous person prone to rational questioning of the world, herself and her own place in the world. Thus, for example, the Slovenian curriculum claims that philosophy helps students to develop the abilities of critical thinking and ethical reflection, making it easier for them to orient themselves in life and make independent decisions in a democratic society (Dačić et al., 2008).

2   This is the case with Ethics in Bavarian Gymnasia, which has the role of an alternative subject for students who do not choose religious education (*cf.* Spaenle & Huber 2010).

The goal of philosophy is not, in the first instance, to understand the great works of philosophy

but to understand how things are

Rosenthal 1989, 158

Chapter 4

Debate Formats

Debbie Newman

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Chapter 4
Debate Formats
Debbie Newman

1   Running a Parliamentary Debate in the Classroom

To hold a parliamentary debate in the classroom the teacher needs a topic (known as the motion), a proposing team and an opposing team. The speaking order and the length of speeches should be agreed in advance of the start of the debate and either the teacher or nominated students should chair the debate and time the speeches.

Debates are flexible:
- You can vary the number of speakers on each team (but make sure that the teams have the same number to ensure fairness).
- You can vary the lengths of the speeches to increase/decrease the challenge (but make sure both teams have the same length overall).
- You can choose to include an audience debate or an audience Question & Answer session to involve more students in the class.
- You can choose to allow speakers to try to interrupt each other with Points of Information (see below for details).

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Here is a sample format for introducing debate to a new class. It has three speakers on each side each giving three minute speeches:

Speaking Order
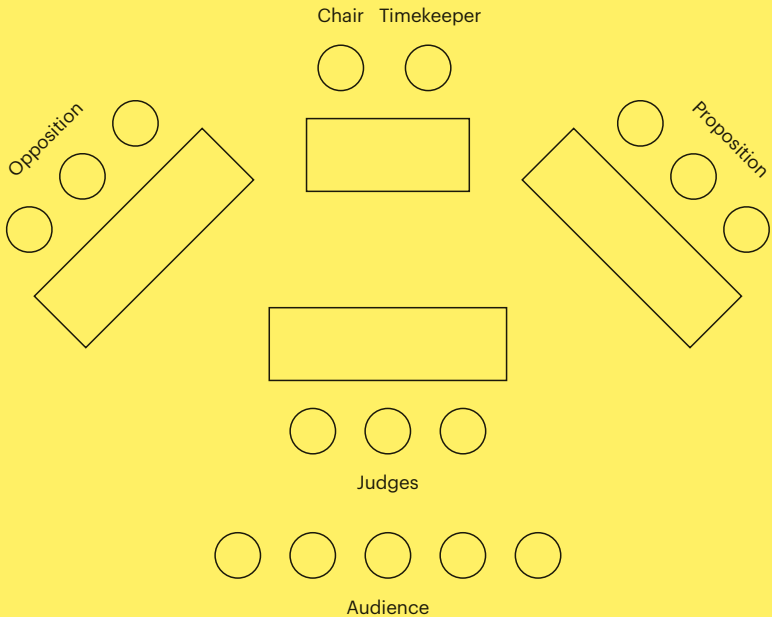
First Proposition

First Opposition

Second Proposition

Second Opposition

Audience debate

Opposition summary

Proposition summary

Class vote

Chair   Timekeeper

Opposition

Proposition

Judges

Audience

d   The classroom should be set up with the two teams facing the
      audience—they are not trying to persuade each other but rather
      trying to persuade the audience that their side is more convincing.
      The chairperson and timekeeper sit in the middle to keep order.

1.1   The Chairperson

> The chairperson starts the debate by stating the topic and
  introducing the teams. They call on the speakers as following:
  "I now call upon the first speaker for the Proposition, Jack"
  *"Thank you very much Jack. I now call upon the first speaker for
  the Opposition, Ria"*.

> After the second Opposition speech they call on members of
  the audience: *"Thank you Karin. It is now time for the audience
  debate. Does anyone have any points in Proposition? In Opposi-
  tion?"*.

> After the audience debate, the chairperson calls on the summa-
  ry speakers: *"That concludes the audience debate. I now call on
  Jarek to sum up the case for the Opposition"*.

Balloon Debates

How it works	Students take on the roll of different philosophers. The conceit is that they are all in a hot balloon which is going down. In order to save any of them, they must start throwing philosophers out of the balloon. If they are thrown over, their contribution to philosophy and the wider world disappears. Students take turns to argue why they should stay in the balloon and be saved. Other students in the class can ask questions and vote on who to save and who to throw over. This can be done in one round or there can be multiple rounds with votes after each one.
Materials needed	None needed
When to use	This could be a fun end of term lesson
Differentiation	In choosing which students to be which philosophers and which to be questioners. Students would be supported with a sheet of notes on their philosopher.
Number of students	Whole class
Level of difficulty	Medium
Time	20-40 minutes (depending on number of philosophers and number of rounds).
Adaptations	Allow the students to use costume or props. Allow students to choose their own philosopher.

Example topics   No topics, just your chosen philosophers.

Feedback   Feedback could focus on students' knowledge
/assessment   and understanding of their assigned philoso-
                        pher and ability to articulate their significance
                        in a persuasive way.

More advanced   Give different rounds specific themes e.g.,
version   "contribution to arts and culture," "contribu-
                        tion to science" and "contribution to politics."
                        Or "importance within philosophy," "impact on   ◇
                        the wider world." Or have a round where they
                        attack each other's value.

Principles   - Understand and formulate
addressed   - Compare with competing views
                        - Evaluate
                        - Application to real world
                        - Articulate a position

Appendix I

Key Concepts in Debate

Definition

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The definition comes at the start of the First Proposition's speech. It is not a dictionary definition of the words in the motion, but rather a clarification of the terms of the debate. It is essential for a good debate that everyone in the room is clear about what they are debating and what the parameters are. For example, if a motion is phrased "This house would legalize soft drugs," the opening speaker must define what they mean by soft drugs.

Model

In policy debates (debates that call for an action—for example to ban, to legalize, to invade), the definition needs to include a model of how the action will be undertaken. The First Proposition speaker must establish the what/when/where/who/how of what is being discussed so that the rest of the debate can focus on the why/why not. Some motions require very little in terms of a model, others need more details to ensure a good debate.

Appendix II

Philosophical Debate Motions

1   Ethics

1   This house believes that the morality of an action should be judged by its consequences and not by its intention.

2   This house would require judges to take into account the views of victims and their family when setting punishment for crimes.

3   This house believes that scientists are responsible for the consequences of their research.

4   This house believes that traditions are neither good nor bad, they simply are.
   (Feyerabend)

5   This house believes that tribal courts in indigenous communities should be allowed to try civil and criminal cases within their territory.

6   This house believes that the Ring of Gyges would turn good people into crooks.
   (Plato)

7   This house would implement a Social Credit System.[1]

8   This house would plug into the experience machine.
   (Nozick)

9   This house would pull the lever to make the trolley switch tracks.
(Foot)

10   This house believes that all living beings have inherent worth regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs.
(Deep ecology)

11   This house would grant animals the same basic rights as humans.

12   This house believes that the unexamined life is not worth living.
(Socrates)

13   This house believes that the eternal recurrence should be the main directive for ethical behavior.
(Nietzsche)

14   This house prefers an ordinary life of mediocrity and simplicity, as opposed to a life that strives towards outstanding achievements.

15   This house believes that science is the key to human flourishing.

16   This house believes that it is immoral to have children.

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From Plato's dialogues to medieval scholasticism to John Stuart Mill's defense of free speech, there is an intimate historical relation between debate and philosophy. So why have debate clubs and philosophy classrooms become such separate worlds in contemporary schools?

This book presents a method that combines the argumentative skills of debate education with central concepts in political philosophy, such as freedom, justice and equality. A practical guide for high school teachers that offers a new approach to fostering democratic values and engaged citizenship.

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Floris Velema

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