



LD Philosophy Primer: Plain-Language Ideas.

A beginner's tour of the ideas that show up most often in LD frameworks. Each idea gets a short definition, a debate use, and a weakness you can attack.

Why philosophy shows up in LD

LD resolutions ask what is **right**, so debaters borrow ideas from philosophers to explain how to decide. You do not need to read the originals to start. You need to understand the core idea, use it correctly, and know where it is weak.

Be honest about sources

If you name a philosopher, make sure you actually know the idea you attribute to them. Use a reliable encyclopedia-style source or a coach to check. Do not guess.

Five core ideas

IDEA	CORE CLAIM	DEBATE USE	COMMON ATTACK
Utilitarianism (consequentialism)	The right action produces the most overall good or least harm	Weigh benefits and harms to the most people	Can sacrifice individuals for the majority
Deontology (duty-based ethics)	Some actions are right or wrong in themselves, no matter the result	Argue we must respect rights and duties	Rules can clash or give bad results in extreme cases
Social contract	Legitimate rules are those people would agree to for mutual benefit	Justify government authority or fairness	No one actually signed it; who counts as 'we'?
Justice	Giving people what they are owed, or treating them fairly	Frame around fairness and equal treatment	People disagree about what is owed
Rights	Protections individuals hold against interference	Defend liberty, dignity and due process	Rights can conflict with each other

Names often linked to these ideas in LD teaching slides: Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (utilitarianism), Immanuel Kant (the categorical imperative, a duty-based view), and Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (social contract theories). John Rawls is also often cited on the rules-based side of the rules-or-consequences debate. Philosophers disagree with each other, so confirm what a thinker actually argued before you name them.

Examples in plain language

Utilitarian thinking

A town can build a park or a parking lot. Count the benefits and harms.

Duty-based thinking

Even if lying would make a group happier, a duty-based thinker says

Social contract thinking

We follow school rules because everyone has fit under everyone's

Connecting to a criterion: Utilitarians often use 'maximize overall well-being.' Deontologists often use 'respect for persons' or 'protecting rights.' Social contract debaters might use 'consent of the governed.' Each is a possible value criterion.

How to use philosophy without sounding robotic

- 1 **Say it simply.** Explain the idea in your own words first, then name it.
- 2 **Give an example.** A short everyday example shows you understand it.
- 3 **Link it.** Show how the idea leads to a Yes or No on the resolution.
- 4 **Know the weakness.** Prepare a response to the most common attack on your framework.
- 5 **Stay flexible.** Be ready to argue 'even under your framework I win.'

- ☐ I can explain each of the five ideas in one sentence.
- ☐ I can name one strength and one weakness of each.
- ☐ I can connect each to a value criterion.
- ☐ I have confirmed any named philosopher or quote with a reliable source.

Keep learning

Ask your coach or a teacher for age-appropriate readings, or use a reputable online encyclopedia of philosophy for overviews. Read slowly, take notes in your own words, and test each idea on small real-life questions before using it in a round.

Want a guided reading plan?

Scholar Coach can build a philosophy and framework plan around your debater. Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: UIL Intro to LD Debate slides, E. Huber (uiltexas.org) · Baylor University (R. Edwards): LD Intro to Philosophy slides, hosted by UIL · UIL Judging Lincoln-Douglas Debate instructions, 2024-25 (uiltexas.org). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

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