Chapter 19

**Argumentation, Consequences, and Principles**

Chapter 15 described different categories of claims: descriptive, definitional, associational, and evaluative. Although some claims fall fundamentally into one of the first three categories, the position taken in this book is that all, or at least most, claims have an evaluative dimension. Thus, evaluation is the primary function of argumentation. Evaluation in argumentation occurs when people claim that one value or set of values is more important than another; that those values are associated with various people, ideas, institutions, or objects; or that those values should be used to guide our actions. Because those kinds of claims are most common in educational debate, this chapter will focus on the last two types of claims—claims that associate values to objects, and claims that evaluate policies or actions.

Two related but distinct ways that people use evaluative claims in argumentation can be described in terms of consequences and principles. Consequences and principles are certainly related to one another. In general, arguments by consequence are based on the philosophy of utilitarianism, and arguments by principle are based on the philosophy of deontology. Sometimes in philosophy, these two methods are used as foils for one another. They are compared to one another in ways that makes one seem superior to the other. From the perspective of this text, both methods, although different, are useful. In fact, more often than not, the two methods can be used to reach the same conclusion but in different ways. The following will explain how the two methods function.

**Chapter Outline**

- Evaluation Based on Consequences of Action
- Evaluation Based on Principles of Duties and Rights
- Summary
- Terms and Concepts From Chapter 19
- Discussion Questions For Chapter 19
- Exercises For Chapter 19
Evaluation Based on Consequences of Action

An argument based on consequences relies, as the name implies on direct material consequences. Arguing by consequences is associated with the philosophy of utilitarianism. According to that philosophy, one value is more important than another if acting on that value creates the greatest utilitarian consequences for the greatest number of people. A person, idea, institution or object is valuable to the extent that it leads to the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The philosophy of utilitarianism asserts that our actions ought to be guided by whether the consequences of our actions produce more good material consequences than other actions.

The philosophy of utilitarianism and the method of arguing based on consequences are very common in debate. Chapter 15 of this text discussed several kinds of evaluative claims. Among the most common claims in educational debate are those that assign values to objects and those that evaluate claims of policy. This section will consider how arguments of consequence can be used to support both types of claims.

An example of the first kind of evaluative claim is one that assigns a value to a person. Following the philosophy of utilitarianism, a person whose actions produced good consequences would be thought of as a good person, while a person whose actions lead to bad consequences might be considered a bad person. For example, the claim that “Mohandas Gandhi was one of the world’s best leaders” would be evaluated by the consequences of Gandhi’s actions. To support such a claim, a debater might use two sub-arguments as support. The first sub-argument might simply describe certain features of Gandhi’s actions. The second sub-argument would then associate those actions with certain consequences. The third argument would provide an explicit evaluation of those consequences. Astute readers of this chapter will notice the describe, associate, evaluate pattern as one that has been used throughout this chapter. That pattern will receive more specific attention in the upcoming chapter as well. The argument is shown in the illustration below:

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Primary Claim: Mohandas Gandhi was one of the world's best leaders.

Sub-argument One (Description): Gandhi taught the method of non-violent protest.

Sub-argument Two (Association): Gandhi’s use of non-violent action produced consequences in Ghana. Using Gandhi’s tactics, Ghana became the first African Country to break free of British rule.

Sub-argument Three (Evaluation): Ghanaian independence from Britain was a positive consequence. Not only did it provide a non-violent means of freeing citizens of Ghana from British rule, it also provided a model for the advancement of civil rights in the United States.

The argument illustrated above is one that seeks to attach a value (being one of the world’s best leaders) to an object (Mohandas Gandhi). It does so by demonstrating the consequences of the actions taken by Gandhi. The argument consists of three sub-arguments. The first sub-argument described a feature of Gandhi’s method of non-violent protest. To support that sub-argument, a debater would need to clearly describe the method of non-violence; then show how that method was central to Gandhi’s teachings. A second sub-argument in the illustration associated non-violent protest with the consequences of assisting Ghana to break free of British rule. Here, the debater would need to provide historical evidence of how Ghana broke British rule, and also would need to show how Gandhi’s method was instrumental to that consequence. The third sub-argument evaluated that consequence by showing how it produced good for the people of Ghana and the people of the United States, as well. To support that sub-argument, the debater would need to provide specific evidence showing how people’s lives in Ghana and the United States were improved. Thus, this argument is one that demonstrates how the consequences of action can be used to evaluate that action.

Another kind of evaluative claim discussed in Chapter 15 is a claim about policy or action. Arguments based on consequences are commonly used to support claims about policies and actions. A policy or an action is good (positively evaluated) to the extent that its positive consequences outweigh its negative ones. A claim that “Nations should provide a minimal level of education to all their citizens” is a claim of policy. A debater might support such a claim by arguing that his or her proposal to provide a minimal level of education to all citizens would have more benefits than costs. When a debater discusses benefits, he or she usually talks of direct material benefits. So, a proposal is a valuable one and is positively evaluated when its benefits outweigh its costs. The illustration presented below contains an example of a policy claim that exemplifies an argument of consequence. Debaters have at their disposal a variety of methods to construct an argument based on consequences. The illustration below shows how three sub-arguments (descriptive, associational, and evaluative) can be combined to create a primary argument about the consequences of a proposed action.
In this example, the debater is proposing a policy to replace a current one. The first sub-argument describes both the current and the proposed policies. It compares and contrasts the current policy with the one the debater proposes as a replacement. The second sub-argument shows how features existing in the proposed policy, and absent in the current policy, are causally associated with certain consequences. The third and final sub-argument provides an explicit evaluation of the consequences established in the second sub-argument.

Motion for debate: Nations should provide a minimal level of education to all their citizens.

Primary argument: Increasing funding and infrastructure for education will improve people’s lives by helping to alleviate poverty.

- **Sub-argument 1 (Description):** The Government team’s proposal substantially changes the policies of the current system.
  - The current policies of nations of Sub-Saharan Africa provide insufficient funding and infrastructure to secondary education.
  - The Government team’s model provides both funding and infrastructure.

- **Sub-argument 2 (Associational):** Infrastructure and funding is causally related to access to secondary education.
  - The lack of funding and infrastructure in the current system leads to poor access to education.
  - By increasing funding and infrastructure, the Government team’s proposal provides better access to education.

- **Sub-argument 3 (Evaluative):** Increasing access to secondary education will help relieve poverty and will improve people’s lives.
  - Lack of access to secondary education leads many to live a life of poverty.
  - Evidence that the Government’s proposal to increase access to education is the fact that people without a secondary education are more likely to be poor than those with a secondary education.
  - Fewer people with a secondary education go without food.
  - People with a secondary education are generally healthier, living longer and better lives.

In the illustration above, the Government team has focused the debate on funding and infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their primary argument is that, by increasing funding and infrastructure, their proposal will improve people’s lives by helping to alleviate poverty. As explained earlier, this primary argument is supported by three sub-arguments. The first sub-argument describes both the current and the proposed policies with regard to funding and infrastructure. In that sub-argument, the debater from the Government Team contrasts the current system with the proposed system, indicating that the proposed system will provide funding and infrastructure that is lacking in the current system. The second sub-
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The argument then draws a cause and effect **association** between providing increased funding and infrastructure and access to a secondary education. The claim made in this sub-argument is that the current system’s lack of funding and infrastructure leads to inadequate access to education, whereas, conversely, the proposed policy will enhance educational access. Therefore, the consequence of increased funding and infrastructure is better access to education. The debater cannot simply assert this cause and effect association; he or she must provide evidence that funding and infrastructure are real contributors to access to education. The third sub-argument then goes on to provide an explicit **evaluation** of the consequence of better access to education. Better access to education is valuable because it helps relieve poverty and generally improves people’s lives. Again, the debater needs to do more than assert that access to education is valuable to people. He or she needs to provide specific evidence that educational access has a real effect on poverty and, thus, on people’s lives.

In summary, one way to support a claim of evaluation is to create an argument related to the consequences of actions. That is the method associated with the philosophy of utilitarianism that suggests that a good action is one that creates the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

**Evaluation Based on Principles of Duties and Rights**

A related way to make evaluative arguments involves appealing to universal principles. Such method, grounded in morals and ethics, is associated with the philosophy of deontology, a philosophy that seeks to link the evaluation of one’s action to duties or rights. One of the clearest deontologists was philosopher Immanuel Kant. Deontology, unlike utilitarianism, evaluates a good (or bad) action using certain principles involving duties and rights rather than the consequences of the action. Thus, a good action is one that is in accord with important principles rather than with consequences (Kant).

How does one know when an act is in accord with certain duties and rights? Deontological normative theory is a kind of formal, deductive logic that philosophers might use to answer this question. Without resorting to formal deductive argument, the question can be answered in less formal but more practical ways. For instance, if an act and its essence (its definition) coexist, then one might say that the act is in accord with the principle on which the essence of the object exists. To put this more simply, a freedom fighter is a person whose acts correspond with the essence of a freedom fighter. In other words, the coexistence of the object and its essence is indicative of the principle toward which the object ought to be aimed. For instance, one might argue that two features define the essence of a freedom fighter: (1) fighting against a repressive regime; and (2) doing so for the cause of the larger community. Assuming that the audience sees these two features as positive moral values, then they serve as principles by which the acts of a group described as “freedom fighters” can be evaluated. Any group of people engaging in the two acts (fighting against a repressive regime for the cause of a larger community) is following a positive moral principle that might be called “fighting for freedom.”
Another practical method of arguing for a principle involves arguing by analogy. For instance, if one group of people can be said to be acting on a certain principle, then a second group who are doing essentially the same acts will also be following that principle. For instance, if a debater were to select a group of people whom the audience already believes is acting on a particular principle, and then shows that a second group also acts in an essentially similar way, the debater can argue that the second group is also acting on the principle. The debater might start with a group of “freedom fighters” that the audience evaluates positively. Depending on the audience, that group might be the Viet Cong or the American Revolutionary War Soldiers. The debater would then describe the essential features of the first group (fighting against repression for the good of the larger community) then compare the first group to a second group, the Free Syrian Army, for instance. To the extent that the Free Syrian Army acts on the same principles as the Viet Cong or American Revolutionary Soldiers, then the Free Syrian Army can arguably be said to be following the same principle—fighting for freedom.

Regarding this approach of evaluating actions according to principles rather than consequences, Harvard philosopher, Michael J. Sandel, writes: “The second approach says that consequences are not all we should care about, morally speaking; certain duties and rights should command our respect, for reasons independent of social consequences” (p. 33). Principled arguments focus on the inherent rightness or wrongness of values and actions. One set of values is better than another if that set of values conforms to universal principles of rightness and wrongness. Similarly, people, ideas, institutions and objects are evaluated based on the universal principles. People who argue based on universal principles believe that our actions are guided by how well those actions correspond to universal principles.

Earlier, arguments by consequences were used to argue in favor of two kinds of evaluative claims: those that assign values to objects, and those that evaluate policies or actions. Principled arguments can also support these kinds of claims, as well. To begin, an argument of principle can be used to assign a value to an object. Earlier, the claim that Mohandas Gandhi was one of the world’s greatest leaders was used as an example to show how an argument by consequence would function. The same claim can now be applied to an argument by principle. Again, several ways of organizing such an argument exist, but one common way is to support the primary argument with two sub-arguments. First, a sub-argument is used to demonstrate why the principle is an important one. Second, a sub-argument is created to show how the object to be evaluated is consistent with the principle, right, or duty. The illustration below uses the same example about Gandhi to show how an argument by principle can function.

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2 Perhaps an East Asian audience would be more likely to positively evaluate the Viet Cong (Vietnamese who fought against the Americans in the “Great American War”) whereas a European or North American Audience might positively evaluate American Revolutionary War Soldiers.
In the above illustration, the first sub-argument suggests that the principle of non-violence is an important one. Of course, the debater would need to provide careful reasoning and evidence to support this sub-argument. Why is non-violence an important principle? Is it somehow related to another principle that is universally accepted? Is non-violence essential to the human condition? The second sub-argument then relates the principle to the object to be evaluated. To support that sub-argument, a debater would need to describe the feature of Gandhi that is related to the principle. In the instant case, the debater would need to explain Gandhi’s method of civil disobedience and why civil disobedience is associated with the principle of non-violence. In general, the overall goal of the argument is to move the audience to viewing the object (Gandhi) in the same positive manner that they view the principle (non-violence).

The illustration presented above shows how an argument of principle can be used to support a claim that applies a value (the principle of non-violence) to an object, (Mohandas Gandhi). An argument by principle also can be used to support the evaluation of a policy or action. Earlier, an argument of consequence was illustrated to support the claim that “All governments have a duty to provide education for their citizens.” The same claim can be supported using an argument of principle. The claim is supported by a combination of several sub-arguments. In that case, the first sub-argument supports the existence of the principle that will be used in the evaluation. The second sub-argument then describes the actions that later will be evaluated according to the principle. It explains the features of the current and proposed actions, and how those features are related to the principle itself. Finally, the third sub-argument shows how the principle, duty, or right is fulfilled by the proposed action. That kind of sub-argument is illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Argument:</th>
<th>Mohandas Gandhi was one of the world’s greatest leaders.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-argument One:</td>
<td>Non-violence is one of the most important principles the world has ever known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-argument Two:</td>
<td>Mohandas Gandhi employed civil disobedience throughout his life. His method of civil disobedience supports the principle of non-violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The argument illustrated above is an argument of principle designed to support a primary claim that all governments have the duty to provide an education for all of their citizens. As explained above, the argument combines three sub-claims. The first is designed to show that the principle, rights, or duties are legitimate. The debater would need to explain why access to education is a right of all citizens. One possible way to do this would be to point to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that declares, “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.”

Having established that access to education is a fundamental right of all citizens, the debater would explain why providing access to education is a duty of the government. The debater might support this argument by showing how the duty to provide access to education is a part of some larger agreed-upon duty, such as the duty to protect the general welfare. Having established that access to education is a fundamental principle; the second sub-argument describes the current and proposed policies and relates those features to important elements of the principle. In the above example, the Government team might show how funding and infrastructure that is lacking in the current system is provided for in their proposed policy. Then they might show how that funding and infrastructure is relevant to access to education, always being careful to provide clear and solid evidence, reasoning, and explanation. Finally, the third sub-argument would show how the Government team’s proposed policy fulfills the

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**Motion for debate: Nations should provide a minimal level of education to all their citizens.**

**Primary argument: All governments have the duty to provide education for their citizens.**

- **Sub-argument 1: Access to education is a right of citizens and a duty of the government to provide.**
  - Access to education is a right of all citizens.
  - Providing access to education is the duty of government.

- **Sub-argument 2: The Government team’s proposal substantially changes the policies of the current system.**
  - The current policies of nations of Sub-Saharan Africa provide insufficient funding and infrastructure to secondary education.
  - The Government team’s model provides both funding and infrastructure.
  - Funding and education are essential for access to education.

- **Sub-argument 3: The Government team’s proposal fulfills the duty of government and the right of citizens.**
  - Providing access to education fulfills the government’s duty.
  - Gaining access to education provides for the rights of citizens.
principle described in the first sub-argument. In this case, they would argue that access to education fulfills the government’s duty as it provides for the rights of citizens. Thus, the example demonstrates how an argument of principle can be used to construct a claim of policy.

Summary

This chapter has concentrated on making arguments to support evaluative claims. Two argumentative methods, consequences and principles, have been the focus of the discussion. As discussed earlier, the argument by consequence is drawn from the philosophical position of utilitarianism, and the argument by principle is consistent with the philosophical tradition called deontology. Both of those philosophies are respected positions, although each has its critics as well as proponents.

Both consequential and principled arguments are legitimate choices for debaters seeking to construct arguments of evaluation. Much if not most of the time, debaters will be able to construct both consequential and principled arguments that lead to the same conclusion—that a certain policy or action should be positively (or negatively) evaluated. As debaters advance in their theoretical and practical understanding of debate, those kinds of arguments will become more and more useful.
Terms and Concepts From Chapter 19

• Utilitarianism
• Deontology

Discussion Questions For Chapter 19

• How can the describe, associate, evaluate pattern be used to make an argument of consequence?
• How can one use an argument about coexistence and essence to support the idea that a certain principle is a good one?
• How can one use an argument by analogy to support the idea that a certain principle is a good one?

Exercises For Chapter 19

• Select a motion from one of the earlier chapters or a motion that you find interesting. Construct at least two arguments to support this motion, one using consequences and another using principles.
• Using the same motion, construct at least two arguments to oppose the motion, one using consequences and another using principles.