Chapter 2

Ethics and Debate

Chapter Outline

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Summary

The Ethical Debater

In some ways, the title of this section, “The Ethical Debater,” is redundant. To debate well means to debate ethically. Throughout the centuries, philosophers, speakers and thinkers from both China and the United States have unequivocally declared that any excellent speaker cannot, by definition, be exceptional without operating from a high moral character adhering to an enduring, ethical code of conduct.

For example, Chinese Philosopher Mencius, who was himself an excellent speaker dismayed by the trickery and manipulation used by traveling advisors to the kings, declared that sincere speech (cheng yan) was “the most effective, moral, and humane mode of expression to accomplish persuasion” (Xing, p. 175). Similarly, Roman Orator Marcus Fabius Quintilianus explicitly taught that while the orator must have knowledge of how to speak well and must achieve an artistic excellence in those skills, “the orator in Quintilian’s view must, above all, be a good man [or woman]” (Kennedy p. 101). As debaters grapple with disputations, they are charged with a vital social responsibility for delineating the best arguments for and against essential civic issues. That social responsibility demands highly ethical practices to ensure the prosperity, growth, and sustenance of a society.

Acting in ethical ways as a speaker and using ethical speech not only fulfills a social responsibility but also inherently supports an arguer’s purpose to persuade. Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, names ethos as the character of the speaker, a character making the speaker “worthy of belief; for as a rule we trust men [and women] of probity more, and more quickly. . . .” (Cooper p. 8). Similarly, “according to the Analects,” one of Confucius’s four components of curriculum was xing, the practice and conducts of morality (Xing p. 166).

Xing Lu writes, “For Mencius, cheng yan referred not only to sincere and honest speech, but also to an innate moral quality out of which sincere and honest speech naturally and powerfully arise in our efforts to influence one another. . . . Therefore,
[Mencius’s] understanding of cheng yan was similar to Aristotle’s notion of ethos, in that cheng yan is an indication of ethos and serves as the most effective means of persuasion” (Xing, p. 175). Exhortations that arguers practice morality and ethics can be found across both Eastern and Western traditions.

Since ethics is a philosophy or system of morality and good conduct, arguers strive to improve their debating skills by developing habits to practice principles of ethical debating. Debaters can examine their own behavioral choices to discover unethical patterns they recognize and replacing those practices with more ethical ones. In educational debate, periodic tournaments provide useful opportunities for debaters to test and adjust those choices. Toward reducing unethical actions, debaters may usefully conceptualize debate as both making argumentation choices and making choices about how to communicate with others.

Key to constructing and delivering an ethical argument lies in the distinction between 1) the topics and arguments constituting the debate and 2) the persons participating in the debate. Arguing the merits of one position or the discrepancies in another’s argument differs sharply from arguing to discredit or demean another speaker or another debate participant. An ethical debater can provide a spirited and animated argument, case, or rebuttal regarding the topic without debasing other individuals in the debate. An ethical arguer constitutes the very essence of an excellent debater: one who pursues a clear and informative clash of ideas, reasons, rationale, and connections.

Ethical problems arise when debaters turn the focus of their arguments away from the critical issues in the debate and toward other speakers or judges in the debate by voicing negative comments or using denigrating tones directed toward individuals rather than the topic. An unethical debater defrauds the purpose of the debate by brushing aside the critical issues in favor of derogatory reflections or assertions about persons in the debate. Often these unethical and destructive practices occur because the offending speaker or team is not well prepared or does not yet possess the skill to squarely address the topics. Teams or speakers who practice character assault fail to achieve critical thinking skills that mark excellent, ethical debates.

How does one decide what are the ethical and unethical actions associated with debate (or with any other activity for that matter). One way is to begin by examine the activity to determine its essential characteristics then to decide what are the higher moral purposes of each of those characteristics. Using this method, one does not simply decide on ethical and unethical actions arbitrarily, but makes that decision based on the essential features of the activity itself. The next section discusses some of those essential features of debate and their higher moral purposes.
Moral Purposes of Debate

The features chosen for discussion in this section are not the only characteristics of debate; they are those considered in this text to be among the most important and the most salient. Four features associated with each feature include: communicating with others, using arguments to solve disagreements, using an adjudicator when participants are unable to solve their differences, and reaching an outcome to a conflict. Each of these four features is then associated with a higher moral purpose that helps to define the ethics of debate.

Communicating with Others

Communicating with other people is an essential feature of debate. Without communication, debate is not possible. During preparation for, participation in, and debriefing after a debate, debaters communicate interpersonally with their school team members, their partners, their coaches and teachers, their judges, and students or officials from other schools. That interpersonal communication, like the public speaking performances within a formal debate, consists of a communicator purposefully choosing messages and intending to influence one or more others. Both the actions of choosing messages and the intentions of influencing others represent keys in this communication process and carry ethical implications.

Communicating responsibly with others is one of debate’s higher moral purposes. One can communicate responsibly with others by considering the other person to be an equal partner in the communication process rather than an object to be overcome. Responsible communicators view others as people whose opinions and evidence may be just as good as our own. These people therefore deserve our respect in the communication process.

Using Arguments to Resolve Disagreements

An essential feature of debate involves the use of arguments to resolve disagreements. Without the use of arguments, debate as it is known could not exist. Using arguments rather than violence is one of debates moral purposes.

All animals, including human animals, have a variety of other methods of resolving disagreements, but only human animals use argumentation and debate. Argumentation and debate are not among the methods available to non-human animals for resolving differences. Whether they are competing over limited resources such as food and water or access to mates, non-human animals frequently resort to violence as a way of resolving these differences. Human animals use violent means to resolve differences over access to resources and other issues – religion, for example – as well. For better and for worse, humans throughout much of history have used their abilities to create and use tools to develop weapons of greater and greater destructive power. Those weapons of mass destruction threaten the very existence of human life on the planet. The ability of humans to use arguments rather than violence thus is one of the high moral purposes of debate.
Using an Adjudicator to Resolve Differences.

An adjudicator, almost always essential, for the conduct of debate, is critical in almost all situations that can be described as debate. As stated earlier, debate almost always occurs before an outside adjudicator. Debate before an adjudicator is the process that is used when arguers are unable to come to an agreement on their own. At the point when people are not able to resolve their disagreements, an adjudicator becomes part of the debate process. So an adjudicator is an important, although not a completely essential part of debate.

Since presence of adjudicator is an important characteristic of debate, respect for the adjudicator is one of the higher moral purposes of debate. More than anything else, the adjudicator needs to be respected as a person. The adjudicator is not an enemy. The adjudicator is a person who cooperates with both parties to come to a decision that the parties could not achieve on their own. As such, the adjudicator deserves respect from all parties involved and that respect is part of the higher moral purpose of debate.

Reaching an Outcome to a Conflict.

A feature of debate, especially adjudicated debate, is that an outcome is reached. At the conclusion of the debate, the adjudicator decides upon and announces an outcome then the outcome is announced to all parties. So the outcome is an important feature of debate, and respect for that outcome is a high moral purpose to be served by ethical debaters.

Having turned the decision-making over to an external adjudicator indicates that such a process is better than the likely impasse that would result from the parties’ inability to make a decision. Thus, turning the decision-making over to an external adjudicator results in an outcome, and an outcome is better than making no decision at all.

So debaters should learn to respect the outcome of the debate, even if they are unable to agree with the decision itself. The choice to submit to an external adjudicator means that the decision made by the adjudicator is preferable to the inability of the debaters to decide by themselves. The ethical response is to respect the outcome as decided by the external adjudicator.

Thus, these four features (communicating with others, using arguments to resolve disagreements, turning the decision over to an adjudicator, and respecting the outcome of the adjudication) are critical to the process of the debate. Each of those features not only describes part of the activity of debate, but describes some aspect of debate’s high moral purpose.

The next section will identify nine guidelines that debaters can use to debate in an ethical and morally upstanding manner. Each of these nine guidelines is derived from one or more of the essential features described in this section.
Nine Guidelines for Developing a Code of Ethics in Debate

Each debater is responsible for the choices they make and the consequences of those choices. Each debater is responsible to act in ethical ways. Ethical choices do not apply only to the debating moment; an excellent debater also uses a code of ethics to guide actions taken during debate training, at tournaments, during debriefings, and in conversations with others about debates. Debaters can benefit from understanding how to engage ethical principles in these interpersonal circumstances, principles that also apply during formal debates.

The following nine guidelines can help debaters begin their work toward developing a strong, ethical code to guide them in their debate practices. Since these nine points represent only a beginning toward establishing ethical practices, debaters who advance past the novice stage will use references in this textbook to seek out many more ways to increase their understanding and mastery of ethics in debate.¹

1. Employ Ethical Guidelines for the Use of Evidence.

Many ethical standards regarding the use of evidence in debate are clear and virtually absolute. Debaters would agree, for example, that fabrication of evidence is absolutely and categorically unethical. Likewise, taking evidence out of context or selectively omitting significant segments of evidence to make it “fit” a chosen argument are also unethical practices. Choosing to exploit an opponent’s slip of the tongue as a way to support a certain argument degrades the debate and the debater who has chosen to do so. These kinds of unethical actions in regard to evidence seem clearly unacceptable to most debaters; these actions reduce the value of the debate and fail to uphold the important purposes of debate in a civil society.

Other ethical questions, however, are less easily answered, generate difficult questions about the tension between winning and truthfulness, and may need to be carefully considered in each case. For example,
- During a debate, should debaters acknowledge and accept evidence that does not support their own cases?
- During a debate, should debaters acknowledge and accept the weaknesses of their own evidence and argument?

If, for example, a team is confronted during a debate with evidence new to them, evidence that significantly belies their case, what ethical position does the team take? If they recognize their case has been badly damaged, do they acknowledge and accept the evidence anyway? Do they revise their case—a practice that likely will reduce their chances of winning the debate—or manufacture ways to move the focus of the debate away from the obvious flaw?

¹ See for instance, Hill and Leeman.; Johannesen.; Jonsen, and Stephen Toulmin; and Stafford.
Do they allow the discovery to move them away from the important principle of arguing for the greater good rather than the individual gain? Do they comply with whatever standard has been set by others on their school team or whatever standard is common in their cultural surroundings? In short, at what point does dodging this unexpected development—an action taken to serve the individual or team—begin to undermine the more elevated purpose of the debate, that is, to serve the civil good? Working out these questions to the benefit of both the debater and the debate may be a mark of a student moving toward a generative debate style.

Similarly, how does a team respond to reasoned argument from their opponents that points out weaknesses in their own evidence or in the arguments they have used? Do team members refuse to acknowledge what they now see and either change the debate focus or ignore the point? Do team members continue to argue for evidence they now believe to be inaccurate, outdated, or poorly sourced? Do they attempt to deflect the attention to this point? Do team members acknowledge the weaknesses or speak only to the strong points?

Individuals’ responses to these ethical issues likely will change and mature as debaters gain mastery and experience. Adhering to a strong ethical standard will assist these changes to support the valuable part debate can play in a society, helping debaters to remain true to the critical issues faced by societies rather than falling into a practice of serving a single individual’s needs. Each debater has a personal responsibility for developing and following a set of ethical standards that serves those high, civil needs. Regardless of the standards set by their school or their debating society, an debater’s ethical code should attempt to surpass the minimal standards of a group and seek to make choices about evidence that best serve the topic and the social need addressed by that topic.

2. **Employ Ethical Guidelines for Choosing Arguments and Reasoning Patterns.**

Effective debate depends on creating arguments from solid evidence but also focuses on logical reasoning. Good reasoning involves making sound arguments from evidence presented to support claims. Sometimes well-meaning debaters use fallacious reasoning, a topic dealt with at length in Chapter 21, but sometimes debaters intentionally use unethical reasoning. Fallacious reasoning occurs, for example, when a speaker draws inferences from inadequate or insufficient evidence, or when a speaker incorrectly or unknowingly draws inferences that do not relate to the evidence.

Unethical reasoning, on the other hand, occurs when the speaker first chooses a goal—for example, wishing to persuade the audience to use a certain type of toothpaste—and then goes about gathering and arranging any bits of evidence in any configuration to accomplish that persuasion. An incidence of unethical reasoning would occur if a toothpaste company argued that 9 out of 10 dentists agreed their brand would reduce cavities for people who used it. The evidence supporting their
claim would be that 9 out of 10 dentists agreed toothpastes containing fluoride would reduce cavities in users. Since their brand contained fluoride, the toothpaste company unethically construes the evidence to apply only to their brand, thereby convincing consumers their brand reduced cavities more than any other brand. The company’s actions would be unethical because they made the conscious choice to elevate the needs of the company—to make money—over the needs of consumers—to know they could have healthy teeth by using any one of many different toothpastes, even a brand that might be less expensive.

Notice in the above example that the claim is true and the evidence is correctly reported. The company took advantage of their ability to construe a connection between the evidence and their individual goal of making money to move the audience to take an action based on an inaccurate belief that only that brand had the “magical” ingredient. A debater trying to judge whether his or her own reasoning is or is not ethical will need to look farther than merely testing the veracity of the claim or evidence.

Unscrupulous arguers often use the argument that the evidence is “true” or the claim is “valid” as a way to justify their actions. To assess whether reasoning is ethical, a debater must question whether or not the reasoning arose organically from the evidence to the inference rather than having the reasoning concocted so it would connect selected facets of the evidence to an outcome advantageous to the arguer. Was the evidence gathered or arranged so it would serve a particular conclusion that served the individual arguer or did the conclusion arise from the nature of the evidence and thereby serve the civil good? Was the argument or reasoning selected to insure the audience would arrive at a conclusion beneficial to the debater but not necessarily encompassing all the audience might know? Is the audience given appropriate information in the reasoning to allow them to critically address the issue rather having information favorable only to the arguer?

Debaters also use unethical argument and reasoning in other ways, such as a means of evading the central clash in a debate. If a topic arises that debaters have not prepared for or feel uncertain about, speakers may resort to extended and sometimes meaningless haggling over definitions or terms to avoid addressing issues they find daunting. Ethical debaters do not demean their opponents in these cases, but simply continue to address the key elements to raise the debate to the highest interaction possible. Applying an ethical code to debate means elevating each argument and each reasoning pattern to a high standard.

3. Implement Mutual Equality

Mutual equality calls for debaters to consider teammates, opponents, adjudicators, audience members, and other interlocutors as equal participants in the discourse. Sometimes debaters develop attitudes of superiority that causes them to honor their own thoughts and conclusions over those of others. Recognizing that each individual
in the debate or exchange will experience the conversation from a different viewpoint, ethical debaters recognize and assume that each other person thinks, reasons, experiences, and verbalizes in a different way—even from within a different cultural or political paradigm—and that each way of processing exudes integrity and value: different, but equal in basic, inherent worth.

Opposing debaters who function with this code of ethics also practice mutual equality. They create supportive communication environments where hearing both sides of the issue and arguing the relative merits of one side or the other are more important than oppressing the other side and eradicating their opportunities to respond.

A presumption of equality does not suggest creating a collection of people who will act and react in the same way, nor does it suggest each person will hold the same values as the next. However, a presumption of equality expects that each various voice in the debate will be heard without interruption, attended with earnest and honorable intent, given space and time to express itself, and afforded a mutual respect across the debate.

Mutual equality does not eclipse disagreement. Equal characters can clash animatedly in debate. The more often people on opposite sides of an issue can create a climate of mutual equality, the higher the quality of debate that ensues and the higher the quality of outcomes for decisions about the issues being discussed. The differences between people and their ideas are featured and examined rather than oppressed; mutual equality fosters climates in which diverse voices and varied perceptions constitute the social discussion network and inform that society’s dynamic decisions.

Mutual equality also extends to relationships debaters develop with team members. Toward understanding others’ experiences, ethical debaters benefit themselves and their teams by

- Choosing to practice with others when that practice can be mutually beneficial rather than when it only helps improve the debater’s skills. If, for example, an experienced debater refuses to practice with an inexperienced debater (either verbally or by nonverbal signals such as gesture, tone of voice, facial expressions, etc.), he or she demonstrates superiority rather than searches for opportunities to learn through the experience. With that single act, the debater denigrates both the other debater and the team as a whole. The debater also introduces a division among team members, indicating some members to be more valuable than others. Debating with various partners in practice rounds can improve the team as a whole and all participating debaters, including the more experienced speakers.

- Choosing debater partners for tournaments based on what is best for the team as a whole rather than what benefits a single debater demonstrates mutual...
equality. Team members can discuss together what kinds of partnering arrangements might best serve the team with each tournament.

- Choosing to socialize with team members of all levels of experience generates an environment of mutual equality. For instance, holding parties that include everyone rather than a segment of the team or having lunch with a range of team members rather than a constant enclave provides multiple avenues for voices to be heard.

Ethical debaters practicing mutual equality emphasize essential listening habits, using perception checking during informal conversation as a means of understanding the particular points offered by other conversant. In formal debates, ethical debaters listen closely to speakers, learn to take effective and sometimes copious notes to insure accuracy, and avoid conferring with their partners in ways that interfere with the presentation by the current speaker. Ethical debaters extend to others in the debate the same dignity, opportunity, regard, and disposition they hope to receive themselves. Such a climate of mutual equality provides a rich environment for an excellent debate.

4. **Use a Voice of Reason; Avoid Sensationalism.**

Ethical debaters work to match the tone of the debate to its high purpose. Using reason as the norm—rather than emotional outburst or physical force—brings the debate to its most elevated and functional form. Speakers on both sides of the issue present reason and arguments for clearly established claims and conclusions. All debaters work to add value and quality to the interchange, thereby stimulating a vibrant and generative discussion.

Debaters who resort to hyperbole and overstatement cause the debate to lose momentum and, more importantly, lose quality and value. Avoiding exaggeration both during the debate and in reflection afterwards can help debaters learn the heights of intellectual analysis and the depths of personal investment that can be reached regarding some topics in some instances. Given the larger purpose of debate as a social tool for mitigating thorny civil problems, learning to speak with a voice of reason without resorting to exaggeration or embellishment can help debaters be lifelong contributors to their world, their cultural groups, and people in their personal relationships.

5. **Interact Respectfully With Others Before, During, and After Debates**

An ethical debater understands the value of each debate participant and demonstrates respect for them in word, manner and action. Participants in debates include debate partners, other school team members, members of teams from other schools or
positions, adjudicators, audience members, observers, coaches, and tournament officials. An ethical debater also treats debate outcomes with respect, even when he or she disagrees with the decision.

Before the debate, students work at their respective schools with others on their team. Attitudes such as racism, sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, or denigration because of economic status or physical abilities have no place in debate or in debate practice. Excellent debaters recognize that their practice time prepares them for the vital social contribution of helping to unravel difficult civic questions using means that avoid violence and oppression. Toward that end, excellent debaters develop good habits of avoiding divisive attitudes, working toward upholding the ethics of debate even as they practice and interact with their own team.

In those practices, attention might be focused on how respect is communicated. While some students mouth respectful words, their nonverbal signals speak disrespect and disregard. Scholars of communication explain that if verbal messages are contradicted by nonverbal signals, the nonverbal signals will be believed. Therefore, a debater who says, “Yes, sir. I see your point,” in sullen, derogatory tones may argue that he or she, the debater, has shown respect through their response.

An ethical debater, however, knows his or her nonverbal presentation and verbal response must concur. Developing an authentic respect for debate, debaters, judges, coaches, and all participants remains the most powerful way to communicate that attitude to others because the nonverbal signals emanate from the values held by the speaker. As a result, a debater who values respect will nonverbally communicate that attitude.

During debates, then, debaters can conduct themselves in a climate of respect and regard. The act of refuting a person’s ideas does not mean refuting the person. In fact, the very act of refuting a person’s ideas shows respect for that person as an equal in the debate. When a debater deftly refutes an idea but clearly shows respect for the other speaker, he or she not only operates in a climate of respect and regard but creates such a climate also.

The problems of respect arise when the debater turns away from the clash of ideas and attacks the speaker instead. Name calling is one form of disrespect: “Only a complete radical could make such an argument.” The speaker has lost the thread of the idea and has turned the argument onto the character of the opposing speaker. Another form of personal attack is deriding a person’s credibility: “Your argument demonstrates your complete ignorance about this subject.” Disrespect for the person also comes in tone of voice or careless gesture. These kinds of remarks and actions have no place in debate. They reflect the speaker’s inability to stay focused on the topic of the debate.

During the debate itself debaters also can show respect for the form, the intent, and the function of debate in a society. Speaking tactfully and with high regard to
partners, other debaters, the adjudicator, and audience members demonstrates a debater’s understanding of their important role in dealing with society’s pressing problems. Laughing inappropriately during another’s speech or raising eyebrows with a partner as the other team makes their presentations indicates debaters have more work to do to develop respect for their craft.

Debaters may display respect during the debate and then change their actions as they leave the debate. As they talk with others about opponents or adjudicators, they may make derogatory remarks freely. They may even make derogatory remarks to the adjudicators. Debaters can remember that respecting the outcome of the debate is different from agreeing the outcome was the best one. Also, debaters can reframe their thinking to recognize the nature of debate and the need for an adjudicator.

Adjudicators exist because debate participants were not able to come to a decision on their own. In court hearings, for example, litigants hire professionals to argue their situations to a judge or jury after the litigants have been unsuccessful at settling the matter with each other on their own. Debaters, therefore, need to be prepared for a wide variety of adjudicators, all of whom have been engaged to listen to arguments and determine a decision. Since each adjudicator is different, an excellent debater must learn the nuances and complexities of fitting an argument to an audience or adjudicator. If the adjudicator decides against the debater, the debater can learn a great deal by discussing that decision with the adjudicator.

If the debater is arguing to the adjudicator that he or she should have made a different decision, the debater does not understand the debate process. The debater holds the responsibility to make arguments that persuade the audience or adjudicator to their point of view. If the adjudicator did not come to that conclusion, the debater was not successful in his or her efforts. At that point, the debater can interview the adjudicator to listen to their reasons for their decision.

Ethical debaters know that the purpose for the conversation with an adjudicator is for the debater to learn how the adjudicator reasoned; that information might help the debater at another time in a similar situation to choose a different argument or a different reasoning pathway to accomplish their persuasion. A debater who argues that the judge was “wrong” understand neither the nature of persuasion nor his or her role in debate and misses the chance to add new insights into the sophisticated and artful process of choosing arguments to accomplish persuasion.

6. **Champion Clashes of Ideas and Eschew Personal Attacks.**

Partnered with the attitude of respect is the intent to engage the debate by confronting opposing ideas rather than confronting other speakers as opponents. Debaters can strive to determine the most critical ideas that emerge as the debate proceeds and then clarify the points where opposing ideas clash. Having identified the clash, debaters
can expand the conversation by presenting reasoning and arguments that privilege one position over the other.

In advertising, political arenas, and sometimes in personal situations, the conflict of ideas can deteriorate into personal attacks and character assaults. A common response to a personal attack is to react with another personal attack. Ethical debaters learn to deflect such attacks, ignore them, or use their time to more fully develop their discussions regarding the clash of ideas, emphasizing, of course, their own reasons for preferring their positions rather than other positions.

Students who encounter personal attacks during debates in these learning situations can use those opportunities to improve their skills at derailing personal assaults and returning the debate to the critical issues. Since the higher purpose of debate involves nonviolently finding reasoned ways to ameliorate contentious social problems, ethical debaters need to develop a repertoire of skills for disconnecting the lure of devolving into personal grievances toward refocusing on the social need being addressed by the debate. In that larger picture, the personal grievances of individuals in the debate have far less value than the larger, social needs in question.


Simply engaging the clash of ideas does not fulfill the best qualities of debate; engaging that clash by searching out the most critical, most meaningful, and most difficult points of clash marks an excellent debate. After such a debate, audiences and adjudicators—as well as debaters themselves—can walk away with better understandings of the issues, of the various positions regarding the issues, of possible responses to or policy changes regarding those issues, and perhaps even new ideas about how to engage this social need.

An ethical debater strives to use debate to achieve these ends. Achieving skills to accomplish an excellent debate takes years of practice, dedication to excellence, a strong ethical code to guide the art of debate, and a deep understanding of what such achievement can mean for a world struggling with cultural difference, political powers, religious diversity, and economic disparity. An ethical debater strives for a very different experience than does a debater whose intention is to win at any cost and in any way. Students who take on the responsibility to debate in ethical ways provide an invaluable service to their own lives, their communities, their cultures, and their world.

8. Take advantage of educational debate opportunities to hone ethical practices into authentic, pervasive standards that operate for all debate activities
Few people will experience the privilege of attending college where they have
multiple opportunities in debate tournaments to practice the art of debating. Students
who attend these tournaments and learn about argumentation, debate, and civil
conversation will profit for the remainder of their lives from this knowledge and the
skills they develop. Their contributions will benefit their families, the communities,
their cultures, and their worlds. For these reasons, ethical debate students will practice
earnestly in each tournament, noting to themselves points they learned from their last
experiences, key features they learned from their classes, notes given to them by
adjudicators or coaches, and new skills they wish to initiate.

Excellent debaters also will use their new skills in other arenas of their lives, being
careful to adjust demeanors to appropriately fit conversation situations. For example,
a debater who learns the value of connecting evidence to claim may not use those
formal terms in a personal conversation, but certainly could make his or her
arguments clearer and more focused on issues in private conversations.

While debaters will need to study the differences between arguing with or without an
adjudicator, these experiences in the educational setting can benefit them outside the
debate environment. Students who seek job opportunities or who have conferences
with their superiors at work will find these ethical practices useful. Since ethical
debaters do not employ superiority or personal evaluation as facets of conflict
assessment, they can fashion their skills to fit personal and family communication as
well. Ethical debating practices support interactive, dynamic conversations, which in
turn, promote healthy relationships.

For these reasons, students can recognize the unusual opportunities provided by
debate tournaments to experiment with argument styles and means for directing the
debate in important directions. They can practice various skills, trying several
different means to intended ends. The tournament experiences provide a wide range
of possibilities for each debater as they develop their craft.

9. **Debate as a Global Citizen, Active and Participatory, Toward Generatively
   Embracing Vital Issues**

An excellent debater—an ethical debater—knows that at all times he or she is a
global citizen working alongside other citizens with the intent to live a good life and
provide a good life for others. Debate provides one of very few avenues for healthy,
productive, and generative reaction to the myriad conflicts that must arise in the
bursting mass of humans living together on the earth. Excellent debate, ethical
debate, helps illuminate the points of conflict among such a throng of people, allows
for people to voice their positions and perspectives, and also promotes a clear side-
by-side picture of how different people experience and think about different
problems. As a tool for human development, debate offers possibilities for people to
use intellect and speech rather than emotion and weapons as ways to progress through
differences.
Ethical debaters, understanding themselves as citizens of the world whose actions and interactive participation with one another can proceed with reasoning and thoughtfulness, generate growth and development. Ethical debaters grow an authentic value for reasoned debate that seeks to include multiple voices in an intelligent, spirited, and active exploration of the best human responses to contention in local and global issues. As these debaters conduct themselves within their code of ethics, they emerge as vital forces toward developing a just, responsible, and sustainable world.

Summary

To debate well means to debate ethically. Philosophers from both China and the United States write about the importance of using morality and good conduct in debate and in speaking. Debaters choose their behaviors both at debate tournaments and in debate activities and can develop a code of ethics as a guide to improving their debate demeanor.

Ethics and debate involve issues of use of evidence, reasoning, and arguments. Blatant disregard for ethical treatment of evidence, for example, poses fewer questions than more complicate issues that arise from the juxtaposition of the goal of winning a debate (sometimes at any cost) and the goal of authentically addressing a social need through reasoned interaction. Students can strengthen their ethical themes through thoughtful discussion and individual case contemplation. Debaters can expect to improve their ethical positions through experience and mastery of skill.

Choices about arguments and reasoning patterns also confront choices between winning at all costs or accomplishing a thoughtful and useful debate. “True” statements do not necessarily constitute ethical statements because speakers can selectively sort through evidence to persuade an audience through implication. Ethical debaters use a high standard of elevated, straightforward clash of ideas as the guide to ethical use of argument and reasoning.

Establishing mutual equality entails working with a variety of team members, listening to speakers who present opposing ideas, and take notes efficiently. Using a voice of reason rather than sensationalism, ethical debaters also will strive to demonstrate respect in word, manner, and action. Respect accorded to adjudicators does not preclude debaters from conversing closely with them about decisions. Results of these conversations can provide debaters with new and useful information about argument and reasoning choices in like situations.

Ethical debaters seek a clash of ideas in the debate, not a clash of personalities. Working to create those clashes at the most critical points of the conflict generates useful and provocative debates. Students can use periodic debate tournaments to grow, hone, and practice their ethical skills. As a global citizen faced with the predictable conflicts that will arise from the diversity of people inhabiting the earth, an ethical debater will operate as vital force toward finding means to avoid violence as a solution to those conflicts, working toward dealing with contradictions through thoughtful means.
Discussion Questions For Chapter 2

• Who are each of the four essential features of debate important to the nine guidelines for ethical debate

• Why is “an excellent, ethical debater” a redundancy?

• How are the points made by Aristotle, Quintilianus, and Mencius alike? How are they different?

• What is the distinction between the topics or arguments in a debate and the speakers in the debate?

• Why do debates sometimes migrate away from the topic and toward the speakers?

• Often debaters are called “opponents.” How is the term, “opponent,” problematic for ethical debaters? How might that term contribute to character attacks during debates? What other term might be more appropriate?

• How might the use of evidence be clearly and virtually absolutely unethical? Why are they unethical?

• How is equality signaled in a debate? What nonverbal cues might indicate one debater seems to perceive themselves as superior to another? Is that message about the issue or the speaker?

• Why do people use sensationalism? If it works, why not use it?

• Relate experiences with adjudicators that generated difficulty. How might respect be shown in those circumstances?

• Is everyone a global citizen? Why would it be important to a debater to position himself or herself as a global citizen? What if the issue were a local issue? Are local issues related to global issues? Global issues to local issues?

• What problems arise if debaters choose to be unethical or not as ethical as they could be?