Cognitive Systems 303 — DEBATES

A. GENERAL FORMAT

1. Debate teams

Each team will consist of 2-3 people. The list of students in each team will be announced beforehand and will be available at the COGS 303 website.

Note 1: Debate *teams* are not to be confused with discussion *groups*
- these change at different rates

Note 2: Only one person can make a presentation for each part of the debate. Each person must make *at least* one presentation. Please think ahead about who will do what.

2. Debate topics

A list of potential debate topics will be presented in class before the debate. Items on this list will be discussed, and a final set of topics voted on. Teams will send in their preferences as to topics.

3. Matching of teams to topics

The TA will match teams with topics so as to optimize the likelihood that each team will get the topic of their choice. However, it cannot be guaranteed that each team will always get their first choice.

4. Format of the debates

A coin toss will determine the position of the teams (for or against the resolution).

Debate will start with the team in favour of the resolution (Team A).
- Team A - opening constructive remarks (3 min) + 30 seconds extra (for definitions)
- Team B – opening constructive remarks (3 min)

    <Break for 90 seconds, while teams consider>
- Team A - rebuttal / further constructive points (3 min)
- Team B - rebuttal / further constructive points (3 min)

    <Break for 30 seconds, while teams consider>
- Team A - crossfire (2 minutes; questions maximum one minute)
- Team B - crossfire (2 minutes; questions maximum one minute)

    <Break for 30 seconds, while teams consider>
- Team A - closing remarks / summary (2 min)
- Team B - closing remarks / summary (2 min)
- Evaluation by class
- (if time): Questions by class on **directions that could have been explored**

This will be followed by a discussion of the interesting points raised during the debate.

Content

1. Constructive remarks
    a. State the topic, and your team's position.
    b. Make your case—positive reasons only.
    c. Disambiguate / operationalize terms as needed – motivate your definitions.

2. Rebuttal
    a. Explain why the other team's arguments are wrong.
    b. Provide additional positive reasons.
    c. If need be, explain why their definitions are poor.

3. Crossfire

4. Closing Remarks
    a. Summarize your position. Take the best points raised (positive and negative) and build them into a solid case.
    b. **No new constructive arguments in the closing remarks.**

Points of Order

1. **No personal attacks**
    *   Refer only to "honourable opponents" (or equivalent)
    *   Otherwise, anyone can call a "point of order" at any time, and have remark struck from the record. **Offending team will be penalized for style.**

2. **No pens**
    *   Pens are construed as weapons. Anyone can call a "point of order" at any time, and have it removed.

3. **No unreasonable definitions**
    *   If an unreasonable definition is given, a challenge can be called at any time, and a new definition proposed. Alternatives will be voted upon. **If the challenge is sustained (more than half the votes support it), the offending team will be penalized for style; if defeated, the challenging team will be penalized for style.**

Definitions must:

a) have a clear and logical link to the motion – the average person would accept it.
b) not short-circuit the issue. E.g., you cannot define "consciousness" as something that by definition cannot exist on a machine.
c) not be time-set. The definition must allow the debate to take place in the present, and not in the past or future.
d) be fair. The definition cannot be so narrow that it would restrict debate to topics that most participants have little knowledge of.

5. Evaluation: Team marks

Each team will be marked out of 12 by the professor, the TA, and the students of the class based on the quality of the debate:
- 6 marks for style + 6 marks for content

Students will assign an additional mark out of 1 to the winning team (must be either 0 or 1).
- Team assigned extra mark depending on fraction of class that believes they won (e.g., if 70% believe they won the debate, team gets 0.7, their opponents 0.3).

Team mark for each debate =

$0.5 \times P$ P (out of 12) is median mark assigned by **prof and TA**
$0.5 \times S$ S (out of 12) is median mark assigned by **students**

6. Evaluation: Participation marks

The mark for each student will be derived from their team mark in a way that is determined by the members of your team. This will be done via a **participation mark**, which reflect the *value of your contributions to **your team.***

At the end of the term, ***each team*** will send an email to the TA, with "participation marks" as the header. The body should contain the marks for all group members, based on their participation to the debates:
- this is to be expressed as a number greater than 0 and can be greater than 100.
- the total number of marks for the team members must add up to 100 * n, where n is the number of people in the team.

The participation mark (out of 100) will be used as a **multiplier** against the total team mark for the debates:

Individual mark = **(Participation mark / 100) x Team mark**
- *Little or no participation in teamwork will result in a low mark.*
- *Extra high participation can result in a mark greater than the team mark.*

Note 1: **Any participation mark not submitted by the deadline will be assigned 100.**

Note 2: To avoid misunderstandings, it is recommended that each team discuss how much work is reasonably expected to get a maximum mark ***right at the beginning***. ***Make sure that everyone agrees.***

If no consensus can be reached, individuals may be asked to submit minority reports, and may be asked to write an essay on the topic of each disputed debate session.

B. DEBATE TIPS

1) Constructive Remarks: rules of engagement; fair definitions; ball analogy

- Ball-pushing analogy: pushing the proverbial ball to the other team's side
    - Typical case: pro has placed ball in the middle
    - Truism: pro has placed ball slightly closer to con; pro is at slight disadvantage, but it is not impossible for con to argue back (e.g., The sky is blue)
    - Tautology: there is no ball (bad)
- Definitions should place the ball in the middle—room to move, look at different perspectives
    - Any changes in the location of the ball should arise from arguments, rather than the definitions
    - Do not try and let the definitions do all the work
    - If you can come up with definitions that you can use to argue the position either way, the definitions are probably fair
    - *Example*: Tautological definitions
- Unpacking ambiguous terms from the debate question: paraphrase the debate question in a way to render it unambiguous against the definitions that you are proposing

** Teams are encouraged to get together to discuss definitions before the debate begins. **

2) Rebuttal and Conclusion: importance of underlying principles

- Avoiding example wars
    - Explicit connections should be made between examples and the issue at hand
    - Refuting an example with a counterexample only leads to more counterexamples, rather than unpack the underlying logic
    - Example: Citing facts
- Importance of reinforcing own position as well as invalidating the opponent's rebuttal
    - Example: Getting lost
- Finding the underlying principles
    - What are the opponents actually saying?
    - What is the opponents' goal? (cf. Marr's computational theory)
    - What values are being traded off? (cf. Browne & Keeley)
    - What are the assumptions holding up the principles?

3) Tips for Upcoming Debate
- Note-taking (summarize, rather than replicate)
  - Example: table format, tree format (Debate 101)
- Pitfalls of over-preparation (less is more)
- Importance of communicating ideas clearly
  - SEXI principle (State, EXplain, Illustrate)

Example: Cognitive science has shown that humans are irrational.

State: Humans are irrational.

EXplain: Rationality is a feature of clear-headed, logical thinking. However, people have a tendency to rely on emotional intuitions and pattern recognition—"gut feelings"— in situations where they are inappropriate.

Illustrate: For example, in a set of randomly chosen people, what is the likelihood that there is a pair sharing the same birthday? In a pool of 23 people, the likelihood is 50%; for 57 people, the likelihood is almost 99%. This goes against human intuition, which severely underestimates the likelihood—despite what probability theory tells us. Indeed, humans are very bad at solving problems that involve step-by-step rational thinking—at least, without extensive training.