

Resolved: Objective morality exists.

Prior to hearing these debates, I side with the _____ (Aff/Neg).

Make sure to recognize your personal bias and remove it from the evaluation of the round.

Your Role

Your most important responsibility is to fill out the ballot. There are six things to fill in on the ballot: 1) The logistical tournament info at the top, including the Aff and Neg codes provided by the debaters (note: this is the only information you should fill out prior to the end of the round), 2) The best case you could make for why the aff wins the debate you heard and any comments. 3) The best case you could make for why the neg won the debate you heard and any comments. 4) The reason the debater you chose to win did the better debating, 5) the side that contestant represented and their code (at the top), and 6) Your name, verifying that the debaters ran arguments about the topic.

Another task as a judge is to take the online post-tournament survey.

During the debate, a judge should keep track of the arguments being made. Organized notes of the important points you thought were raised during the round will help you complete your ballot and may help you make a decision about who was better at debating.

Students are allowed and encouraged to time themselves, but you may also choose to time various parts of the debate, particularly the Question Segments and each student's preparation time.

The Debate

Each round features 2-4 students: one side representing the affirmative and one representing the negative. Each side gives four speeches, and there are two periods of questions. If students are competing in pairs they will alternate speeches. Students will attempt to prove or disprove the statement: "Resolved: Objective morality exists."

Affirmative Constructive – 5 minutes

Negative Constructive – 5 minutes

Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rebuttal – 4 minutes

Negative Rebuttal – 4 minutes

Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Consolidation – 3 minutes

Negative Consolidation – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rationale – 3 minutes

Negative Rationale – 3 minutes

Each side has 3 minutes of preparation time during the debate, to be used in increments of their choice. For example, a student may elect to prepare for 1 minute for their rebuttal speech, 1 minute for their consolidation speech, and 1 minute for their final speech. Students may also prepare "for free" during each other's preparation time.

Topic Primer

This debate addresses one of the perennial questions at the intersection of philosophy, theology, and science. The question of moral objectivity is the question of whether there are correct answers to moral questions, or facts about morality. What would a moral fact be, or what would it take to make a moral claim true? Moral facts could be about the will of God, about natural law, about what reasons we have as rational creatures, about benefits and harms, and so on. Some people think moral facts would automatically give us motivations to act, if we saw them correctly. Debaters should discuss what it means for something to be objective, as well as address background assumptions about what exists.

One popular negative argument is about moral disagreement. The fact that people disagree about morality is taken as evidence that there are no facts about morality. The affirmative may respond by arguing that there are facts, but morality is hard to understand, our thinking is distorted by self-interest, and not everyone shares relevant beliefs about relevant non-moral facts.

Another related idea is that you cannot prove that a moral claim is true or false. Both sides should think about their standards of proof and evidence. We can give excellent reasons why something may be true, but not all will be convinced. Does that mean we are wrong? If disagreement makes us doubt moral objectivity, how is moral disagreement different from disagreement in the sciences, which doesn't usually make us skeptical of the existence of right answers? Another form of the argument from disagreement involves other cultures. Cultural relativism in this context could mean that because different cultures have different moral views, that may disprove the idea of objectivity.

The affirmative may argue that a lot of what we ordinarily say and think about morality seems to presuppose correct answers. We argue, we agonize over tough moral choices, we get mad when we're treated badly, we criticize others for bad views or actions. Right answers to moral questions can exist without being universally agreed upon.

You may hear these arguments and more! Keep an open mind and enjoy the debates!