

# Political Theory

## - General Advice

The rest of the guides in this series will deal with specific arguments that you might employ in debates about political theory, this one is designed to be a quick and general reference on the way you may want to argue, regardless of what the individual arguments you use are.

- **Prove every step:** This goes for any debate but it's very obvious in political theory debates when you don't do this. You can't just assert that equality is a great thing or that we have a right to free speech, these are precisely the things that are being questioned. Tell me in simple step by step fashion why what you say is true.
- **Have a core principle (or principles) for your side:** What is at the heart of your argument? Do you care about pragmatic outcomes, do you care about the inherent rightness or wrongness of particular actions or are you arguing for certain liberties or rights? If you have strong core principle(s) to tie your case back to it will keep your argument on track and prevent you from becoming distracted by side issues.
- **Go easy on the practicalities:** This doesn't mean forget them altogether, if the debate is about implementing a particular kind of state healthcare it's perfectly legitimate to argue that this specific kind of healthcare sucks, even if you agree with the general principle of providing it. However in general a rousing argument about abstract philosophical ideas will beat quibbling over the bill. If the proposition have shown that we have a concrete moral duty to provide universal healthcare and you're still arguing about doctor shortages you lose the debate, it's that simple.
- **Don't name drop:** Also wise advice for life in general I think. You get marks for being able to present the arguments not knowing who said them. Standing up and saying "J.S. Mill said we should all have free speech" carries precisely as much weight as standing up and saying "I think we should all have free speech", i.e. not very much. Presenting his argument step by step on the other hand is precisely what we are looking for.
- **Think strategically:** What are the other side trying to prove? If at core they're arguing for equality then that's what you need to hit, don't waste time rebutting their assertions about how it's best achieved, go straight for the philosophical jugular. Show me why equality isn't something you're obliged to provide or even why it isn't a good thing at all and you've basically knocked out their whole case. Equally you need to build up and then protect the core of your own argument.
- **Be smart:** Original thinking beats regurgitated analysis most of the time. You don't have to know what the conventional philosophical response to a particular argument is every time. Use your head and think about what the other side is saying, what assumptions they're making and how you can undermine them.