

Comments on the debate

1. As best I can tell, George never understood what the argument I was offering was. In his first speech he seemed to assume that my idea of an economic argument was “this increases economic efficiency, hence is good.” It is possible that he got that idea from something I said in the previous debate, which I don't have a record of, because I do sometimes argue for economic efficiency as a proxy for maximum utility, but that isn't what I was doing in this debate. As I tried to make clear in my first speech my argument was not that everyone agreed on objectives, let alone that they were all utilitarians, but that a libertarian society was enough better than the alternatives to make it better for almost everyone judged by their (differing) values. George kept claiming that I thought everyone wanted the same sort of society when my claim was more nearly that everyone would want about the same sort of society if they agreed with me about what the outcomes of different sorts of societies would be — and that is an issue in economics, not in moral philosophy.

George seemed surprised by my agreeing, later on, that economics could not establish normative statements. I had said that, explicitly, in my first speech. My argument was not that economics by itself could show you what you should support but that economics combined with the normative beliefs you already held could show you that.

2. Reading over the debate, it occurred to me that in the parts that involved the effectiveness of the different sorts of arguments George and I were imagining very different contexts. He was asking what sort of argument would persuade someone to fight, perhaps die, for liberty. I was asking what sort of argument would persuade someone who didn't believe in laissez-faire that he should.

3. In his response to Russell Turpin, George claimed to be able to solve Hume's is/ought problem, to have a way of deriving normative conclusions from positive facts without any normative assumptions. He never explained how. Can someone point me at the argument somewhere in his, or someone else's, writing?

4. In the section at the end where we were questioning each other, George kept saying that he didn't know how many Nazis or fascists would support Nazism or fascism if they knew what its consequences would be. He was correct that for me to show that my argument was true, I needed an answer to that question. It didn't seem to occur to him that for him to show that my argument was false, he needed one.

[Video](#) of the debate. [Text](#) of the debate.