

The Ideological Turing Test



In preparing for debates, it is helpful to consider both sides of the argument. A strong debater will want to be familiar with the strongest arguments of the opposition, in order to be able to respond to it effectively.

It is tempting to resort to weak or exaggerated characterizations of an opponent's position, in order to make it easier to refute. This is an example of a "straw man" argument. A straw man is weak and not real, and so knocking him down is not really a victory.

One way to measure whether or not you are able to respond to an opponent's actual argument is to attempt to pass the "Ideological Turing Test." This is based on the original Turing Test, which was created by Alan Turing in 1950, and deals with artificial intelligence, like a computer. To pass the Turing Test, a computer must be able to convince a neutral human observer that it is human (or, at least, indistinguishable from a human) by the way it responds.

The Ideological Turing Test extends this idea to humans and their ideologies/viewpoints. To pass the Ideological Turing Test, a person would need to be able to summarize an opposing side's arguments sufficiently well that a neutral person could not distinguish whether the summary had been written by a person who agreed or disagreed with the position. Ideally, you would be able to summarize the opposing position well enough that a person on the opposing side might guess that you agreed with the position.

If you can do this for both sides of a controversial issue, you will be sure to address the most persuasive aspects of the competing views and to have grappled deeply with the subject before forming your own argument.