

superiority over anyone who disagrees with them, and knows and understands less about whatever it was they disagreed on in the first place. Rather like Alex and Ayesha.

Let's rewind.

Imagine if, instead of shouting at Alex, Ayesha just tells him what she didn't like about what he said or did, and why. Imagine Alex listens to what Ayesha says, carefully. Imagine he then explains why he said or did what she didn't like, and why he thought it was the right thing to say or do. Imagine Ayesha listens to him, carefully, before explaining why she disagrees with him. Imagine Alex listens to her disagreement, before responding, calmly and reasonably, with his own point of view. Maybe Ayesha persuades Alex. Maybe Alex persuades Ayesha. Or maybe they just agree to differ on this one thing, and carry on being friends, carry on liking each other, carry on enjoying each other's company, carry on doing stuff together, carry on respecting each other. Maybe even respecting each other more.

Have you ever had an argument like that?

I hope so. Arguments like that actually bring friends closer.

For three and a half years after the EU referendum, Britain was engaged in the first kind of argument, about Brexit (see Because 6), both sides shouting at each other, both thinking they're right and the other side was stupid, or ignorant, or evil, neither side listening. The United States (at the time I'm writing) is doing much the same about President Trump and his policies. This doesn't make either of those countries a nice place to live; nor does it help anyone to get anything done. It could be better than this. It should be better than this. Shouldn't it?

What has debating got to do with this?

Actually (you won't be surprised to hear) quite a lot.

We'll go more into how debates are judged, how it's decided who won and who lost and why, in Chapter 8, How To Win a Debate. However, I can tell you this now. Debating is a competitive activity - sometimes fiercely competitive - and you should always go into a debate trying to win. But it has rules.

In a debate, if you shout at the other side, you'll lose. If you refuse to listen to them, you'll lose. If you accuse them of being bad people for disagreeing with you, you'll lose. If you call them names, you'll lose. If you make no attempt to understand why they're saying what they're saying, you'll lose. If your speech is

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the length of a social media post, you'll lose. If your only form of argument is to keep repeating the same thing because you are absolutely certain it is true, you'll lose. And if you are incapable of seeing the world from any point of view other than your own, you'll lose every debate in which you have to argue a case you don't agree with - i.e. about half of them.

On the other hand, if you keep yourself thoroughly informed about what is going in the world, making sure you get your news not only from sources you agree with, you'll win. If you take the trouble to understand both, or all, sides of a question, you'll win. If you listen to those who disagree with you - really listen, until you understand why they're saying what they're saying - you'll win. If you construct your arguments carefully and thoroughly, brick by brick, taking nothing for granted, constantly questioning your own assumptions, you'll win. If you focus on facts and arguments, not people, you'll win. And if you treat the people you debate with respectfully, as opponents, not enemies, you'll win.

What's more, you'll be a much nicer person to be around.

Imagine a world in which everyone - especially people in public life - behaved in the way a successful debater behaves. Wouldn't it be a much nicer, safer, more civilised world? And (just as important) wouldn't it be better run? Wouldn't better decisions get made, if they were only made after the kind of careful, balanced deliberation debating makes you engage in?

One of the reasons I am so passionate about debating, and have devoted so much of my life to promoting it amongst young people, is because I sincerely believe that it can change the world for the better.

It might not seem like it now, but it won't be too long before you and people your age will be in charge. If you can put into practice what you learn from debating in the way you run the world, it will be a much better place.

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