

The Big Ideas

In this chapter we'll be learning about different ways of seeing the world, and how the clash between them is behind many debates.

'Of course people should be able to hire whomever they want for a job.'

'Of course the government should provide free health care and education.'

'Of course anybody should be allowed to live in any country they want.'

I hope you've realised by now that there are almost no 'of courses.' That's pretty much the point of debating; almost everything is up for discussion and disagreement, almost nothing is ever finally settled. And yet, it's surprising how often people assume that their way of seeing the world is the only possible way, and that anyone who disagrees with them is either evil or stupid. That's usually because they haven't examined the assumptions behind their beliefs. Once you examine the assumptions behind your beliefs, you will soon see that they are just that, assumptions rather than absolute truths, and that there are almost always opposite, and equally valid, assumptions opposing them.

What are the assumptions behind the 'of courses' above?

'Of course people should be able to hire whomever they want for a job.'

Freedom to do what you want is more important than freedom from unfair treatment.

'Of course the government should provide free health care and education.'

Providing the necessities of life is the responsibility of the state, not the individual.

'Of course anybody should be allowed to live in any country they want.'

Diversity is a higher good than stability.

Any of those assumptions could be switched around to make the opposite case. Suddenly, there's no 'of course'. That's one of the (many) great things about debating; it makes you question everything.

So, in this chapter, we're going to be learning about three of the most important Big Ideas. Big Ideas are the fundamental issues which lie deep below debate motions. If you can understand what Big Ideas are and how they work, you will see the motion in a new way, and you will also be able to take control of the debate and

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