

Judging Big Questions

Resolved: Objective morality exists.

Prior to hearing these debates, I side with the _____ (Aff/Neg).

Make sure to recognize your personal bias and remove it from the evaluation of the round.

Your Role

There may be space for you to enter tournament information (date, location) and students' identifying codes at the top of the ballot. This can be done before the debate begins.

During the debate, a judge should keep track of the arguments being made. Organized notes of the important points you thought were raised during the round will help you complete your ballot and may help you make a decision about who was better at debating.

Students are allowed and encouraged to time themselves, but you may also choose to time various parts of the debate, particularly the Question Segments and each student's preparation time.

After the debate is over, complete the ballot by writing: 1) The best case you could make for why the affirmative wins the debate you heard and any comments. 2) The best case you could make for why the negative won the debate you heard and any comments. 3) The reason the debater you chose to win did the better debating. Mark which side you picked to win!

The Debate

Each round features two sides: one representing the affirmative and one representing the negative. Each side gives four speeches, and there are three periods of questions. Students will attempt to prove or disprove the statement: "Resolved: On balance, societies benefit from religious belief and practice."

Affirmative Constructive – 5 minutes
Negative Constructive – 5 minutes
Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rebuttal – 4 minutes
Negative Rebuttal – 4 minutes
Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Consolidation – 3 minutes
Negative Consolidation – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rationale – 3 minutes
Negative Rationale – 3 minutes

Each side has 3 minutes of preparation time during the debate, to be used in increments of their choice. For example, a student may elect to prepare for 1 minute for their rebuttal speech, 1 minute for their consolidation speech, and 1 minute for their final speech. Students may also prepare "for free" during each other's preparation time.

Topic Primer

The topic asks debaters to argue whether or not objective morality exists. At its simplest, this means the affirmative will argue that objective morality does exist while the negative will argue it does not, or that it is subjective. This topic is massive and covers a question that humans have debated about for centuries and has an impact on every field of study whether it be philosophy or science. The main question underlying the topic is whether or not some things are always morally right or always morally wrong and how can we prove or persuade others of that?

For many who hear the topic, the first arguments that arise are often arguments against the statement. In society, we often hear about people doing what is right for them or that what is right in one place is incorrect or immoral in another with the most common example being different countries or cultures. There are countless examples of people in one culture doing something that is considered morally unthinkable or taboo in another, so the concept of a true, overarching, objective morality feels very debatable.

Additionally, the topic uses the word "objective," which may conjure images of scientific-type proofs. That may on its face look very difficult to apply the same kind of scientific standards that are objective to something like morality. However, within scientific communities there is often disagreement and different theories or experiments abound, but that does not make one mistrust science as a field. This is why teams have a unique debate before them about what it means to be "objective" and what kind of standards one could use to prove objective morality.

With this topic, both teams have multiple bodies of philosophy they can draw from with dozens of authors putting forth myriad arguments on this subject. Teams and judges should do their best to not get overwhelmed and instead focus on what it means to be objective, how one can determine that, and if those methods themselves are objective. For judges to determine a winner, they must weigh the consequences of living in both the world of the affirmative and the negative and come to a decision about which one best answers the topic's question about objective morality.