

Judging Big Questions

Resolved: Moral systems rooted in theism are preferable to non-theistic moral systems.

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 won 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 two periods of questions. Students will attempt to prove or disprove the statement: "Resolved: Creativity is a more powerful force than intelligence."

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

This year's resolution asks us to evaluate the foundation of moral systems and determine whether those grounded in theism, or belief in a divine being or beings, are preferable to those that are not. To do so, it will be necessary to explore how morality is defined, where it originates, and what it means for one system to be "preferable." Because this topic involves both philosophy and theology, it invites discussion from a wide range of disciplines, including ethics, religion, sociology, and psychology.

A theistic moral system is one in which moral principles are rooted in or derived from belief in a deity or divine will. Such systems often argue that moral truths are objective because they are established by a higher power. Affirmative debaters may argue that theistic moral systems provide a stable and universal foundation for morality, encourage accountability through divine authority, and promote social cohesion by uniting people under shared values. They may also contend that belief in a divine source gives moral duties greater significance and motivation to follow them.

A non-theistic moral system, by contrast, grounds morality in human reason, empathy, social contracts, or shared human experience rather than divine command. Negative debaters may argue that non-theistic moral systems are preferable because they are inclusive of diverse beliefs, adaptable to new circumstances, and based on principles that can be justified through logic and evidence. They may also claim that grounding morality in human understanding avoids dependence on religious interpretation and allows moral progress as societies evolve.

Enter these debates with an open mind, and enjoy Big Questions!