



South Australian Debating Association Inc

## Intermediate B, Round 4

*“That we regret the idea that people can be born naturally intelligent”*

### 1. Type of Topic

This is a regret, or counterfactual topic. The best interpretation of these topics is “That the world would have been better if people did not believe that people can be born naturally intelligent”. This is unlike a normative (model) topic, in which both teams can propose a model describing exactly what a world where people don’t believe that someone can be born naturally intelligent looks like. Instead, both teams should use a reasoned argument to illustrate what the world would most likely look like if the public didn’t hold the view that someone can be born naturally intelligent, and compare this to the world we currently live in.

This argument is called a “counterfactual”. A counterfactual argument requires reasoning that shows why a particular outcome is likely; for instance, the affirmative team’s “counterfactual” might be that in a world where people didn’t believe that someone can be born naturally intelligent, people would be more motivated to learn. However, to prove this, it is important for them to provide a clear logical mechanism that explains why people not holding this belief would lead to such an outcome.

### 2. Background / Context

There are many widespread views in society, one of which is that people can be born with particular traits, such as intelligence, and that from birth are always going to be more intelligent than other people that weren’t born with intelligence. This debate is not about arguing over whether this is true, or whether it’s true that lots of people believe this. Rather, this debate is asking you to assume that most people hold this view, and then ask whether the world would be a better place to live in if people didn’t believe that someone can be born naturally intelligent.

Debates such as these require you to consider how people’s thoughts shape their behaviour. It will be important for both teams to analyse how people holding different views leads to them behaving differently, and how these different behaviours are beneficial or harmful. For example, a negative team might try to argue that people believing that someone can be born naturally intelligent leads to people engaging in more beneficial behaviours such as working harder.

This debate also comes from the classic question of “nature vs nurture”, whether someone’s intelligence is determined by their genetics from birth (nature) or by the way they were raised, their education and environment (nurture). While this topic does not require you to debate about

whether nature or nurture is more significant in determining someone's intelligence, consideration of such a context may sometimes be appropriate. For example, a negative team may try to argue that nature is the main source of someone's intelligence, and therefore we don't regret people holding this belief as it is factual. However, such a discussion is not intended to become the core issue in this debate.

### 3. Specific Questions for consideration

When approaching this debate, teams may find it useful to answer the following questions to better understand what is being discussed in this debate, and to help them formulate arguments:

- What does it mean to be born naturally intelligent?
  - What is the most common form of this viewpoint?
- What is intelligence? Are there different types of intelligence? When people talk about people being born "naturally intelligent" are they referring to a particular type of intelligence?
- Where is this viewpoint most common? For example, at school, in the workplace, in social situations etc.
- How does holding this viewpoint influence people's behaviours?
  - What behaviours, actions or decisions does it make them more or less likely to engage in?
  - Does the way in which this viewpoint influences people's behaviours depend on the person? For example, is a more intelligent person likely to respond in the same way as a less intelligent person? Is a teacher likely to respond in the same way as a student?
- If people did not believe that people were born naturally intelligent, what are they most likely to believe instead?
  - Would this be more or less harmful than believing that people are born naturally intelligent? Why?
  - How would people's behaviour change if they didn't believe that people were born naturally intelligent? Would this depend on the person and, if so, how?
- Is it more important that people believe something which is true, or that they believe something that it is beneficial for them to believe?
  - Is it acceptable for someone to believe something untrue if society benefits from them holding that belief?

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