

Nicholas Kantack Essay

I spend nearly all of my afternoons in our school's crowded and cluttered debate room. On most days it plays host to desperate preparations for upcoming tournaments and frantic searches through the iconic (if chaotic) scenery of scattered tubs and ubiquitously strewn sheets of lost evidence. If anyone would retire from their page-long "to do" list for just a moment, their attention would gravitate to the upper reaches of the back wall. From their authoritative perch over the diligent laborers below, the words, "Ethics has no need of rules," bathe the room in their concise wisdom. At first, the words struck me as contradictory; ethics meant no more to me than a set of rules. Later, as maturity supplanted stark obedience, I began to accept personal limitation more willingly, striving to find for myself some value in their existence. The dignity of any debate event, and society for that matter, depends entirely upon the honesty, accountability, and integrity of each of its participants.

Honesty remains the most easily transgressed virtue of the debating community and society. Many have fallen victim to the idea that breaches of truthfulness remain justified in certain circumstances. Debaters remain inherently critical of slippers slope situations, small suspensions of rules which slowly grow and expand until the rule itself carries no weight. Honesty constitutes one of the most frequent targets of this compelling logic. The foundation of trust necessitates the certainty that honesty's unalienable authority will always stand.

The realm of accountability faces a similar battle. No novice debater from our school, by their recount, has ever legitimately lost a debate round. Their failure stems (supposedly) from an incompetent judge, unexposed breach of honesty by their opponent, or anomalous disappearances of evidence from their immaculate organized filing. We older debaters try our best to endure these diatribes with straight faces; realizing that time alone will uncover their flawed logic. As debaters develop their own accountability, they begin to understand their role in each of their losses. Just as in debate, accountability allows all members of society to accept their shortcomings, find a means to improve, and become more productive citizens in their community. Humbling receiving failures leads to more frequent and gracious reception of victory.

Just as important as the immediate presence of these virtues remains the strength with which one grasps them. To speak the truth only when helpful demonstrates no honorability; owning up to mere achievement requires little self control. All of morality becomes hollow when only adhered to in times of convenience. When one demonstrates integrity and commits to ethics unconditionally, then each virtue can bring color to the painting of one's character. Ethics does not require rules. If we can discover the treasure of morality, then the debater can add another trophy to the chaos of our debate room, and the citizen can march boldly into a brighter and more fulfilling society.