

Guidelines for Discussion of Topics

Taken from the Socrates Cafe website.

1. **Respect your fellow thinkers ...**This one is pretty obvious, if someone is talking don't interrupt and try to make sure you do not monopolize the conversation.
2. **Discuss the opinions not the people ...** We want to make the group conducive to a discussion and if people are being attacked or feel that they are being attacked then they will stop contributing or stop coming all together.
3. **Consensus is not expected and agreement is not necessary ...**We know that most questions have no one answer and we don't get together to figure out how to achieve world peace. We get together to have a conversation to discover what we think and what others think, whether we all agree or not. We want to leave knowing that it's okay to disagree.
4. **We want a safe environment for a discussion ...**Now when lots of people hear or see the word "argument" they think yelling and screaming, but that's not the best idea of an argument, it's not even the proper meaning. Dictionary.com defines argument as "A discussion in which disagreement is expressed; a debate." and this is exactly what we are trying to do. We are trying to have an intellectual argument.
5. **Look for the "good question" ...** This is a more difficult point to cover. Basically when choosing and discussing a question we look for four main things:
 - **Examine the question for built in assumptions.** For example the question: "How do we stop evil?" assumes that all evil must be stopped. Someone could then ask "Doesn't evil have it's place in the world?"
 - **Examine the question for embedded concepts. In the question:** "How do we stop evil?" we might ask "What is evil?"
 - **Examine the question for differences in kind and degree.** Are there different kinds of evil? Can one "evil" be more "evil" than another?
 - **Examine the question for logical consistencies and inconsistencies.** Would stopping a naturally occurring idea such as "evil" be an evil in itself? What are we without evil?

But the most important guideline that we have is also the simplest. **Listen.** You cannot have a good discussion without listening to what others are saying. We don't ask you to agree, we don't even ask you to accept their ideas, but we do ask that you listen to them.