

The speech presented by James Baldock

How many people believe in climate change? Raise your hand

How many people don't? Raise your hand

Interesting ok I've always wanted to do that but I guess it articulates the fact that already we have different beliefs. A belief is merely a thought produced in your cerebrum. Shaped and morphed based on individual experience and circumstance. In fact, every 5 seconds, you have 4 thoughts. That doesn't seem like a lot when some of these are natural occurrences, you know re-reading a word on a page, the majority encompass who you are. A belief is something that defines you. Inherited either from birth or nurtured as you grow up. What you believe in dictates how you act and determines how you react in certain situations So, you are your beliefs and your beliefs are you.

With this I mind, the question still stands. Do we have the right to believe whatever we want to? You know if you multiply a thought a second by just over 7 and a half billion people and that is a lot of differing ideologies. And it can be quite daunting to think about, when the most powerful weapon on earth is the mind and we have all this space for cognitive clashes. So, do we the right? Well the united nations say yes, article 18: Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety". So, I guess the big takeaway from this is that you have the right to believe whatever you want, but not everything you believe is right.

Now I know you can look further into this and question who holds the absolute power dictate if something is right or wrong in fact René Descartes, writes a fantastic philosophical work that elaborates on mentality. But for today let's assume that all beliefs are intended to reflect the real world. Going of this principle, we can assume that all beliefs, that are non-robust, lack thought and are backed up with no-viable reasoning can be seen as fabricated. So, what about the theory of a flat earth. In ancient times, it made perfect sense for one to assume the 2Dess of the earth. Ships would sail off into the horizon and more often than not, never return. This belief perfectly made sense and was backed with, for the time, viable reasoning. So, in essence according to our definition, It was true belief – it reflected the real world. Well we now know of the spherical nature of our planet and the true belief is that the earth is round.

So, is it right in saying, that belief back then was false? No, they didn't know any better. A belief is merely the most accurate concept that is as close to the real world as we know it. Try and convince people to say that the earth is like a pancake, and you will have a hard time because the foundation that the earth is ball shaped is a closer representation of what we know to be true

So, just quickly, what happens when you Do believe in a lie that is so ludicrous and beyond comprehension? De Nicola writes that when a belief is morally repugnant, then we have no right and I'd just like to remind you that we have no right to beliefs that condone violence or incite feelings of hatred toward one another. We have an obligation as believers to ensure we are not blinded by falsehood.

"It makes no sense to talk about rights without also talking about responsibilities" – Randy Pausch. We have these scintillating thoughts and beliefs that can influence the course of so many people's lives. And subsequently, there is this underlying responsibility when harnessing a belief. Now I'm not talking about the belief that the earth is round I'm focusing on social beliefs that, with correct care can change pivotal aspects of our society – such as climate control, or a larger refugee intake.

The one responsibility that you have when harassing a social belief, is simple. Express it. Since the turn of the 20th century characters such as MLK, JFK Rosa Parks have taken responsibility for their beliefs when others won't. But it's not happening enough.

We have established already that we are entitled to our own beliefs but many adults are reluctant to challenge the status quo. It's this whole idea of complacency vs progression. Where we strive for advancement but are more comfortable in the situation, we are currently in. It can be challenging and risky to voice an opinion, especially a social belief because everything you do is watched so carefully by outside sources and many adults are afraid of social persecution.

It's like Plato's allegory of the cave where we see an individual who has experienced something new, attempt to enlighten the situations of others, but due to their pre acquired comfort, never see the light of day. In the category of social progression, a risk is a profound concept that should be celebrated by adults because it takes society into uncharted territory, but the word risk has connotations to be unstable, disloyal, irresponsible and ultimately a non-viable option for many adults, so the beliefs or ideas that are bottled up inside them, stay put.

But there is another demographic. They make up 40% of the population and almost 100% of the population in this room, who have the word risk as their motto. It's the youth. Prepared to take full responsibility for societal issues but due to the year they were born, are not even allowed a seat at the table. And it's really frustrating because the adults are expected to harnesses and oversee all the change in our society. They are the leaders; they are the supposed change makers. But when it comes to controversial issues, 9 times out of 10, they don't speak up for what the truly believe in. On the flip side of this, from a young age, children are given the gift to believe whatever they want. That is why they are told these stories of fanciful beings. They are encouraged to form their own opinions but when a ground-breaking concept evolves from a youthful brain, it is seen as second class and not a viable option. We are stuck in a funny sort of pinball machine, where the kids are firing the balls but the adults are putting up all the blocks. I have tried to steer away from Greta Thunberg and regardless of her style of delivery, she has begun to take responsibility for a belief and we need to see more of this happening.

There is no real call to action because we all know what to do, its just hard when we keep getting pushed back down. There is an ethic of believing, acquiring, sustaining and relinquishing beliefs, but in conjunction, there is also a responsibility too. In class we raise our hand for the right answer, why can't we raise our voices for the right concept too. As I said at the beginning, 4 beliefs in 5 seconds. Our first 3 might never be heard, but as long as you take responsibility for the 4th, exposure can be granted. I don't like finishing with cheesy quotes but really, with great power to think, comes great responsibility to do, with great power to know, comes great responsibility to grow.

James Baldock