

Debate Ammunition: What is truth?

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The Richard J Murphy YouTube Channel

Debate Ammunition

What is Truth?

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Today's topic

What Is Truth?

The video which this Debate Ammunition supports [is available here](#).

The core argument

Most of what passes for political certainty is not fact at all: it is belief, shaped by the stories we inherit, the media we consume, and the identities we hold. Because beliefs feel like facts to those who hold them, political disagreement will never be resolved by simply asserting the correct answer; it requires first understanding the narratives that formed the opposing view. A politics of care, therefore, demands intellectual humility, not dogmatic certainty, and that means engaging seriously with views we find uncomfortable rather than dismissing them.

The argument structure

Step 1 — Beliefs are not facts — Most of what we treat as true is actually belief: stories absorbed from family, nationality, faith, and political culture. These narratives feel like truth to those inside them, which is why confident assertions of fact so often produce only deeper disagreement.

Step 2 — Even facts depend on agreed conventions — Using his own birth date as an example, Richard argues that even apparently hard facts are only meaningful within

frameworks of agreed definition. Dates, measurements, and statistics are real only within the systems we have chosen to use; strip away the convention and the fact dissolves.

Step 3 — The Ipswich Town test — The analogy is deliberate: Richard knows his belief that Ipswich Town is the best football club in England is not factually true, yet he holds it because it is part of his identity. This is what most political conviction actually looks like; sincere, felt as truth, and resistant to counter-evidence precisely because it is not really about evidence.

Step 4 — Certainty is a barrier; understanding must come before persuasion — The Reform and racism used in the video illustrates the cost of false certainty: the claim that every racist is in Reform is no more accurate than the claim that nobody in Reform is racist. Racism is pervasive, and a politics of care requires engaging with that uncomfortable reality rather than projecting it onto a convenient target. You cannot persuade someone by ignoring the narrative that formed their view.

Their argument → your rebuttal

They Say Your Response

This is just relativism. Some things are true and some are false; refusing to say so only helps those who spread misinformation. Distinguishing belief from fact is the opposite of relativism. It is the precondition for honest argument. Calling a belief a fact does not make it one; it just stops you noticing when you are wrong. Relativism collapses all claims into opinion; this argument insists we work harder to identify what is actually verifiable and what is not.

You cannot both-sides racism. Reform is a racist party and pretending otherwise normalises racism. Nobody said otherwise. The point is that racism is a pervasive social problem, not a sealed compartment confined to one party. If you treat it as exclusively a Reform problem you will ignore it everywhere else it operates and you will also fail to understand why people vote for Reform in the first place. Engagement with uncomfortable reality is not normalisation; it is the precondition for changing it.

Politics is not therapy. We need clear positions and decisive argument, not endless hand-wringing about other people's feelings and narratives. Clear positions built on misunderstood premises lose. If you want to persuade someone, you have to start where they actually are, not where you wish they were. That is not weakness; it is how effective political communication has always worked. Dismissing the narratives behind

an opponent's position is how campaigns lose.

The media and social media are the problem. Once you fix the information environment, truth will reassert itself. The media shapes narratives but it does not create the underlying identities and experiences that make those narratives persuasive. People do not believe misleading things because they are stupid or manipulated; they believe them because those things fit the stories that make sense of their lives. Fixing the media is necessary but nowhere near sufficient. The stories need to change, and that means politics, not just platform regulation.

The one-liner

“If you want to change someone’s mind, you have to understand the story that formed it first: certainty is not a substitute for that understanding, it is a barrier to it.”

Further reading

Post Date	What it covers
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<u>What is it about Reform?</u>	May 2026 Explains how neoliberal artificial scarcity makes people vulnerable to narratives that blame migrants, and why a politics of care offers an alternative social story.
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<u>Reform and the Politics of Care</u>	May 2026 Argues that neither neoliberalism nor Reform can be defeated without a coherent alternative philosophy; sets out the politics of care as that alternative.
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<u>Dear England, neoliberalism and the fear of losing</u>	May 2026 Explores how fear produces the demand for false certainty, and how curiosity and coherence offer a more productive political culture; directly relevant to the video’s argument about humility.
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<u>Moving on: from normalised people to the politics of care</u>	May 2026 Examines how neoliberal conformity intersects with social scapegoating and racism, illuminating the structural roots of the narratives the video discusses.
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<u>Developing our thinking on the politics of care</u>	Feb 2026 Sets out the challenge of constructing a political narrative that opposes neoliberal behaviour without alienating those who hold neoliberal beliefs; directly
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applies the video's point about persuasion requiring understanding.

[Why don't people engage with politics?](#) Dec 2025 Discusses political disengagement and the role of education and media in shaping or suppressing critical thinking; consistent with the video's call for an education centred on uncertainty rather than supposed facts.