Objectivity  
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Affirmative Case by Joel Erickson



“Objectivity” examines the resolution from a non-Western vantage, posits an unorthodox framework, and espouses ideas about cultural relativism. Rather than avoiding the oft-proposed notion that property rights are culturally confined, you should embrace it, articulate a cogent defense, and force the negative to refute a position with which they likely disagree but to which they haven’t formulated conscious objections.

Ensure that the international scope resolutional analysis becomes the centerpiece of the round. As soon as you deliberately shift the debate’s terrain to the entire globe, it illuminates a myriad of nations with alternate perspectives on property rights.

Additionally, dominate the value framework. If you can effectively convince the judge that “Objectivity” ought to be the value, extrapolate the implication (the debate is no longer “conflict-centric”) in the rebuttals. Many debaters have difficulty conceiving of debates that exclude direct conflict, and if you provide a cogent, coherent justification for a non-conflict based assessment of the resolution, they will be ill-equipped to respond to your arguments.

Objectivity

*Resolved: The needs of the public ought to be valued above private property rights.*

# Definitions

To dispel any misunderstanding, let’s define the two key concepts in the resolution.

**Public Needs**: I’ll break this composite phrase into its constituents. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines “public” as “of or concerning the people as a whole”[[1]](#footnote-1) and “need” as “necessity; a thing that is wanted or required.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Therefore, public needs are the necessities for the entire populace of a nation.

**Private Property Rights:** According to Auburn University’s Glossary of Political Economy Terms, “private property rights” are

“The basic rights of individuals (and organizations or associations of people functioning as a single conglomerate “legal person” such as corporations, partnerships, churches, non-profit foundations, etc.) to the peaceful possession, control and enjoyment of the things they own as well as their rights to make contracts to rent, sell or give away all or part of their various ownership rights over these possessions (or these possessions' services) to any other people willing to accept the owners' terms. The possessions over which a person has property rights may be tangible (like real estate, factory machinery, livestock, automobiles or a jack-knife) or intangible (like contractual obligations to provide goods or services at some time in the future, shares of common stock in a corporation, bonds, insurance policies, the right to broadcast over a designated radio frequency, patents, trademarks and copyrights). In highly specialized societies, property rights over particular resources may be “unbundled” and parcelled out among many individuals according to quite complex rules of division of authority over particular aspects or uses of the resource specified in written contracts — for example, separating mineral rights from surface rights to a parcel of land, utility easements over the same land, restrictive deed covenants and so on.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

With this established, I’ll offer one point of background for the resolution.

## Resolutional Analysis: Global Scope

The competing ideals we debate today are not limited to the geographical boundaries of America. In fact, to arrive at a comprehensive conclusion, we must apply an international perspective to the conflict between public needs and private property.

With this in mind, I offer a standard to evaluate the pros and cons of both sides of the resolution.

# Value: Objectivity

Merriam-Webster states that “objectivity” is the quality of “existing outside of the mind; existing in the real world.”[[4]](#footnote-4) When we conceive of the resolution in terms of objectivity, we’re asking if public needs and private property rights correspond to reality, or if they are mere conceptualizations, conjured up by ivory tower theorists with no grounds in actuality. Whichever side of the resolution that tangibly conforms better to reality ought to warrant your ballot. While Objectivity might initially sound unconventional, there is one robust reason to use it in comparing private property rights and public needs.

## Value Link: *A Priori* Issue

Proper comprehension of reality precedes all other concerns. While we make everyday decisions based on questions of utility (does this actually work?) or morality (is this the right thing to do?), our actions are predicated on our notion of objectivity. From decisions as simple and tangible as determining what we are going to wear to choices as abstract and paramount as wrestling with the nature of humanity, our fundamental, underlying assumption is that we want to opt for something that comports with the real world, that doesn’t just exist in our minds but reflects reality. Apprehending reality is an *a priori* issue, we must value objectivity before anything else.

I’ll demonstrate that public needs are more objective than private property rights in two contentions, beginning with…

# Contention 1: Property Rights Are Social Constructs

Because property rights are the product of the aforementioned ivory tower theorists, they are not objective. Oftentimes, rights theorists discuss property rights as a tangible cornerstone of society, but in reality, property rights are simply social constructs, failing to depict the state of reality accurately. Essentially, property rights are culturally conditioned by the Western intellectual tradition,[[5]](#footnote-5) which explains why some non-Western societies lack the very notion of private property.

## Application: India

One of the oldest nations in the world, India’s ethno-religious heritage extends far back to at least 1500 B.C. Because of its Eastern, pantheistic culture, India does not possess the Western notion of private property rights. According to Dr. R. Panikkar, in Diogenes, a peer-reviewed journal of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies,[[6]](#footnote-6)

“In confrontation and dialogue with the Western model, the Indian critique would stress fundamentally that Human Rights should not be absolutized. It would contest that one can speak of ‘Human Rights’ as ‘objective’ entities… the individual as such is an abstraction, and an abstraction as such cannot be an ultimate subject of rights.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

While India’s conception of rights may sound esoteric, looking at the resolution from a global perspective entails that we consider the viewpoints of all cultures. An analysis of non-Western tradition demonstrates that the property rights we cherish are merely social constructs existing only within our culturally conditioned universe.

# Contention 2: Public Needs Are Objective

On the other hand, public needs transcend cultural and societal parameters. As humans, each of us experience viscerally the basic necessities for sustaining our lives individually and as a society at-large.

## Application: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

As Dr. Neel Burton describes it,

“In his influential paper of 1943, A Theory of Human [Motivation](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/motivation), the American psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed that healthy human beings have a certain number of needs, and that these needs are arranged in a hierarchy, with some needs (such as physiological and safety needs) being more primitive or basic than others (such as social and ego needs).”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Maslow delineates the public needs of humans—we all require food, water, shelter, health, familial stability, and safety. These aren’t just individual needs; these are public needs because only within stable, secure societal structures can they but fully actualized.

No matter what your lineage, religion, or culture, these needs are indispensable. The universality of these public needs testifies to their objectivity.

# Conclusion

Prioritize the objective over the subjective, the universal above the conditioned, the necessity above the luxury. Vote affirmative, and elevate public needs over property rights. Thank you.

Negative Brief

Ample tactics abound to rebut this case.

* Discredit the resolutional analysis. If we are debating public needs and private property rights, we might exclude any society that doesn’t at least value both. Disqualify non-Western nations by demonstrating that because there is no public needs-private property debate occurring there, such applications are irrelevant to the resolution.
* Debunk the value. Tell the judge it’s ludicrous to evaluate public needs and private property when the two never conflict.
* Turn the value link. Show why your value also is an *a priori* issue that precedes Objectivity.
* Critique Contention 1. Are property rights really mere social constructs? The philosophical literature overflows with material on this topic.[[9]](#footnote-9) Appeal to your judges’ intuitions that property rights are not merely culturally conditioned but in fact transcendent ideals.
* Criticize Contention 2. Hammer that Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs actually doesn’t describe public needs, and therefore isn’t encompassed by the resolution. Propose that public needs are defined by the public, and therefore aren’t objective.

1. “Public,” New Oxford American Dictionary, 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/public> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Need,” New Oxford American Dictionary, 2016. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/need> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Private Property Rights,” Glossary of Political Economy Terms, Auburn University, 2005. <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/private_property_rights> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Objectivity,” Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objectivity> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “The Case Against Human Rights,” Eric Posner, published in *The Guardian*, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/04/-sp-case-against-human-rights> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Source information for *Digones*, <http://dio.sagepub.com> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Panikkar, R. (1982). “Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept?” *Diogenes* 30 (120):75-102. <http://dio.sagepub.com/content/30/120/75.full.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Our Hierarchy of Needs,” Neel Burton, M.D. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/our-hierarchy-needs> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “The Right to Private Property,” International Enyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/property/#H2> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)