It Depends (Resolutional Kritik)  
Negative case by Mark Csoros



This case is a Resolutional Kritik, or Rez K. Most negatives just say that the resolution is untrue (preemptive warfare is not morally justified). This negative says that we can’t tell whether or not the resolution is true because the debate is too hypothetical. Any attempt to predict the situations in which we could use preemptive warfare is just a random guess, and so we need to reject the idea of the resolution with a Negative ballot.

To do that, you have a point of Resolutional Analysis and four contentions. They follow a very logical progression.

Res A: Show that the point of the resolution is to set ethical doctrine

Contention 1: Show that we judge moral justification with the use of standards

Contention 2: Show that standards are situational

Contention 3: Prove that we can’t predict future situations

Contention 4: Summarize why you win.

You’ll probably notice, as soon as you read this case, that I’ve included only hypothetical examples. If Affirmative points this out, you have 2 responses. First, if we’re going to set doctrines, we have to weigh the future, which only consists of hypotheticals. Second, there are real-world examples of unjustified preemptive war. Nazi invasion of Poland? Nazi invasion of the Rhine Valley? Russian invasion of Crimea? Pearl Harbor? The Spanish Conquistadores destroying Incan and Aztec villages? All of those instances are examples of unjustified preemptive warfare.

Once you have the basic syllogism laid out, you need to defend yourself in CX. By far, the most common question Affirmative asks when faced with a Rez K is: “If affirming the resolution is impossible, what do you run on affirmative?” This question is a lot of fun on Affirmative, and not as much fun on Neg. Here’s how you respond:

“I have two answers: First, the resolution could hypothetically be affirmed; you just haven’t fulfilled your burden. Second, my job isn’t to supply you with affirmative arguments you can use against me; my job is to negate the resolution. If you have any counter-arguments, I’d be happy to respond, but it would defeat the purpose of debate for me to give you those arguments.”

Easy kill.

That said, don’t get snarky with the Affirmative debater or the judge. Caustic rhetoric is rarely effective. Instead of saying, “The resolution is a complete fallacy,” say something like, “Given our limited understanding of the future, it doesn’t make sense to affirm the resolution.”

Above all, don’t say that the judge cannot vote for the rez. He’s the judge. He can do what he wants. He’s also probably already voted Affirmative during the tournament. So just debate, and don’t tell people what to do.

Stay logical. Walk through the syllogism and defend each link. Pretty simple, right?

Resolutional Kritik: It Depends

The philosopher Lao Tzu once said, “Those who have knowledge, don't predict. Those who predict, don't have knowledge.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Those words point out the fallacy inherent in today’s resolution: Preemptive warfare can be justified under some scenarios, but it can’t be universally declared to be just or unjust. Because today’s resolution asks an impossible question, a negative ballot is warranted.

Before we get into the reasons why, we need to understand the aim of this resolution, in a point of Resolutional Analysis.

# Resolutional Analysis: Resolution is oriented ahead

This resolution, in essence, asks the debaters to act as government ethicists. It asks us to determine whether or not a nation can preemptively strike another. That question is about what to do in the future, and so it tasks us with setting a precedent, using an affirmative or negative ballot to decide whether preemptive war is a moral option. My opponent’s job is to say that preemptive war is morally justified, and my stance is that you can’t agree with that statement.

I’ll prove that in 4 contentions, starting with…

# Contention 1: Justification requires standards.

Most philosophers have had their own interpretation of what constitutes a just war. From Augustine of Hippo to Thomas Aquinas to Daniel Webster to Henry Kissinger, most statesmen and scholars have ideas of what makes warfare (in general) and preemptive warfare (in specific) acceptable. Even the affirmative debater has standards for justification. He’s told you that preemptive warfare is okay because it “protects national interests” or “saves human life.” The problem is that not every preemptive war will meet those standards.

We’ll see that in…

# Contention 2: Standards depend on Context

The problem with this resolution is that it seeks to make a blanket statement that can neither be defended or attacked. “Preemptive warfare is morally justified” can certainly be true in some circumstances, but it can’t be verified as “true,” “untrue,” or even “more true than false” or “more false than true.” Why? Because the moral justification of something depends on the context surrounding the action.

We’ll look at this further in…

## Application 1: Food allergies

Think of this scenario: I’m camping, and I find a man trapped under a boulder. I call 911, and while I wait for help to arrive, I feed this very hungry man some shrimp. A very ethical, morally justified action. Then I go back to my day job, as a waiter in a restaurant. A man comes in who is allergic to shrimp, but I put shrimp sauce on his plate. That’s a less ethical decision, and the man goes into anaphylactic shock. How is that? The same action became wrong or right depending on the context.

Let’s see how that works with preemptive warfare in…

## Application 2: Lilliputian War

This example comes from a classic work of political satire: Gulliver’s Travels. The author, Jonathan Swift, decided to write a book that showed how ridiculous the political situation of the 18th century was, and he got it just right. In the story, Lemuel Gulliver is stranded on an island of little people and is asked to perform a service for the Emperor. His job is to swim to another island and capture the navy of the Befuscan people. Lilliput and Blefuscu have been rivals for generations because they disagreed on the most pressing political issue of the day: whether to crack an egg at the little end or the big end. Obviously, that war didn’t make sense, and the preemptive capture of an entire navy was overkill. But some wars do make sense, and destruction of a navy can be acceptable.

This leads to…

# Contention 3: Future contexts can’t be proven

Of course, there have been examples of morally justified preemptive warfare. There have also been examples of unjustified preemptive war. But we shouldn’t take examples, cobble them together, and then affirm the resolution. We can’t promote a doctrine of preemptive war because we don’t know the contexts under which it will be used.

Now, my opponent will likely say that there are clear standards of when preemptive war is okay, when it’s not, and that some preemptive wars meet those standards. That’s true. But think of what he’s actually saying. He’s saying that “in some contexts, preemptive warfare is morally justified.” That doesn’t affirm the resolution, that doesn’t fulfill the goal of this debate, and that doesn’t answer the question. It gives a conditional answer, not a resolutional answer.

The conclusion we can draw from comes in…

# Contention 4: Resolution can’t be proved

“Is preemptive warfare justified?” is the same type of question as, “Should I feed someone shrimp?” The answer to both questions is, “It depends on the context” We can’t say yes or no to the question the resolution asks, and so we need to reject it completely.

Because the resolution can’t be affirmed, I’d ask for a negative ballot. Thanks.

Opposing This Case

In order to win, you need to prove that this resolution is more true than false. Of course, no resolution is absolute, and so there will be exceptions to every rule. But exceptions don’t disprove that rules exist. In the same way, the fact that some preemptive war is unjust doesn’t disprove the fact that preemptive war can be justified. Once you have that link, you can go about proving why the resolution is true most of the time.

Stay strong on your value. Since Negative doesn’t have a value, this can be a win for you. But, you need to explain why. *Do not* say, “This is value debate, and my opponent doesn’t have a value, so I win.” That’s both unpersuasive and incorrect. Rather, articulate why your value is important and how voting for preemptive warfare means your judge gets good things.

If you’re feeling up for it, you can try to attack the resolutional analysis of the Negative. Negative says that LD is designed to simulate a governmental ethics discussion, and there are responses to that. If you’re a libertarian, you might say that governmental ethics is an oxymoron. If you’re a theory debater, you might argue that the point of LD isn’t to set doctrines, but merely to argue about philosophies. You might also argue that you can affirm the resolution only under certain select instances (i.e. situations where a preemptive war is justified), but that these examples are representative of the debate as a whole.

Finally, you can argue that most of the time, preemptive warfare has been used correctly, and that justifies an affirmative ballot. To do that, you need to argue that using past examples is a valid way to discern the truth in the resolution. The downside is that your debate will turn into a battle of applications, but the upside is that you get to debate Affirmative ground. Then, you get to pick the examples of conflict and challenge Negative to show why each one doesn’t apply. Chances are you’ll win at least one, and then you can spend most of your time impacting that example and persuading the judge to vote on it.

Remember, Resolutional Kritiks are both fun and legitimate, so actually spend time debating it. Don’t do your opponent any favors by reverencing the K, but don’t underestimate it either. If you attack it correctly, you can win. If you laugh at it, scoff at it, or whine to the judge about it, you will likely lose.

1. Tzu, Lao. "Predict Quotes." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore, n.d. Web. 23 July 2017. <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/predict.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)