Inherent Moral Legitimacy  
Negative Case by Thomas Sargent



How would you like neutralize any affirmative value in 10 seconds or less? With this strategy, you can do that – and a lot more.

First and foremost, this is an advanced case that should never be run unless you understand what it is. The basic premise is that because preemptive warfare is simply a tool, it is impossible to prove that it’s morally acceptable. Achieving a desired goal doesn’t assign moral acceptability to an extrinsic tactic. It’s like a computer that can be used for good, amoral, and bad things.

A computer isn’t justified by posting a Bible verse. Nobody ever says,

*“I read your post today! So encouraging! God bless your computer!”*

In and of itself, no computer has no inherent value or merit — it’s only valuable because of what it achieves. For that reason, you cannot consider it a morally justified object. In this case, a similar position is taken with preemptive warfare. This position objects to the resolution, so understand that it is most definitely not a balanced neg. You don’t say, “it depends,” you say, “it’s impossible.” Right off the bat, you’re claiming that they are physically unable to defend their position – regardless of their value. By running this case, you have two advantages:

1. First off, you surprise non-Mons (non-Monument Members). Most opponents are going to be utterly oblivious to this position, which makes it more rewarding for you to run.

2. Second, you force them to accept your premise. The affirmative is now forced to debate on your terms and your ground. Their value is now irrelevant, and they have no choice but to make your case the central issue in the round. From a strategic standpoint, that’s solid gold.

You should know that while an objection is fascinating, it is risky too. If the affirmative can prove that preemptive warfare is morally acceptable in one instance, your entire position collapses and your opponent wins by default. Always be ready to defend your stance. To get the ballot, you have to prove that preemptive warfare is never inherently moral, regardless of the intentions behind it or the outcomes that result from it.

Remember: no matter how tempting it is, you should never respond to your opponent’s value. If the resolution is impossible, you cannot measure it with a value. End of story. Expect your opponent to challenge this argumentation. Merely re-clarify what a resolutional objection is. You’re not just saying that the resolution is false; you’re saying it’s impossible. Impossible things can’t be measured with a value.

Cheers!

Inherent Moral Legitimacy

What if I stood up and declared, “Computers are justified”?

That would be a terrible position because computers are just tools. In and of themselves, they cannot be acceptable, reasonable, or justified.

Preemptive warfare is the same way. In and of itself, it has no moral value. It’s just a tool. Therefore, it cannot be considered morally justified.

Instead of a usual case with a value and contentions, I’m going to prove to you that the resolution is impossible. In other words, you should vote negative because the affirmative position cannot possibly be correct.

Since the resolution is unprovable, values are no longer needed to measure it. Therefore, I neither agree nor disagree with my opponent’s value.

I will prove my position using four main points: a thesis, a burden, an alternative, and an impact. Don’t worry – I’ll explain everything as we go. Let’s start by looking at my thesis.

# Thesis: Tactical Apparatus

The most important thing we need to realize is that preemptive warfare is extrinsic. This means that if we were to open up a book of military strategies, pick preemptive war, and use it to achieve victory in a scenario, it would remain a simple strategy – only valuable if it works. However, no matter how much we like it, it is still a tactic; nothing more, nothing less. Why does this matter?

The motive is moral, not the tool. Numerous wars have been fought through history for excellent or legitimate reasons. Others have evolved from terrible or greedy purposes. Regardless, however, the tools used cannot be considered morally acceptable or morally deplorable.

For instance, during World War I both the central and allied powers used guns. On the end of Great Britain, France, and the United States guns were used to secure a (somewhat) just purpose while the central powers used them for the opposition. However, any weapons used were still only used for a given motive. Are guns morally justified? Not in and of themselves. Can be they be used for a justified reason? Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

The same goes with preemptive warfare. Preemptive warfare is only a means to achieve a given goal. No matter what you use it for, it’s only an external tool. Just like a computer, a drill, an ax, a dollar bill, and a microphone it has no moral worth in and of itself. That’s a problem for the affirmative case. The resolution implies that preemption is acceptable morally. That is an impossible position to prove.

Preemptive warfare is not justified. The reason we use it can be. But it’s just a tactic, bar none.

# Burden: No Moral Value

This question should determine your ballot: is preemptive warfare inherently moral or not? Is the tactic justified? Or is the goal of an attack justified instead? The burden gives you a way to decide.

If I can show you that preemptive warfare is not intrinsically justified, but is rather just a tool to accomplish a given goal, then you ought to vote negative. However, if the affirmative can prove that preemption contains moral legitimacy in and of itself, I will be happy to give him the win. To recap, if preemptive warfare is inherently moral, vote affirmative. Otherwise, vote negative.

# Alternative: Pragmatism

Because it’s just a tactic, I propose that the way we ought to measure preemptive warfare is pragmatism, not morality. Pragmatism measures something by how useful it is. If a tactic reaches an end goal, it is pragmatic.

You can measure a drill by how effective it is. You can do the same with preemptive warfare. Instead of saying that preemption is moral because of an outcome, measure how pragmatic it is in achieving that outcome. In the real world, that’s how we should measure tactics. Motives can be weighed morally, but not tools.

# Impact: Resolution is Impossible

Preemptive warfare is an externally valid tactic. It’s not a moral entity. Therefore, it can be pragmatically effective, but it cannot be proven to be morally acceptable, reasonable, or justified. For that reason, the resolution is unprovable.

On the table is a ballot. The ballot is not justified. The decision you make with it is.

I urge you to use that decision to vote negative.

Opposing This Case

Drew Magness came to one of our Colorado tournaments. He made me realize a powerful truth that should be understood by debaters nationwide. You can be an excellent speaker and still sell an impossible position (and just to clarify, his views are not impossible, but rather quite strong). But if you take down a persona and examine the actual arguments being presented, you’ll find inconsistencies and fallacies with cases across the nation. This one is no different.

First off, make sure you understand what a resolutional objection is. Take a look at the graph below to see the comparison of an objection concerning other negative philosophies.

To make it even more clear, here are some examples of resolutional objections:

- *Resolved: The needs of the public ought to be valued above private property rights* - **Res. Objection:** Property is a public need. Therefore, the resolution is impossible.

- *Resolved: Thomas Sargent is a whacky weirdo (once again, entirely true)* **- Res. Objection:** “Whacky weirdo” is a subjective term. To be true, most people need to agree with the resolution. Since it’s so subjective, I win. Therefore, the resolution is impossible.

Do you see what’s going on here? Res. Objections don’t say that the resolution is wrong; they say it’s fundamentally flawed and thus impossible. To win, you have to de-link the premises. Take a look at the following syllogism:

1. Tools cannot be morally justified.
2. Preemptive warfare is a tool.
3. Therefore, preemptive warfare cannot be justified.
4. And now for your benefit, Comic Sans. (did I mention that I love having fun?)

Remember the resolution. Notice first-hand how the resolution says “justified,” not “acceptable.” There is a difference between the two. “Justified” generally means that something is done for a good reason. “Acceptable” is different. It’s a lot broader, less specific. Consider the resolution through the lens of “done for a good reason.” If preemptive warfare can achieve reasonable goals, then it fits the definition of justified. If it can be justified, the negative collapses.

Ding-ding!

The results are in: that’s an affirmative ballot.

Once you take care of de-linking the neg mindset, you’ve won the round. Re-enforce your value, and stay on your ground. If you win the value premise, restoring your applications should be easy.

Don’t forget to finish off your opponent with a healthy helping of humor, logic, and emotional connection. Have fun, and God bless.