

You Have a Choice!
A resolutorial objection by Travis Herche

I'm going to do something a little different in this debate. I will argue that the resolution is false because it is impossible. In other words, you should vote against it because it cannot be true. Because my advocacy is so fundamental, values no longer have a place in the round. I neither accept nor reject my opponent's value.

I will prove my position using five points: a thesis, a conflict, a burden, an alternative, and an impact. Let's walk through them one at a time.

Thesis: Moral Agency.

At the heart of a discussion of morality lies a basic idea about choice. It is called Moral Agency, which is operationally defined as: "The idea that moral circumstances allow for choice." This can be well explained through my

Application: Seeing a Mugger. If you're walking down the street and see a thug with a knife attacking someone, you have two options: walk on by and call the police, or intervene. Intervention would be great, but you run a good risk of just hurting yourself in the process. In other words, trying to assist could do more harm than good. Unless you're trained in combat, avoiding the situation could cause a more favorable result.

Agency says that you shouldn't be condemned for choosing not to jump in. It says that you have a choice of assisting or not assisting - and both are morally acceptable. This doesn't mean that there are no evil options - like splitting the money with the mugger - it just means there is more than one good option.

The principle of Moral Agency applies to everything. It's a basic idea running all the way back to the Garden of Eden: one fruit you can't eat, but hundreds that you can. Whether you're picking a hobby or running a country, you always have a choice.

Conflict: Obligation vs Agency

The American Heritage Dictionary defines Obligation as: "A social, legal, or moral requirement, such as a duty, contract, or promise that compels one to follow or avoid a particular course of action."¹

Obligation is the idea that you have no choice in moral considerations. You have to do one specific thing, and if you don't, you should feel guilty about it. My opponent looked at

¹"Obligation." *The Free Dictionary*. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company., 2009. Web. 12 Dec. 12. <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/obligation>>.

applications and claimed that having government assistance was the only possible choice that could be morally acceptable. That means my opponent rejects the notion of moral agency in favor of the notion of moral obligation.

Burden: More than One Option

The choice you have to make with your ballot is: which moral concept sounds most correct: Agency or Obligation? The burden gives you a direct way to make a choice between these two.

If I can prove to you that there is more than one morally acceptable way to deal with nations in need, I will have proven the resolution false. On the other hand, if my opponent can prove that all other possible ways to handle a situation besides direct government assistance are all evil, meaning there is only one correct choice, I will forfeit the round. So again: only one option, vote affirmative. Two or more options, vote negative.

Alternative: Moral Inclination

In most cases, governments helping nations in need can be a positive thing. At the very least, motives are in the right place. But *good* does not equal *obligatory*. It just means there's a moral inclination to assist. It's a nice thing to do. If you stop to fight a mugger, good for you! You didn't have to stop, and that actually makes your decision more noble.

Sending government assistance is one option. Here are a few more: private charity, free trade, open immigration and diplomatic pressure. In a moment, I'll walk through my opponent's applications and offer you a few alternative perspectives. But before I do, let me finish the negative case with one final point:

Impact: Resolution is Impossible

The resolution is built on the flawed idea that human beings don't have choice. They're forced into specific actions every day, and any deviation from that is evil. That's a depressing world. The good news is: that world isn't real. The real world is big and exciting and has thousands of choices. It accepts that people have unique skills, needs, and personalities. Moral agency does not reject the idea of morality; it gives it detail.

You have a choice. I ask you to use it to vote negative.

Negative Notes

An objection is an argument claiming that something cannot be true, regardless of its current support. For example, if you faced the assertion: "purple is better than triangle," you would reject the entire premise as incoherent and without conflict - while a standard negative would come up with a value explaining why triangle is actually better. If someone accused you of being Hitler, you could provide 5 differences between you and Hitler, or you could object by pointing out that Hitler is dead, so you can't be him.

This case says that moral obligation is impossible, so the resolution can't be true. This is strategically powerful because it forces the affirmative onto your turf. You do have one important job left, though: the aff applications.

Rather than arguing about whether or not assistance would be a good idea, just give the judge 2 alternative ways to tackle each application. For example, the genocide in Rwanda could have been prevented if increased economic opportunities (perhaps through international trade) had eliminated the staggering wealth discrepancy between Hutus and Tutsis. Meanwhile, advances in biotechnology are eliminating famine by giving starving populations cheap, abundant, disease-resistant and drought-resistant crops.

Depending on your persona, you might get some mileage out of this quick joke:

"You're facing a moral inclination in this round because you're supposed to vote for the debater with the most compelling position. You have moral agency. You don't have to vote for me, but it would be great if you did."

Under no circumstances should you dignify your opponent's value with a response. The resolution is impossible, and impossible things cannot be measured. If pressured in cross-examination, take the opportunity to further explain what a resolutional objection is.

Affirmative Notes

The purpose of this case is to counter value-centric affirmatives by shutting down the framework debate completely. You should search for any way you can to bring it back. Ask specific questions about your value in cross-examination - for example, get the negative to admit that it's a good goal for governments and it's morally relevant.

Scrutinize the neg responses to your applications. Do they all work? Do they all uphold your value as well as your proposed method? What do you know about your application that you can use to shut this down? You're more than happy to talk about your applications - revel in the chance to explain why government assistance is the only true option.

Obligation doesn't have to mean only once choice. Consider entering a definition war, defending your position that a moral obligation is just superior to other options, or arguing that there can be multiple obligations, or arguing that you can have an obligation to help but many ways to accomplish that.

Make the negative squirm by asking hypothetical questions with very challenging ethical dilemmas - just be sure not to push too far. The negative will never respond well to a direct question like "So can you agree that in some cases a moral obligation exists?" But you can bring him right to the edge.

Example:

Your mugger application is a hypothetical example, right? (Yes)

So hypothetical examples are useful in this debate? (Yes)

Here's a hypothetical example I want your thoughts on. You see a newborn baby playing on train tracks. You hear a whistle in the distance. You don't see anyone else around. How many moral options do you have? (Uh-oh)