Negative: Idealism

By Aaron Clendenen

Resolved: In democratic elections, the public’s right to know ought to be valued above a candidate’s right to privacy.

Lincoln-Douglas debate is a debate of philosophy. I like to think of it as, rather than a debate of what IS, (such as a policy debate), it’s a debate of shoulds. The question of the res is not what is, but what should be. This case provides one of many possible approaches to what should be. This case is largely based in American political history, because it provides one of the most clear cases where a democracy has worked with minimal intrusion into the affairs of politicians.

This case becomes more difficult to run when you have 1) a practical judge, who sees things the way they are, not the way they should be, or 2) someone who understands how Resolutional Theory relates to either proving or disproving the resolution. (See below note)

NOTE: This case is a Resolutional Objection. Unlike a Resolutional Critique, which says the resolution cannot be debated, a Resolutional Objection (In this case) says that, within the scope of the resolution, it is not only false that the public’s right to knowledge is the higher value, but it can never, in any instance be true. This means that you will open the doors to your opponent providing a single instance where the resolution is true and successfully proving the resolution. If you play your cards right, this won’t be an issue for the case, but you will need to know and be aware of this potential weakness. (For refutation of a specific burden of scope, I would recommend stressing the first Resolutional Analysis, because that is the basis of the whole case, and the reason for the Resolutional Objection, or the primary argumentation under your first contention.)

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Negative: Idealism

The debate before us today is a debate over what the world should be. We are asked, ‘Should we value your right to knowledge above a politician’s right to privacy’. The important word in the question before us today is the word, should. I would contend that sometimes, we really do have to, but we *shouldn’t* have to, and therefore the resolution is false.

DEFINITIONS

Privacy

Dictionary.com “Privacy” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/privacy>

A personal matter that is concealed; a secret.

It is important to note that this the term ‘private’ does not refer only to a concealed matter, but a concealed matter that is *personal*.

Right to Know

Dictionary.com “Right-to-know” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/right-to-know>

Of or relating to laws or policies that make certain government or company data and records available to any individual who has a right or need to know their contents.

RESOLUTIONAL ANALYSIS 1: Debate of Shoulds

Lincoln Douglass debate is a debate of philosophy. The purpose of philosophy is to attempt to show the world, or certain aspects of it, as they ought to be. We have to look at the resolution the way it was intended to be addressed. In other words, the question before us today is not ‘Can we practically value one side over the other, and how’, but rather, ‘which side is ideally more valuable?’

VALUE: Honor

Reason to Prefer: Intrinsic, applicable and ideal

As we just discovered, the resolution before us is asking, which side *should* we value? Which side of the resolution is actually more valuable? I would contend that a right to privacy is a higher value insofar as politicians ought to be, in a perfect world, trusted to keep their personal life free from scandal and public concern. The value of honor is,

1. Intrinsic. Being an honorable, trustworthy and ethical person is something that is intrinsically valuable.
2. Applicable. When asking which side of the resolution is higher, we have to ask WHY we would ask for private information from politicians. The answer is that we don’t trust them; but ideally, we should. The value of honor is the most applicable value for both sides.
3. Ideal. The value of honor provides an ideal Brightline through which we can assess resolution. Ideally, politicians should be honorable, and so we can begin the resolution the way it was intended to be addressed.

CONTENTION 1: Honor without compromise

As we have established, the resolution asks a question of ideals. *Should* we value the public’s right to knowledge above the politicians right to privacy. The answer to this question is no. We should value honor without compromise. In other words if a politician cannot be trusted, that’s a problem with the politician, not with their right to privacy. While Nixon should not have been trusted, George Washington should have. To throw out all politician’s right to privacy is to say that all politicians cannot be trusted. Unfortunately, this statement is just not true if we look at the way things *should* be. While sometimes, it is true that we cannot trust politicians, we *should* be able to. Therefore, the right to privacy should be valued higher because we *should* have honorable politicians, even though sometimes we don’t.

Application 1: George Washington

Perhaps the best example for what we should expect from politicians is George Washington. The first official president of the United States of America has much he can teach younger generations, not least of which is what a good leader looks like. Washington was willing to fight for his nation, he was willing to defend it, but above all, he was an honorable leader. Mount Vernon.org puts it this way;

Mountvernon.org, “10 things you really ought to know about George Washington” <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/10-things-you-really-ought-to-know-about-george-washington>, Mountvernon.org is the website of George Washington’s house, which is now open for tours and educates people on the life and work of George Washington. DATE UNKNOWN, BUT THE INFORMATION IS HISTORICAL, SO THE DATE SHOULD NOT BE CHALLENGED.

While Washington is best known for the positions he held, both as a general and president, it is his willingness to surrender power that may be his most important legacy. On December 23, 1783, Washington strode into the Maryland State House in Annapolis and [surrendered his military commission](https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/biography/timeline/#g-43_m-surrendering-his-commission-web-3) to Congress – thereby affirming the principle of civilian control of the military. When King George III heard that Washington would surrender his commission, he reportedly said that if "He did [this] He would be the greatest man in the world."

We have had many politicians throughout history that have indeed been untrustworthy, but as Washington shows us, this is not a problem with politics, but with modern politicians. We ought to value the honor of our leaders, and therefore, their right to privacy. We should not *need* to seize our elected officials private information, we should be have leaders who are honest and trustworthy.

Affirmative Counter-Brief: Democracy

The best way to counter this negative case is to note that it is a little too philosophical. Philosophy, while not necessarily 100% practical, is by nature a practical study. Philosophy, like history, is only valuable insofar as it dictates your day-to-day life. This case is philosophy without application. As soon as you note the nature of the case, you can show (and refute) the downfalls in the case. A good way to refute this case is to ask the question, are ideals inherently good?

Please note that below the abbreviations ANA and MPX and RSK refer to Analysis and Impact and Risk (respectively), for an analysis of the quote provided, its impact and the risk of running the argument. Also, any square brackets within quotes are put there to make the quote easier to read. *They do not change the meaning of the quote in any way.* This is allowed in NCFCA.

Ideals are dangerous

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/355154-ideals-are-dangerous-things-realities-are-better-they-wound-but#:~:text=Quotes%20%3E%20Quotable%20Quote-,%E2%80%9CIdeals%20are%20dangerous%20things.,but%20they're%20better.%E2%80%9D>, Oscar Wilde (American Poet), Lady Windermere’s Fan, 1893.

“Ideals are dangerous things. Realities are better. They wound, but they're better.”

**ANA:** *This quote does not mean that all ideals are dangerous*, but rather that some are. All this quote does is introduce a better argument. The argument you should make from this quote is that some ideas are good, but in practice are not. *Start this argument in cross examination* by asking the question, ‘is helping the poor valuable?’ and go from there to ask, ‘should we try to help the poor?’ The answer to both of these questions should be yes. When your opponent concedes these points, you can say that *ideally*, the idea is sound, but when you look at it from a realistic, philosophical prospective you can see that it is not. *The idea is the basis of socialism, and communism.* You can take this cross examination and quote to show that ideals, *when divorced from reality* are dangerous. It is only through the practical, day-to-day realities that we are able to assess which ideals are good or not.

**MPX:** If you can break down the value of honor, the case falls apart completely. There are numerous ways to do this, but the easiest is to break the link between ideals and Lincoln Douglas, which this argument and quote do.

**RSK:** Pay close attention to the italicized words and phrases in the above Analysis. This argument can be seen as extreme if you do not limit it to specifically the case you are discussing. To say that ‘ideals are dangerous’ is something that most judges will reject unless it is said 1) correctly and 2) in a way that is true.

Philosophy Is Practical

<https://www.jmu.edu/philrel/why-study-philosophy/why-study-philosophy.shtml#:~:text=The%20study%20of%20philosophy%20helps,develop%20these%20various%20important%20skills.>, James Madison University, “Why Study Philosophy?”2020, DATE UNKNOWN, accessed 7/1/2020.

“Much of what is learned in philosophy can be applied in virtually any endeavor. This is both because philosophy touches so many subjects and, especially, because many of its methods can be used in any field. The study of philosophy helps us to enhance our ability to solve problems, our communication skills, our persuasive powers, and our writing skills. Below is a description of how philosophy helps us develop these various important skills.”

**ANA:** This quote shows the purpose of philosophy. You don’t study philosophy because its particularly important to know what Thomas Hobbes thought about human nature hundreds of years ago, you study philosophy because it is a practical thing to do.

**MPX:** The impact of his quote is heavy. If philosophy is practical, then this solely idealistic approach to the resolution is philosophically invalid. Be careful not to say that your opponents case is not philosophically sound if you run this argument, because there are sects of philosophy that are idealist, but you need to stress that they are not *completely* divorced from practicality, as this case is.

**RSK:** The risk of running this quote is that the quote is from a college, and specifically relates to why you should study philosophy *at their college*. This means that your opponent can run bias against the quote.