Moral Agency
Affirmative Case by Shaylea Sawyers



This case argues that nationalism enables countries to act independently, thus best promoting the pursuit of truth. Nationalism holds to the national values even when they conflict with those of the world. In doing so, nationalism can make the correct choice even when the globe has made the wrong one.

The value in this case is Moral Agency, which means you’ll be advocating for a government’s freedom to follow its conscience and it citizens’ morality. This promotes your reason to prefer of Pursuit of Truth because there are times when the globe has made the wrong choice. In those situations, governments can and should use their moral agency to act on what’s right and true.

The applications illustrate such dilemmas. The UNCRC is a situation of the entire world infringing upon parent’s rights, and one country using its moral agency to stand in opposition. Slavery was an example of an atrocity being morally accepted worldwide, until we accepted the truth of slavery’s injustice, one nation at a time.

When arguing this case, it’s important to keep in mind the moral motivation in political decisions. Every action a government takes is connected to some part of that government’s worldview. Thus, whenever interests or actions conflict, a moral conflict lies underneath.

Opponents might try to paint your position as moral relativism. They might claim your argument holds all nations as “correct” and reject absolute truth. You must be quick to correct them. Your argument is not that we can’t find truth. On the contrary, your argument is that we should pursue truth, but we cannot blindly trust globalism to do so.

Moral Agency

The French philosopher Voltaire once said:

“It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

We have a responsibility to stand up for truth, but we can only do so when we are allowed to make our own moral judgments. Because a philosophy that places what the collective decides to be true over the beliefs of individuals can never respect moral agency I stand

**Resolved: Nationalism ought to be valued above globalism.**

For the sake of clarity, I’d like to begin today’s round with a few…

# Definitions

Nationalism is defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as

“the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

And Globalism is defined by Dictionary.com as

 “the attitude or policy of placing the interests of the entire world above those of individual ..nations.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

To make sure we’re on the same page about what this resolution means, I offer a…

# Resolutional Analysis: Government Standpoint

In this debate, we ought to look at this resolution from a government’s standpoint. What that means is that we should not focus not on how nationalism and globalism affect individuals’ actions because, in reality, the average person doesn’t regularly deal with these philosophies. Instead, we ought to look at nationalism and globalism’s most common context: policy decisions.

When we look at those policy decisions, what we need to make sure they respect is the…

# Value: Moral Agency

My Value for this round is Moral Agency. Moral Agency can be operationally defined as an entity’s ability to make moral judgments. All legislation is connected to a decision of morality. For example, we outlaw murder because we believe killing is wrong. Therefore, governments have to exercise moral agency whenever they make a policy decision. Only when the government’s decisions represent the citizens’ beliefs is moral agency being protected.

# Reason to Prefer: Pursuit of Truth

In order for humanity to pursue truth, governments have to be free to make their own moral judgments. This way, humanity is allowed to observe the consequences of those moral judgments. This observation allows nations to pursue truth and decide for themselves what they believe is right. As Voltaire said:

“Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so, too.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

To explain how Nationalism best respects Moral Agency and the Pursuit of Truth, I present two contentions.

# Contention One: Globalism Disrespects Moral Agency

Globalism believes the interests and decisions of the world are more important than those of individual nations. This disrespects countries’ moral agency because it sees the moral judgments of the collective as more valid than a nation's individual moral beliefs. Because of that, if a certain nation’s beliefs contradict what the world decides is best, globalists tend to pressure governments to agree with them instead of their citizens. An example of this can be found in

## Application: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the world’s most comprehensive treaty on children’s rights. It’s been ratified by every country on earth with one exception - the United States. The US has been under enormous pressure to ratify the treaty; some call our refusal “embarrassing.”[[5]](#footnote-5) However, the bill concerns some US citizens. It requires children to learn about multiculturalism, equality of the sexes, and environmentalism, potentially damaging parents’ right to educate their children freely. As Phyllis Schlafly, constitutional lawyer and leader of the conservative movement explained: “The American people would not permit Congress to prescribe what all our children must learn on these sensitive issues, so we certainly don't want the United Nations to lay down the law [6].”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Convention is an expression of Globalist interests in conflict with our Nation’s values. Globalism would like to strip our right to decide what we think is moral and just, but nationalism gives us the moral agency to protect it, as I’ll explain in…

# Contention Two: Nationalism Respects Moral Agency

Nationalism allows governments to put their own values and the values of their citizens before the practices of the rest of the world. This is most valuable when global practices are wrong. Nationalism gives governments the moral agency to reject common institutions to pursue what they believe to be true, as illustrated in

## Application: Vermont’s abolition of slavery

Slavery has been a worldwide phenomenon dating back to the Babylonian times.[[7]](#footnote-7) But in the 1500s, it exploded with the start of the Atlantic slave trade. According to The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History: “from approximately 1526 to 1867, some 12.5 million slaves had been shipped from Africa, and 10.7 million had arrived in the Americas. The Atlantic Slave Trade was likely the most costly in human life of all of long-distance global migrations.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The vast majority of the planet had no objection to this massive human rights abuse; the globalist mentality justifies any atrocity, as long as the collective agrees.

Yet, near the close of the 18th century, the then independent nation of Vermont acted against global values to pursue its national beliefs. In 1777 Vermont became the first sovereign state to abolish slavery.[[9]](#footnote-9) Nationalism gave Vermont the choice to act in opposition to global tradition.

If governments are to respect their own and their citizens’ values, they have to take their policies into their own hands, even in the face of global pressure. Valuing Nationalism above Globalism affords governments the moral agency to act against the rest of the world and pursue what they believe to be true.

Opposing This Case

The flaw in this case’s philosophy is that is leaves countries powerless to intervene in actual atrocities. While it claims that globalism cannot be trusted to find truth, nationalism is no better. You can assert that globalism is better equipped to find moral truth. It does so in two ways.

1. Iron sharpening iron. Globalism combines countries with vastly different view points and forces them to find common ground. This helps glean the best parts of each nation’s worldview and forces out the inconsistencies.
2. Accountability. Sometimes the actions of a nation are clearly wrong, take North Korea or the Soviet Union for examples. Governments like that must face resistance. Globalism empowers the world to hold harmful nations accountable to moral truth.

In order to argue this, you will have to cede that globalism does not best protect moral agency. However, you can justify that by explaining how either your value or the pursuit of truth outweighs moral agency.

1. “Voltaire,” *The Quotations Page*, accessed November 26, http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/20876.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Nationalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published Nov 29, 2001, revised Dec 15, 2014, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Globalism,”. *Dictionary.com Unabridged,* Random House, Inc., accessed: November 26, 2017, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/globalism [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Voltaire, “Essay on Tolerance,” *The Quotations Page, accessed November 26,*  http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/35375.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sarah Mehta, “There’s Only One Country That Hasn’t Ratified the Convention on Children's Rights: US,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, NOVEMBER 20, 2015, (Sarah Mehta is a Researcher for the ACLU Human Rights Program), https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/theres-only-one-country-hasnt-ratified-convention-childrens-rights-us [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Phyllis Schlafly, “The New World Order Wants Your Children”, *Eagle Forum: The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, March 1993, Phyllis Schlafly is a constitutional lawyer and leader of the conservative movement, http://eagleforum.org/psr/1993/mar93/psrmar93.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bamber Gascoigne, “History of Slavery” HistoryWorld. From 2001, ongoing. http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac41 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Facts about the Slave Trade and Slavery,” *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, 2017, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/slavery-and-anti-slavery/resources/facts-about-slave-trade-and-slavery [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “CHRONOLOGY-Who banned slavery when?,” *Reuters*, MARCH 22, 2007, http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-slavery-idUSL1561464920070322 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)