Thinking Like a Soldier  
Philosophies of the Resolution by Mark Csoros



Lincoln Douglas debate came about because of a love of philosophy. People get tired of endless topicality presses and evidence debates of policy, so they created a style of debate that emphasized critical thinking, deep questioning, and philosophical argumentation. In that grand tradition, this article is intended to provide an overview of the differing mindsets of this year’s Stoa resolution. This article isn’t a primer on what to believe, nor is it a magic bullet for you to quote at your opponent. It’s intended to give you enough information to help you analyze the resolution at a new and deeper level. There are four key philosophies that we’ll cover:

* Nationalism
* Globalism
* Pragmatism
* Epistemology

# Nationalism

Nationalism, as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica, is an:

[*ideology*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society) *based on the* [*premise*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/premise) *that the individual’s loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Historically, Nationalism has been the defining ideology of empires and successful world powers, and it will also be the defining ideology of most affirmatives. In ancient Greece, the nation-state of Sparta was known for the willingness of its people to sacrifice for the state. Rome, an empire dedicated to outward expansion, granted more rights to Roman citizens than to the people it conquered. England, whose colonies were so expansive that it was said that “the sun never sets on the British Empire”, had a strong tradition of loyalty to the monarchy. In fact, that tradition is so strong that some liberated English colonies (like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) still pledge loyalty to the Queen of England. The American and French Revolutions, the independence movement in India, the push for Scottish independence and Brexit are all examples of Nationalism.

However, Nationalism also has a bit of a PR problem. Until the late 20th century, there was a clear need for nationalism. People lived in nations with clearly defined, if not airtight, borders, international trade was minimal, and cross-cultural communication was rare. Now, nationalism has fallen partially out of vogue. Technologies like the World Wide Web mean we can communicate, trade, travel, and live in an unprecedented way. Now, nationalism is more likely to be seen as antiquated or reflexive, rather than patriotic. It doesn’t help that nationalism has been used to justify some really horrible things. Adolf Hitler was a nationalist, and so it doesn’t seem to matter that Winston Churchill was, too. North Korea is nationalist, so who cares if Brexit is a good idea?

The trick to being simultaneously nationalist and ethical is to steer clear of “ethno-nationalism.” Ethno-nationalism says that the people of a certain race, ethnicity, or religion are the *only* people who should be protected. Nationalism says “Germany comes first.” Ethno-nationalism says “Aryans come first.” If you’re on affirmative, you’ll likely need to argue for “true” nationalism. If the government’s job is primarily to benefit its own people, then preemptive warfare is justified. Negative will probably accuse you of supporting abuses in the name of nationalism, so remind them of the difference between ethno-nationalism and true nationalism. You aren’t supporting genocide; you’re supporting the security of free nations. You’re supporting the government’s obligation to its own people *first*.

**Globalism**

Globalism is the counter-ideology to Nationalism in almost every way. Globalism is a trendy, newer ideology that mocks Nationalism for being stuck in the past. Globalism embraces free trade, multi-national integration, and the United Nations. It opposes tariffs, isolationism, and most war. While definitions of Globalism vary (some emphasize the economics, some the culture, and some the politics) this mindset sees the individual less as a part of a nation, and more as part of a broader international community. It sees each government less as a sovereign defender of national borders, and more as a member of various international organizations (the WTO, the UN, the IMF, NATO), dedicated to achieving world peace and a high standard of living for every human. One of the best comprehensive definitions of Globalism comes, fittingly, from the publication *The Globalist.* It says:

“Globalism, at its core, seeks to describe and explain nothing more than a world which is characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental distances. It attempts to understand all the inter-connections of the modern world — and to highlight patterns that underlie (and explain) them.”*[[2]](#footnote-2)*

So, why is this mindset becoming so prevalent? Interestingly, one of the best practical arguments for Globalism *is Nationalism*. Because of how inter-connected our world is, nations are no longer stand-alone entities. National security, economic viability, and individual quality of life all depend on a vast network of allegiances, councils, security boards, and trade relationships. If governments want to protect their citizens, they need to be a part of a global community. What’s the best way to lose standing in the world? Unilaterally start conflicts. Worse, preemptively start conflicts, then find out they weren’t really necessary. Wantonly killing foreign nationals won’t help domestic citizens at all.

Secondly, Globalism has a strong ethical argument. Let’s say you had the choice of killing an innocent person, or there was a good chance (say, 99% chance) an innocent person would die. Mathematically, the most ethical choice is to do nothing, because there’s a 1% chance no one will die. If you choose to step in (under the rules of this scenario), you know for sure someone will die. Apply that same logic to preemptive warfare. Nationalism would have you step in, fire off a preemptive strike, and kill some foreigners, because the people of a nation are the government’s first priority. Globalism tells you to do nothing, because a) all humans are equally entitled to life, and b) that 1% chance everyone is fine is better than the 100% chance someone dies.

# Pragmatism

This philosophy works both ways. It can support the willingness of the affirmative to take life to protect a nation, and it can support the negative’s unwillingness to disrupt the international harmony that citizens need. Pragmatism can mean slightly different things, depending on context, so let’s look at a definition from Merriam Webster:

1. *a* [*practical*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/practical#h1) *approach to problems and affairs*
2. *an American movement in* [*philosophy*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philosophy) *founded by C. S. Peirce and William James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is preeminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief [[3]](#footnote-3)*

I don’t recommend that you, as an individual, adopt the philosophy of Pragmatism. There is more to life than the practical bearings of conceptions, and truth is true regardless of its consequences. However, Pragmatism is something that governments can and should use. I want my government to think, but I want that thought to guide action. I want my government to seek truth (they need to know about threats to my safety), but I’m more concerned with the practical application of those truths (preemptive warfare…or not, depending on what benefits me).

In this resolution, Pragmatism’s greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. That powerful chink in the armor is that Pragmatism is dependent on a goal. Pragmatism is weak, because it can justify the single-minded pursuit of a goal, but it will never be the goal itself. Its strength is that it’s both rhetorically powerful and organizationally supple. You can use Pragmatism as a persuasive tool, to show how you best uphold your value, and to flick opposing arguments. The simple line, “it works,” is a pragmatic appeal that most judges will have at least some sympathy for.

But, use caution. Pragmatism has been used in the past to justify some horrific abuses of human rights, and there is a superficial dichotomy between pragmatic logic and moral justification. For an explanation of why Pragmatism is relevant, refer to the Resolutional Overview’s philosophy section. If you’re having trouble de-linking Pragmatism from Japanese internment camps, slavery, or the Holocaust, remember this: Pragmatism doesn’t define the destination, it just gets you there faster. Ethical and unethical choices become more effective when you act pragmatically.

# Epistemology

Finally, let’s talk about what we know. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy says this about Epistemology:

Defined narrowly, epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief. As the study of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with the following questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits? As the study of justified belief, epistemology aims to answer questions such as: How we are to understand the concept of justification? What makes justified beliefs justified? Is justification internal or external to one's own mind?*[[4]](#footnote-4)*

You might be wondering why epistemology matters at all. After all, “what is a justified belief” seems really far away from whether “preemptive warfare is morally justified.” Here’s where they intersect: For the last 200-odd years, we’ve believed that preemptive warfare is just if it meets the criteria of the Caroline Doctrine.[[5]](#footnote-5) It must be in self-defense, characterized by an instant, overwhelming necessity, and there have to be no other options. Fair enough, but sometimes philosophers have to ask questions like a 2-year-old. Questions like:

* “how do you know there’s an overwhelming necessity?”
* “Is a war imminent?”
* “How do you know?”
* “Can you predict the future?”
* “If you can’t know for sure, aren’t you guessing?”
* “If you’re guessing, aren’t you basing the lives of millions of people off of your gut instinct?”
* “Are you that comfortable with the feelings of your gut?”

As much as I would like to delve into exactly what knowledge is, whether or not you can predict the future, and what constitutes a justified belief, my editor would not love me if I spent the next 10 pages doing that. So, here’s what you need to do:

1. Find out where knowledge comes from.
2. Find the differences between justified belief and justified true belief (the Gettier problem is useful here).
3. Find out how we make predictions (hint: it has a lot to do with intuition and historical precedence).

I know, summer homework isn’t always fun. But, the title of this article doesn’t just refer to the philosophical questions and mindsets behind preemptive war. Thinking like a soldier means preparing now for the challenges you will face. So, spend time answering these questions, reading philosophy, and internalizing the information you find. The more you sweat in practice, the less you bleed in war.

1. Kohn, Hans. "Nationalism." Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 17 July 2016. Web. 24 June 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Nye, Joseph. "Globalism Versus Globalization” The Globalist, 14 Dec. 2016. Web. 25 June 2017. <https://www.theglobalist.com/globalism-versus-globalization/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pragmatism." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 25 June 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pragmatism> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Steup, Matthias. "Epistemology." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 14 Dec. 2005. Web. 25 June 2017. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/#GET> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a refresher, see the Resolutional Overview article at <https://monumentmembers.com/stoa-lincoln-douglas-release-01-preempt-not-preempt-info/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)