# A/T Epistemological Bias Arguments

Many responses. Your argument is impact justified and appeals to consequentialism. **MASSEY[[1]](#footnote-1):**

When I debated five years ago, it was common to hear frameworks like this: “The standard is minimizing terrorism. Terrorism kills [#] people every year, making it the largest threat to civilians worldwide. Terrorism destabilizes the international community, causing wars, etc.” Then, debaters started pointing out that these frameworks were *impact-justified*: they assumed consequentialism without justifying it and used weighing arguments as standards-justifications. Impact-justified frameworks artificially excluded other consequentialist impacts and artificially inflated the importance of marginal links to their standard. (Even if annually terrorism kills more people than bee stings, a marginal link to terrorism might be outweighed by a huge link to bee stings.) This realization was the biggest advance for framework debate in recent memory. Impact-justified frameworks virtually disappeared, and debaters got down to the real task of justifying the underlying weighing mechanism (consequentialism, deontology, etc.). Framework and contention debates started to make much more sense.

But recently, **impact-justified frameworks** have returned in a subtler and thus more pernicious form. Consider the following framework arguments I’ve actually heard in rounds: 1. “The community is necessary to formulate morality. Thus, the standard is protecting the community.” This is impact-justified since it **assume**s that **people have a moral obligation to preserve their ability to formulate morality**. (It’s just like the Bostrom extinction-first argument.) I’m not aware of any moral theories that place much emphasis on this moral obligation or even prescribe such a moral obligation, much less say it’s the *only* moral obligation. **As long as people are acting correctly, morality doesn’t** seem to **care if they can formulate the rules according to which they’re acting**. So this is not only impact-justified, but it seems even less plausible than the old impact-justified frameworks: At least when people assumed consequentialism, they were making an assumption that many people believe is true. (Here I’m reading the argument charitably. If it’s not impact-justified, then it conflates the pre- and post-fiat distinction: as debaters in this round, **we are capable of formulating morality whether or not the people in the post-fiat world can do so.) You can also see the same disconnect here as in the old impact-justified frameworks between marginal links to the standard and the justification for the standard: Even if it’s necessary to have a community, it doesn’t follow that any harm to the community short of destroying it is bad. 2. “You can’t know anything if you don’t know your own ontology, and respect for the Other is required to formulate an ontology. Thus, the standard is** respecting the Other.”This **[other] argument[s] assume**s **we have an obligation to know stuff. Not obviously true, and** almost definitely outweighed by other impacts. Also, like other impact-justified frameworks, **the argument artificially excludes** other impacts to knowing stuff: if there are **other things that are necessary for us to know stuff**, those would also matter.

**MASSEY 2** continues with four more responses:

“Thanks for the questions, Daiya. I’m glad you brought up the pre- and post-fiat distinction, because that’s exactly what I want to refer to in answering your first question. You rightly point out in your #2 that framework arguments apply on both a pre- and post-fiat level. That’s not what I want to deny, and I’ll explain what I mean through my answer to your first question: You bring up the argument that an opponent’s framework is epistemically suspect because it fails to give special weight to X group or impact. As I touch on in the article (see the parentheses “Here I am reading the argument charitably…”), there are two ways to read these claims. To have a clear example, let’s assume it’s the neg making this argument on the Sept/Oct resolution. **[first] Either** (1) **The argument is that people in the aff world** of presumed consent **would not be able to form true beliefs because their society** would **fail[s] to provide for X** group or impact. This **[which] is impact-justified** in the same way as the examples in the article. **Or** (2) **The argument is that the** affirmative **debater** (we’re **on the pre-fiat level** now) **is not able to make true arg**ument**s** in the framework debatein the round **because her society fails to give special weight to X** group or impact. **If that is the case, the same applies to** the negative **[both] debater[s], since they live in the same society** (this is especially apparent when these arguments make really sweeping indicts, as of something like imperialism). Maybe the argument doesn’t indict an entire society or tradition of thinking but only the affirmative debater’s personal way of thinking. In that case, there are two important points, which actually apply to either the personal or societal version of (2): (a) Proving that the post-fiat aff world is [biased] imperialist isn’t sufficient to show that the aff debater/debater’s society is epistemically biased. The neg may show that presumed consent is imperialist, but in fact we do not have presumed consent in the United States. So showing that presumed consent is imperialist wouldn’t show that the aff debater/debater’s society is imperialist. (b) As you point out, **[second] this** argument **is defense. Showing** that **your opponent’s framework** argument **is epistemically biased might give a[n] comparative advantage** to your other framework arguments (since they would presumably escape that epistemic bias), **but it’s not much of a justification** for your framework on its own. Even if imperialism causes epistemic bias, that doesn’t say anything about the question of whether imperialism is MORALLY right or wrong. (See my arguments in the article that morality doesn’t really care about whether you can correctly formulate moral rules as long as you behave well.) **Moreover, an epistemic bias claim** of this sort **is extremely WEAK defense [since]** if the debater doesn’t point to any specific errors in his/her opponent’s reasoning (missing links, circularity, etc). Basically **it** has the same problem as an ad hominem attack–you’re **indict[s]**ing **the arguer rather than the argument.** It’s as if the debater is saying “I know there’s something wrong with my opponent’s reasoning here, but I can’t put my finger on it.” Seems to me that a specific criticism of reasoning should carry more weight. Finally, though this point has surely been made before, I’ll again say that this **[third]** epistemic **bias claim[s]** would **neglect the core question of** most resolutions and **framework debate**: all moral theories may agree that imperialism is bad, but the question is, what ought we to do about it? **Should we minimize** imperialism, even if that involves being imperialist to a lesser degree, **or** should we **take a** more **deontological approach?** Note as well that my necessity/sufficiency criticism applies here, too: **[fourth] the** epistemic **bias argument**, if it did work, **would prove only** that minimizing imperialism is **a necessary standard** but **not** that it’s **sufficient. There might be other things that** would **cause** epistemic **bias or other things that matter besides** epistemic **bias.”**

# A/T [X] before fairness

Fairness precludes the evaluation of any layer if a theory argument indicts that layer since it comes prior to the evaluation of who even won that layer in the first place. Massey et al:

“Pre-Fiat Arguments” [same author quals] Emily Massey, Grant Reiter, Geoff Kristof 2/3/14 http://nsdupdate.com/2014/02/03/pre-fiat-arguments-by-emily-massey-grant-reiter-and-geoff-kristof/

Third, pre-fiat debaters claim that their impacts precede fairness. To see what’s wrong with this, we need just to remember why fairness matters in debate in the first place. **Fairness constrains substance since abuse skews the judge’s evaluation of who did the better debating on the substantive layer. It constrains pre-fiat impacts for** exactly **the same reason. Even if the better debater is the person who resists oppression the most, abuse skews the judge’s evaluation of who did** the better debating on **that** pre-fiat layer.

# A/T Policymaking

Policymaking is limiting and an unnecessary and unwarranted focus, Massey:

“NSD Update ‘State of Debate’ Round Table Part II” Emil Massey, Eric Palmer, Jeff Liu, Larry Liu http://nsdupdate.com/2013/04/09/5145/

Emily: One of the best things about **debate** is that there are hardly any prescribed rules. Nothing else, in high school or beyond, **offers so much** opportunity for **intellectual creativity**. (Perhaps this is why so many great debaters are not straight-A students.) So fundamentally, I oppose **limiting** the **arguments** debaters can make. Moralizing about arguments **makes debate a lot** more like school and a lot **less fun.** For another thing, different people are drawn to different types of arguments. **Some find empirical questions uninteresting but love philosophy** – don’t we want them to debate, too? **Moreover, the reliance on argument in debate is what gives it intellectual value.** Debate teaches that **argument is the** only **way to justify one’s views.** Deeming certain issues beyond question runs counter to this basic idea. **So if you think** nihilism is false or certain **philosophical questions are irrelevant** to debate about the resolution, then **you must be able to justify that.** Finally, **there’s already an activity devoted to** considering the **empirical dimensions of topics: policy debate.** I see no need to make LD into “short policy.” Sure, LDers can make policy-type arguments, but why restrict them to those kinds of arguments?

Policymaking requires philosophy anyways, **Massey 2** furthers:

Emily: Agreed. I would add that **many of the biggest debates in politics seem to be philosophical disagreements about the role of government: Is gay marriage the province of civil authority? Does a mandate to purchase health care infringe on personal liberty? If we care** primarily **about preparing students to go into politics** (though, like Eric, I don’t see why we should), **we should encourage philosophical debate.** You don’t learn how to debate the role of government by taking the truth of one side for granted in every round.

Policymaking paradigms are unwarranted and don’t justify consequentialism, Palmer:

**4. Another common refrain in the present day LD community is that philosophical positions detract from the educational mission of debate, which, according to this position, is supposed to be to mold debaters into informed citizens, and the kind of people who might someday be policymakers. Is this right? Eric: I find this argument suspect. If “molding students into informed citizens and potential policymakers” means forcing them to think about moral issues through the jaundiced lens of consequentialism, then I want no part in it. I would not really feel comfortable with an activity that was somehow premised on turning students into worse people. My hope** is that **LD**, insofar as it is **premised on** the examination of **questions of a distinctively ethical character, should** do something to make **help make students into better people** per se, and not just people who are well-suited to occupy positions of political consequence. **And I would hope** that **students who** do **end up holding** various **roles in government bring with them the right sort of values**, and so I would hope, ideally, that they had thought through some abstract moral considerations that might bring them to the right sorts of views (this assuming that they are not already persons of virtue, in which case I do not know that abstract reflection will benefit them). The notion that the style of debate we have inherited from policy is somehow more true to the “real world” and actual policy making strikes me as dubious. **Real policymakers do not suppose** that **their primary task** in all instances is **to consider the likelihood that their actions** could **lead to human annihilation**, since there are not very many political decisions that are more than tangentially connected with this kind of outcome. And real policymakers are not, as a general rule, concerned with what Heidegger, Foucault, or any other so-called “critical” author has to say about the issues they consider. I should also note that the assumption that policy making is distinctively consequentialist seems to me to be wildly mistaken. Hiroshima excepted, we do not commonly think that the slaughter of the innocent in war is justified, even where more lives might be saved. Our understanding of the laws of war seems to better accord with something like the Doctrine of Double Effect than anything else. **We** also generally **take it for granted that persons enjoy fundamental human rights, and** that these rights constrain the formation of policy (again, excepting some unfortunate cases like the Bush administration’s endorsement of torture), and we accept **that forms of discrimination** like racism and sexism **are unequivocally wrong, regardless of the consequences.** One might think that these dimensions of ordinary political thinking can be accommodated by rule consequentialism, and that may be true in many cases, but it still stands to reason that there are people in politics who do not accept propositions of this kind simply because of the desirable consequences associated with the adoption of a rule. Many suppose, I would think, that racism is wrong in itself, and not just because of the benefits of avoiding the additional social costs imposed by racial discrimination. John McCain’s opposition to torture, to cite one more prominent example, seems premised primarily on principle, not consequences. **Beyond this**, I’ve always thought **the idea that the purpose of debate is to produce people suited for politic[s]**al life was **[is] presumptuous.** Why do my students need to aspire to a government post? **Why can’t [debaters]** they **be doctors, philosophers, or artists?** And if they are entitled to choose that kind of career, why shouldn’t there be room in debate for the consideration of issues that might be of importance to them? **A doctor** plausibly **needs to be equipped with** some understanding of **non-consequentialist ethics since** we do, after all, care about things like patient consent, and **we do not**, after all, **murder the innocent** in order **to redistribute their organs** to the needy. The use of theory arguments and paradigmatic choices to discourage non-consequentialist or otherwise philosophical arguments has always struck me as stemming from a kind of anti-intellectual prejudice. If you want to make consequentialist arguments of the sort favored in policy debate, then why not defend consequentialism, or at least try to link your arguments into the framework proposed by your opponent, e.g. by pointing out that Kantian ethics supports positive obligations and then winning defense on your opponent’s arguments alleging violations of the basic duties of justice? If you really believe that we ought to evaluate moral and political questions [consequentially] from that kind of standpoint, then why not try to defend it?

1. Emily Massey [verified by PDI as considered to be the best judge in the community, former debater and coach for Walt Whitman, and my hero]. “The New Impact Justified Standards.” NSD Update. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)