

Nothing Special About K: A Rejection of Kritiks in LD

by Justin Bowles

I want to be very clear about what this article concerns and my own bias in this area. I am against K for many reasons. In my view they are arguments that seek to do the opposite of what they are meant. They seek to win at all costs while asserting that there is something more important than winning. However, I will say that I am open to evaluate kritiks on a case by case basis. If I see a kritik that is specific and necessary, I as a judge will vote on it. But I feel that such arguments are few and far between. To clarify the intent of this article, I am not addressing the kritik in terms of its use in Policy debate. Although some of these ideas may apply to certain kinds of kritiks across the spectrum, my focus here is Ks that are run on the negative in LD.

There is one glaring reason that kritiks should be rejected in Lincoln Douglas debate, and it is that kritiks are unnecessary because the negative position in LD is, at its very core, a critical one. When an affirmative presents a criterion in a case it is up to the negative to provide a challenge to it in order to meet the burden of clash in the round.

In essence, the negative is challenging the assumption of the affirmative position in trying to weigh a value. For example, when the affirmative seeks to uphold a value through a utilitarian criterion they are most often challenged by a deontological criterion on the negative. Here we have a situation whereby there are two distinct worldviews in conflict. And yet there is no indictment of institutions or systems, or accusation of perpetuating oppressive systems through language. In point of fact, the kritik seems to be taking the negative position to an extreme that is most times meant to give the negative

Two separate debates may have the same set of issues and ideas, but depending on the way certain things are argued can produce two different ballots. With a set of kritiks in their arsenal it is no longer necessary for a negative debater to have to respond directly to the affirmative or think on their feet in response to other arguments. In a world of K all that needs to be known is K.

The kritik would say that we disregard the arguments made specific to the resolution in favor of other issues, that while possibly relevant to abstract discussions of ideal worlds, has no place in a discussion on a

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an unfair advantage of having what would amount to a silver bullet argument. What I mean by this is an argument that always applies and always wins.

Such a situation isn't how a debate should work. Every debate is its own self-contained discussion, and should be treated as such.

specific topic. This is exacerbated by the fact that the arguments of the K are usually ones that can't be proven to any reasonable standard. You will most likely end the debate exactly where you started without ever having discussed the resolution in any real depth.

Now we will move on to some specific issues with certain kinds of kritiks.

The first issue to be discussed is resolutional K. These are arguments that the affirmative links to just by affirming the resolution. Such resolutional kritiks should be thrown out whole cloth from debate in general. Trying to condemn the affirmative for performing their burden in the round is abusive, and should not be tolerated. If an affirmative is to have any hope in a debate round they must affirm the resolution. And if that is enough for them to lose the round



in the eyes of the negative there is nothing that the affirmative can do except be ready to argue only theory in round, leaving the actual debate behind.

Now we will move on to the performative contradictions of most K. We will stick with the resolutorial K, but add in that it is a discourse K as well. To say that the affirmative links to the K simply by affirming, and that we must destroy the system or institution by creating discourse outside of round, the negative must run that K in every negative round to be consistent and honest. In addition to this, they must also not affirm the resolution because that would cause them to do the very things that they are advocating against in every other round. In order to meet the standards of their own argument the negative must not run an affirmative case at all. Or they must run it in such a way so as not to affirm at all.

The same can be said of language kritiks. If the negative seeks to change the way we speak in order to change our world they must

be held to the same standard outside of round just as they are advocating we all be. In the case of a language or discourse K it would be necessary to find out whether or not the debater has been consistent in arguing the K, as well as to determine whether or not they are engaging in a performative contradiction when they argue on the other side. Some may say that we can't do so because we cannot hold them to standards outside of the specific round, but the K seeks to do that in the first place. If we are going to allow the negative to seek discourse or education outside of the round we must hold them to the same standards they are advocating. There would be no way to enforce such a standard at a tournament.

So now that we know the problem we must come up with some solutions. Each and every person in the debate community can do something to try and deal with this issue. First, the NFL can come out with a strong and official position on kritiks in LD. They can create rules that would govern the K so

that we don't have abusive arguments being run on a regular basis. Second, the coaches can teach their students the flaws of K in LD and how to deal with it in round. If debaters are better able to handle the arguments they will become less attractive to those who would want to run them. Third, judges can be very clear about their distaste for kritiks in their paradigms. I very much doubt that a debater will run kritiks if they know that you will vote them down for doing so. Finally, and this is the most important part, the debaters themselves can reject K and refuse to run it. They can also, as stated above, learn to defend against K so that it becomes less and less attractive. ■

About the Author

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