#### Even if identity politics is important to talk about, a controversial policy statement must be the starting point for discussion – That focus is the internal link to all our decision-making impact AND turns the aff – Without striving towards concrete solutions, we are just pissing in the wind

Austin J. Freeley and David L. Steinberg – John Carroll University / U Miami – 2009, Argumentation and Debate: Critical Thinking for Reasoned Decision Making, p. 4-5, googlebooks

Debate is a means of settling differences, so there must be a difference of opinion or a conflict of interest before there can be a debate. If everyone is in agreement on a tact or value or policy, there is no need for debate: the matter can be settled by unanimous consent. Thus, for example, it would be pointless to attempt to debate "Resolved: That two plus two equals four," because there is simply no controversy about this statement. (Controversy is an essential prerequisite of debate. Where there is no clash of ideas, proposals, interests, or expressed positions on issues, there is no debate. In addition, debate cannot produce effective decisions without clear identification of a question or questions to be answered. For example, general argument may occur about the broad topic of illegal immigration. How many illegal immigrants are in the United States? What is the impact of illegal immigration and immigrants on our economy? What is their impact on our communities? Do they commit crimes? Do they take jobs from American workers? Do they pay taxes? Do they require social services? Is it a problem that some do not speak English? Is it the responsibility of employers to discourage illegal immigration by not hiring undocumented workers? Should they have the opportunity to gain citizenship? Does illegal immigration pose a security threat to our country? Do illegal immigrants do work that American workers are unwilling to do? Are their rights as workers and as human beings at risk due to their status? Are they abused by employers, law enforcement, housing, and businesses? How are their families impacted by their status? What is the moral and philosophical obligation of a nation state to maintain its borders? Should we build a wall on the Mexican border, establish a national identification card, or enforce existing laws against employers? Should we invite immigrants to become U.S. citizens? Surely you can think of many more concerns to be addressed by a conversation about the topic area of illegal immigration. Participation in this "debate" is likely to be emotional and intense. However, it is not likely to be productive or useful without focus on a particular question and identification of a line demarcating sides in the controversy. To be discussed and resolved effectively, controversies must be stated clearly. Vague understanding results in unfocused deliberation and poor decisions, frustration, and emotional distress, as evidenced by the failure of the United States Congress to make progress on the immigration debate during the summer of 2007.¶ Someone disturbed by the problem of the growing underclass of poorly educated, socially disenfranchised youths might observe, "Public schools are doing a terrible job! They are overcrowded, and many teachers are poorly qualified in their subject areas. Even the best teachers can do little more than struggle to maintain order in their classrooms." That same concerned citizen, facing a complex range of issues, might arrive at an unhelpful decision, such as "We ought to do something about this" or, worse, "It's too complicated a problem to deal with." Groups of concerned citizens worried about the state of public education could join together to express their frustrations, anger, disillusionment, and emotions regarding the schools, but without a focus for their discussions, they could easily agree about the sorry state of education without finding points of clarity or potential solutions. A gripe session would follow. But if a precise question is posed—such as "What can be done to improve public education?"—then a more profitable area of discussion is opened up simply by placing a focus on the search for a concrete solution step. One or more judgments can be phrased in the form of debate propositions, motions for parliamentary debate, or bills for legislative assemblies. The statements "Resolved: That the federal government should implement a program of charter schools in at-risk communities" and "Resolved: That the state of Florida should adopt a school voucher program" more clearly identify specific ways of dealing with educational problems in a manageable form, suitable for debate. They provide specific policies to be investigated and aid discussants in identifying points of difference.¶ To have a productive debate, which facilitates effective decision making by directing and placing limits on the decision to be made, the basis for argument should be clearly defined. If we merely talk about "homelessness" or "abortion" or "crime” or "global warming" we are likely to have an interesting discussion but not to establish profitable basis for argument. For example, the statement "Resolved: That the pen is mightier than the sword" is debatable, yet fails to provide much basis for clear argumentation. If we take this statement to mean that the written word is more effective than physical force for some purposes, we can identify a problem area: the comparative effectiveness of writing or physical force for a specific purpose.

Although we now have a general subject, we have not yet stated a problem. It is still too broad, too loosely worded to promote well-organized argument. What sort of writing are we concerned with—poems, novels, government documents, website development, advertising, or what? What does "effectiveness" mean in this context? What kind of physical force is being compared—fists, dueling swords, bazookas, nuclear weapons, or what? A more specific question might be. "Would a mutual defense treaty or a visit by our fleet be more effective in assuring Liurania of our support in a certain crisis?" The basis for argument could be phrased in a debate proposition such as "Resolved: That the United States should enter into a mutual defense treatv with Laurania." Negative advocates might oppose this proposition by arguing that fleet maneuvers would be a better solution. This is not to say that debates should completely avoid creative interpretation of the controversy by advocates, or that good debates cannot occur over competing interpretations of the controversy; in fact, these sorts of debates may be very engaging. The point is that debate is best facilitated by the guidance provided by focus on a particular point of difference, which will be outlined in the following discussion.

#### Dogmatism turns the aff –staking our intellectual claims and refusing to suspend our beliefs means we talk past each other and never convince anyone outside our inner circle

Haskell, Professor History Rice, 90

(Professor of History at Rice, “Objectivity is not neutrality: Rhetoric vs. practice in Peter Novick’s That noble dream,” History and Theory 29, no. 2: 129–157)

Detachment functions in this manner not by draining us of passion, but by helping to channel our intellectual passions in such a way as to insure collision with rival perspectives. In that collision, if anywhere, our thinking transcends both the idiosyncratic and the conventional. Detachment both socializes and deparochializes the work of intellect; it is the quality that fits an individual to participate fruitfully in what is essentially a communal enterprise. Objectivity is so much a product of social arrangements that individuals and particular opinions scarcely deserve to be called objective, yet the social arrangements that foster objectivity have no basis for existence apart from individual striving for detachment. Only insofar as the members of the community are disposed to set aside the perspective that comes most spontaneously to them, and strive to see things in a detached light, is there any likelihood that they will engage with one another mentally and provoke one another through mutual criticism to the most complete, least idiosyncratic, view that humans are capable of. When the ascetic effort at detachment fails, as it often does, we “talk past one another,” producing nothing but discordant soliloquies, each fancying itself the voice of reason. The kind of thinking I would call objective leads only a fugitive existence outside of communities that enjoy a high degree of independence from the state and other external powers, and which are dedicated internally not only to detachment, but also to intense mutual criticism and to the protection of dissenting positions against the perpetual threat of majority tyranny.¶ Some hypothetical examples may clarify what I mean by objective thinking and show how remote it is from neutrality. Consider an extreme case: the person who, although capable of detachment, suspends his or her own perceptions of the world not in the expectation of gaining a broader perspective, but only in order to learn how opponents think so as to demolish their arguments more effectively—who is, in short, a polemicist, deeply and fixedly committed as a lifelong project to a particular political or cultural or moral program. Anyone choosing such a life obviously risks being thought boorish or provincial, but insofar as such a person successfully enters into the thinking of his or her rivals and produces arguments potentially compelling not only to those who already share the same views, but to outsiders as well, I see no reason to withhold the laurel of objectivity.10 There is nothing objective about hurling imprecations at apostates or catechizing the faithful, but as long as the polemicist truly engages the thinking of the enemy he or she is being as objective as anyone. In contrast, the person too enamored of his or her own interpretation of things seriously and sympathetically to entertain alternatives, even for the sake of learning how best to defeat them, fails my test of objectivity, no matter how serene and even tempered.¶ The most common failure of objectivity is preaching to the converted, proceeding in a manner that complacently presupposes the pieties of one’s own coterie and makes no effort to appreciate or appeal to the perspectives of outsiders. In contrast, the most commonly observed fulfillment of the ideal of objectivity in the historical profession is simply the powerful argument—the text that reveals by its every twist and turn its respectful appreciation of the alternatives it rejects. Such a text attains power precisely because its author has managed to suspend momentarily his or her own perceptions so as to anticipate and take account of objections and alternative constructions—not those of some straw man, but those that truly issue from the rival’s position, understood as sensitively and stated as eloquently as the rival him- or herself could desire. Nothing is rhetorically more powerful than this, and nothing, not even capitulation to the rival, could acknowledge any more vividly the force and respectability of the rival’s perspective. To mount a telling attack on a position, one must first inhabit it. Those so habituated to their customary intellectual abode that they cannot even explore others can never be persuasive to anyone but fellow habitués.¶ That is why powerful arguments are often more faithful to the complexity and fragility of historical interpretation—more faithful even to the irreducible plurality of human perspectives, when that is, in fact, the case—than texts that abjure position-taking altogether and ostentatiously wallow in displays of “reflexivity” and “undecidability.” The powerful argument is the highest fruit of the kind of thinking I would call objective, and in it neutrality plays no part. Authentic objectivity has simply nothing to do with the television newscaster’s mechanical gesture of allocating the same number of seconds to both sides of a question, or editorially splitting the difference between them, irrespective of their perceived merits.

#### Without this pre-round consideration, debates have nowhere to begin- destroys the valuable process of thinking though another’s arguments

Robert E. Goodin and Simon J. Niemeyer- Australian National University- 2003,

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Certainly, ‘consideration’ necessarily comes temporally prior to ‘discussion’. An internal process of weighing of reasons necessarily precedes any participation in a public discursive interchange. That, after all, is how we decide what position to take in the ensuing public discussion. Ideals of deliberative democracy may require that we go into public discussions with an ‘open mind’, in the sense of a willingness to change our opinions in the light of subsequent evidence and argument. But if everyone came to the process with a completely open mind, to the extent that no one was prepared to take any position to start with, the deliberations would have nowhere to begin. Internal-reflective processes are also involved in responding to the arguments and evidence presented by others in discussion. Much of the work in understanding what others are saying, whether in a formal meeting or an everyday conversation, inevitably occurs inside our own heads. We ‘get’ their jokes, catch their allusions, complete their ‘conversational implicatures’, fill in suppressed premises of their argument-sketches, and so on (Grice, 1975; Mansbridge, 1999). Empathetic extensions of that sort are crucial in enabling us to make sense of one another over the course of discussions, democratic or otherwise. So too, we argue, do they loom large in the run-up to those discussions. And so too might they do likewise, we suggest, even in the absence of any formal discussions. Imagining ourselves in the place of another for purposes of trying to understand what the other is saying is broadly of a cloth with imagining ourselves in the place of another for purposes of trying to understand what the other is or might be feeling or desiring (Goodin, 2000, 2003). The motivations might be different. But the process is broadly the same.10 As a modest step toward establishing those larger arguments, we here examine how deliberations actually proceeded in a citizens’ jury on an Australian environmental issue. There, just as our model of ‘democratic deliberation within’ hypothesizes, deliberation of the more internal-reflective sort did indeed precede – and did indeed do more to change people’s attitudes than – formal group deliberations of the more discursive sort.