

RESOLUTIONAL RELEVANCE:
A PRIMARY STANDARD FOR EVALUATING CRITERIA
IN NON-POLICY DEBATE

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". . . the affirmative must describe the nature of their criteria and demonstrate their relevance to the proposition" (Warnick, 1981, p. 117).

"Our value is _____" (Any debater, any year).

It's inevitable. After defining the terms in the resolution, most first affirmative speakers in a CEDA debate round proudly announce, "The value we uphold is [insert value]," and proceed to name an abstract value such as life, peace, or democracy. If not, the second negative speaker will ask upon cross-examination, "So, what's your value?" Once, just once, I would like to hear the first affirmative respond, "Well, I'm one of the better debaters on our squad, I get pretty good grades, and my parents think I'm pretty smart. What's your value?"

Joking aside for the moment, the criteria issue in non-policy debate is too often given cursory attention by debaters without a genuine understanding of the functions criteria serve (Cole, Boggs & Twohy, 1986, p. 36). The purpose of this paper is to further understanding of the criteria issue. Specifically, the paper will (1) discuss the development of criteria standards in intercollegiate debate, (2) present arguments justifying the legitimacy of evaluative standards for criteria, and (3) explain the proposed standard of resolitional relevance. For purposes of clarity, and to reflect current debate usage, this paper will use the word criteria to refer to both singular and plural.

While a clear-cut definition may not exist, this paper defines criteria as the mechanism that operationalizes the evaluative term in the resolution. In a sense, criteria functions as the warrant, linking the resolitional claim with the data advanced for its proof (Toulmin, 1958). Because many disputes revolve around the adequacy of the warrant, evaluative standards for warrants advanced in debate become important.

The Need for Criteria Standards

CEDA distinguishes itself, substantively, from NDT debate in its selection and use of non-policy propositions. These propositions differ from policy propositions in their requirement of criteria defining affirmative resolitional burdens. Put simply, in CEDA the affirmative must tell what they must do to prove the resolution true. Although all resolutions, non-policy and policy included, require the articulation of criteria, the development and

adoption of various decision-making paradigms in policy debate all but alleviated the need for their argument on a round-by-round basis (Tuman, 1987, p. 87; Zarefsky, 1980, p. 10). Lack of widespread agreement on paradigms, or criteria, for non-policy propositions (Ulrich, 1986, p. 61) opened criteria as an issue to be argued in the debate found. It is now the normative practice for the affirmative team in a CEDA round to present a criteria and both sides to argue criteria as an issue, often a major issue.

Considering the importance of criteria (Cole, Boggs & Twohy, 1986, p. 36), one would expect the development of standards for formulating and evaluating criteria to be of great significance (Rowland, 1982, p. 134). However, theory and practice are lagging in the development of non-policy debate theory in this area (Brownlee, 1987, p. 59). In many CEDA rounds, the affirmative does no more than assert a nebulous value as their criteria, usually abusing Zarefsky's value maximization standard (1980, p. 13) and rarely supporting the value with evidence or analysis. Affirmative contentions and negative value objections do not fulfill the criteria, but often claim policy-type significance. The debate judge must sometimes assume a weighing mechanism (such as CBA) if she is not given one. In short, much of what occurs in CEDA rounds has little to do with affirming or negating the resolution chosen for debate because the value chosen is not linked to the affirmative case rather than the resolution.

How is it, then, that criteria are evaluated? Professor Brownlee (1987) proposes four standards for evaluating criteria: Clarity, relevance, consistency, and support (p. 59). This paper begins with Brownlee's standard of relevance, modifying it into a proposed standard of resolutional relevance. The basic argument is that decision criteria must be relevant to the resolution debated. Although many standards for criteria evaluation are possible, this paper contends that resolutional relevance is a primary standard (Dixon & Leslie, 1984, p. 16) for evaluating any criteria.

Justifying the Standard

At this point, one might inquire into the general legitimacy of evaluative standards. Previous efforts to articulate evaluative standards for criteria (Brownlee, 1987; Cole, Boggs & Twohy, 1986) avoid this issue. Professor Zarefsky (1982) argues that evaluative standards are counterproductive and impossible to formulate. This section of the paper briefly addresses both arguments: The possibility of formulating objective standards and the desirability of evaluative standards. Zarefsky's position is that objective evaluative standards are impossible to formulate. The thesis of his argument depends on what one considers to be the starting point of analysis in debate. Zarefsky argues that the paradigm is the starting point and that objective standards are impossible because they emanate from the very paradigms they are designed to evaluate (Zarefsky, 1982). An evaluative standard based on Paradigm A would therefore be inappropriately applied to evaluate Paradigm B. The argument is persuasive, but overstates the function of paradigms in

debate. If all paradigms are internally consistent, as Zarefsky notes (1982, p. 142), the need for general evaluative standards generated from sources other than those paradigms is imperative.

This point might be illustrated by returning to Toulmin's model of argument. Toulmin claims (excuse the pun) that the components of argument - claim, data, warrant - are field universal. The substance of the warrant, however, is field specific. In the context of Zarefsky's argument, paradigms do not specify or alter the form of argument, but provide standards for evaluating warrants. The standards that are the focus of this paper are field universal; that is, they deal with issues directly related to the form of the argument.

This paper contends that the resolution is the proper starting point of the debate process (Church & Wilbanks, 1986, p. 45) and, consequently, should be the initial source of evaluative standards for criteria. Because the resolution is the only common ground for debate, it would be an appropriate place to begin formulating criteria. Generally, resolutions for debate exist prior to and independent of the theory we have constructed for their verification. This is especially true of CEDA debate. Because no single paradigm dominates CEDA practice the criteria is usually formulated after analysis of the resolution and is specifically tailored to the subject matter and type of resolution (fact, value or quasi-policy). Even Zarefsky, in his seminal article on criteria, derived criteria from resolutions in the aforementioned manner (Zarefsky, 1980).

In summary, the underlying problem with Zarefsky's position is that the theoretical paradigms used to develop propositions and their classification are different in type than the paradigms or criteria used to prove their truth or falsity. The criteria chosen to prove a resolution certainly could be judged by standards based upon our collective beliefs about resolutions. Utilizing this normative basis, the paper proposes a standard of resolutional relevance that can be used to evaluate criteria. Such standards would be beneficial for two reasons:

First, evaluative standards could assist the arguer of a proposition in choosing or formulating criteria. In a debate resolution, one is given only a vague evaluative term from which to begin his analysis. For example, how does one define "undesirable" in the Fall 1990 CEDA topic? Leaping from that point to actual verification of the resolution requires some sort of theoretical assistance. Brownlee's relevance standard, for example, suggests using the field implied by the resolution to ascertain criteria (1987, p. 60). By analogy, policy debaters have general stock issues to guide them from resolution to case (Tuman, 1987, p. 87). Criteria standards could help debaters in the task of finding criteria by providing starting points for research.

Second, evaluative standards would provide a common ground for arguing criteria in debate rounds. As a debate judge, one is often faced with the situation in which both sides in a round advance criteria, yet have no idea how to compare them as a means of choosing the best decision rule. At this point, debate lowers

itself to a superficial, "Ours is best"/"No, our is," level of argumentation. Evaluative standards would provide a framework for arguing criteria, thereby improving the quality of clash.

Explaining the Standard

According to Brownlee's relevance standard, "criteria must be relevant to the field of discussion, they must involve close substantive belongingness to the subject matter" (1987, p. 60). To the extent a debate resolution constitutes a field or provides an area of discussion, this standard might be reworded to state, "Criteria must be relevant to the resolution." This section of the paper explains how the criteria should be relevant to the resolution.

To begin, all debate propositions contain an evaluative term or phrase from which criteria is derived. The evaluative term in a policy proposition is always "should." Because the term "should" implies that it might be desirable to undertake a certain action in the future, debate theorists turned to the field of policy-making to find criteria to analyze resolutions calling for United States government action. As a consequence of this approach, utilitarian models became popular criteria.

The evaluative term in a non-policy proposition changes, depending upon the evaluation the author wishes made. Thus, criteria for determining the desirability of covert involvement in Central America may differ from criteria for ascertaining the benefit of third parties to the American political process. Criteria functions by operationalizing the evaluative term or phrase in the resolution to allow verification or denial of the resolution. For the Spring 1990 topic (foreign investment), criteria would operationalize "detrimental" while criteria for the Fall 1990 topic (censorship) would do the same for "undesirable." This view of criteria provides the theoretical basis for the resolutional relevance standard.

Returning to Toulmin's model of argument might again clarify the substance of these standards. Absent criteria, the only components of an argument present in a debate are the resolution, a claim, and affirmative contentions, the data. This paper suggests incorporation of standards analogous to two other components of the model: First, resolutional nexus as a standard for warrants, and second, resolutional threshold, as a standard for qualifiers.

The first major component of resolutional relevance is the requirement of a resolutional nexus. In order for a judge to determine the truth of the resolution debated, there must be a clear connection between the affirmative criteria and the resolution. Suppose on the Spring 1988 CEDA topic, Resolved: That the American judicial system has overemphasized Freedom of the Press, an affirmative team asserted judicial restraint or national security as their criteria. These may be important values but, standing alone, do not allow determination of the truth of the resolution. This type of criteria is sometimes modified to a form

based on Zarefsky's value maximization standard: "Whoever best upholds [insert value] wins the debate." This type of argument is counterproductive because it shifts the focus of the debate from the resolution to an abstract, perhaps even irrelevant, value.

On the same topic, suppose the affirmative operationally defined "overemphasized" as the actual treatment of free press issues by the Supreme Court. By empirically counting the number of times the Supreme Court voted in favor of free press over competing interests, conclusions could be drawn about the Court's treatment of free press issues (Anderson, 1987). This type of criteria is more persuasive, as an argument, because it directly links the criteria to the evaluative term in the resolution.

Another example may further illuminate this point. It is becoming a common practice in CEDA for negative teams to run disadvantage-type arguments on almost every proposition. Rather than deal with the affirmative criteria, LNC simply announces that "Life is paramount," reads a piece of evidence, claims it as a "counter-criteria," and the debate continues. Life may be important, and the disadvantage-type argument may actually have something to do with the resolution, but to simply assert life as a counter-criteria with no connection to the resolution does not allow for an accurate denial of the resolution, as the negative desires.

A second aspect of resolutional nexus concerns the type of resolution debated. Criteria should be formulated not only based upon the resolution itself, but also the type of resolution. The affirmative should establish the classification of the resolution as one of fact, value, quasi-policy, or whatever, and their criteria should have a definite connection to that type of resolution. Many debaters in CEDA, for example, have developed a passion for the value maximization criteria mentioned earlier. Zarefsky suggested this criteria for evaluating propositions dealing with a conflict among values (1980, p. 13), but it might be inappropriate for quasi-policy propositions, which imply the traditional stock issues.

This has become a common problem in CEDA. The use of free expression as a criteria does not inform a judge how to determine if censorship is undesirable, just as a policy-making paradigm does not shed any light on the question of whether the American judicial system has overemphasized Freedom of the Press. As mentioned earlier, many judges intervene with their own standards under these circumstances. Likewise, critics in CEDA often face the difficult situation in which one side interprets the resolution as a different type than the other. The consequences of failure to encompass the type of resolution in criteria are clear: Lack of clash in rounds and extreme difficulty in evaluation (Dixon & Leslie, 1984, p. 16).

The second major component of resolutional relevance is resolutional threshold. This term is borrowed from Cole, Bogs and Twohy (1986, p. 39) and addresses the recent controversy over whether the focus of debate is the resolution or specific example advocated by the affirmative (Herbeck & Katsulas, 1985; Rhodes &

Pfau, 1985). The most logical position to emerge from the discussion is that, while the affirmative does not have to debate the whole resolution, they must prove the resolution true (Biggers, 1985, p. 32) through the use of reasonable, representative, or significant examples. This standard requires the affirmative to establish, in criteria, at what level they plan to prove the resolution true.

Another situation judges encounter in CEDA rounds is that in which the affirmative team offers a specific example as proof of the resolution's truth while the negative disputes the resolution on a holistic level. One would normally expect criteria to be dispositive on this issue, but it rarely is. The closest most affirmative teams get to the issue of threshold is simply to declare that, "Our contentions are independent," or to assert the primacy of their example. If the function of criteria is to operationalize the evaluative term or phrase in the resolution, then that operationalization should necessarily indicate how the affirmative plans to prove the resolution through example.

The necessity of this standard precludes its rigidity. Many non-policy propositions contain evaluative terms that, on their face, do not anticipate the use of examples for their proof. For example, the Spring 1988 CEDA resolution asked whether the legal concept of Freedom of the Press had been overemphasized. The evaluation of overemphasis might include references to certain examples, such as pornography, cameras in the courtroom, etc., but without justifying the examples used, verification of overemphasis is not possible. Other non-policy propositions contain fluid evaluative terms which, by their nature, call for a weighing of examples. On the Fall 1988 CEDA topic, Resolved: That significantly stronger third party participation in United States Presidential elections would benefit the political process and affirmative team could deal with a specific benefit to the political process without the risk of failing to prove the whole resolution because the term benefit implicitly suggests weighing advantages and disadvantages to the evaluatum.

If the tenor of this paper suggests that affirmatives should clearly state their position on resolution or example in first affirmative constructive, it does. If one accepts the position that the affirmative has an obligation to prove the resolution true, then the criteria should provide a vehicle through which the judge can make the inductive leap from affirmative to resolution. If the affirmative fails to do so, and the inductive generalization cannot be made, then the case would not be prima facie after IAC because of its failure to prove the resolution true (Bile, 1987, p. 12).

This standard is analogous to the concept of significance in policy debate--the affirmative case is expected to reach a certain level of significance to justify adoption of the offered policy. Although significance was originally formulated to reflect real-world decisions about policies, many judges have adapted the concept as a test of resolutional threshold. Thus, an affirmative case that does not reach a certain level of significance does not

warrant changing the present system. Non-policy debate needs such a standard for criteria.

This standard would also solve what has become an additional headache for many negative teams in CEDA. Many affirmative teams offer multiple examples of the resolution, independent contentions, claiming each example is capable of proving the resolution. Requiring the affirmative to designate a resolutional threshold would force the affirmative to explain how each separate contention proves the resolution true. In addition to reducing the abusive practice of stacking examples, this standard would give the affirmative incentive to provide a criteria which could evaluate affirmative examples against negative examples.

Conclusion

CEDA is not value debate. Too many debaters, utilizing the opposite view as their starting point of resolutional analysis, have adopted a perspective of criteria which shifts the focus of debate from proving resolutions to debating abstract values. CEDA does debate propositions of value but, more frequently, propositions generally classified as non-policy. Using basic assumptions shared about the nature of non-policy resolutions and their classification, this paper articulated an evaluative standard for criteria of resolutional relevance. This standard requires simply that the criteria chosen for debate of a given resolution have something to do with that resolution. Many of the problems facing CEDA, on a pragmatic level, are directly related to a misunderstanding of criteria and how it functions in non-policy debate. A standard of resolutional relevance could assist in returning CEDA to debating resolutions.

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PARAMETERS FOR CRITERIA DEBATING

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"[M]oney, relative to other measures of value, should become less important as we slough toward the millennium. The catch is that, as soon as you say anything that could remotely be construed as anti-money, it sounds like the sixties. The very words smell of reefer. They conjure images of bearded vegetarians in flannel shirts, and hippie chicks who didn't shave their armpits. They open one to that most damning of charges: not pragmatic" (Shames, 1989, p. 189). America's search for values in an age of greed is not proceeding well at all.

We justify the bombing of a Libyan compound to deter terrorism and produce a net saving of human life. We forget that Truman used the same calculus when he decided to obliterate the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We justify the deaths of 73 children from Progeria, the aging disease. Because the disease has an incidence of 1:8,000,000 births, pharmaceutical companies won't fund research for a cure; it's not cost-efficient. We justify criminal behavior as patriotic without even knowing his criminal's value calculus.

"Back at his NSC office on November 25, (1986), the day he was fired, [Oliver] North sat down to list the priorities that had motivated him:

1. my country
2. Presidency
3. family
4. hostages
5. others who helped

Right before 'others who helped,' North had written 'self,' but then crossed it out." (Emerson, 1988, p. 234)

Maybe, altruism is dead. Maybe not. More likely, values continue to evolve, or according to some, devolve, but, for certain, our instruments to discover and test this d/evolution are not keeping pace.

PREMISE:

Is the search for values worth it? Yes. "An enlarged concept of rhetoric is necessary if we are to comprehend the substantial and dynamic sense in which rhetoric functions to generate continuous validation of ways in which communities act together" (Scott, 1973, p. 88).

But values are unavoidable. True. However, value argumentation presupposes that the calculus the critic uses to decide which arguer did the better debating engages criteria which explore a value. Traditionally, that calculus is introduced by the arguer affirming the resolutive claim.

By default, this is the common practice: a debater argues "the