Debating Values:
An Idea Revitalized

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Introduction

In 1978, Matlon argued that an understanding of value debate would begin with a review of the interdisciplinary literature on values. Two years later, Vasilius warned that "value proposition debate cannot rely on piecemeal pilfering from policy debate" ("Presumption" 40). In 1982, Bartanen still found it necessary to criticize the "tendency to debate value propositions as if they were policy propositions minus a plan" (19). This brief review is not to suggest that theory development has been ignored in CEDA. To the contrary, various guidelines and paradigms for debating values have been proposed (Boggs; Brownlee; Gill; Matlon; Trapp; Ulrich; Vasilius; Verch and Logue; Warnick; Zarefsky). Unfortunately, very little practical attention seems to have been paid to this work, especially as CEDA has moved away from its earlier focus on debating propositions of value. A review of the various paradigms uncovers one area of similarity. Few have taken what would seem to be the most logical path of investing value *debate* with a firm foundation in value *theory*. And that is the reason for this article.

It is *not* our contention that CEDA debate is value debate. Nor do we wish to become embroiled in the CEDA versus NDT argument. Rather our perspective is that whenever values are employed—as criteria or as support for a judgment, for a policy, or for a plan—debaters ought to be arguing values in an appropriate manner. Some have forsaken debating values, saying that values are too complex for contemporary debaters and coaches to master (Matlon "An Idea"). While we do not wish to endorse the mistaken view that CEDA debate is value debate, we do wish to challenge the thought that value debate is too difficult. Our purpose, then, is simple and straightforward—to provide an explication of relevant aspects of value theory that readers can understand and use, regardless of the type of proposition being debated. We also discuss three practices, widely evident in CEDA debates, which illustrate incorrect value argumentation. First, we demonstrate that while "life" may be used as a decision rule, it is not a value.

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Second, we explain why a set of values, instead of a singular value, should be employed. Third, we urge the use of value sets which are specific and relevant to the topic being debated. In sum, we propose both theory and practical implications for strengthening value argumentation with the hope of reintroducing some rationality into competitive debate.

Value Theory and CEDA Applications

Early value researchers such as McDougal and Murray developed "catalogs" or lists of values. Their work in turn influenced that of Allport, Vernon and Lindzey, Inglehart, Kluckhohn, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Maslow, Morris, Smith, Williams, and, of course, Rokeach. While these scholars span the disciplines of anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology, and their theories may employ different terminology, certain themes are common to all:

- A value is that which is desirable (Allport, Vernon and Lindzey; Kluckhohn; Maslow; Morris; Smith);

- Values are relatively few in number and relatively stable over time (Inglehart; Maslow; Rokeach; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach; Schwartz and Bilsky);

- Individual values which are related cluster together (Rokeach; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach; Williams);

- Individual values combine to form value structures or systems (Allport, Vernon and Lindzey; Rokeach; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach; Williams);

- There is an inherent hierarchical structure to values (Allport, Vernon and Lindzey; Pitts and Woodside; Rokeach; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach; Williams);

- The hierarchy may differ from one individual, society, and even situation to another (Kluckhohn; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck; Rokeach; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach; Schwartz and Bilsky; Williams);

- While values transcend specific situations, different situations evoke different subsets of values (Kluckhohn; Rokeach; Schwartz and Bilsky).

When the object of study is culture or society, values have been viewed as a primary dependent variable, since they are thought to be determined by culture. One would expect to observe differences in values across cultures. When the object of study is social attitudes and behavior, however, values become the primary independent explanatory variable (Rokeach, *Nature*). That is, attitudes and behaviors are thought to be determined by values (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1—Relationships Among
Culture, Values, Attitudes and Behaviors**

Culture —> Values —> Attitudes —> Behavior

Values provide potentially powerful explanations of human behavior because they serve as standards or criteria of conduct (Williams). In CEDA debates, however, the misuse of values as criteria is rampant. Underscoring the importance of concern over such widespread misunderstanding is the realization that we are really borrowing concepts from other disciplines and that such appropriation should be done with integrity (Sheth 13).

Definitions: Are We Really Arguing "Values"?

In common, everyday usage, the word *value* may have many connotations. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, for example, provides a variety of meanings. Selecting just a few of the listings illustrates the point. In economics, *value* refers to the fair monetary worth of things or services; in mathematics, it refers to a numerical quantity; in music, relative durations of tones and rests are *values*; and artists speak of the lightness of a perceived color (1972). For social scientists, however, the term *value* refers to a specific construct.

Perhaps the most often quoted definition of a value in CEDA literature (Bartanen; Tuman; Verch and Logue) is that provided by Rokeach:

> A *value* is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A *value system* is an enduring

organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance (*Nature* 5).

Values, then, are "beliefs about what a person should or ought to do both concerning goals and ways of behaving to obtain goals" (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 339). Put more succinctly, values are "mental representations of important life goals that [people] are trying to achieve" (Peter and Olson 96). As such, values are abstract. They transcend specific instances and can be applied to a variety of situations, objects, places, and people (Rokeach).

Rokeach offers a list of eighteen terminal values (desirable end states or goals such as equality, freedom, and happiness), and eighteen instrumental values (specific behaviors that facilitate attainment of the end states, such as being ambitious, courageous, and polite). Complete lists of these values are provided in Table I. Most research employing Rokeach's Value Survey (RVS), including his own, has focused on the terminal values. But one need not be restricted to the RVS. Other scholars have offered their own lists of values. For example, Arensberg and Neihoff developed a list of core American values. Presented in Table II, their listing, which includes items such as individualism, conformity, and material well-being, often appears in discussions of American culture in social science texts. *The Yankelovich MONITOR*, a publication of a commercial research service, tracks social trends and value changes by regularly surveying consumers in the U.S. and Europe. Daniel Yankelovich has also begun *The DYG Environmental Scanning Program,* which annually measures social values and suggests their implications for business. Kahle and colleagues factor analyzed Rokeach's values and developed their own, smaller set of person-oriented values. Presented in Table III, the List of Values includes items such as self-fulfillment and being well respected. Anthropologists Schwartz and Bilsky are engaged in a longitudinal cross-cultural study of values in Australia, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Spain, and the United States. Using Rokeach's terminal values as the base, they are investigating his hypothesis that values are universal. Taking the opposite position, several researchers around the globe, led by social psychologist Henry Triandis, are addressing variations in cultural values. The point here is that there is no scarcity of information about values in this or any other culture. (See also Boggs for additional sources.)

Why, then, has "life" become so ubiquitous a "value" in CEDA debates? Probably because debaters are not well versed in the many alternatives, unaware that a thirty-six-item list is available from just the most prominent of the value theorists. Additionally, it must be admitted that there is nothing so simple as the calculus of the body count. These reasons notwithstanding, "life" is not a value. "Life" does not appear on any of the value lists cited above. Neither is "life" consistent with the definition of a value.

Table 1—Rokeach's Value Survey

Terminal Values	Instrumental Values
A Comfortable Life	Ambitious
a prosperous life	hard-working, aspiring
An Exciting Life	Broadminded
a stimulating, active life	open-minded
A Sense of Accomplishment	Capable
lasting contribution	competent, effective
A World at Peace	Cheerful
free of war and conflict	lighthearted, joyful
A World of Beauty	Clean
beauty of nature and the arts	neat, tidy
Equality	Courageous
brotherhood, equal opportunity for all	standing up for your beliefs
Family Security	Forgiving
taking care of loved ones	willing to pardon others
Freedom	Helpful
independence, free choice	working for the welfare of others
Happiness	Honest
contentedness	sincere, truthful
Inner Harmony	Imaginative
freedom from inner conflict	daring, creative
Mature Love	Independent
sexual and spiritual intimacy	self-reliant, self-sufficient
National Security	Intellectual
protection from attack	intelligent, reflective
Pleasure	Logical
an enjoyable, leisurely life	consistent, rational
Salvation	Loving
saved, eternal life	affectionate, tender
Self-Respect	Obedient
self-esteem	dutiful, respectful
Social Recognition	Polite
respect, admiration	courteous, well-mannered
True Friendship	Responsible
close companionship	dependable, reliable
Wisdom	Self-Controlled
a mature understanding of life	restrained, self-disciplined

Table 2—Arensberg and Neihoff's Core American Values

Material Well-Being
Twofold Moralizing
Work Is more Important than Play
Time Is Money
Effort, Optimism, and Entrepreneurship
Mastery over Nature
Egalitarianism
Humanitarianism

Table 3—Kahle's List of Values

Being Well-Respected
Family Security
Financial Security
Fun and Enjoyment in Life
Self-Fulfillment
Self-Respect
Sense of Accomplishment
Sense of Belonging
Warm Relationships with Others

Existence is not a value, a desired end-state or a goal. Life *is*; it is a *given*. Rokeach makes this point directly when he addresses the differences between needs and values, between humans and "the lowly rat." While all animals can be said to have needs, "man is the only animal that can be meaningfully described as having values" (*Nature* 20). Values are at the center of the study of human behavior, while needs are at the center of the study of other animal behavior. Both rats and people have life, but only people are motivated by values, by goals. Hollihan makes much the same point: "[I]ssues of values are fundamental to understanding the motives of human action and are at the very center of what debate should be all about" (5). Thus, when values are an issue in debate, "life" is not a value.

Neither is "quality of life" a value. In fact, Rokeach specifically suggests that the distribution of values within a society may "be regarded as one important social indicator of the 'quality of life'" in that society (*Nature* 56). The prevalence of values such as equality, a world at peace, and a comfortable life can be measured to account for the "quality" of living in one society or another, at one time or another. "Quality of life" also can be assessed via other tests, such as measures of income. Clearly, "quality of life" is not a value; rather, it is a phrase describing the circumstances of existence.

Driven by the desire to capture the high ground from which to fling mega-impact briefs, the battle over values has most often resulted in grappling with the "life versus quality of life" scenario. CEDA literature is peppered with this icon of debate, often highlighted as an example of "value" debate. In the first *CEDA Yearbook*, Zarefsky offered "human life versus human freedom" as an example of a "value proposition." Herbeck and Wong, in the seventh *Yearbook*, stated that "most would agree that life is an important value" (18). Boggs, who otherwise provides a sound, theory-based discussion of standards for comparing values, offers "life" as one example of a social value. Most recently, Winebrenner illustrates a presumption position with "the familiar dialectic between 'life' and 'quality of life'" (5).

An illustration of the argumentation which takes place in CEDA is the 1992 final round of the national tournament. As explained by Tuman, Florida State argued a very specific example of the resolution for which Southwest Missouri State was unprepared. An apparently desperate SMS team elected to argue "life" as a counter-value to "quality of life." Perhaps nothing so well documents this problem of contemporary CEDA debate than Tuman's discussion of how these teams *should have* argued these "values." Ironically, the survivors of a grueling process aimed at selecting the two best CEDA debate teams for 1992, when forced to argue values, cannot do it properly. There is double irony in that one of the nation's best judges, while precisely criticizing non-hierarchical value argumentation, endorses "life" as a value.

If "life" as a focus for debate is endorsed by national champions and if so many link-roads lead to the body count, what is to be done? Is there a rational approach? What seems clear is that "life" will be debated, but it need not be debated as a false value. Instead, it should be treated as a "decision rule" appropriate to certain propositions, but *not* to those in which the language of the proposition mandates value criteria. Many judgement propositions can be argued with a "life" criterion; for example, the proposition, "[r]esolved: That U.S. bombing of Serbian targets is a justified response to the Bosnian crisis," would allow both the affirmative and the negative to utilize "life" as a decision rule. There is no reason to try to force this issue as a value.

With the temptation to rush to "life" under control, there remain other questions about appropriate approaches to value analysis. The consensus of experts suggests

hierarchical, almost systemic, approaches as most appropriate. Debaters must resist one other temptation, the urge to select the "highest" value.

Value Hierarchies: "Highest" is Wrong

Inherent in the concept of values is the idea of a hierarchically arranged structure. Early theory development by Allport, Vernon and Lindzey as well as recent empirical studies reported by Pitts and Woodside and Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach highlight this feature. Let us return to the definition of values, this time paying particular attention to the second sentence. Values are

> enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A *value system* is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a *continuum of relative importance* [emphasis added] (Rokeach, *Nature* 5).

Williams explains that people rarely are guided by just one value (287). Vinson, Scott and Lamont concur, suggesting that there is a central/peripheral dimension to value structures, with the hierarchy ranging from the most to the least centrally held values. Further, within the hierarchy, there also may be clusters of values. Gutman and Vinson report that respondents have complained about the difficulties of ranking values, saying that some values cluster together and cannot be separated (335; see also Ng). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca make the same point when they discuss the interconnectedness of values.

How, then, do these value systems and hierarchies develop? Rokeach explains that values initially are acquired as absolutes and in isolation from other values. For example, as children, we are taught "always be honest." As we mature, however, we often encounter situations in which several values may come into conflict; for example, being honest may mean hurting someone's feelings. When this happens, the process of weighing one value against another begins. The end results are decisions about which values are most important. Rokeach puts it this way: "Gradually, through experience and a process of maturation, we learn to integrate the isolated, absolute values we have been taught in this or that context into a hierarchically organized system" (*Nature* 6).

Clearly, then, one value does not stand alone. Instead, it is an integral part of a larger system and should be considered along with others in its set, or at least its cluster. Pitts and Woodside make the point quite forcefully: "The theory of value systems would

seem to require that researchers examine the total system rather than single values . . . single values . . . are salient only in the context of the entire value system" (38). Homer and Kahle charge that in the social sciences "most past research has concentrated on . . . single values, thereby neglecting the complex nature of value structures" (638). More recently, Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach raised the same concern: "What is missing from many discussions of values . . . is the notion of value systems or hierarchies, the idea that societies and individuals can accurately be compared to other societies and individuals not only in terms of specific values but also in terms of value priorities" (775).[1] The hierarchy concept is important because it is the most central values which will most often serve as guides for decision making and behaviors.

Interestingly, the idea of value hierarchies and clusters often has been acknowledged by authors of articles on CEDA debate (Bartanen; Boggs; Vasilius "Back"; Verch and Logue). In fact, the Tuman article mentioned earlier is entitled "Natural Value Hierarchies and Presumption." Herbeck and Wong acknowledge that "there is more to comparing values than simply arguing the importance of the value" (21). They provide the impact for us when they conclude: "Unfortunately the existing literature on the nature of value debate fails to recognize this problem" (21).

This lack of maturation is too often apparent in CEDA debates, when one value is abstracted from the value system and held up as the "highest value in the round"—exactly what value theory says should not be done. Vasilius provides an example of the problem of artificially extracting one value from an overall system. She notes, no one would deny that "courage" is a

> laudable trait, but few would say that it should be an absolute factor for determining behavior. Indeed, such clichés as "Discretion is the better part of valor" suggest that courage should be tempered by wisdom. Yet to argue that we should not value courage because courage alone can lead to foolish action ignores the cultural context of courage and makes the argument shallow and silly ("Back" 14).

Debate also can be made shallow and silly when values which are not specific to the topic are selected as criteria. Debaters must resist one final temptation, selecting values irrelevant to the topic being addressed.

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[1] With the increasing use of causal modeling, research addressing value systems has been undertaken and reported (see for example Homer and Kahle; Kamakura and Mazzon).

Relevant Value Subsets: An Issue of Rationality

To understand how to debate values, we also must comprehend their role in decision making. Williams points out that values function as the *criteria* or standards for determining preferences, for evaluating and judging situations and issues, and for making choices. Further, he suggests, this "value-as-criterion" perspective is one of the more important usages to which values may be put in social science analysis (283). A situation or issue evokes certain values. They, in turn, aid in the selection of arguments/facts to be gathered and presented. In everyday communication, this process is not always directly observable, for the values that lay behind an issue often are implied. In debate, however, the relevant values must be made explicit so that the real focus of clash may be determined. Rokeach explains the issue this way:

> This is not to suggest, however, that a person's total value system is ever fully activated in any given situation. It is a mental structure that is more comprehensive than that portion of it that a given situation may activate. It is a generalized plan that can perhaps best be likened to a map or architect's blueprint. Only that part . . . that is immediately relevant is consulted, and the rest is ignored for the moment. Different subsets of the map or blueprint are activated in different social situations (*Nature* 14).

Other researchers support this theory. Kluckhohn writes that values influence the "modes, means, and ends of action" that would be selected in a situation (395). Homer and Kahle suggest that "values also guide individuals about which situations to enter and about what they do in those situations" (638). Kristiansen and Matheson demonstrate that values are "implicated in how people reason about social issues" and that individuals differ "in the values that they regard as relevant to the consideration of social issues" (665-66).

While these discussions have focused on the individual, societal values function in the same way. According to Rokeach, "values are the cognitive representation not only of individual needs but also of societal and institutional demands" (*Nature* 20). He adopts the perspective of English and English that values are social products and that, within society, various institutions have been assigned the task of "specializing in the maintenance and enhancement of selected subsets of values and in their transmission from generation to generation" (*Nature* 24-25). Accordingly, religious institutions specialize in religious values; family, educational, political, economic and legal institutions

specialize in other subsets. Bartanen makes much the same point when he suggests that values define community interests in a particular issue or decision and that clusters of values help a community assess particular issues (20). Sillars and Ganer provide an example from politics. In the 1976 Presidential election, the relevant value subset clustered around "trust" and "honesty." By 1980, however, the relevant subset had shifted to considerations of economic and national security. The 1992 Presidential election also provides a good illustration. Its outcome was decided in part because the electorate's relevant value subset had changed from foreign to domestic policy issues—a shift illustrated by the placards and bumper stickers which proclaimed, "It's the economy, stupid." Like Rokeach, Sillars and Ganer conclude that "values which lose saliency because of a change of issue do not go away; they simply become less significant at the time" (190).

The need for decision-making arises—and hence the basis for framing debates is formed—when the values evoked by a situation or issue are not compatible.

> Since a given situation will typically activate several values rather than just a single one, it is unlikely that [an individual] can behave in a manner that is equally compatible with all of them. A given situation may, for example, activate a conflict between behaving independently and obediently or between behaving politely and sincerely; another situation may activate a conflict between strivings for salvation and hedonic pleasure or between self-respect and respect from others. A value system is a learned organization of principles and rules to help one choose between alternatives, resolve conflicts, and make decisions (Rokeach, *Nature* 14).

However, the potential for conflict is even broader since the values evoked by a situation may not be just those within an individual's value system. The interests of the individual, of society, and its various institutions may overlap. When they do, there is no value conflict. When there is no overlap, however, the various value subsets are likely to compete with one another. The resolution of such conflicts certainly is appropriate ground for debate, since Kahle argues that values facilitate the process of adjusting, coping, and adapting, by helping to achieve the "active equilibrium that an organism seeks in relation to its environment" (30). (See also Boggs for a discussion of standards for comparing competing values.)

Several points about the relationship of values and decision-making should now be clear.

- From the overall value system, a situation or issue activates a relevant value subset.

- The same issue may activate different subsets for different individuals (or groups of individuals).

- There may be conflict within an individual's relevant value subset and/or conflict among the individual's and/or society's and/or institutional relevant value subsets.

- The values in the relevant subset(s) are the criteria or standards used to make decisions about the situation.

- Since not all values are equally important, it is the most central ones which will guide decision making and behavior (Rokeach; Vinson, Scott and Lamont).

Some authors, most notably Henderson and Vasilius, have maintained that a focus on values will necessarily restrict debates to rational argumentation about the proposition because of the natural relationship between issues and values. As noted in the introduction, attitudes are derived from values. Put more strongly, values are perceived to be the primary explanation for social attitudes and behaviors (Rokeach *Nature*). The answer, then, to Vasilius' question of "must all debate devolve into . . . weird analysis and even weirder cases?" ("Back" 13) is a resounding "No!" Value theory requires consistency between values and the issue at hand. The two are inextricably linked.

Henderson makes this point by providing examples of issues and potential relevant value subsets. In cases relating to rape, issues of individual privacy and fair trial may be evoked. In cases relating to child abuse, familial and child rights may be at issue (2). In both instances, one cannot help but note the specificity of values linked to issues and to the absence of cosmic (and nonsensical) "values" such as "life" being invoked at every turn. Vasilius illustrates the hollow logic of employing values "irrelevant" to an issue or topic: "It would be absurd, for example, to advocate a belief system despising children, perhaps evidenced by infant cannibalization, as an alternative to a belief system advocating a liberal arts education" ("Presumption" 38). She concludes that debate about values almost by definition must be rational debate.

> [A] negative team . . . would be restricted to arguments of quality in an effort to win the round. A negative team could issue exotic arguments, or "spread," but the affirmative would have a correspondingly light burden of refutation. Values also require too much analysis to permit

such extravagance. . . . [A]n affirmative team is limited to the substance, rather than the periphery, of the proposition ("Presumption" 38).

Too often in CEDA debate, neither team argues the substance of the topic. Instead of arguing the central values that are most directly relevant to the resolution, teams search for the extreme scenarios rejected by Vasilius but predicted by Willard to be the inevitable result of a sort of maturation of competition. The absence of advocacy grounded in solid value theory, however, has meant simultaneous absence of standards for exclusion of peripheral argumentation. Proliferation of generic, cosmic-impact claims has led to degradation of clash in contemporary CEDA debate. What has emerged is an exchange of briefs in parallel debates. For example, in the fall of 1992, the resolution focused upon the "problems of the urban poor," and when affirmative teams isolated "quality of life" as the value/criterion, negatives knee-jerked into: "Life is the highest value." They then argued the poor were better off in their current misery than if they were vaporized—and the flow of the debate rushed off into a search for nuclear detonation. At this point, clash was limited to "links," "flips" and "turns." There are probably more productive ways to spend weekends.

Value Theory's Relevance to Contemporary Debate

If debaters are to resist the three temptations we have highlighted and, instead, utilize values appropriately, what might a round look like on a productive weekend? We return to the fall 1992 topic, "[r]esolved: The welfare system exacerbates the problems of the urban poor in the United States," for illustration.

While it would seem clear that this topic could be argued as a proposition of fact, most teams chose to make the effort to achieve the value high-ground. Can it be done sensibly? Step one is to heed the advice of the many authors cited in this article and choose criteria that are logical and rational (in this case, a set of standards for determining the point at which the urban poor's problems are exacerbated). Ideally, the affirmative would select a subset of values germane to the topic which would reduce abstractness to a debatable level. For example, "self-esteem" and "dignity" could be core values that would serve as the filter for analysis of the welfare system, arguing that damage to these values would equal "exacerbation." The negative would have the usual set of alternatives. The most obvious and productive would be either to accept these values and argue the welfare system does not "exacerbate" or argue a set of alternative values clustering around, for example, health and safety (nutrition, infant mortality, and so forth). The difference between this example and the typical battle over "quality of

life" and "life," would be the specificity of analysis of the resolution. Argumentation would center on the urban poor—not humanity at large. Self-esteem and dignity would be weighed against health and safety—instead of nuclear annihilation. The resolution would be the focus of the debate; the "value map" would be the guide to the relevant territory.

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