REFLECTIONS ON SOLVENCY IN QUASI-POLICY PROPOSITIONS

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Over the past ten years several articles on arguing propositions of value have concluded that the way to establish theory on value debate is to let a theory evolve through practice. The Spring 1985 CEDA topic called for the discussion and practice of solvency in value debate. "Resolved: that the United States is justified in providing military support to nondemocratic governments" has obvious policy implications as well as an implication of the status quo. Debaters approaching this topic looked at the current U.S. policy in providing military support and then justified this support by looking at the problems it should be solving. In other words, solvency was argued. Many debaters were reluctant to argue solvency, a policy debate concept, and some claimed they did not need to address the issue. But with a quasi-policy resolution some policy concepts will need to be addressed. This article will look at the validity of solvency in debating value propositions, specifically in quasi-policy propositions, and describe affirmative approaches to solvency in quasi-policy rounds.

When debating propositions of value the focus of the debate is generally evaluative. Is the evaluatum good, bad, beneficial, justified, etc.? Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) identified the issues in value debate as definitive and designative.

> A definition of a value term may merely serve as a clarification preliminary to the discovery of the issues in a proposition of value, or such a definition may itself constitute an issue.... The designative issues are whether the subject of the evaluation meets the criteria defined. If, for example, "beneficial to farmers" means higher and more stable incomes, the designative issue is: Has the present administration provided such values? (222)

Zarefsky identified types of non-policy propositions and defined quasi-policy as "not advocating a specific plan of action, yet one is implicit within the statement of the proposition" (10). Using the Spring 1985 topic debaters examined the policies of the United States and their results in order to determine if military support "is justified." One of the designative issues was: Has the United States helped governments by providing military support? Implied in this question is the existence of a problem requiring the use of military support. Thus, negative teams pressed affirmative teams for proof that these policies solved the problem. Many affirmatives responded with "this is value debate and we do not have to prove the policy works, only that it has value." But if a value is justified by the policies which reflect the value, does it

not follow that the policies must work? Brownlee has argued that "the extrinsic value of an object or behavior may be based on its resolution of these troubles and may vary with the intensity of the needs" (44). Solving the problem, therefore, can justify the resolution if the resolution is dealing with extrinsic values, as do most debate resolutions.

When considering the resolution in question, military support is given to governments for the benefits that result. Military support is not a good in and of itself. Therefore, the resolution was one embodying extrinsic value. It follows that if affirmatives rely on current policy examples, solvency must be proven in order to justify the resolution. For example, the affirmative's claims that military support to El Salvador stops Soviet aggression or limits Soviet influence in Central America justify the resolution only when United State military support meets the stated goals. Solvency, therefore, is an essential argument in quasi-policy debate rounds.

Negative teams were strategically correct to press for solvency from affirmatives. There were a plethora of generic positions available to negative speakers who sought to show that affirmatives could not achieve their goals. Solvency responses by the affirmative usually took two forms: 1)Affirmatives defined solvency as an attempt to decrease the scope of the problem rather than eliminate the problem or 2)Affirmatives extrapolated from expert evidence or examples they claimed to be typical that the problem could be eliminated completely. Negative teams answered the first strategy by saying the solvency means 100% elimination of the problem (100% solvency). The second strategy usually led to affirmative overclaiming of the evidence which some negatives noted. In either case considerable clash occurred on the issue of solvency. It would not seem necessary to completely eliminate the problem, as negative teams suggested, to claim a level of value for the policy under discussion. Instead, the affirmative teams can claim some value from only creating a reduction in the size of the problem. For example, aid to El Salvador may help stabilize the government but not completely eliminate a Soviet threat. Affirmative teams can correctly argue that stabilizing a government reduces the Soviet threat by making the government better able to resist attacks. The negative teams are correct that the Soviet threat is not eliminated, but the affirmative can still demonstrate that the policy has value if you accept the premise that governmental stability is a step toward security, i.e. eliminating the Soviet threat. There is considerable room for clash under the above approach either in counterarguing the specific supporting evidence for each side or in

attacking the underlying premises of the affirmative position. The latter would seem to be the essence of value debate.

It would seem that debaters are on the right track when they introduce solvency into quasi-policy debate rounds. While solvency may not be a voting issue for all value resolutions it is very beneficial to the analysis of quasi-policy topics.

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