

The Indivisibility of Value Claims from Policy Positions:
An Argument for Policy in Value Debate

Dale Herbeck and Kimball Wong
Boston College

One of the traditional distinctions between debate as practiced by the National Debate Tournament (NDT) and the Cross Examination (CEDA) has been the nature of the resolution being debated. While NDT has tended to focus almost exclusively on policy resolutions, CEDA has tended to focus on value resolutions. [1] In part, this difference in focus can be explained as an attempt to distinguish the different types of debate.

While the nature of the resolution distinguishes the two types of debate, CEDA's decision to focus on values can also be explained as a response to the perceived overemphasis on policy considerations. Marilyn Young made precisely this claim when she argued:

For more than two decades the competitive debate community has actively avoided a confrontation with that type of resolution popularly known as 'the proposition of value. . .'. The majority of the active debate community continues to push relentlessly toward policy debate based on quantitative (and, therefore, presumably, more rational) analyses. [2]

CEDA's decision to debate value questions can be seen as an attempt to fill this void. [3] In the words of David Thomas and Maridell Fryar, "It is our intuitive feeling that one of the main reasons value resolutions are coming into vogue is to give students more experience in debating values, not facts, and in relating arguments to people, not to computers." [4] By providing a forum for debating questions of value, CEDA has provided such experience to contemporary debaters. [5]

CEDA has profitably debated such questions for the past 11 years (for the first 3 1/2 years CEDA debated policy topics). Over those years, a line of thinking has emerged which suggests that such value debate is very different from traditional policy debate. This thinking has suggested that

not only is the focus of value debate different from policy debate, but also that many of the theoretical constructs of policy debate are inapplicable in the value setting. It has been argued that the theoretical constructs of policy debate are of little use to students of policy debate. Consequently, there have been numerous appeals for improved value theory.[6]

Given the growth of CEDA, it is clear that value debating is a very viable activity. Still, despite this success we believe that an artificial bifurcation of value resolutions from policy considerations exists which has resulted in significant consequences. In particular, we believe that this bifurcation has worked to the detriment of quality argumentation. We attempt to support this claim in the following sections. In the first section we argue that it is impossible to separate questions of value from policy considerations. In the second section we argue that our attempts to separate these interrelated issues have frequently led to ambiguous and unsatisfying argumentation. In the final section we argue that policy considerations should be allowed in value debate at the discretion of the affirmative.

The Indivisibility of Value and Policy Questions

Any attempt to neatly distinguish value and policy concerns is necessarily oversimplistic. [7] There is an inherent interrelationship between these types of questions. In distinguishing between different types of value resolutions Ted Sheckels categorized the different types of value resolutions by equating them to the policy making process. According to Sheckels, the "pre-new policy" proposition "offers a value judgment which, if adopted, would lead one to perhaps then go a step further and advocate a new policy." [8] The second type of resolution is a "pre-present policy choice" proposition "which, if accepted, would lead one to go a step further and choose between two present policies." [9] The final

type of resolution is the "pre-present policy rejection" proposition which, if affirmed, would lead one to repudiate an existing policy choice." [10]

By defining value resolutions according to their implications in the policy making process Sheckels implicitly recognizes the inherent relationship between questions of value and policy. This is consistent with Matlon's claim that "value propositions are also intertwined with attitudes about policies insofar as they often lead to or are embedded in policy suggestions. [11] This, policy proposals frequently depend on value judgments.

At the same time, however, it should be remembered that many value questions frequently flow from policy problems. Depending on the nature and the scope of the policy being discussed, many different types of values can be impinged. Frequently slightly different policies will evoke an entirely different set of value considerations. By changing the nature of the policy being discussed, advocates can reorder their value claims. This is especially true since many value considerations flow from the application of broad principles to specific instances.

Despite the inherent indivisibility of value and policy questions, much of the current practice in value debates suggests that these issues are clearly separate and distinct. While policy debaters frequently make value claims, it is unusual for a value debater to make policy claims. Most policy claims are frequently dismissed in value debate precisely because they are policy claims. Unfortunately, the glib unwillingness to entertain policy arguments in value debates is not without consequence.

The Consequences of Bifurcating Value & Policy Questions

Because of the inherent interdependence between value and policy concerns, the artificial attempt by the forensic community to bifurcate these issues into discrete resolutions has had adverse consequences on

value debate. These consequences are especially evident if one considers the way in which theorists suggest that value resolutions should be debated.

Working from a stock issues model, George Ziegelmüller and Charles Dause propose three questions that debaters should ask when considering value resolutions: "(1) Does the value really represent 'a good?' (2) Is there a more important value? (3) Is the meaning of the value properly interpreted?" [12] Once the values have been identified, Ziegelmüller and Dause believe that the debaters should be able to compare the competing values to determine the more important value. Barbara Warnick suggested the following procedure for analyzing value topics:

- Step 1. Provide a definition for the evaluatum.
- Step 2. Locate the evaluatum within a field.
- Step 3. Establish the criteria or standards for evaluation.
- Step 4. Operationally clarify the standards or criteria by applying them to the evaluatum. [13]

This method is consistent with a five-step process proposed by Stephen Verch and Brenda Logue in resolving value conflicts:

- Step 1. Identify the value to be affirmed and the value to be refuted.
- Step 2. Present the criteria to be used to resolve the value conflict, and demonstrate why [they are] reasonable for resolving this conflict.
- Step 3. Apply the criteria to the value to be affirmed and show why the criteria [are] met.
- Step 4. Apply the criteria to the value to be refuted and show why the criteria, although reasonable, [are] not met.
- Step 5. Demonstrate why winning this value conflict should resolve the conflict over winning the ballot. [14]

Although sympathetic to Verch and Logue, Diana Prentice and Jack Kay complain that it provides little guidance for determining what criteria should be utilized to compare values. [15] Thus, they suggest that a debater should begin with an "inquiry process" and then proceed to the "advocacy process." This model suggests that debaters should study the relevant value structure and then project this analysis into the advocacy

stage.

The problem with all these models for value debate is that they work from an extremely simplistic understanding of the nature of value questions. They assume that the debaters need do little more than determine the relevant values implicit in the resolution and then proceed to argue which value sets are more important. The problem with this view is that it oversimplifies the nature of value controversies. Admittedly, debaters must identify the relevant importance of the competing values. Nevertheless, their analysis must go on step further. To arrive at informed decisions debaters must measure the relevant significance of the claim made upon any value. Simply put, to arrive at an objective decision the debaters must necessarily consider the magnitude of the claim upon the value and the importance of the value. Only then can the comparisons required under most resolutions be made.

For example, most would agree that life is an important value. Indeed, it might be argued that since life is necessary for all other values that life is the single most important value. Consequently, it could be claimed that if an affirmative team could lay claim on life as a value upholding the resolution that they should necessarily win the debate. However, we are also aware that all claims on life are not equal. A governmental decision that results in 100,000 unjustified deaths is surely more reprehensible than a governmental decision that results in but a single unjustified death. Any decision that results in such wanton death is wrong, but in this instance it appears that one decision is certainly "more" wrong than the other.

This example suggests that to arrive at the proper conclusion it is necessary to consider more than the value. It is necessary to consider the degree of claim that an advocate can make on a value. According to George

Kent, "Since there is no way to know in advance which particular values will serve to differentiate competing proposals, it is pointless to argue over the relative merits of different value hierarchies before developing concrete designs." [16] Absent such a design it is impossible to determine the relevant values and the extent of the claim that can be made upon those values.

A debate which merely identified the presence of competing values would be extremely unsatisfying. At the end of the debate the judge would undoubtedly be able to come to some sort of conclusion regarding which value or set of values was more important in the abstract sense. However, under such circumstances the judge would tend to arrive at a conclusion regarding the resolution which is based more upon subjective opinion than the argumentation in the debate. Unless debaters were able to link these values to the subjective conception of the resolution held by the judge there would be no way that they could win the debate. Simply put, to argue a value proposition the advocates must do more than simply identify the relevant value or value sets. The advocates must identify the values and then link them to the resolution as perceived by the judges.

Unfortunately, this is where contemporary value debate breaks down. At present there is little theoretical understanding as to how to draw this objective linkage. There is no agreement on whether or not the affirmative must defend the whole resolution or whether the affirmative may defend some subset of the resolution. While policy debate has considered this issue at some length, there has been little consideration of this issue in value debate literature. [17] In particular, there is considerable ambiguity as to whether the affirmative may defend specific policy alternatives in value debate.

Consider for example the fall 1985 CEDA proposition: "Resolved, That

restrictions on mass media coverage of terrorist activities in the United States are justified." The real controversy in these debates was what sort of restrictions were being discussed. In debate after debate we observed negative debaters argue that restrictions would violate the cherished First Amendment to the United States Constitution. In response, affirmatives would argue that the restrictions they advocated did not violate the First Amendment. Upon closer analysis we discovered that both teams were correct. Obtrusive restrictions (like prior restraints) on media coverage of terrorist activities clearly violated the First Amendment. But unobtrusive restrictions (such as access requirements), did not violate the First Amendment. Thus, the question became, which restrictions or collection of restrictions is the affirmative defending? Does the affirmative need to defend all possible restrictions on mass media coverage of terrorist activities? Can the affirmative defend some, but not all restrictions on mass media coverage of terrorist activities? Does the affirmative have the right to defend specific restrictions on media coverage of terrorist activities? Until we could ascertain which restrictions were being debated it was impossible to determine if the First Amendment was being violated. And, absent some assessment of the degree of the impingement on the First Amendment it was impossible to determine whether or not the resolution was justified.

Precisely the same problem occurred with the spring 1986 proposition: Resolved: That membership in the United Nations is no longer beneficial to the United States." Under this resolution affirmative teams frequently argued that membership in the UN was no longer beneficial to the US. In response, negatives frequently charged that if the United States left the UN then the UN would promptly collapse. Answering this argument, the affirmative argued that they were not actually advocating withdrawal from

value claims based on specific alternatives, it would be possible to determine the issues being debated. For example, in the previous section we explained the ambiguity that resulted under the topic calling for media restrictions on terrorism. In an effort to resolve this ambiguity and encourage more meaningful argumentation, the affirmative team could commit to a specific set of alternatives. For example, the affirmative could defend a specific set of restrictions limiting media access to ongoing terrorist events. Or, the affirmative could defend a specific scheme of prior restraints on media coverage of terrorist activities. In response to this strategy, the negative would need to develop arguments against these specific affirmative policy alternatives. Simply put, they would need to prove that these restrictions were unjustified. Presumably, the resulting debate would offer an intelligent consideration of these specific alternatives instead of the ambiguous debate that frequently resulted when there was no agreement on the specific alternative being debated.

By defending a specific policy alternative, the affirmative would have the ability to focus the debate on a specific proposal. This would allow both teams to adapt their argumentation to a definite idea instead of an abstract construct. Value debates will necessarily become much less abstract and more objectively suited for consistent decisions.

Second, allowing the affirmative the right to defend a specific set of policy alternatives would lead to more realistic debate. As presently conceived, the negative has every incentive to distort the resolution to the detriment of the affirmative. Under the terrorism topic, for example, the negative could argue that the government could simply prohibit mass media coverage of terrorist activities. Such a restriction would clearly be within the bounds of the resolution and it would undoubtedly violate the First Amendment in a meaningful way. Even though no affirmative team would

ever propose such an extreme restriction, this restriction still constituted a reason to reject the resolution. Debating such resolutions without allowing more specific focus encourages the negative team to propose absurd examples of the resolution.

In defense of debating only the value implications critics might charge that negatives should only offer reasonable examples of the resolution. By offering the most obvious interpretations, they could claim, the negative could deny the resolution. While this is undoubtedly true, there is no reason why advocates would undertake the arduous task of proving that a mainstream interpretation was undesirable when they could undertake the much easier task of proving that an absurd interpretation of the resolution was undesirable. Moreover, what may be considered a mainstream interpretation by one judge may not be by another judge.

Third, allowing the affirmative to designate a specific policy alternative would allow for a more focused debate. To pretend that four debaters can definitively treat recent topics in a single hour is illogical. The arms sales, terrorism, and the United Nations (the three most recent CEDA topics) are problems that all defy easy answers. These issues are far too complex to be treated in that length of time. Broad, unnecessarily abstract interpretations of value resolutions contributes to this problem. If the affirmative was able to limit the number of different ideas being discussed in the debate, it would be possible to debate a more manageable set of issues.

For these reasons, we believe that the affirmative should be allowed the option of defending a specific set of policy alternatives. By defining the specific policies being discussed it will be possible to determine the extent of the claim that the advocate can lay on the competing values. Furthermore, specification would allow for more realistic debate because it

would absolve the affirmative of the need to defend absurd interpretations of the resolution. Finally, such a scheme would allow for a more focused and therefore presumably more detailed debate.

While there are good reasons to allow the affirmative to defend specific policy alternatives, there will undoubtedly be those who are critical of this position. At face value, it might be charged that it may well prove impossible to offer specific policies under all value resolutions. For example, what if we were to debate the proposition, "Resolved, That moral relativism has had a positive effect on America." [18] How could the affirmative defend examples of this resolution?

Admittedly, it might prove difficult for the affirmative to offer specific policies under specific value resolutions. However, this difficulty can be explained if one remembers the distinction between the different types of value resolutions as described by Sheckels. Obviously, under certain types of value resolutions it will be impossible to defend specific policies. However, this does not cut against our position. We are not arguing that values can never be discussed absent policy considerations. Rather, we are arguing that by their very nature certain value controversies are better considered in specific settings.

Moreover, we are not arguing that all affirmative teams should be forced to consider policy considerations. Instead, we are only arguing that under certain topics it would be theoretically legitimate for affirmatives to exercise that right if they choose to do so.

It might also be argued that allowing the affirmative to specify policy options would work to the detriment of the negative team. Since the affirmative could define ground so as to eliminate the most viable grounds, critics might charge that the negative would be placed at a competitive disadvantage. While such a result might be possible, we believe that it is

preferable to the present situation. Under current practice, the negative frequently chooses the most absurd interpretations of the resolution to deny the affirmative case. Allowing the affirmative to defend only specific examples of the resolution would do little more than restore equity. Since the affirmative would be bound by their initial choices they would be unable to gain any unfair advantage over the negative team.

Another criticism will come from those who believe that it is important that we consider value questions. These critics will charge that allowing affirmative's to defend plans will transform value debate back into policy debate. This, according to the critics, would neatly circumvent the original goal of increasing discussion over values.

This criticism is not without merit. However, we believe that it can be discounted at several levels. First, allowing affirmatives to specify alternatives would reintroduce some policy considerations in CEDA debate. However, we see this as leading to improved value debate. Since it is impossible to separate values from policy considerations, we believe that allowing policy considerations will lead to more enlightened discussion of values. The previous examples illustrate this point. We believe that there would be better discussion of values in a debate that considered the relative benefits of one specific restriction on media coverage that in a debate in which all possible restrictions on media coverage were simultaneously advocated.

Second, we believe that there is already a great deal of policy argumentation in contemporary value debates. Given the subject of recent topics, the wording of the resolutions, and our desire to debate timely issues, the community has already allowed policy questions to enter value debate.[19] Rather than complain about such cross-over, we should recognize that such debates can still provide the meaningful discussion

of values that lead to the original attempt to debate only value questions.

Third, we believe that it would still be possible to encourage the detailed consideration of value questions. Debaters debate values when those issues are relevant to the topic. If we wish to avoid overemphasis on policy issues and encourage discussion of value issues, then we should select resolutions which lend themselves to value arguments. For example, if we selected a topic dealing with Fifth and Sixth Amendment rights then we could reasonably expect that there would be a good deal of debate over competing values. On the other hand, if we selected a topic that dealt with consumer products then we could reasonably expect that there would be comparatively less discussion of values. By prudently framing and selecting the topic being discussed, we can continue to encourage debaters to focus on value questions.

One of the refreshing aspects of value debate is that there are no theoretical imperatives. Since the debate community is still creating a theoretical basis for value debate, we believe that it would be appropriate to recognize the inherent relationship between questions of value and policy alternatives. Toward that end we advocate that the affirmative be allowed the option of defending specific examples of the resolution should they believe that it would help to clarify the values being debated. This option will lead to a more realistic discussion, and finally, to more detailed argumentation.

Notes

[1] NDT (or more correctly phrased, its precursors) has debated only one non-policy topic. In 1921-22, the proposition was, "Resolved, That the principle of the 'closed shop' is unjustifiable." Ronald J. Matlon, "Debating Propositions of Value," 14 Journal of the American Forensic Association (Spring, 1978), p. 194.

[2] Marilyn J. Young, "The Use of Evidence in Value Argument: A Suggestion," in Proceedings of the Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. Jack Rhodes and Sara Newell (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication

Association and the American Forensic Association, 1980), p. 287.

[3] CEDA has debated a variety of different value resolutions. Although NDT has yet to debate a value resolution, there has been discussion of this idea. See for example William B. English, "Should the National Intercollegiate Debate Topic be a Non-Policy Proposition? An Affirmative Answer," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Houston, 1975.

[4] David A. Thomas and Maridell Fryar, "Value Resolutions, Presumption, and Stock Issues," in Dimensions of Argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. George Ziegelmüller and Jack Rhodes (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1981), p. 529.

[5] Theodore F. Sheckels, Jr., Debating: Applied Rhetorical Theory (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 80.

[6] "Despite widespread recognition of the importance of value propositions. . . scholars in argumentation have provided little guidance for the person caught up in arguing them." Joseph W. Wenzel and Dale J. Hample, "Categories and Dimensions of Value Propositions: Exploratory Studies," 11 Journal of the American Forensic Association (Winter, 1975), p.121.

[7] See for example Lawrence E. Rothstein, "What about the Fact-Value Dichotomy: A Belated Reply," Journal of Value Inquiry 9 (1975), pp. 307-311.

[8] Sheckels, p. 80.

[9] Sheckels, p. 81.

[10] Sheckels, p. 81.

[11] Matlon, p. 195. Emphasis in original.

[12] George W. Ziegelmüller and Charles A. Dause, Argumentation: Inquiry and Advocacy, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 51.

[13] These four steps are a summary of the procedure presented in Barbara Warnick, "Arguing Value Propositions," Journal of the American Forensic Association 18 (Fall, 1981), pp. 116-117.

[14] Stephen L. Verch and Brenda J. Logue, "Increasing Value Clash: A Propositional and Structural Approach," CEDA Yearbook, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1982), p. 27.

[15] Diana Prentice and Jack Kay, The Role of Values in Policy Debate (Kansas City: National Federation of State High School Associations, 1985), pp. 10-11.

[16] George Kent, "Political Design," in Planning Alternative World Futures: Values, Methods and Models, ed. Louis Rene Beres and Harry R. Targ (New York: Praeger, 1975), p. 36.

[17] In policy debate theory those who believe that the debate should focus on the entire resolution have argued for counter-warrants. A counter-warrant is an argument which justifies rejecting the resolution even though it might not justify rejecting the specific affirmative plan. For a defense of counter-warrants see James W. Paulsen and Jack Rhodes, "The Counter-warrant as a Negative Strategy," Journal of the American Forensic Association 15 (1980), pp. 205-210; and Jack Rhodes, "A Defense of the Counter-warrant as a Negative Strategy," in Dimensions of Argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. George Ziegelmueller and Jack Rhodes (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1981), pp. 485-493. For a critique of counter-warrants see Marjorie Keeshan and Walter Ulrich, "A Critique of the Counter-Warrant as a Negative Strategy," Journal of the American Forensic Association 16 (1980), pp. 199-203; Pat Ganer, "Counter-Warrants: An Idea Whose Time has not Come," in Dimensions of Argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. George Ziegelmueller and Jack Rhodes, (Annadale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1981), pp. 476-484; and Dale Herbeck and John P. Katsulas, "The Affirmative Topicality Burden: Any Reasonable Example of the Resolution," Journal of the American Forensic Association 21 (Winter 1985), pp. 133-145.

[18] This resolution is taken from English and is intended only as an illustration.

[19] A graphic example of this occurred in the Final Round at the First National Championship of the Cross Examination Debate Association. In that debate the affirmative claimed that membership in the United Nations was no longer beneficial to the US because the UN exacerbated conflict in the world. In defending the UN the negative argued (and prevailed by claiming) that US membership was justified since the UN acted to decrease proliferation in the world. In this debate, both of the teams relied almost exclusively on policy claims to justify their respective positions.