APPROACHES TO THE EVALUATION OF CRITERIA

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Identification of stock issues is important both during preparation for and participation in debate. No universal agreement exists on the nature of stock issues for value propositions, but there appears to be some consensus that one valid approach includes consideration of the criteria for evaluation (Matlon, 1978). Gill (1987) goes so far as to claim that establishing criteria is "fundamental to any affirmative case" on a value resolution (p. 69).

For almost any object of consideration there are multiple criteria. An automobile might be evaluated on crashworthiness, fuel economy, resale value, appearance, comfort, road stability, cargo area, horsepower, cost, protection plan, performance, available options, along with numerous additional criteria. In a similar vein, Rolston (1985) identified the following dozen criteria for the evaluation of undeveloped wildlands: economic, life support, recreational, scientific, genetic diversity, aesthetic, cultural symbolization, historical, character building, therapeutic, religious and intrinsic (p. 24). It would certainly be an extremely rare object appropriately evaluated on one standard alone.

Though most of the literature on debating value propositions identifies criteria as essential components of the debate, nothing is available to assist the debater in evaluating or comparing those criteria. This article proposes four standards, borrowed from Swedish political scientist Evert Vedung's (1982) assessment of rational political discourse, useful for the evaluation, support and refutation of criteria.

Any judgment on the validity of a criterion presupposes the ability to answer the following four questions:

(1) Is the criterion clear?
(2) Is the criterion relevant?
(3) Is the criterion consistently applied?
(4) Is the criterion supported by good reasons?

It is not suggested that these questions can be objectively answered; argumentation over criteria is likely to be as contentious as that found in any other segment of a debate. Nevertheless, it is contended that these four standards provide a framework for the resolution of dispute over criteria. The support or refutation of criteria should focus on these four standards.

Standard of Clarity

The clarity of a criterion depends on both the abstraction of the language and the presence of tacit assumptions. One particular criterion could range in abstraction from "political participation" to "consumers and workers playing an increased role in economic policy development." The more abstract the criterion, the less likely that its meaning will be clear. While equity and efficiency are frequently cited criteria in the design of urban renewal projects, Fainstein (1987) notes that their meanings are often ambiguous (p. 232). Does equity demand that the poor bear the same degree of inconvenience as the wealthy, or does it require the costs to be more progressively assigned? Such uncertainty means a decision-maker may opt for a criterion, yet have little notion of the true standard that has been accep-

ted. Debaters should strive for concreteness in the selection of their criteria.

Criteria should, likewise, avoid tacit or implicit assumptions. Vedung, finding such assumptions to be relatively common, notes:

> Assumptions are sometimes excluded because they seem obvious. To express them would be superfluous; after all, everyone understands that they exist. Occasionally, they are excluded because they are controversial. This is particularly true of essentially contested value premises (p. 126).

Gill offers an example of a criterion for measuring legal doctrine, a criterion subject to doubts about unidentified assumptions: "If guilty people are not convicted because of actions designed to protect their rights" (p. 69). This criterion assumes there is an accurate means of determining guilt separate from the judicial system. Any affirmative may be excused from omitting assumptions understood by all, but a criterion including unstated, but highly controversial, assumptions should be suspect. To meet the standard of clarity, criteria should avoid both high degrees of abstraction and questionable assumptions.

Standard of Relevance

Given the standards identified earlier for automobiles and wildlands development, it is obvious that there is little overlap. Genetic diversity is as inappropriate a criterion for selecting a car as is crashworthiness a measure of a desirable wildlands policy. Criteria must be relevant to the field of discussion, they must involve "close substantive belongingness to the subject matter" (Vedung, p. 37). Making such judgments is, however, easier said than done. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) conclude that there is seldom agreement concerning the relevancy of one claim to another.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do suggest one source for aid in judging relevancy. The field of the controversy may provide the needed guidance, as the authors declare, "The discipline often determines also the level at which the argumentation must be presented, laying down what is beyond dispute, and what must be regarded as irrelevant to the debate" (p. 465). The discipline of the preponderance of expert sources used in a debate provides an indication of the field of discussion. Some debates, however, concern all society and cannot be relegated to a specific field. In such instances, criteria may be drawn from several fields of inquiry.

Standard of Consistency

The import of a criterion may be inferred from the extent to which the standard is applied consistently. The more exceptions that exist to the application of a criterion, the less certainty that the criterion should be employed in this instance.For example, the United States Supreme Court might be said to utilize the criterion of prior restraint in its examination of First Amendment cases before the Court. The exceedingly few exceptions to ruling on the basis of prior restraint confirm Justice Burger's claim that "(t)he thread running through all these cases is that prior restraints on speech and publication are the most serious and the least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights" (Nebraska Press Assoc. v. Stuart, 1976, p. 599). Were there a large number of exceptions to the consistent application of the criterion it would be difficult to label it "the most serious." The standard of consistency, then, can be taken as a measure of the criterion's relative importance and validity.

Standard of Support

A discussion of all types of

support providing good reasons is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, three commonly used forms of support--authority, public opinion, and deductive logic--will be evaluated. It is not difficult to find some authority declaring the ultimate importance of any value. Justice Brandeis' claim that the right of privacy is "the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilized man" is well known to many debaters. Legal authorities are not the sole source of criteria for judgment. Debaters may find support for criteria in the words of other political, religious or moral leaders. Mikhail Gorbachev, in his New Year's address to Americans, spoke of peace as "that supreme value equal to the gift of life." Coretta Scott King referred to unconditional love as "that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life." Advocates may also find a criterion in Proverbs, IV, 7: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding." Even literature provides an answer. "Truth," wrote Mark Twain in Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar, "is the most valuable thing we have." Depending on the source, either peace, love, wisdom, or truth is the ultimate value.

Authorities additionally offer judgments on the comparison of different criteria. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes noted: "We have to choose, and for my part I think it a lesser evil that some criminals should escape than that the government should play an ignoble part. In a similar spirit, the historian Will Durant concluded that "the health of nations is more important than the wealth of nations."

Whether establishing the supremacy of a particular criterion or judging the relative importance of several standards, authorities should not be viewed as infallible sources of opinion. Toulmin (1964) strongly objected to the use of authorities in value argument, claiming that "arguments from authority are no more 'ethical' than experienced guess-work is scientific" (p. 161). For Toulmin, value judgments should not be based merely on the word of advisors. The same grounds employed to evaluate source credibility should be applied to authorities used to document criteria. Is peace the ultimate objective because Gorbachev says so?

Even if the source is a respected authority in the field of the value controversy, this approach to supporting criteria assumes that most or all other authorities would provide the same weighing of criteria. If not, the foundation for the criteria erodes when an authority of greater renown suggests a different balancing of the standards. The same damage may be done if two or more qualified sources oppose the judgment of the one authority. To rely on a single authority to decide such important an issue in the debate as which criteria receive precedence over others is unwise and risks shifting the argumentation into a comparison of source qualifications.

A second approach to support, differing from the first only in scale, indicates that the relative importance of criteria provided by the advocate are consistent with the priorities of the general public. The crowd becomes the authority. Zeuschner and Hill (1981) recommend the use of prevailing public opinion to establish the debate's criteria. The debater who seeks to identify that opinion is well served by several comprehensive efforts to record a hierarchy of American values (Rieke & Sillars, 1984). George Gallup annually polls the public to discover those social values regarded as relatively more important than others.

How well does public opinion validate the selection of criteria? One flaw is the transient nature of that opinion. Were the public's choices consistent from year to year there would be little reason for Gallup to conduct repeated surveys. History is, likewise, replete with examples of where the public has either promoted or tolerated repugnant social philosophies and public policies that were later rejected out of hand. The fact that the public holds an opinion at this moment should give the debate critic little sense of satisfaction that a correct decision is being made.

Obviously, one means of correcting this inadequacy is by demonstrating that the criteria selected have been uniformly rated among the highest values of the American public. Any deviations from this pattern should have been both insignificant and brief. If this is not the case, the advocate should be able to demonstrate that the change in public opinion was reasonable, that the previously held opinion had resulted in serious public harm and change was necessary.

An additional difficulty with polls on American values is that value hierarchies vary from one demographic group to another. As Rieke and Sillars note concerning Gallup's 1982 poll, family life was the highest value for those over 50, physical health for those 30 to 49, and happiness for those 18-19 (p. 111). The differences were in no case staggering, but they do reflect the fact that one's age, gender, income, education, religion, political orientation, and place of residence play a role in determining personal priorities. Rieke and Sillars also construct six, somewhat different, value systems that they claim operate within the United States (pp. 118-124). How is the advocate to demonstrate that one American's value system is superior to another? Hopefully, the advocate will select criteria that are compatible with all or most of the value systems. That is again evidence of the criteria's strength.

A third means of supporting criteria involves creating a logical framework that establishes one standard as deducible from another. The advocate may illustrate that the one criterion is an essential prerequisite to many or all other potential measures. As such it is a more valuable objective in that it logically subsumes the competing standards. It might be argued that economic or political freedoms only arise after freedom of communication occurs in a society, therefore the First Amendment freedoms are ultimately a more important objective for a nation.

This approach has merit in several fashions. First, it uses the reasoning of the critic to gain validity. Kraft notes the power of this method:

> Substantiation is objective if the evaluative viewpoint ceases to be merely personal and becomes intersubjective, super-individual. Value judgments inferred from commonly acknowledged evaluative viewpoints are valid for everyone sharing these viewpoints; the critique is impersonal, objective (p. 152).

If the logical sequence described by the advocate matches the pattern accepted by the judge, then half of the advocate's persuasive task has been accomplished. It will be relatively difficult for the opponent to convince the judge that the judge's own reasoning is illogical. Secondly, the logical structure provides insight into the reasons of the authorities and may be more compelling than simply quoting the experts. There are problems with the exclusive use of logical support. If the logicical structure contradicts the judge's perspective, then the critic is more likely to be convinced by an opponent's objections. In refuting the logical support, the opposing advocate may attempt to demonstrate through analogy that while the sequence is correct, the interpretation is flawed. The opponent may argue

that while a oyster is required to produce an authentic pearl, the oyster is rarely of greater value than the pearl. One logical relationship does not yield a uniform interpretation in all contexts. It is left to the debaters to explain which interpretation is correct.

Support for selection of criteria need not rely solely on one of the above mentioned approaches. The debater's ability to defend the criteria increases when all three approaches are available for use. It is quite possible that the approaches will complement each other, just as the logical sequence is corroborated by the opinion of an authority who accepts that sequence; it is no longer merely the debater's logic.

Conclusion

The selection and defense of criteria is critical to the debate. Use of one criteria set will easily justify a policy or philosophy, while adoption of a differing set will invalidate the decision. This article proposes four standards for the evaluation of criteria, considering their clarity, relevance, consistency and support. As such, they are criteria for criteria.

These standards are neither novel nor unique to the evaluation of criteria. Their success in the consideration of arguments in other contexts, particularly the in political realm, bodes well for their application to criteria. Which criteria function in the debate round to influence the final decision will depend on the advocates' ability to support and refute the standards.

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