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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the components of an "ideal" debate using a non-policy proposition. It is argued that debates using non-policy propositions are currently plagued by a variety of problems. Value propositions on the college level are dissimilar to the value propositions used in high school Lincoln-Douglas debate. Many debaters are somewhat pre-deterministic in their selection of value(s) to advocate in relation to the debate proposition. There is a lack of understanding in the debate community regarding the role of criteria as a prima facie issue. There are abusive debate practices that generally permutate resolutions of value into de-facto policy propositions. This paper outlines a preferred argumentative process when debating an intercollegiate proposition of value. Specifically, it is concluded that the adoption of "real world" models of value adjudication would improve the argumentative quality of college debate rounds. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/NKA)

Debating Values: Key Issues in Formatting an Argumentative Case.

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the components of an "ideal" debate using a non-policy proposition. It is argued that debates using non-policy propositions are currently plagued by a variety of problems. Value propositions on the college level are dissimilar to the value propositions used in high school Lincoln-Douglas debate. Many debaters are somewhat pre-deterministic in their selection of value(s) to advocate in relation to the debate proposition. There is a lack of understanding in the debate community regarding the role of criteria as a prima facie issue. There are abusive debate practices that generally permutate resolutions of value into de-facto policy propositions.This paper outlines a preferred argumentative process when debating an intercollegiate proposition of value. Specifically, it is concluded that the adoption of "real world" models of value adjudication would improve the argumentative quality of college debate rounds.

Overview

Unfortunately, the use of non-policy propositions on the collegiate level has been in decline in recent years. The original impetus behind debating non-policy resolutions was the use of value propositions by the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA). During this time, the bulk of argumentative theory regarding prescriptive standards in value debate was produced. Since the discontinuation of value propositions by CEDA in the early 1990's, the only major debate association using propositions of value is the National Educational Debate Association (NEDA). It should be noted that NEDA only uses a "non-policy" proposition in the fall semester. The only other regularly occurring form of value debate is high school Lincoln-Douglas debate. The relative decline of the use of value propositions has seen an accompany decline in normative standards in formatting and advocating a value case. The lack of normative standards for value propositions in NEDA has given rise in some quarters to abolish its use as a propositional form altogether.

This would be a major loss. Many "real world" controversies involve the adjudication or application of competing values. Value debate has distinct characteristics that has widespread application in a variety of argumentative contexts. To foster the educational focus of NEDA,. value propositions should be retained. This paper hopes to identify the current problems associated with debating propositions of value, discuss a series of normative standards that would characterize an "ideal" value debate, and lastly offer a real world context for normative standards in value debate.

Problems Associated with Debating Non-Policy Propositions.

In Search of the Holy Grail

Generally speaking, three types of "non-policy" debate propositions exist: quasi-policy, fact and value. A related issue is that the term "value debate" is often used synonymously with the term "non-policy" debate. However, clear delineations exist within this propositional division and that one set of standards cannot be generalized to others within the same division.

A quasi-policy topic, or a proposition of judgement, call for an evaluation of an aspect of the external world (Nobles, 1978). These are usually quasi-policy because these kinds of resolutions typically ask for an evaluation of an existing or suggested policy. This evaluative judgement usually involves a "singular evaluation" and does not ask for a direct comparison of values.

Although, it should be noted that some scholars delineate propositions of judgement as a separate propositional category (Zarefsky, 1980). In theory, a proposition of judgement does not have to pertain to specific policy, i.e."freedom is a desirable state of being." Therefore, the key aspect of the resolution is the evaluative phrase in the resolution, e.g. "desirable."(Corcoran, 1988).

The second category for non-policy resolutions are propositions of fact. Propositions of fact call for a determination of reality or truth. Bartanen and Frank (1994) point out that factual propositions can be assessed along a categorical dimension. Specifically, the nature of the disputed reality can fall into three areas: being, designation and causal. "Being" involves whether something exists. "Designation" involves how something should be described or classified. "Causal" propositions concentrate whether two events are causally related (p. 35).

The third major "non-policy" propositional category is the value proposition. Strictly speaking "pure" value proposition involves a value comparison. Here the debate often take the form of preferences for one value over another. Thus, the debate focuses upon a "hierarchy of values." Debaters try to prove that one value is more important than competing values. An important aspect of this debate is the widespread use of philosophical evidence to justify the ranking of values.

Propositional variations is frustrating for those who want to apply uniform consistent standards to all non-policy debate. One solution might be the consistent wording of debate propositions that would strictly adhere to one propositional variant. A better solution would be the recognition of the different propositional forms and the development of standards for each. The literature in non-policy debate does provide the basis for the development of such standards.

<u>Value Propositions: High School vs. College</u>

A real problem facing collegiate value debate has been a general lack of recognition of the variations of the "non-policy" propositional form. Compounding this problem, is the divergent trends in topic selection in high school Lincoln-Douglas debate vs. intercollegiate debate. High School Lincoln-Douglas debating has been generally typified by propositions that ask for an explicit value-comparison. Whereas NEDA non-policy propositions are typically quasi-policy resolutions of judgement. Since 1994, arguably of the four non-policy resolutions used in NEDA, three have been quasi-policy resolutions of judgement and one has been a resolution of fact. One major problem facing incoming collegiate debaters is the dissimilarity of value propositions used in high school.

Square Pegs into Round Holes

Thanks to their experience in Lincoln-Douglas debate, many high-school debaters emerge with an impressive knowledge of philosophy. It is not uncommon for debaters to have a "favorite value" which is buttressed with a particular philosophical justification. Many debaters on the college level are tempted to use a particular value philosophy irrespective of the wording of a particular debate proposition. Thus, many quasi-policy propositions of judgement are converted to a comparison of values. This brings a certain convoluted approach to the debate round since the values being compared were not explicitly identified in the proposition and may or may not be a "good match."

Policy vs. Non-Policy Debate

Many debaters enter NEDA intercollegiate debate with their primary experience being high school cross-examination debate. High school cross-examination debate uses propositions of policy topics exclusively. Thus, many incoming intercollegiate debaters in NEDA have little to no experience debating non-policy propositions. This is also true for many NEDA coaches, many of whom have been recently hired from the high school ranks.

The evolution of debate practices in CEDA during the 1980s debate point to the potential danger of this inexperience. Specifically, debaters and coaches unfamiliar with the nuances of quasi-policy resolutions of judgement, have incentive to permutate the debate round to resemble the tactics and style of the policy rounds experienced in high school.

Specifically in CEDA, negative teams started to infer "policy implications" derived from the proposed "adoption" of the value advocated by the affirmative team. Thus, negative teams could justify arguing policy disadvantages (from a plan that was never advocated!). Affirmative teams responded by running a specific plan or by premising their cases on extremely narrow topical grounds. By the early 1990's, this was the de-facto practice in CEDA debate. In this context, CEDA's decision to abandon value propositions is understandable. It also has the virtue of being more intellectually honest.

Role of the Value Criterion

The biggest problem plaguing non-policy propositions is the lack of understanding regarding the role of the criterion. This lack of understanding is puzzling given the consistent treatment criterion receives in debate theory texts. The criterion has been referred as the "definitive stock issue" in value debate (Richards, 1992, p. 41). Simply put the criterion is absolutely necessary to measuring competing values and to determine whether the affirmative team meets the evaluation inherent in the resolution. Simply put an affirmative case cannot be prima facie without an operational criterion. As Richards (1992) states: "A criterion is needed to set standards and tests for measuring the worth of a belief or course of action, namely, the value advocated by the affirmative team" (p. 41).

Unfortunately, many debaters do not understand that a "value" and a "criterion" are not synonymous terms. Most debaters are successful in identifying a value to advocate in the debate round. However, most do not understand the need for assessing that value. Simply put, in a quasi-fact resolution of judgement, if the affirmative team proposes "freedom" as a value and the negative team accepts that value, then some measuring stick needs to be proposed to see which side best upholds the resolution in this value context.

Another problem is the use of "loaded" or "biased" criterions. To be legitimate, a criterion should offer a fair means of winning to both sides of a debate proposition. A good test is whether the affirmative can give a plausible scenario of how the negative team could win using the proposed criterion. Many debate theorists favor making this question a prima facie test of an affirmative value case (Bartanen and Frank, 1994; Richards, 1992).

Another issue is the appropriateness of the criterion in relation to the value. Winkler, Newnam and Birdsell (1993) note some criteria do not lend themselves to definitive measurements. A common pattern in value debate in CEDA was the use of "life" as a value and the use of cost-benefit analysis as the criteria. However, this assumes that enough information is available to make a quantification of this value in monetary terms. Also, a philosophical objection can be made about appropriateness.

Value vs. Value

Sometimes a college debate proposition calls for an explicit comparison of values. However, this has been rare in NEDA. In a quasi-policy proposition of judgement, the negative team has the option of accepting the proposed value offered by the affirmative or offer a value of their own. However, affirmatives have a certain degree of presumption in offering a value. Thus, the negative team when offering a counter-value need to establish a level of justification. In theory, a negative team can accept a value and offer an alternative means to measure. However, this is rare since a criterion is usually directly derived from a value. Therefore, a negative team when offering a counter-value need to establish why their value is superior in the context of the proposition (Preston & Wood, 1989).

Unfortunately, this rarely happens. Typically, the negative team offers a counter-value without justification. Thus, after the negative constructive speeches, the debate tends to run along two separate tracks.

In establishing a justification for a counter-value, the negative team has several options. A value hierarchy can be established to illustrate the superiority of the negative value. Value hierarchies can premised on a variety of grounds. Milton Rokeach (1973) delineates values as being terminal or instrumental. A instrumental value are the means to attain terminal values. A terminal value refer to end-states or goals of human existence. For example, "college education" as a value would be instrumental to the terminal value of "knowledge." Thus, a negative team can argue a terminal counter-value that would consume the value offered by the affirmative team.

Rieke and Sillars (1993) discuss the "sphere dependence of values" (p.158), which by implication a system of values is determined by the context of the proposition. Thus, the prioritization of values is determined by the standards being used within subject area of the resolution. For example, the prioritization of values for scientific argument would be different from that of religious argument.

Kluckhohn (1949) refers to "value orientations." This approach argues that values do not exist in isolation (p. 411). Typically values are part of a larger system of values linked to cultures and sub-cultures that exist. Thus, a value hierarchy can be established from the cultural norms that characterize the relevant decision-makers or audience. Rieke and Sillars (1993) argue that American political culture is characterized by the enlightenment value system. According to this perspective, the side proving that its value is consistent with the values currently accepted in American culture (Ulrich, 1986) would have a higher priority.

Values can be assessed on a pragmatic basis. Thus, values that are considered "utopian" or realistically unobtainable would be given lesser priority to "pragmatic" values. A related means of assessing values has been referred to as "value utility" (Winkler, Newnam & Birdsell, 1993, p. 45). Value utility argues that the preferred value should be the one that provides the greatest good to the greatest number of people.

Another way values can be prioritized is using works of philosophers, especially political philosophers (Corcoran, 1988). The focus of much philosophy is the establishment of a hierarchy of values. Debaters should be encouraged to make use of philosophers, political scientists, psychologists,and the systems of other theorists to defend their value or value system as superior (Richards, 1992).

Ronald Boggs (1987) pointed to several specialized justifications that can be used to rank values. A "social values" model assesses values by giving presumption to the values used by the status-quo (p. 27-28). Another means of value assessment is the "exigence and salience" model (p. 28). Under this model, the higher value is judged to be the most urgently needed. This discussion is not an exhaustive review of the literature. Overall, the number of value rationales is only limited by imagination.

The Smorgasbord Case

Affirmative case construction can use "dependent" or "independent" contentions. Dependent contentions are thematically linked chains of logic. Affirmative cases often need to prove a contingent contention that leads to the next contention. Each dependent contention does not prove the proposition true per se, only when collectively linked does the affirmative meet its resolutional burden. Independent contentions are not thematically linked. Each contention stands "independently" as proving the resolution true. In theory, the advantage to running a case with independent contentions is that only one is necessary to win the debate. In appearance, an affirmative case using independent contentions is akin to 3-4 mini-cases within a single affirmative constructive.

In policy debate, affirmative case contentions are held to reasonable bounds due to requirement of the affirmative to solve for its identified harms. In value debate, the number of independent contentions should be restricted because of its relevance to the value-criteria proposed by the affirmative team. However, based on some of aforementioned problems in applying and understanding value-criteria, many affirmative cases lack internal cohesion in the relationship of the independent contention to the value-criteria.

Many debaters use a shot-gun approach in case construction. The more varied and disparate the contentions the better. Here the affirmative value would have extremely broad application to make each contention relevant. Additionally, the affirmative criteria is rarely able to measure each of the independent contentions. In such cases, debaters would potentially need to present two to three independent criteria as well (Corcoran, 1988).

Many collateral problems also occur with the use of a "smorgasbord" case.The application of so many unrelated contentions keeps the debate on a broad superficial level. Rarely are issues explored in any depth. Thus, the educational value of the debate is limited.

Toward A Vision of an Ideal Value Debate

Based on these criticism a model of a value debate round can be constructed.

1. Recognition of the non-policy propositional variations

Each one of the non-policy variations has implications in formatting an affirmative case. Thus, the first step in an ideal value debate is a proper diagnosis of the non-policy propositional form. Quasi-policy propositions of judgement call for an evaluative judgement about the object of focus (the suggested policy). In these propositions a key evaluative term exists: e.g. "detrimental," "desirable," "undesirable," or "important." Thus, an affirmative must offer a value to operationalize the evaluative term in the resolution. Propositions of fact have implicit value of truth. Thus, the key requirement for an affirmative case is establishing the standards of what constitutes proof. In propositions of value, debaters need to understand how to establish value hierarchies.

2. Successfully make the "Non-Policy" Transition.

Most high school debaters are not well prepared to make the transition to debating collegiate non-policy propositions. Debate coaches need to educate incoming debaters on the unique requirements of collegiate propositional forms. A proper orientation may prevent debaters from permutating the debate proposition to more familiar forms.

3. Understand the basic role of criterion

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of non-policy propositions is the role of criteria. As discussed earlier, affirmative teams have a prima facie burden to include a value-criteria. Whether dealing with a proposition of quasi-policy, fact or value, a criteria must include at least three elements. First, a criteria must quantify or measure the value. Second, the criteria must provide a threshold as to when the value is significantly affected. Lastly, the affirmative should explain the burdens for both the negative and the affirmative teams using the proposed value-criteria.

4. Promote a depth of focus and cohesion.

An ideal value case would offer a high degree of cohesion. A preferred affirmative case would have a depth of focus. An affirmative case structure using a chain of logic with dependent contentions would typically provide a depth of focus and maintain a degree of cohesion in relation to value-criteria. In short: quality over quantity. Additionally, the selection of an affirmative value should be a natural outgrowth of the case theme. Shoehorning a preconceived value into a case structure would tend to undermine case cohesion.

In Defense of an Ideal Vision.

There are alternative "visions" of what might constitute an ideal value debate round. Some offer an alternative model of "good reasons" as being ideally suited for non-policy debate. Many debate critics feel uncomfortable with the role of value-criterion and the use of dependent contentions in non-policy debate. Many feel that value criterion is presumptively telling the debate judge "how to judge." The use of dependent contentions has been criticized as supplying an insufficient basis to affirm a debate proposition. Further, some feel that an extended debate over criteria would constitute a"debate on how to debate.

An Alternative Vision: The "Good Reasons" Model

The "good reasons" model of debate is pointed to as an alternative to using a value-criterion. The "good reasons" approach has a strong rhetorical tradition dating to Aristotle. Generating "good reasons" to adhere to an argumentative claim are learned from early childhood and would be characteristic of an accessible argumentative system. Zarefsky (1980) defined the "good reasons" model as "reasons which are psychologically compelling for a given audience, which make further inquiry both unnecessary and redundant--hence justifying a decision to affirm or reject a proposition" (p.10).

What this model means in competitive debate is open to some interpretation. On one level, the "good reasons" model may ideally suited to value debate. Johannesen (1971) argues that through "good reasons" we could test values and construct them through argumentation. The relevant factors provide reasons for the upholding the proposition,though they do not deductively entail it (Govier, 1992). The debate judge would interpret the meaning of the arguments in the context of the round and evaluate their comparative adequacy. The judge would listen to arguments presented in a round, and draw upon their experience to evaluate the merits of the argument.

The "good reasons" model would prescribe the use of independent contentions. Govier (1992) labels these arguments as "conductive arguments" (p. 308). "Each piece of information is relevant, and separately relevant, to establishing that conclusion" (p. 309). Thus, each affirmative case contention would constitute a "good reason" to affirm the proposition. Additionally, the "good reasons" model would be compatible with current debate practice regarding affirmative and negative presumption. As Hill and Leeman (1996) conclude, "we like to have some "good reasons" for abandoning old beliefs and behaviors for new ones" (p. 142).

However, as Freeley (1996) notes "that what constitutes good reasons for one audience may not be good reasons for another" (p. 3). Thus, absent of a criteria, the debate round is akin to throwing darts in a dark room. The argumentative effect of any given contention would be open to the subjective interpretation of the judge. Further, there would be incentive to throw as many darts as possible to increase the likelihood hitting the target. One could safely assume a judge would have argumentative preferences, but these preferences would go unspecified. Thus, the "good reasons" model would give cover to the secret, perhaps unjustifiable prejudices of the judge (Ulrich,1986).

Further, the use of a "good reasons" model is not mutually exclusive of using a criteria.

Many debate theorists have reached the conclusion that a "good reasons" model needs a criteria. As Zarefsky (1980) posits the question, "What constitutes good reasons for affirming a proposition?" (p. 10). McKerrow (1982) comes to the same conclusion when he asks, "What standard or criteria of justification should be employed in underwriting a logic of good reasons?" (p.114).

Telling the Judge "How to Judge?"

At no point does a criteria presume to tell a judge "how to judge." But a criteria is important to establish internal standards in the debate round. Judges use a variety of paradigms (see Ulrich, 1986), only a few of which would be potentially incompatible with a value-criteria. Thus, absent a criteria, a debate critic would be forced to intervene to make a decision. Additionally, debate as a specialized argumentative field, would demand a criteria in a non-policy affirmative case. There is a broad consensus in the debate theory literature regarding this point. Although much of NEDA debate is in the context of lay judging, abandoning prima facie standards would be the worst form of audience adaptation. The true test of audience adaptation would be to explain the need and rationale for criterion standards. This argumentative context would be comparable to legal argumentation, where lawyers have to explain in lay terms specialized argumentative concepts such as presumption, decision rules and tests of evidence and logic.

Insufficient Basis to Affirm the Proposition?

Does a case using dependent contentions lack sufficient breadth to affirm the non-policy proposition? This brings into question the issues of sub-topicality and representativeness. It is true that a case using dependent contentions relevant to a single value-criteria would tend to produce affirmative cases on narrower propositional grounds.

However, as long as the affirmative case meets the traditional stock issue of significance, a topically narrow affirmative case would be unlikely. In practice, a topical issue being used as a premise for a dependent contention case is also being used as a independent contention by others. Thus, it really comes down to depth vs. breadth. Given the time restrictions inherent to competitive debate, I prefer depth.

Debating on How to Debate

Another fear voiced about the use of value-criteria is that the debate will center on criterion to the exclusion of other relevant issues. In some respects, this concern misses the point. As Corcoran (1988) states, "Every good non-policy debate should come down to a clash on an abstract level" (p. 16). Thus, when resolving value disputes, criteria is the debate. If you do not like a debate over criteria, in essence you are saying you do not like value debate. As will be discussed later, many real world value clash is resolved by a value criteria.

A Link to the 'Real World'

Competitive debate, being a co-curricular activity, needs to promote experiences that will lead to relevant knowledge applicable to the 'real world' upon graduation from college. Thus, a key question is the role of criteria in real world value clash.

If competitive debate promotes 'real world' dispute resolution skills, does criteria apply in this area? Fisher and Ury (1981) in their landmark book,"Getting to Yes," point to criteria as a key aspect in dispute resolution. As Fisher and Ury note, "whether you are choosing a place to eat, organizing a business, or negotiating custody of a child, you are unlikely to reach a wise agreement as judged by any objective standard if you take no such standard into account" (p.

85).

Criteria plays a key part in 'real world' deliberative decision-making. Thus, when facing decisions about potential policy options, many scholars argue that a criteria should dictate the result. One decision-making model, the "rational reflection" model argue that a decision criteria needs to be established before a policy option is chosen (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

Lastly, any cursory analysis of U.S. Supreme Court opinions illustrate the widespread use of criteria to assess and adjudicate value disputes.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to identify the problems associated with non-policy debate. The parameters of an 'ideal' value debate round has been discussed. Specifically, affirmative cases formatted to include a detailed value criteria and use of dependent contentions are recommended. Additionally, recognition of the variants of non-policy propositional forms is suggested. Lastly, potential criticisms concerning these parameters have been reviewed and hopefully addressed.

Links to real world argumentation offers further support to the use and tactics of non-policy propositions. Hopefully, the discussion of normative standards for non-policy propositions will contribute to the viability to this propositional form. Considering that NEDA is one of the last venues of value debate, it is important to preserve this genre of competitive debate. Considering that many real world controversies concern questions of value, the educational mission of NEDA is increased with the continuation of this propositional form. The use of non-policy propositions, as David Zarefsky (1980) suggests, help students "to be far better prepared to understand and to apply the argumentative perspective to the wider range of settings in which human beings must make choices under conditions of uncertainty" (p. 16).

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