

THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY IN VALUE DEBATE

by Martin "Randy" Cox

There has been a tendency in debates of value resolutions to resort to what has been called a "core value." This strategy of debate isolates the concern of a resolution in terms of its implications on single aspect or subject of value orientation.

For example, given the resolution

Resolved: That euthanasia is justified

the focus of a constructive speech would be on a single, or core, value, such as individual liberty, or the "value" of society.

Ethical theorists use the terms "naturalistic fallacy" to refer to this strategy. G. E. Moore discusses the fallacy at length in his *Principia Ethica*, arguing that the property of goodness is not synonymous with the things that possess that property.

The naturalistic fallacy is committed when the boundaries of the debate are shifted from the value implicit in affirmation or negation of a resolutional issue to the value of a separate issue as it is affected, sometimes indirectly, by the resolutional issue. The analysis of the constructive limits itself to a single subject, deemed a value, rather than the comprehensive value of a resolution.

It is important to understand, in dealing with resolutions of value, what "value" means, according to *Webster's II* (1984):

A principle, standard, or quality regarded as worthwhile or desirable. To rate according to relative estimate of worth or desirability.

In other words, a principle or standard is rated as valuable or desirable for determinable reasons. There is

something inherently unsatisfiable about reducing the analytical scope or relative value of a resolutional issue to single or core value. In cases of core value debate, the guilty party has merely replaced the resolutional issue with a single other issue.

However, a resolutional issue is not synonymous with a contingent issue. In other words, "euthanasia" is not synonymous with "individual rights" or "society." Reduction of the affective dimension of a resolutional issue to a single core value is an affront to the comprehensive value of the resolutional issue.

Contingent Value Systems

Values do not exist in a vacuum. To claim a "value" means that one has placed worth in a principle or standard. We "value" things for different reasons in different contexts. We place value in an idea, principle, concept, standard, object, etc., because of complex systems of interests or contingencies. In other words, all of our values are contingent upon the interests of the valuer, which may be affected by different temporal and cultural loci. It is perhaps more appropriate to speak of "value systems."

It is the duty of the value debater to flesh out the value system which supports affirmation or negation of the value resolution. A core value is merely one aspect of the system which reasons that we value the principle.

The core of a value debate should be in justifying the acceptance or denial of a resolution; i.e. there is greater value in affirmation

or negation of the resolution

The following section suggests a strategy for dealing with resolutions as contingent upon value systems. It is the contention of this essay that a unified strategy of analysis would better fulfill the potential range and importance of a resolution than the core value strategy.

Unified Analysis in Value Constructives

The unified approach to analysis has been used in the past in constructing answers to questions in the Extemporaneous Speaking event. The style first answers the topic question definitively, and then provides sound reasons as the body components of the speech, rather than disjointed areas of analysis which often have little to do with the answer to a question.

Value resolutions are similar to topic questions. However, the answer to the potential question is stated in the construction of the resolution. For example, the question *Is capital punishment justified?* becomes *Resolved: That capital punishment is justified.* A resolution answers a rhetorical question.

The next step in unifying analysis is to provide sound reasons or proofs for an answer or rhetorical statement. The measure of analytical success should be in its persuasive scope. If a resolution can be demonstrated to be justified in great measure, then the value of affirmation of the resolution has also been demonstrated. If a resolution can be shown to be unjustified in great measure, then its negation has been shown to be more valuable than its affirmation.

The following is an ex-

ample of the potential wording of preview outlining in negation of the aforementioned resolution.

"The negative stands against the resolution. In fact, capital punishment is not justified, because, first, capital punishment destroys life; second, it destroys individual liberty; and finally, capital punishment affirms autocracy."

The foundation for constructive development is now in place. Rhetorical and philosophical proofs can now be offered in support of several contentions, thus extending the scope of the analysis against the resolution.

In addition, the unified approach to value constructives keeps the focus of debate on the resolutional issue by showing the contingencies of a value system in the context of the resolution rather than a single item of value which, in the course of the debate, becomes synonomous with the resolutional issue (the "my value is bigger than your value" approach).

Attacking a Core Value

Because core value debate focuses the context of a constructive speech around a single principle of value articulated by (usually) a single philosopher, core value debate has the potential to leave itself open to a number of problems. LD'ers who are unsatisfied with the core value approach will want to develop a more sophisticated form of analysis, especially those LD'ers who are adept at philosophical inquiry and support.

LD'ers who choose to run core value cases should also be aware of the potential pitfalls of the method. The following suggestions will help in pointing out the flaws in a core value case and in composing effective responses.

The main things that ev-

ery LD'er needs to remember are: 1) **NOT A SINGLE** philosopher in the history of normative ethics ever claimed that a single concept was the "end-all-be-all" of value discussion. Every philosophical position is dependent upon contingent circumstances and a very particular world-view. 2) **NOT A SINGLE** philosopher (yes, including Rawls), ever even insinuated that the major subject of their works should be the subject of every debate of value. 3) **NOT A SINGLE** philosopher ever articulated a formal criteria which indicated that, having fulfilled the criteria, any contingent principle would have absolute value. The notion that all a debater would have to do is to uphold justice according to Rawls' definition to win the round is absolutely ludicrous, and an affront to the very nature of value debate and the use of philosophical principles. 4) In addition, no resolution can be simplified or reduced to a single value, because resolutions deal with a multitude of value systems, some of which support, others of which deny, and others of which have little to do with the jurisdiction of the resolution.

Criteria

The criteria for fulfillment of a value is **NOT** the same as a criteria for the debate. The voting criteria lies in who best defends the affirmation or negation of the resolution. As any judge will attest, the ballot for Lincoln-Douglas Debate does not claim *anywhere* that a debater must establish a core value. An LD ballot asks the judge to determine who has done the best debating, according to the judging criteria of case and analysis, support through evidence and reasoning, and organization and delivery. Any debater who claims that you must have a core value to

win the debate is lying. Core value is a *style* of debate, and certainly not the only style.

Values

Values are principles or ideas which we value for specific reasons. It is not enough to assume that these principles or ideas have intrinsic value. There is not such thing. "Democracy," "liberty," and "justice" are not values, they are principles which we value according to a particular world-view. If the debater is going to use these concepts as the basis for a case, then he or she must demonstrate why these concepts are valued and why they should be the focus of attention when we have already been given a focus of attention (the topic of the resolution). By the same token, principles or ideas which we disvalue, we do for logical reasons. It is not enough to say "elitism," one must demonstrate why elitism is bad.

Questions

Often, LD'ers will be asked and should ask the following questions when debating a core value debater:

1) "What is your value?"

Why asked: this is question asked by core value debaters hoping to pin down a debate to a single subject separate from the resolution. *Appropriate response:* "If you are referring to the style of debate which chooses a single value, that would be a gross understatement of my case. If I had to choose a 'core' value, it would be the benefit/harm of the subject of the resolution.

2) "What is your criteria?" *Why asked:* This question is asked in order to claim some kind of neutral criteria by which two core values can be compared. *Appropriate response:* "The criteria for

this debate is who best affirms or denies the resolution."

3) "What does your criteria do?" *Why asked:* this question should be asked of core value debaters. Remember, there is a difference between the criteria for fulfillment of a principle of value, and a criteria for the decision in the round. Also remember that it is up to the judge to decide who best proves or negates the resolution.

4) "Who says your criteria is right?" *Why asked:* The designers of LD didn't sit down and say, "Hey, let's make it so that if they fulfill some abstract criteria, they win the round." Who designed the criteria? Does it make any sense? What is the logical basis for this criteria? Did the philosopher say that this was so?

5) "Where did your philosopher establish this criteria?" *Why asked:* Forces the core value debater to pinpoint the source of a criterial argument if proposed by the philosopher. Enables you to check your references to check the validity of the value criteria. If the debater can not answer, ask for the context of the criteria; e.g. what led up to the establishment of this criteria?

6) "Is that criteria absolute?" "Is that value absolute?" "Under what conditions might your criteria or value be non-absolute?" *Why asked:* Forces the debater to admit to absolute values, against which you may have prepared some relativism arguments. Otherwise, it forces the debater to admit conditions for limitation, which can set up your case and refutation.

7) "Does this mean that the resolution is limited to considerations of only this value?" *Why asked:* You need to determine whether the core value debater is putting an

unnecessary limitation on the resolution. Usually, a core value criteria does not appropriately coincide with the full jurisdiction of the resolution.

8) "Is there a difference between value criteria and voting criteria?" *Why asked:* Sets up the distinction between criteria for fulfillment of a valued principle and the criteria for affirmation or negation of the resolution.

9) "Is a core value **the** basis for debate a merely a method of application?" *Why asked:* Forces the debater to distinguish. If the core value debater answers, "**The** basis," you need to respond with, "According to who?"

10) "Are you claiming that your value should be the basis for all discussions of any value resolution?" *Why asked:* Forces the opposing debater to tone down an extremist position. If the extreme position is maintained, be prepared with arguments of relativism.

For additional support, refer to the following excerpts. These are from value theorists, not just some run-of-the-mill Lincoln-Douglas Debate writer:

But it seems arbitrary to insist that all particular valuing must either promote or instantiate an abstract value. I can see no reason to accept the claim that one can explain a specific and/or relatively unimportant attitude only by showing that it flows from one's central and important ones. Nothing in attitude theory suggests it must be so. Intuitively, it seems more the mark of a fanatic to let one's abstract or general commitments determine all one's attitudes. It certainly strikes me as implausible to insist that, if I value a smile from my

infant daughter, the full exposition of this valuing must, necessarily, turn on the claim that it promotes or instantiates an abstract value such as "being loved by my children," "happiness in babies," or whatever. (Gaus, Gerald F. *Value and Justification: The Foundations of Liberal Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990.)

Justifying any statement of value is a process of deducing it from one or more premises. All justifying is deducing. The converse is not true. All deducing is not justification. Only if the premises of the reasoning are acceptable does the deduction justify the conclusion. (Wellman, Carl. *Challenge and Response: Justification in Ethics*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971.)

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