POLICY MAKING REVISTED: INHERENCY THAT COUNTS

by Jim Paterno

Once upon a time in the great ivory towers of debate, where only the bravest and wisest of debaters dared to venture, lived the guru of debate theory. Patiently waiting, the guru sits and thinks great thoughts, hoping to share his words of wisdom with each sojourner of forensics. Many have made the trek, but few have truly understood the words that have come to be set in stone.

"Oh, great guru, what is inherency?

"It is what prevents the status quo from adopting the affirmative proposal."

"Is there only one type of inherency, Master?"

"No, Grasshopper, there are many forms of inherency."

"Does inherency really matter?"

"But of course, Grasshopper. Inherency matters to all but the policy maker."

Inherency is not a dead issue ...

Alas, the sojourner runs wildly down the stairs into the streets, shouting his newly found knowledge. And so it came to pass that the policy maker never votes on inherency.

As fantastical as the tale, so is its message. For some unknown reason debaters have come to mindlessly accept and argue that the policy making judge does not care about inherency. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is high time that debaters begin to think beyond the "catch-phrases" of debate, "Policy makers don't care about inherency," and examine the analysis behind such absurd remarks.

Perhaps the myth of policy makers never voting on inherency has been abusively extrapolated from the desires of a true policy-maker: discovering solutions that solve problems and implementing a plan of action with desirable side-effects. As such, it seems logical to focus the debate on what can be done rather than on why it is not being done currently in the status quo. However, one must realize that such a sterile analysis is premature, failing to account for the initial steps of the problem solving process. The result of which is the practice of instrumentalism, described by James Rule (1971) as "the concentration on the adequacy of means rather than the moral quality of the ends being sought." Thus, the policy maker who fails to consider inherency constructs, perpetuates a system which focuses on the means and not the ends.

Avoidance of instrumentalism and the implementation of successful policies is achieved through the sound identification of what is being sought, the desired end-state. James Wilson (1967) contends that "the only point at which very much leverage can be gained on the problem is when we decide what it is we are trying to accomplish." For example, if the problem of hunger in the United States is being attacked, the effective policy -- maker envisions the end-state desired: the ability of individuals to feed themselves and/or their families. With this as the target objective it is clear why hunger still exists in America--policies are directed at giving food to the hungry, not at enabling individuals to provide for their own food needs. Thus it is evident that any problem being attacked must begin with a clear delineation of objectives, a clear statement of the desired end-state. Simply saying something is a problem, treating the symptoms and ignoring the causes does little to solve problems.

One way of deciding what the end-result should be is to examine what it is not. This is where inherency comes into play. While the surface question of inherency might be what is preventing the affirmative plan, the answer is a much deeper analysis of the status quo. Even policy makers are concerned with why a problem exists, for without the cause how could any plan to solve be identified and adopted? In addition, the policy maker in search of a solution will always ask certain basic questions: why does the problem exist? what is the probable cause? who is affected? Such questions relate to the first and second steps of problem solving outlined by Gaw and Sayer (1979): defining

It is a facet worthy of consideration ...

the nature of the problem and analyzing the problem for causes and effects.

Policy makers also subscribe to the third step of problem solving: suggesting solutions. Note the plurality of solution. Policy makers brainstorm a variety of answers to problems and then examine each one carefully. Thus, the inherency burdens of "has it been done before" and "why isn't it being done now" comes into question. Good policy makers seek to learn from the past -- both successes and failures. It makes little sense to duplicate a past effort that has failed, unless of course the causes of failure have been removed or accounted for in the new proposal.

All of this is not to say that

the affirmative must propose ten or fifteen different policies for consideration. It does, however, suggest that an affirmative be able to respond to past efforts, similar efforts currently being practiced, and how preventative structures -- attitudinal, structural, or motivational -- are being overcome or accounted for in the affirmative plan. Moreover, if the status quo

Instrumentalism: Concentration on the adequacy of means rather than the moral quality of the ends ...

is doing the affirmative, even on a small scale, the burden to show the value of duplication is high. Double efforts do not necessarily yield double results. In fact, the two can work against each other, fighting for resources, diminishing the others competitiveness to bolster one's own efforts, etc. Inherency in this line of argumentation is the policy making judge's a priori issue, if she is truly seeking to achieve a superior policy that provides desirable side-effects with minimal disadvantages.

On the other hand, inherency becomes a key argument for the affirmative with a policy making judge if the affirmative can clearly establish that the status quo is not practicing the affirmative plan. Since the main objective of the policy maker is to discover a problem solving policy, questions of why the status quo is not doing the plan carry little weight and provide an impetus to the adopt the plan since any advantage gained would be greater than the inaction of the status quo. Obviously the negative burden then becomes to demonstrate that the status quo inaction is superior than doing the affirmative because of potential disadvantages and/or the plan's inability to solve for the harm be-

ing claimed. In short, inherency arguments become key in helping to establish a data base from which conclusions may be drawn and decisions based on evidence and not the assumption that something should be done just because it is written in a resolution.

Why the status quo is not doing the affirmative does become an issue to the policy making judge when argued from the perspective of motives. Zarefsky (1987) describes six core motives that can prevent adoption of an affirmative proposal in Advanced Debate: 1. Actual or perceived self-interest, 2. Role definitions, 3. Role conflicts, 4. Actual or perceived threat to self-concept, 5. Conflict in value hierarchies, and 6. Jurisdictional concerns. Policy makers are concerned with these core motives to the extent that each one, separately or collectively, could diminish the plans ability to solve for the harm being claimed, if not prevent it from being solved at all.

Inherency argumentation now comes to satisfy the fourth step of the problem solving process described by Gaw and Sayer: selecting a solution. The affirmative plan should be the solution which they believe to be the best answer to the problems or harms they have identified in the status quo. Implementation of the plan requires a preliminary sketch of what might happen when put into action. That is, pragmatically, will the plan run into individuals that will circumvent or fight the policy? Will the plan be declared unconstitutional or illegal (e.g. flag burning laws, censorship laws)? Will the attitudes against the proposal prevail and develop other harms in the system much worse then those being solved for by the affirmative? Policy makers who ignore such inherency concerns are apt to adopt policies which do not solve, are ineffective, and/or incur tremendous disadvan-

tages. Once again, the examination of inherency concerns provides for a solid foundation of knowledge from which to base decisions.

Inherency is not a dead issue. It is a facet of debate as worthy of consideration as any other issue. It gains in importance as one begins to think of debate as a problem solving entity, a body-politic seeking to

The affirmative must respond to past efforts and similar efforts being practiced.

improve the conditions present in the status quo. Critical examination of inherency provides a data base of experience against a world of speculation. Policy makers who value the knowledge to be gained through inherency argumentation demonstrate the needed discretion and sincere desire to discover a superior policy for the betterment of the human condition. Perspective is maintained and actions taken are superior when inherency burdens are closely examined and utilized as a backdrop to the debate.

(Jim Paterno coaches at Puyallup High School, WA)