

CRITERIA AND HIERARCHY: THE ORIGINAL ODD COUPLE

by William H. Bennett

In debate there is general agreement that competitors and judges need a way to weigh and compare values. One defensible method is to offer a criteria and/or hierarchy for the judge to use in selecting between competing values. The purpose of this article is fourfold: to define what a criteria and hierarchy are, to see why they should be used, add some suggestions on how to use them, and identify limits and weaknesses in using these tools.

WHAT ARE THEY?

Are criteria and hierarchies synonyms? Some impressive sources say no. *The CDE Lincoln Douglas Dictionary* (1) says a **criteria** is "a method of evaluating...when a value(s) is achieved", while a hierarchy is "the arrangement of values in a comparative order". The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2) compares a criteria to epistemology. Dr. Colbert (3) writes "The stock issue of value criterion consists of defining terms in the resolution that imply value dimensions".

But most debaters treat the two concepts as nonconcentric but significantly overlapping concepts. The basis for such an assumption is based on common sources and word usage. *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (4), for example, defines **criterion** as "a standard of judgment may be formed". And it defines **hierarchy** as "things arranged in order of rank, grade, class".

In real life hierarchies and criterion often exist and are used to avoid arguments and resolve everyday problems (5). It is an accepted tool we use to settle or avoid a conflict.

Some philosophers (6) see

consequences as the determinant of the criteria. Others (7) focus on prioritizing human needs as the key to a value hierarchy. But Prof. Ulrich (8) identifies the most commonly basis for the criteria used today: "There are four dominant philosophies of value debate that have emerged in recent years. The first view suggests that any evaluation of values should be based on current social values. The second view, drawing from Zarefsky's work on hypothesis testing, suggests that presumption is always against the value implied by the resolution. The third view suggests that the values of the individual judge should be presumed to be valid until a reason is given to discard those values. The final approach, drawn from the Utilitarian philosophers, assumes that the value that promotes the greatest good for the greatest number of people should be promoted."

WHY ARE THEY USED?

Debating philosophy is very challenging. It is easy to be shallow, partially because you do not realize how much deeper true inquiry need go. As Shakespeare wrote in *Troilus and Cressida*:

You have both said well;
And on the cause and
question now in hand
Have glaz'd but superficially;
not much
Unlike young men, whom
Aristotle thought
Unfit to hear moral
philosophy.

Criteria and hierarchies are tools that move us one step closer to understanding the needs of strong quality choice

and clash in comparing values.

Debate exists primarily as a competitive activity. That implies a winner and loser will emerge from each "round" or confrontation. To determine the winner in a value debate often means that the judge will want to decide which value(s) is/are more important than other values. Selecting the crucial value(s) is a crucial but often preliminary step. As Ayn Rand (9) tells us: "'Value' is that which one acts to gain and/or keep. The concept 'value' is not primary; it presupposes an answer to the question: of value to whom and for what?"

Every debater decides, consciously or unintentionally, on one or more methods to try to convince the judge that the value(s) s/he is advocating are the most important. Thus every round has an implied or openly enunciated criteria and/or hierarchy. In many rounds each side presents a different and often conflicting criteria and/or hierarchy. The assumption is that whichever side predominates in the criteria/hierarchy battle will set the framework that the judge will use to determine which value(s) deserves the critics support.

When different values exist each debater strives to clarify (10) why his or her value is most important. The criteria each debater supports can thus become a secondary decision rule (11), a way the judge uses to rule which value is most important in that particular debate.

There are at least two defensible assumptions that underlie this position. First is the claim that hierarchies resolve moral conflicts, that ranking values is essential to resolving conflict (12). Second is the claim that clash and decisions should

focus on the highest value, that the highest value should be the focus of the debate (13).

HOW ARE THEY USED?

Since a criterion is used to evaluate and compare values it is almost always presented before the value is identified. This allows the speaker to explain the application of the criterion or hierarchy to the value immediately after the value is labeled and/or described.

The hierarchy itself is not a voting issue (14), rather it is a tool the judge uses to select between competing values. The criterion is not the goal, the value is the goal (15), and when there are competing goals the criterion tells the critic how to select between them. As every debater knows there may be more than one defensible criterion for the same state of affairs (16), therefore the advocates duty is to identify and defend his or her choice of criterion.

Successful competitors consider at least three factors and techniques in selecting criteria and values. Doug Fraleigh (17) identifies the first, the importance of evidence in establishing value hierarchies. He notes that evidence used to rank values usually takes one of three forms: [1] evidence that directly compares conflicting values, [2] evidence stating that one value is a precondition for another, and/or [3] evidence that supports or denies the importance of a value. Clarity of presentation and logic enhance the effectiveness of evidence usage.

The second factor is strategic. Selecting a positive goal, value, or criterion is almost always more effective than selecting negative or avoidance goals or criterion (18); making one value seem more significant than another is a similarly successful strategem.

The third factor is the most

challenging. The debater must consider all the options available in selecting the best criterion and/or hierarchy. Too often debaters choose a criterion simply because it has worked before on a different topic, and/or because s/he knows the criterion and does not want to take the time to find a new, albeit better, option. As Douglas Den Uhl (19) reminds us "Rationality and choice are thus not two separate faculties, but rather distinct aspects of the same cognitive contact with the world." The best debaters will familiarize themselves with a very large number of possible choices, of possible hierarchy options. Every philosophical system attempts to tell us what is good and bad, what is desirable and what is less desirable. Therefore EVERY philosophy offers the debater a potential criteria and hierarchy (20).

To learn different criterion there is no substitute for reading. A preliminary look at L/D and value debate texts that include sections on value comparison and hierarchies, such as *Lincoln Douglas: The Text* (21) and/or *Debating Value Resolutions* (22), is a good start. This must be followed, however, by extensive reading and understanding of a wide variety of schools of philosophy. Common philosophers (Kant, Mill, Hobbes, Locke), recent philosophers (Rawls, Rand, Adler, Kohlberg), common ideas (categorical imperative, utilitarianism), and uncommon philosophical ideas must not just be read but understood. Deontology, teleology, and *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* must become your close friends.

The debater's view of philosophy, criterion and hierarchies must not be constrained. Religious dogma is almost never used but offers significant criterion potential (23). Economic choice is often overlooked, yet

economic theorists and authors have long offered us some intriguing and different value criterion (24). Asian philosophy, lesser known female philosophers, and other regrettably obscure genres offer almost limitless potential.

The best criterion or hierarchy can be the dominant decision event in any debate. Having it in the case does not mean the debater will use it well. Not including one removes half the bullets from the duelist's gun.

LIMITS AND/OR WEAKNESSES

While this writer believes that criteria are essential to effective value debate there are limits to its use. At least five attacks or criticisms can be made on this tool.

First, the presumption or belief of the judge may invalidate the hierarchy or criteria. A debater may argue for a position based upon moral views so repugnant to the judge that no criterion will make any difference to the judge's view. Certain debaters confronting abortion and religious topics (25) have encountered this position. Not all choices are rational. It is even possible to construct debate arguments advocating and/or using this premise.

Second, a criterion assumes a choice exists. But some topics do not offer moral or ethical choices. As Hume notes, we cannot denote an "ought" from an "is". Topics of fact are not amenable to hierarchies.

Third, the debater or listener may have or offer a value construction or series of requirements that the criterion does not meet. Often one value stems from or relies on another. A hierarchy that ignores this interrelationship is risky. A good example is noted by W .H. Werkmeister (26): The crucial act of world-affirmation entails

a whole system of values," It is sometimes possible to offer a hierarchy that covers all pertinent values. Often the speaker does not know or have time to account for all moral and logical relationships and variables.

Fourth the debater might argue that there are no universal hierarchies, that conditions and/or beliefs so inherently vary that no valid generalizations can be made. One example of this strategy is known as "relativism", the claim that as conditions change so do value criteria and appropriate hierarchies. You may, as one common example reminds us, be ethically opposed to murder. But this value can shift or change if a sadomasochist attempts to burn and mutilate your child. Dewey, for one argues (27) that there is no one single, fixed, and final moral good.

A fifth problem is that values may not always be comparable. The wording of the topic may interfere with such comparisons. And it can even be argued that disagreement over what constitutes a value invalidates any attempts at creating criteria (28).

Finally, and importantly, there are other ways to argue about and compare values (29). Option one is to argue that the way the two values clash does not mean that the judge has to select one value over another. Instead the debater tries to show how sacrificing a small part of one value assures protection of the remainder of the value plus assurance of maintaining another value too. Option two is to turn the tables. The debater argues that by promoting value X we also promote values Y and Z because one value promotes the other. Option three is to argue that values must be considered as pluralistic rather than absolute. Using this method the debater describes why and/or how several

values are equally important and that no single value is more important than a combination of the other values. So, rather than saying that one value is dominant or absolute (i.e. that hurting or violating this one value outweighs hurting or violating any other value) the debater argues that two or more values are roughly equal in their importance. Thus violating one value is no better or worse than violating another. Option four is to use an emotional appeal (e.g. talk about massive death, environmental decay, or any other "label" that is likely to extract a predictable, useful emotional response from the judge).

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Notes

1. J. Paterno, *The CDE Lincoln Douglas Dictionary* (CDE, Taos, N.M.), 1993, pages 34 and 57.
2. Anthony Kennedy, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume 2* (MacMillan, Inc., New York), 1967, p. 258.
3. Dr. Kent R. Colbert, "Standards For Resolving Value Debates" in *The Forensic Educator*, Vol. 3, #1, 1988/89, p. 6.
4. Jean L. McKechnie and staff, *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, Second Edition, (Simon and Schuster, New York), 1983, page 432 and 858.
5. See, for example, Gardner Lindzey, ed., *Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. 1*, (Addison-Wesley), 1954, p. 253.
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Existentialism", *History of Western Philosophy*, (the Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.), 1964, p. 528: "For Hare, when we have specified the consequences of acting upon the sort of principle we have chosen, when we have specified the way of life of which this principle is a part, the justification for principles is at an end. Here we can no longer argue, we can only decide. But this is apparently Sartre's ethical position

also, and even Kierkegaard's."

7. Robert L. Kemp, *Lincoln Douglas Debating*, (The Alan Co., Clayton, Mo.) 1984, p. 45 - 6: "In summary, individuals have certain basic needs; there is a hierarchy to these needs. In judging the importance of each, recognize that the values change and often seem in conflict. It is important not only what society believes is of greater value, but also the discovery of some personal values."

See also Richard A. Kalish, *The Psychology of Human Behavior*, 4th edition, (Brooks/Cole Publishing, Monterey, Calif.), 1977, p. 31 - 32.

8. Walter Ulrich, *Debating Value Resolutions*, (Griffin Research, San Francisco) 1988, p. 33.

9. Harry Binswanger, ed., *The Ayn Rand Lexico* (Meridian, New York) 1988, p. 520 reprinting a section of "The Objectivist Ethics".

Martin Scheerer, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 1: *Theory and Method*, edited by Gardner Lindzey (Addison-Wesley Publishing, Reading, Mass.) 1954, p. 116: "...we have mainly cited the following points: the individual strives for cognized objects and goals, not for satisfaction itself; having attained a specific goal, he sets new ones for himself."

10. Scheerer, p. 116: "Correspondingly Hilgard (1951) speaks of two goals of perception -- one, to attain stability in the world about us, and two, to achieve clarity in what we perceive."

11. Ann Gill, *Prima Facie: A Guide to Value Debate*, edited by Stephen Wood and John Midgley (Kendall/Hunt Publishing, Dubuque, Iowa) 1986, p. 70: "Yet another source for criteria is in a value that the affirmative defends as paramount. Whatever the criterion, once chosen, it acts as the decision rule for the round. The quickest way for the affirmative to lose the debate is to fail to meet their own criteria. If the affirmative does not meet their criteria, they can count on a negative counter-criteria from the opposing team. Therefore, as with definitions, affirmatives must not only set out the criteria, but be prepared to justify it as both reasonable and the best criteria in the round."

12. W. H. Werkmeister, *Man and His Values*, 1967, p. 90: "Hartmann is also right in maintaining that behind every moral conflict there can always be found the opposition of one value to another value, not the opposition of value to disvalue. And if that conflict is to be resolved in a favorable satisfactory way, it must be resolved in favor of the higher value. The order of rank of values, therefore, takes on a crucial significance."

13. Werkmeister, p. 91: "This highest value may be the peace that comes to us when all desires cease, or it may be the harmonious realization of all our desires, or it may be harmonious realization (Bennett to page 40)

(Bennett from page 14)

tion of all our desires, or it may be something else. But once we have accepted a highest value--whatever it may be--that value rightfully becomes the focal point relative to which all other values are ranked."

14. Colbert, p. 6: "Winning the value criterion should not be considered an independent voting issue in and of itself."

15. Robert P. Newman & Dale R. Newman, *Evidence* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston) 1969, p. 4 - 5: "A goal is a concrete or specific objective of action...These specific goals are value--impregnated...We support specific policy goals because we believe them to be instrumentally related to higher values; we want to reach a policy goal because it will help implement some deeply held value. Values, on the other hand, are intrinsically desirable; they are not means to an end, they are ends in themselves."

16. Kenny, p. 258: "But on several occasions in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein considers the possibility that there may be more than one criterion for the same state of affairs."

17. "Evidence in Value Debate", *Prima Facie: A Guide to Value Debate*, cited above, pp. 42 - 43.

18. Morton Deutsch, "Field theory in Social Psychology", *Handbook of Social Psychology*, cited above, p. 207: "Experimental results have indicated that, other things being equal: the decision time is greater in choice between two negatives as compared with two positive valences (Barker, 1942), and that it increases the more the opposing situations are of equal potency (Escalona, 1940), the more the opposing forces are of equal strength (Cartwright, 1941), the stronger the opposing forces (Barker, 1942), and as a function of certain personality characteristics."

19. Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, "Life, Teleology, and Eudaimonia in the Ethics of Ayn Rand", *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana) 1986, p. 69.

20. Ulrich, p. 37: "All philosophical systems attempt to develop standards for determining what is good and what is not, and thus each system is a potential paradigm for value debate. Debaters should read Mill, Rawls, and Dworkin to develop a framework for analyzing values, and they should realize the implications of these theorists in debate rounds. For example, if a topic requires that the arguers evaluate an ethical problem, there are a large number of perspectives that could be used to support a conclusion. If a debater operates under Utilitarian assumptions, then an action would be justified based upon the ends of the action; the ends would justify the means. If the arguer were to operate under the Judao-Christian ethical system, the problem would be resolved based upon the interpretation of the Scriptures. If the judge were an egoist, the decision would be determined by the self-interest of the

judge. Depending upon the wording of the topic, the theories of Mill, Hume, Locke, Spinoza, or Rawls might be used to create an ethical system that is then applied to the dispute in question."

21. William H. Bennett, *Lincoln Douglas Debate: The Text* (CDE, Taos, N.M.) 1989. pp. 12 - 16 are useful.

22. Ulrich, noted above.

23. See, for examples, John K. Roth and Frederick Sontag, *The Questions of Philosophy* (Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, Calif.) 1988, p. 263 which looks at St. Augustine and his hierarchy. And examine Alasdair I.C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia) 1980, p. 35 for their views on Ritschl, Schleiermacher, and Kant vis-a-vis "judgments of value".

24. Two good examples are Den Uyl, cited above, pp. 198 - 99, and Adolf A. Berle, *Power*, (Harcourt, Brace & World, New York) 1969, p. 262+.

25. MacIntyre, p. 514: "To be a Christian is not to have reached a conclusion but to make a choice. But since all religions and moral belief equally lack ultimate rational justification..."

26. Man and His Values, 1967, p. 93. He continues "Thus, if the world is to maintain itself completely on its own, then each of its parts must remain identical with itself (Value of preservation), the various parts must remain identical with itself (value of preservation), the various parts must coexist harmoniously (value of harmony), and there must be activity to preserve and develop what is (value of action). These three values, moreover, must be so interrelated that each is realized in and through the others; none can be realized by itself alone."

27. John Davidson, *Philosophers Men Live By*, 1961, p. 286: "Dewey begins by asserting bluntly and unequivocally that there is no single, fixed, and final moral good. What we find when we look to experience, he insists, is a large number if changing, individual goods and ends in moral life. For some men in some situations health is the most important thing in life; for others honesty or temperance is essential in meeting successfully the temptations of modern life. For the university student the development of his mental capacities may well be the primary concern."

See also Bennett, *Lincoln Douglas Debate: The Text*, p. 12.

28. For more along these lines see Bennett, pp. 12 - 13.

29. Roger Solt goes into these options more deeply in *Debating Values* (Griffin Research, San Francisco) 1987, pp. 5 - 6. These pages are well worth reading.

