Deriving Logical Values in LD (from Everyday Debate)

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Introduction

In a series of articles for the NFL publication Rostrum, Jason Baldwin, at the time, PHD Candidate in philosophy at Notre Dame University, described a brilliant scheme for applying Logic in LD debate (src: http://www.nflonline.org/Rostrum/LDBaldwin1004). Part of the article described problems with the traditional model for the selection of values and value criteria and proposed an alternate model based on classical logic. Prior to having read his article, I also worked on techniques for applying syllogistic logic to the selection of value criteria after watching my debaters struggle resolution after resolution trying to understand and apply the standard model. Far too often, I have seen criteria which are as vague as the values they intend to measure. For me, a sort of revelation occurred when I realized the LD terminology is "value premise" and a premise is an assertion which provides the basis of a logical conclusion. Applying some terminology from Charles S. Peirce's study of logic, there is a sort of corollary between the broad, conceptual value premise and the major premise which Peirce calls the "rule". Therefore if we have the conclusion, the resolution itself; and we have the rule, an application of the value premise; then we need only infer the minor premise, Peirce's "specific case", as the premise which narrows our application of the rule and thus provides the criterion which is applied to the conclusion. In short, the conclusion (resolution) is inferred from a general rule (VP) and specific case (VC). This article will describe my approach to deriving the LD values and value premises.

Explicit Values

Sometimes the wording of the resolution more or less demands an evaluation of a specific value. For example, Resolved: A just society ought not use the death penalty as a form of punishment. The explicit use of the word "just" would suggest the value of justice should be examined by both sides. At its most basic, the resolution affirms capital punishment is not just. It is possible for the debater to choose a different value but this places an additional burden on the debater to show how the value ultimately links to the resolution. For example, if the debater chooses life as a value premise, the debater must, at some point in the case, establish how the value of life is linked to the conclusion that capital punishment is unjustified. This will be examined later. To begin the process of deriving the premises which drive the conclusion about capital punishment, we breakout the subject and predicate of the resolution as "societal use of capital punishment" is the subject; "is not just" is the predicate. To deduce the premises we establish a middle term (m) and formulate the syllogism:

(m) is not just
Uses of capital punishment is (m)
Therefore, use of capital punishment is unjust.

Give the above construct, creating a suitable middle term links the rule (all m are not just) to the specific case (capital punishment is m). For example, the debater may choose to replace the middle term with "forms of murder" and yield the syllogism:
Forms of murder are unjust
Uses of capital punishment is a form of murder
The use of capital punishment is unjust.

The logic works but is it consistent? In other words can the debater prove the premises are valid?

Consider another middle term of, "actions which risk innocent lives".
Actions which risk innocent lives are unjust.
Use of capital punishment risks innocent lives.
Therefore, use of capital punishment is unjust.
Again the logic is sound but now it is possible to prove the minor premise by giving evidence showing sometimes the innocent are mistakenly executed. So we can select for the value of justice, the value criterion of "reduce risk to innocent lives". There is nothing implicit in this process to suggest the derived value criterion is the only possible criterion. There can be many as long as the resulting premises can be proven true, the conclusion must be true.

Selecting Implicit Values
Often debaters will choose to defend values which are not explicitly given in the resolution. Sometimes it is necessary because the resolution does not suggest a value. Other times, debaters will choose an alternate value either because they feel it gives them some kind of advantage or they believe they can better defend an alternate value. Regardless of the reason, the chosen value must link to the resolution and there are several ways this can be done. The main problem debaters face, is how to choose a value in the first place and perhaps application of logic can help here. For example, Resolved: Colleges and universities ought to ban hate speech. We can rearrange the wording without changing the meaning so as to identify the intended subject and predicate for the syllogism. Hate speech ought to be banned (by colleges and universities). Constructing the premises we have:

(middle term) ought to be banned (by C and U)
Hate speech is (middle term)
Therefore Hate speech ought to be banned (by C and U)

Choosing "dehumanizing individuals" as a middle term yields the premises:
Dehumanizing individuals ought to be banned. (major premise)
Hate speech dehumanizes individuals. (minor premise)

Based on the major premise we can derive potential value premises if we consider that dehumanization is something we ought not value, then things which humanize we should value, so we could for example, use a value premise of inclusion or self-worth.

Anything which promotes inclusion should be valued.
Dehumanization of individuals does not promote inclusion.
Dehumanization of individuals should be rejected (not valued).

Dehumanizing individuals ought to be banned.
Hate speech dehumanizes individuals.
Hate speech ought to be banned.

Here is another example, Resolved: Nations ought not possess nuclear weapons. In the example,

there is no explicit value so we must supply one. Let's start by deriving a categorical syllogism from the resolution.

First, let's rearrange the wording without changing the meaning of the resolution: Nuclear weapons ought not be possessed by nations. The subject is nuclear weapons, the predicate is ought not be possessed (by nations). Constructing the premises:

(middle term) ought not be possessed (by nations)
Nuclear weapons are (middle term)
Nuclear weapons ought not be possessed (by nations)

Choosing a middle of term of "weapons which kill indiscriminately" the major and minor premises become:
Weapons which kill indiscriminately ought not be possessed. (major premise)
Nuclear weapons kill indiscriminately. (minor premise)

Based on the major premise can we make a conclusion about what ought be valued? Perhaps, but it would be a little awkward to suggest since, weapons which kill indiscriminately ought not be possessed, we should possess weapons which do not kill indiscriminately. So in this case, it may be worthwhile to breakdown the major premise even further.

(middle term) ought not be possessed
Weapons which kill indiscriminately are (middle term)
Therefore, weapons which kill indiscriminately ought not be possessed.

Using a middle term such as "instruments of mass murder" creates the premises of:
Instruments of mass murder ought not be possessed
Weapons which kill indiscriminately are instruments of mass murder
If our major premise states what NOT to possess then what should we possess? We can possess things which promote the value of life or freedom from the fear of death.

Instruments which do not promote life should not be possessed
Instruments of mass murder do not promote life.
Instruments of mass murder ought not be possessed

Instruments of mass murder ought not be possessed
Weapons which kill indiscriminately are weapons of mass murder.
Weapons which kill indiscriminately ought not be possessed.

Weapons which kill indiscriminately ought not be possessed
Nuclear weapons kill indiscriminately.
Nuclear weapons ought not be possessed.

What About the Value Criterion?
At the beginning of this discussion, I mentioned the work of Charles Pierce and his terminology of the rule and specific case as major and minor premise. I noted how the term, value premise,

relates to a general rule or principle. We learn from LD handbooks and NFL guidelines, that the value criterion is a "standard" which allows the judge to evaluate how well the case supports the value being promoted. In other words, the Affirmative declares, my case upholds the value of life. Since there are many, many ways to potentially uphold the value of life, the debater narrows things down a bit for the judge and specifies, "such and such" promotes life so if my case achieves "such and such", then my case upholds life. One can even see, a kind of syllogistic structure emerge:
(middle term) upholds life
My case case is/does (middle term)
My case upholds life.

Really, this syllogism can be described as a value/value criterion framework for the case. We see the major premise or rule as the broad value. We see the minor premise or specific case as the criterion which provides a specific application for the rule and from that emerges the conclusion the debater ultimately wishes the judge to reach. Applying this, recall the hate speech value syllogism:

Anything which promotes inclusion should be valued.
Dehumanization of individuals does not promote inclusion.

Here we see that if dehumanization does not promote the value of inclusion, we promote inclusion by reducing dehumanization so we declare a value premise of reducing dehumanization.

In the second example, our value syllogism was:

Instruments which do not promote life should not be possessed
Instruments of mass murder do not promote life.

In this value structure, we promote life by eliminating an instrument of mass murder and so we can declare that as our value criterion.

Many Paths to Truth
In the above examples I have taken some basic resolutions and derived a value premise which links to the resolution in a logical way. Of course in looking at these examples and thinking about how to apply the principles to examples of your own, you may choose different middle terms and ultimately yield links to other values and thus find other ways to arrive at the logical "truth" of the resolution. It is more an art than science because, a great deal of care and experience must be applied in order to construct syllogisms which not only make sense intuitively, but can also be backed up by evidence and fundamental knowledge as the case takes shape. It is important to remember that in order for the syllogism to be true, the premises must be true and it is your job as a debater to convince the audience the premises are true. Your ability to do so, in the face of an opponent who is also trying to make a case, can only get better as your debate skills improve through experience. But, applying these principles can be helpful in creating case structure which is linked from value to final conclusion by well defined logical inferences.