January 2012

This House Would Not Mix Burdens: The Conflation of Fact, Value, and Policy in NPDA

Crystal Lane Swift
Mt. San Antonio College, crystallaneswift@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/ctamj
Part of the Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This General Interest is brought to you for free and open access by Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.
This House Would Not Mix Burdens:
The Conflation of Fact, Value, and Policy in NPDA†

Crystal Lane Swift
crystallaneswift@hotmail.com
Professor of Communication
Mt. San Antonio College
Walnut, CA
&
Adjunct Instructor of Communication
California State University, Northridge
Northridge, CA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dispute in the forensic community over whether there is (or ought to be) a distinction between resolutions of fact, resolutions of value and resolutions of policy. This dispute is informed by philosophical literature on the subject in this paper. The philosophical positions are applied to the dispute in NPDA, and the author sides with the distinction rather than the collapse of the distinction. Theoretical, rhetorical, and pragmatic implications are drawn from the analysis, and pedagogical recommendations are made.

“Madam adjudicator, we have before us today the resolution: Resolved: Healthcare is a human right. The government team’s interpretation of this resolution is that it is a resolution of factvalue.” When I heard this interpretation as a novice National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) debater my freshman year, I was confused. According to my coaches, there were three kinds of resolutions: fact, value, and policy. There was no ‘factvalue.’ Hence, the entirety of the argumentation that my partner and I advocated in that particular round was technical and concerned with the interpretation of the resolution, which frustrated the judge, the government team, my partner, and me. Although it is entirely possible that the aforementioned round was an anomaly, or a product of too little practice on the part of the government team, I have noticed a tendency for NPDA teams tend to, as one of my former coaches put it, “not know anything about fact or value resolutions.” This paper is concerned with how coaches and students alike seem to be conflating fact and value resolutions in NPDA debate in recent years. Middleton (2005) explained:

The legitimacy of claiming distinctions between resolutions of fact, value, and policy in parliamentary debate has generated expansive debate. In particular, whether differences

† Dr. Swift would like to thank Dr. Jon Cogburn, Professor of Philosophy, and Ryan McGeouh, Doctoral Student in Communication Studies, both of Louisiana State University, and Professor John Vitullo, Professor of Communication Studies at Mt. San Antonio College, for their contributions to this project.
exist in the resolitional burdens provided by a resolution of ‘fact’ are different from those found in a resolution of policy or value. (The facts about “fact” debate)

There are many participants, who do not value this distinction, but this paper aims to establish the importance of the distinction and how we, as members of the forensic community can best train our debaters. As Knapp (1996) argued:

Interpreting the resolution from the oppositional standpoint is unwieldy at best — frustratingly impossible at worst. To aid in the process, the opposition can turn to more specific areas of interpretation, resolitional type. Resolitional types look to the resolution as a whole for guidance in the direction of the case. Resolutions may be of fact, value, or policy. I should note here that the notions of fact, value, and policy can and do overlap. To determine which policy we should adopt, we probably need a value to guide the policy. Certainly factual claims are required to show the importance of values in action. The waters can get pretty murky with all of these ideas floating around. A good, clean debate will assert the type of resolution and how facts, values, and policies help us to evaluate the pros and cons of the resolution. If the government does not make these issues clear, the opposition must clarify them through points of information or by asserting these issues in the Leader of Opposition constructive. (p.27)

Clearly, the types of resolutions are not always mutually exclusive. “Although seldom acknowledged, the history behind propositions of fact, value, and policy is rich and sophisticated, coming out of some of the finer thinkers of this century” (Fiordo, 1985, p. 102). As illustrated above, however, the clearer the government can be with these types of distinctions, the clearer the ensuing debate can be. Philosophical positions on the subject of the fact/value collapse or fact/value distinction can also be helpful to coaches and students alike. “After all, if there is one thing the rest of academia really seems to need from philosophers, it is a theory of propositions, or at least a theory of something like propositions” (Dennet, 1995, p. 205). The resolutions that debaters are given to debate over are interpreted by many to be propositions (i.e. Crossman 2005; Meany and Schuster, 2002), and by others simply as something like propositions, as Dennet suggested above. Additionally, there are different kinds of propositions. As Fiordo noted, “[I]n dealing with propositions, all propositions signify. Not all propositions denote. Similarly, once a proposition signifies, it signifies in degrees of adequacy, reliability, belief, and knowledge as well” (p. 103). Philosophers have argued about the way we think about and interpret facts and values generally, and more specifically within discussion and argument. Hence, a discussion stemming from philosophy is naturally warranted. We begin by examining the fact/value distinction in philosophical literature, apply these notions to NPDA debate, and draw implications from this analysis.
The Philosophical Standpoints

Philosophy is a study immersed in the study of language. It is precisely what we say and how we discuss our thoughts which philosophers speak and write about. For example, as put by Levinas (1990):

The original function of speech consists not in designating an object in order to communicate with the other in a game with no consequences but in assuming towards someone a responsibility on behalf of someone else. To speak is to engage the interests of men. Responsibility would be the essence of language. (pp. 20-21)

Here, Levinas is emphasizing the importance of the words we use themselves, rather than their referents as a responsibility to the other. What we say and how we say it matters to Levinas.

Traditionally, philosophers have maintained the view that fact or descriptive statements are mutually exclusive from, or at the very least, not the same as value or normative statements. Nietzsche’s iconic Four Great Errors, for example, are founded entirely on the human confusion of interpretation (value driven) with truth (fact driven). He explains his first of the Four Great Errors this way: “There is no error more dangerous than confusing the effect with the cause: I call it the genuine corruption of reason” (emphasis in original, Nietzsche, 1997, p. 30). This is clearly a violation of positing something as true, rather than as simply an interpretation, and proceeding as if other things may follow from it.

Many other philosophers, however, now conceptualize these two types of statements as the same, or at the very least, quite interconnected:

Developing and defending a philosophical position is a bit like weaving an intricate piece of fabric. When things go well, each strand of the argument adds strength and support to the others, and gradually interesting patterns begin to emerge. But when things go poorly—when one of the strands breaks—it sometimes happens that the entire fabric begins to unravel. A little gap becomes a big gap, and soon there is nothing left at all. (Stich, 1996, p. 3)

Though he was referring to his own theory regarding eliminative materialism in that passage, this sentiment is quite accurate when it comes to the disagreement over the fact/value dichotomy. Within philosophy literature, two positions emerge: 1) there is no fact/value distinction and 2) there is a fact/value distinction.

No Distinction

Those philosophers who do not advocate a fact/value distinction claim overall that words, by their very nature have evaluative impacts. As we educators know and teach most semesters, words have denotative and connotative meanings. Even denotative meanings to words do not exist outside of the usage of terms, given the dynamic and cultural nature of language. Perhaps the most influential author supporting this view is Putnam (2002). He argued that the dichotomy set forth by many scholars between objective and subjective is false. Instead, he claimed that the
subjective can in fact be rationalized and the objective, many times, has subjective implications. As Putnam (2002) argued:

The attempt of noncognitivists to split thick ethical concepts into a 'descriptive meaning component' and a 'prescriptive meaning component' founders on the impossibility of saying what the 'descriptive meaning' of, say, 'cruel' is without using the word 'cruel' or a synonym. (p. 38)

Overall, Putnam (2002) encouraged philosophers to see the interconnections between factual and evaluative statements rather than separating them entirely. Facts and values are so entangled in the real world, Putnam argued, that they simply cannot be completely severed from each other. Other scholars agree with Putnam's claim that fact and value statements are not entirely mutually exclusive. For example, Rorty (1979) explained that the only way one can accurately contend that there are such thing as fact-only statements is if one can prove that there is such thing as a value-free vocabulary. Furthermore, Flew (1964) argued that speech acts are, or at least can be as Austin deems them, 'illocutionary,' or actually perform as they are said. While he claims that illocutionary speech acts justify deriving ought from is, he concludes this supports fact and value claims not being distinct. Derrida (1991), a master of the intricacies of language, explained:

The word 'deconstruction,' like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called 'a context.' For me, for what I have tried to write, the word has interest only within a certain context where it replaces and lets itself be replaced by such other words as 'e’criture,’ ‘trace,’ ‘dife’rance,’ ‘supple’ment,’ ‘hymen,’ ‘pharmakon,’ ‘marge,’ ‘entame,’ ‘parergon,’ etc . . . ! (p. 275)

Derrida seems to reject the notion of discrete, hard-and-fast meanings of words. Rather, he supports the idea that words can only have meanings hermeneutically. The word play in his works are a performitive affirmation of his idea that things shift meaning and derive meaning within context.

This notion is, of course, echoed by contemporary rhetoricians. “Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler, 1993, p. 13). Here, Butler supported the notion that referent and speech act are not distinct, but rather work together to produce a meaning. Read more literally, speech acts actually justify not deriving an ought from an is, only a repetitive is from an is. The performed identity embedded within speech acts do not prescribe, but merely illustrate a self or state of affairs.

**Pro Distinction**

While there is a push from many to merge fact and value claims, there are many philosophers who still support the fact/value distinction. Searle (1964) explained why it is that one should not derive ought from is:

[T]here is a class of statements of fact which is distinct from a class of statements of value. No set of statements of fact by themselves entails any statements of value . . . no
set of descriptive statements can entail an evaluative statement without the addition of at least one evaluative premise. To believe otherwise is to commit the naturalistic fallacy. (Emphasis in original, p. 43)

Searle was not suggesting that there is not overlap whatsoever between these types of statements, rather that there are two distinct primary functions. He further raised three distinct objections to being able to derive an ought from an is: 1) if a descriptive premise leads to an evaluative conclusion, there must be a hidden evaluative premise before the conclusion, 2) there must be a hidden evaluative principle behind the descriptive premise(s), and/or 3) the derivative relies on a factual interpretation rather than an evaluative interpretation. All of these objections show that if one is deriving an ought from an is, he or she is at worst illogical, and at best, mixing argumentative burdens. The impact of Searle’s (1964) argumentation was stated later:

[E]valuative statements perform a completely different job from descriptive statements. Their job is not to describe any features of the world but to express the speaker’s emotions, to express his [sic] attitudes, to praise or condemn, to laud or insult, to commend, to recommend, to advise, and so forth. Once we see the different jobs the two perform, we see that there must be a logical gulf between them. (p. 53)

While it is obvious that not every single descriptive statement is without an at least connotatively derived evaluation and vice versa, for the sake of training argumentation and debate skills to students, there are enough clear differences to keep the categories in the traditional trichotomy valid. Perelman (1963) specified that in legal philosophy the is/ought distinction is essential:

Indeed, as I entirely accepted the principle that one cannot draw an 'ought' from an 'is'—a judgment of value from a judgment of fact—I was led inevitably to the conclusion that if justice consists in the systematic implementation of certain value judgments, it does not rest on any rational foundation. (p. 16)

Summers (1963) explained further that if the two are conflated, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between what one is arguing is wrong with the legal system and what ought to be done about the problem(s). This is a principle already clear in one of our individual forensic events, persuasion. The way, in which most persuasions are written now, there is a problem, cause, and solution point. These are all (hopefully) closely related, yet quite distinct. The solution does not belong in the section describing the problem or effect. To allude to Summers’s example, a persuasive speech on a bad legal system would establish in the problem point what is wrong with the legal system. The cause point would evaluate why the problem continues, in effect condemning (evaluating) the harms by expressing inherency, and finally the solution would state what ought to be done about the harms and inherency. In debate rounds, we are essentially dealing with one of these main points per resolution. True, there must be some statements made by debaters throughout the round that are not within the particular category of the resolution. Conversely, the main thrust of the argumentation is always aimed at proving (or disproving) the original resolution itself. The is/ought distinction is one that more closely mirrors arguments over the conflation of fact and policy, but is equally problematic to the
conflation of fact and value. Genova (1970) responded specifically to Searle’s argument that facts entail values:

This is a brute sense of ‘ought’ which simply indicates whether we value, commend, recommend, endorse (or whatever) the evaluated institutional facts without presupposing that they are themselves good, bad, or indifferent. This does not mean that there are literally two meanings of ‘value’ any more than that there are two meanings of ‘fact.’ There are, indeed, different uses of ‘value’ and ‘ought,’ just as there are different uses of ‘fact’ and ‘is,’ but . . . I contend that the meaning of these terms is not sufficiently determined by their use. (emphasis in original, p. 44)

In other words, the (mis)use of the term fact or value does not change the actual meaning of the word. Many rhetoricians will disagree with this philosophical stance. True, the definitions of words are dynamic and, many times, socially constructed. The concepts used in competitive debate also change over time. Due to the nature of forensic debate, however, it is essential to have some somewhat stagnant rules for the activity to operate within. Swinburne (1961) explained that descriptive statements are easily proven true or false, in the logical sense, while “[e]valuative assertions have properties the exact opposite of the four properties of descriptive assertions” (p. 302). Hence, not only are fact and value statements distinct, but the exact opposite of each other. Swinburne (1961) went beyond his initial observation to prescribe that “people ought not to infer from ‘descriptive’ assertions to ‘evaluative’ assertions” (p. 303). Descriptive or face statements merely illustrate the state of the topic, not whether the topic is good or bad, or whether any action ought to be taken for or against the matter. Hence, philosophically, mixing a fact and a value statement is poor practice. He further clarified:

Values do not belong to the world but belong to the spectacles through which each individual looks at the world; and so value-words can only function legitimately as devices for getting things done in the world or for expressing one’s feelings about the world, not for describing the world. (p. 305)

Therefore, mixing fact and value statements is unhelpful and theoretically dangerous. Basically, the most clear training for debate shows debaters how to operate within the box or tradition before they go outside the box, make their own box, or destroy the box. One way that this can be achieved is through training debaters about the traditional trichotomy.

**Application to NPDA**

NPDA debate is an extemporaneous format of debate, in which debaters receive their topic only 15-20 minutes (up to 29 minutes at the NPDA national championship) before the debate begins, depending on the tournament. Resolutions define sides for debaters; without them, the roles in a debate are hopelessly ambiguous. Traditionally, debaters are taught that there are three types of resolutions: fact, value, policy, just as beginning speech students are traditionally trained in public speaking courses that there are three forms of claims: fact, value, and policy. While many current NPDA coaches of highly successful teams may argue that there are no (or
should be no) hard and fast classifications of resolutions, argumentation and debate textbooks continue to introduce this distinction. (e. g. Crossman, 2005; Herrick, 2011; Hill & Leeman, 1996; Rybacki & Rybacki, 2008) Though there are NPDA teams outside of communication departments, it seems the most logical place for us to start training debaters would be with argumentation texts and scholarship.

However, as of late, (I would venture to say especially—but not exclusively—on the West Coast) some coaches are training their debaters that there are no such thing as fact resolutions, or (even more popular in my estimation) that every resolution is actually a policy resolution. While I disagree with this conflation on principle, I would be much more willing to listen to this kind of argument if it were informed by some theory. Please do not get me wrong. I am certain that the coaches who train their debaters contrary to the way that I train my own are informed by theory. However, I have rarely heard a claim in-round which states much more than “All resolutions have policy implications” or “There is no such thing as objective” as justification for not recognizing the traditional distinction. With an understanding of how the fact/value dichotomy, or lack thereof, is discussed in philosophy, we can apply these concepts to NPDA debate. Analogous to the philosophical positions, there are two primary positions regarding NPDA debate: 1) there is no distinction between fact and value resolutions and 2) there is a distinction between fact and value resolutions.

**No Resolutinal Distinction**

Those who conflate resolutions of fact and value usually suggest that statements of fact imply values or policy implications. Fiordo (1985) suggested that there is an interconnectedness between all forms of resolutions. “. . . [I]n dealing with informative propositions, as in natural science, the support for such propositions is guided by norms or standards (such as what is to count as admissible evidence), thereby blurring simplistic distinctions between informative and valutative propositions.” (Fiordo, 1985, p. 104) He continued, “[s]imilarly with informative or ‘is’ propositions and ‘ought’ propositions, while they may be treated as theoretically independent, there is a dynamic interaction and mutual Influence between these two as well.” (Fiordo, 1985, p. 105) More recently, Brodak and Taylor, (2002) observed the trend in NPDA to mix fact and value resolutions:

[W]e have stopped asking ourselves whether the proposition is best understood as an issue of fact, value, or policy. Instead, we allow ourselves to be argumentatively constrained by the mere appearance of symbolic identifiers in the resolution. Since the word justified is an indicator of value judgment, we limit the possibility of resolutinal identification to one of value whenever the word appears in the proposition. (p. 26)

This observation does not, however, provide a compelling reason to continue this practice. Brodak and Taylor (2002) critiqued traditional fact resolutions by saying, “since the resolution itself already has a correct answer, the resulting debate following the introduction of a ‘factual resolution’ has been predetermined as well” (pp. 28-29). However, this conflates theoretical
claims of fact (which can be true or false) with the lay interpretation of fact (which assumes that the statement is true). Another position against the trichotomy comes from Hanson (1997), who integrated the theories of Burke and Perelman. He concluded, “I believe Burke's theory can add to Perelman by giving a global perspective which points to the social implications and limits of the process of social reasoning” (Hanson, 1997, Sociality in the Rhetorics of Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman: Toward a Convergence of Their Theories). When we are reasoning in social situations, or any part of the “real world,” the trichotomy seems useless and counter intuitive. The debate round remains a forum in which, through trial and error, students can practice their argumentative skill outside of the real world. Although this position is intriguing and popularly practiced in debate, it unfortunately has remained under-theorized.

**Pro Resolutinal Distinction**

Those who support the fact/value distinction advocate the traditional notion of avoiding mixing burdens. Kuster (2002) asserted that there are three kinds of resolutions in NPDA: fact, value, and policy. He implied that these types of resolutions ought to be considered mutually exclusive, because this distinction is what he proposes as a benefit of NPDA. This is one way that students must learn a variety of rhetorical strategies, according to Kuster. The sources in this section may seem dated. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of current scholarship on forensics generally and especially on NPDA specifically. Some coaches may argue that my ideas of a distinction in categorizing resolutions is ‘old school’ or outdated. Anecdotally, I know that is not the case. Additionally, in a personal interview on June 15, 2012, with Professor John Vitullo, one of the directors of debate tabulation at the Phi Rho Pi National Tournament, he stated that the Phi Rho Pi Tournament uses two policy, two value, and two metaphor topics for preliminary rounds. Each regional governor submits a list of topics for the debate directors to choose from each year. Vitullo says that one of the challenges the directors face each year is that some of the ‘value’ topics are written as fact resolutions, which Phi Rho Pi only offers in the form of metaphor topics. In fact, the directors sometimes re-write resolutions to fit into a different category, because they were worded as fact when they should have been value or vice versa. Hence, clearly a national tournament acknowledges that there is indeed a distinction between fact and value resolutions, and beyond that even a proper way to write them. True, this is not the NPDA. However, because of the fragmented nature of the practice of forensics, even NPDA sanctioned tournaments vary quite a bit in their execution and interpretation of NPDA.

In support of the above, Corcoran, Nelson, and Perella, (2000) argued that there is a clear definitional distinction for each of the types of resolutions: 1) “a resolution of fact is a resolution which is, at least in theory, empirically provable,” 2) “a value proposition proposes that something is either good or bad,” and 3) “policy propositions ask the critic to determine if a particular proposal should be adopted” (Emphasis in original, pp. 211, 32, & 33). Winebrenner and Burnett (1997) introduced the idea of fact, value, and policy resolutions in their text this way:
Debate propositions are framed as statements about controversial facts, value judgments, or proposed policies . . . Because factual propositions and value judgments always involve subjective evaluation of various facts, there is a stock way of looking at such a proposition which will reveal its major issues. (p. 276)

These authors clearly explained that there are important theoretical and pragmatic reasons for understanding the differences between each type of resolution. In the same text designed to introduce a variety of forensic events to its readers, Trapp (1997) explained:

Defining the motion is a necessary but insufficient part of building a case for the proposition. Debaters must also construct arguments that support the motion . . . Constructing arguments for the proposition is a process that varies depending on the type of proposition being debated. We have already discussed the division of propositions into the categories of literal and metaphorical. Within each of those divisions, one can say propositions are either of fact, value, or policy. (p.305)

This introduction supports the need to encourage students to learn the distinctions, at least at first.

Inherently, human beings seem to weigh values in argumentative decision making. There must be a criterion for value decision, which differs from strict formal logical decision making. “Many arguments based on values involve comparisons” (Lundsford, Ruszkiewicz, & Walters, 2004, p. 84). Students are continually taught that facts and values are not the same thing. “A resolution of value compares value claims or postulates an expression of a ‘good’ that is subject to debate” (Meany & Shuster, 2002, p. 30). Many parliamentary debaters and coaches alike agree that value based rounds of debate are problematic. “There are some problems with most value motions and cases that purport to support these motions” (Meany & Shuster, 2002, p. 99). This is the most frequently talked about and contested form of resolution. Meany and Shuster (2002) clarified that the problems with constructing and debating value cases lies in the fact that values have many different interpretations and most value debates end up disputes over what the identified value means. One way that debaters can overcome this is to research values and their possible interpretations and applications, so that the debaters can adapt to their opponents as well as their audience. Value judgments seem to be inherent within every parliamentary debate round, however, because at the end of the round, the critic must choose which team has done the “better” debating, which is where clearly explained warrants can help.

Corcoran, Nelson, and Perella (2000) offered perhaps the clearest explanation of the requirements of value debate. In their text, which covers multiple formats of debate, they explain that NPDA involves fact, value, and policy resolutions which entail different stock issues. Specifically, they explained:

The traditional definition of Prima-Facie case is a case which, without refutation, would convince a reasonable person to adopt the resolution . . . The Organic Definition of a Prima-Facie case is a case which substantiates the stock issues required for that type of a proposition. (Emphasis in original, pp.34-35)
Hence, it seems the traditional trichotomy of resolutions is upheld by argumentation and debate texts. While many contemporary NPDA debate coaches may argue that the ‘trichotomy’ is dead, according to Swift (2007), at least some judges at the NPTE still support this traditional approach to resolutinal analysis:

These judges [in the category of ‘stock issues’ in the study] expect the stock issues of each genre of resolution to be appropriately addressed. They may intervene, but only when a team is failing to meet the stock issues of the given resolution. From these judges’ perspectives, there are three, mutually exclusive types of resolutions: fact, value, and policy. They see that each of these types of resolutions has a separate set of burdens to be fulfilled, and expect that government teams will do so accordingly. These judges came right out and stated that they decide rounds “based on stock issues.” They also dislike especially fast delivery, “unwarranted topicality,” “kritiks,” and “generic disadvantages.” These judges appear to reject gamey positions in general. There were 12 that fit into this category. (p. 30)

In today’s competitive NPDA debate, many coaches favor supporting values through policy implications, or what was once referred to as quasi-policy. Unfortunately, this creates a sense of ambiguity which Plato argued is dangerous to students; any ambiguity in teaching is poor practice. For instance, when Plato referred to concepts of ethics and rules, he did not use the words interchangeably. Along this vein, Edgerton (1985) stated that human beings usually assess meanings from that which they observe and are taught before they evaluate any formal, written rules. This continuous practice of coaching without clear distinctions between types of resolutions may leave students frustrated and confused when their ballots come back disagreeing with whatever their coach(es) taught them to do. Conceivably, if more forensic teams incorporated this habit of teaching that the categorization of fact, value, and policy traditionally does exist into training, understanding of value debate would drastically improve.

Impacts

While this analysis is interesting, it is useless without some form of impact to the activity of NPDA. I hope that this paper serves as even a small call to continue to be both reflective and reflexive regarding our coaching and competitive practices and to write about this reflection/reflexivity. Having explored the arguments for and against the fact/value distinction from both philosophical and parliamentary debate literature, we are able to draw theoretical, rhetorical, and pragmatic impacts.

Theoretical Impact

Theoretically, we can conclude that NPDA has quite a bit to learn from philosophical literature. Even those who do not like the trichotomy may actually support the split for its
pedagogical value. Interestingly, Trapp (1997) explained why he promotes the traditional trichotomy of resolutions:

Personally, I do not find the categories of fact, value, and policy to be theoretically sound distinctions. I am using them here because introducing my own category system might prove confusing without a full discussion of each of them and how they are similar and different from the more traditional fact, value, and policy categories. (p. 305)

Perhaps this provides even more support for the validity of training the difference between types of resolutions. Even though Trapp is not a fan of the distinctions, he sees the value of explaining the differences to (beginning) debaters.

Logically speaking, the only value implications that can truly come from a claim or resolution of fact occur once the claim or resolution of fact has been determined to be true or false. Until one has determined the truth or falsity of a claim, determining whether it is good or bad can be largely irrelevant and inaccurate. In the forensic world, if we can accept this premise, the conclusion we must draw follows. In order to draw any evaluative impacts from a debate on a resolution of fact, we have to agree on some things first. Even when setting up a traditional value style case in debate, certain things must be agreed upon as factual or at least acceptable by both sides, such as definitions, examples or evidence, etc.

I see deriving evaluative impacts or conclusions from resolutions similar to the way that we deal with kritiks (critiques) in debate. In NPDA, the impacts debaters can run (advocate) are pre-fiat and post-fiat implications to a philosophical or theoretical kritik. Suffice it to say, the impacts are rhetorical (pre-fiat) or hypothetically occur after passing the government’s plan (post-fiat). In the case of evaluative impacts in a fact round, these impacts can only occur post-ballot because, until the judge have voted that the resolution is true or false, nothing evaluative can be garnered from a resolution of fact. Of course, this position does not instruct the judge on how to judge a fact round. Further research and discussion should address that issue in the future.

**Rhetorical Impact**

Rhetorically, this analysis encourages us to lean toward precision in our thinking as debaters and as coaches of debate. Plato encouraged teachers to be precise with teaching practices (Pangle, 1980 trans.). Moreover, Kuster (2003) argued that a major value of NPDA debate is that students are offered resolutions of fact, value, and policy to debate. This variety expands students’ argumentative skill base. Rhetorically and argumentatively, this offers a reason that communication departments across the nation can continue to advocate and support these programs. If NPDA were to teach poor rhetorical or argumentation practice, communication departments would have a valid reason for pulling funding. Students—while creative and innovative—need structure and guidelines when mastering new skills. Forensics allows a lot of room for creative outlets, but we are teaching skills that students can utilize in other contexts as well. The clearer our theoretical positions are, the more accessible the
information will be to our beginning students. One small way in which we can accomplish this is through teaching the trichotomy in NPDA debate.

**Pragmatic Impact**

Pragmatically, we can conclude that our pedagogy needs to be informed from this analysis. Many authors support NPDA as a format of debate, for various pedagogical reasons (e.g. Alexander, 1997; Backus, 1997; Berube, n. d.; Biles, 1997; Burnett-Pettus & Danielson, 1992; Crossman, 1996; Galizio & Chuen, 1995; Jensen, 1993; Jensen, 1996; Jensen, 1998b; Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Johnson, and Trapp, n.d.; Kuster, 2002; McGee & Simerly, 1997; Rutledge, n. d.; Rutledge, 1993; Rutledge, 2000; Theodore, Sheckels, & Warfield, 1990; Williams, & Guajardo, 1998). One of the most pedagogically theoretically sound practice we engage in is the fact, value, policy trichotomy. As coaches of NPDA, we ought to encourage our students to be clear in debate rounds as to what theoretical standpoint they are coming from, so that communication with the other debaters and with the judge can be truly educational and clear. Forensic teams have a hard time justifying themselves to communication departments as it is. The justification that communication departments need to hear is that forensic coaches are, in fact, instilling good communicative practices in their students. As articulated by Diers (2011):

> The leaders of forensics organizations must be leaders and actively manage their organizations. I can appreciate many forensics educators’ interests in encouraging student learning and creativity; however, organizational structure and clarity are not antithetical to student learning and creativity. This is why in our classrooms we set policies; why on our teams we set policies; and why in our forensics organizations sometimes we have to be ‘rules cops’. (p. 49)

While Diers was not specifically addressing the trichotomy, her sentiment can be applied here as well, I believe. No, we don’t have to attempt to quash creative interpretations or stop debaters or coaches from liking value or policy resolutions more than fact resolutions. However, especially given the academic and institutional support for the distinction between fact and value claims/resolutions, it follows that coaches would at least teach debaters this perspective.

As long as traditionally supported public speaking and argumentation texts support the distinction between claims of fact, claims of value, and claims of policy, communication departments are likely to agree and encourage coaches to also support this distinction. In the midst of economically uncertain times such as now, all forensic teams are at the risk of budget cuts. Coupled with the trend of seeking more external justification for continuation or growth of programs, debate coaches may become increasingly pressured to justify the invaluable skills and experiences they share with their students. While there are many departments (both within and outside of the area of communication) which allow forensic teams to exist without interference, we seem to be headed into an era of even more standardization. For instance, the most recent trend is Student Learning Outcomes, for which departments must provide “objective” stated goals and assessment which articulates how those goals are met (see, e. g. Student Learning
Outcomes: http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/listlearningjo3.html). In order to keep up with this sort of pressure, forensic teams may need to be more regimented and clear than in the past.

**Conclusion**

We have explored the philosophical literature, debate literature, and drawn implications regarding the fact/value distinction. Hopefully, as a community, forensic coaches can find common ground in this area. Although I expect that this paper will by no means resolve the dispute in NPDA debate, I hope that this project will, at the very least, provide a (perhaps small) impetus for continued discussion over the subject in forensic journals. This theoretical and conceptual discussion between coaches can positively impact our students in the future. I don’t know why the trichotomy is so unpopular in so many contemporary debate circles. I think it is an essential part of the beginning debater’s training. Sure, there are situations in which we can “move past” the trichotomy, I suppose, but I will remain resolved to believe it is essential. It is exciting that the NPDA community allows us to articulate our reasons for and against the trichotomy as well as multitudes of other theoretical positions. Pragmatically, I do not anticipate hearing a government team interpret a resolution as a ‘factvalue’ again, but I suppose without clear conceptual perseverance on the subject, it is always possible.

**References**


