WARRANCY: WHERE'S THAT LINK?
by Martin "Randy" Cox

Since at least the times of Plato and Aristotle, we have grappled with the tension between philosophy and rhetoric. That is to say that we have been aware of a distinction between, first, what we rationalize in formal logic and philosophical dialectic, second, how we respond to persuasion.

Lincoln-Douglas Debate stands at the crossroads of the two disciplines. We profess a love and need for philosophy, its history and its logical syllogism. Debaters engage in a formalized sort of dialectic over normative issues. In the same moment, these students test our resolve, demonstrating time and again that any proposition of value can be valid and invalid at the same time, depending on your perspective. L-D is a perfect synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian ideals.

The synthesis is not without its problems, however. We are faced with the necessity of creating arguments which are both philosophically sound and rhetorically appealing.

It was in the 1940's that Stephen Toulmin took to the study of this fusion. From the publication in 1948 of his doctoral thesis, *Reason in Ethics*, Toulmin's ideals helped to shape the way we think about ethics, reasoning, and values, and his work gives us some directions to think about in constructing value based arguments.

Toulmin began with a belief that traditional logic, especially the formal syllogism, is incomplete as a tool for studying reason (Foss, et al, 78). He studied the structure and anatomy of effective arguments across disciplines. While he did not mean to prescribe how arguments should be constructed, he did define the basic vocabulary for the structure of arguments.

There are many elements to a sophisticated argument, but the basic structure is that data or proof (*grounds*) leads from demonstrated reasoning (*warrant*) to a conclusion (or *claim*).

Obviously a claim will seem unconvincing without support. What Toulmin's model makes clear, though, is that proof and claim are not enough. They must be linked together in some way. The reasoning, or warrant, must be clear.

In his analysis of arguments, Toulmin noted that warrants were often subtle. In practical conversations, we share certain assumptions which create unstated warrants. In debate, however, those warrants must be made explicitly clear in order to validate both the logic and rhetoric of the argument.

Debaters must never assume that an audience will accept mere data as justification for a claim. In every case, you must make your reasoning explicit, and you must warrant a conclusion. For example, in 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a speech to the Young Democratic Clubs of America. In that speech, he offers the following argument:

[Grounds] The rules that governed the relationship between an employer and employee in the blacksmith's shop in the days of Washington cannot, of necessity, govern the relationship between the fifty thousand employees of a great corporation and the infinitely complex and diffused ownership of the corporation.

[Warrant] If fifty thousand employees spoke with fifty thousand voices, there would be a modern Tower of Babel.

[Claim] That is why we insist on their right to choose their representatives to bargain collectively in their behalf with their employer. (Lawler & Schaffer, 111)

Roosevelt's reasoning is clarified in the second sentence before making his final claim. Without that warrant, the movement to the claim would seem awkward (at best) and confusing (at least). Every proof, reason, contention, or justification that you offer to defend or negate a resolution must be explicitly linked to the resolution through a warrant.

Grounds, Claims, and Warrants

Grounds in L-D does not refer, generally speaking, to empirical proof. Grounds refers to what David Zarefsky calls "rhetorical proof," materials which support but do not guarantee a conclusion (187). Unlike science, which tries to demonstrate a hypothesis through mathematical proof or formal logic, arguments based on persuasion and values are dependent upon the interaction between the speaker and the audience.

The *claim* can be thought of as the contention, argument, or justification at hand. The resolution itself is a claim.

Warrants are a bit more difficult to deal with. A "warrant" authorizes the reasoning that gets you from the grounds to the claim. The warrant provides the explicit persuasive link between the proof and the contention, and later between the contention and the resolution. It is perhaps easier to ask the questions, "What warrants that statement?" or "Is the claim warranted?"

Warrancy is especially important in value debate. When

linked to a proposition of value (a value premise), warrants tap into "our motives as human beings, as members of our culture, or as unique individuals" (Campbell, 197).

David L. Vancil, one of my favorite writers on the structure of arguments, frames warrancy in the following way:

"Brush your teeth," the mother says, "or they will turn black and fall out."

"So what?" says the child. "I don't want my teeth." (171)

Apparently, the mother and child reason and value differently because they have different warrants. Turning black and falling out means little to the child if the teeth themselves are unwarranted.

In terms of your actual debate practice, here are some suggested guidelines for case writing and for refutation. Each of the following guidelines were developed by