

OUT OF THE CAVE

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Two major impediments to sound Lincoln-Douglas debate have emerged in the past few years. The first impediment occurs in the area of defining terms, the second has to do with the nature of logical argumentation. These practices constitute serious threats to the quality of values debate. In order to deal with them effectively we need to recognize them and understand why they are antithetical to the principles of Lincoln-Douglas debate.

One of the most important tasks of a Lincoln-Douglas debater is clarification of words or phrases in the resolution. Clarification occurs through the use of one or more of a number of types of definitions. However, one type of definition, "operationally defined" terms, is inappropriate and illogical in Lincoln-Douglas debate. "Operationally defined" terms are commonly used in Policy debate because the meaning of the terms in question emerge as the plan for change is defined. Thus, "operationally defined" comes to mean that particular plan or operation defines the terms. Since values debate does not permit plans, defining terms operationally is impossible. Lincoln-Douglas debaters must learn to rely on other types of definitions to set the stage for sound argumentation.

Correct logical argumentation lies at the very heart of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Unfortunately, values debate too often devolves in to a war of words instead of a clash of logical arguments. The confusion results from an inability on the part of many debaters to distinguish between persuasive speaking, on the one hand, and correct

logical argumentation on the other. Only a logical argument can prove or disprove a position.

In order to understand why only logical arguments can prove ideas, we need to take a closer look at the the nature of logical argumentation. In his book *Logic*, Robert Baum, professor of Philosophy at the University of Florida, defines a logical argument as follows:

"an argument is defined as a set of statements which is such that one of them (the conclusion) is supported or implied by the others (the premises)."

So, in order for an argument to exist, there must be premises that are meant to support a conclusion.

The following is an example of an argument:

Example: Justice involves giving each person his or her due.

Each person is due the most extensive range of rights consistent with a similar range of rights for others.

So, justice involves giving each person the most extensive range of rights consistent with a similar range of rights for others

Notice that the first two sentences are offered as support for the third sentence. Thus, we have premises which are supposed to support (and in this case do support) the conclusion. This is a logical argument.

STEPS IN CONSTRUCTING A LOGICAL ARGUMENT:

1) State the claim.

(Be sure it is grammatically correct, clear, and concise.)

2) Explain the claim.

(Amplify the meaning through rhetoric which clarifies.)

3) Support the Claim.

a. use logical argumentation and philosophical quotes

b. illustrate with examples and analogies

At this juncture, in order to clarify the application of the preceding to Lincoln-Douglas debate, we must make an important distinction. There is a world of difference between an "assertion" and a logical argument. An "assertion" is a statement of belief, an unsubstantiated opinion. It lacks supporting evidence which could be used to prove the conclusion. Since an assertion lacks premises, it is not an argument and can never prove anything.

The following are examples of assertions:

Examples: 1) Societies are merely collections of separate individuals.

2) Progress is good.

Notice that we cannot know whether or not the following statements are true since they lack support. The most we can say about them is that they represent an opinion.

One of the primary functions of Lincoln-Douglas debate is to teach students to effectively use logical arguments and to avoid unsubstantiated assertions. The focus of any Lincoln-Douglas debate is the constructing of a case through logical argumentation that proves the debaters position and the defense of that case against attacks from one's opponent. If

students learn to create well-developed logical arguments, then their cases will largely stand. If, however, they come to rely upon assertions, their cases will fall. If we fail to teach students to create well-constructed arguments, then we fail as educators.

The temptation to rely upon assertions rather than full-blown logical arguments is especially great during rebuttals where time constraints become a factor. In the rush to cover as much of the flow as possible, and to give several responses to each argument, many students will resort to the use of assertions as counters. But, this is a strategy that is doomed to failure because, as was mentioned earlier, arguments can neither prove nor disprove a position. Thus, while the use of assertions does allow debaters to cover the flow, and to give multiple responses to each argument, it does so at the cost of leaving the opponent's case essentially intact.

One of the necessary consequences of the commitment to well-constructed logical argumentation is that a Lincoln-Douglas debate necessarily consists of a limited number of logical arguments. In a typical debate, the Affirmative and Negative together should not offer more than five arguments. Usually an Affirmative case should offer definitions, a value premise, observations (when necessary), criteria, and their arguments. The Negative should offer counter-definitions (when appropriate), a value premise, criteria, observations (when necessary) and two arguments. Only when such a structure is followed will debaters have time to develop and clash logically correct arguments.

Some may object that Lincoln-Douglas debate is meant

to teach effective speaking. We agree wholeheartedly. But, that effective speaking must occur in the context of correct logical argumentation and not as a substitute. There is a difference between reasons that sound good and good sound reasons.

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