

# A Pragmatic Framework for the Evaluation of Policy Arguments

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*A policy argument is an oral or written statement that advocates adopting a policy or justifies the decision to adopt a policy. This article advances the study of policy arguments by establishing a simple and general framework for their evaluation that is inspired by pragmatic philosophy. A pragmatic framework recognizes that all policy arguments are normative in purpose and that a good policy argument supports its normative claim with factual and value-based "good reasons." Establishing an argument's claim mediates these supporting reasons. A pragmatic approach delineates the nature and purpose of policy arguments more clearly than has been done in the past, providing a more suitable framework for study.*

A policy argument is an oral or written statement that advocates the adoption of a policy or justifies the decision to adopt a policy. The study of policy arguments is an important area of the logic of policy inquiry, given the ubiquitous presence of policy advocacy. As a result, there is substantial literature on the study of policy arguments.

The first systematic attempt at studying policy arguments within policy analysis was Hambrick's sketch of appropriate questions for use in argument analysis (1974). Hambrick presents a matrix of 10 types of propositions by 4 analytical perspectives, but does not provide much theoretical context. Fischer (1980, 1982, 1986) follows with largely theoretical work that calls for the unification of normative and empirical analysis in the development of a "value-oriented" epistemology for policy analysis. Fischer (1980) draws heavily on sources familiar to political philosophers, including Toulmin's schematic for argument analysis, Taylor's hierarchy of value questions, and Habermas' perspective on political discourse (Fischer, 1980).

Several other authors have drawn upon sources more familiar to policy analysts to advance the study of policy arguments. Paris and Reynolds (1983) conceptualize policy inquiry itself as an attempt to establish and justify the premises of policy arguments. Paris and Reynolds seek to establish the elements of a logic of policy inquiry which could be used to construct what they term a "rational ideology," a justification for policy claims

which does not conform to the dictates of formal logic but is compelling all the same. In contrast to Paris and Reynolds, Dunn (1994) incorporates the work on policy arguments into a more conventional treatment of public policy analysis. Nelson (1987) bridges the fields of rhetoric and policy analysis, calling for a narrative form of policy analysis. Similarly, Majone (1989) focuses on the role of argumentation in the democratic process, concluding with a call for formal study of argument and persuasion as part of the education of policy analysts. Finally, applications of these differing perspectives on analyzing policy arguments to policy analyses have been brought together in Fischer and Forester (1993).

This article establishes a framework for evaluating policy arguments, inspired by pragmatic philosophy, and advancing their study. A pragmatic approach more clearly delineates the nature and purpose of policy arguments. In this article, a pragmatic approach is used to develop a simple and general framework for evaluating policy arguments, an approach that is more sharply focused and better integrated than its predecessors.

In laying out this framework, I provide a basis for evaluating one argument against another, regardless of the specific style or "mode" of reasoning employed. I take policy arguments as phenomena to be critically assessed against standards of quality. These standards are based on a definite concept of what a good policy argument should contain. This article is not directly concerned with how to make good policy arguments, but with addressing how to evaluate them.

To evaluate policy arguments, this article presents a concept of a good policy argument in three successively more applied stages. The first section provides a perspective, defining policy arguments based on their logic and purpose. The second section is written at an intermediate level of abstraction, establishing the basic structure for developing criteria to evaluate policy arguments. The final section illustrates the appropriate criteria for analyzing the value of policy arguments within the constraints of my proposed pragmatic framework.

#### PERSPECTIVE: POLICY ARGUMENTS ARE NORMATIVE IN PURPOSE AND PRAGMATIC IN NATURE

To produce a useful framework for evaluating policy arguments, it is insufficient to simply say that they advocate the adoption of a policy or justify the decision to adopt a policy. I define policy arguments in more detail to produce a more worthwhile method for evaluating them. However, the narrower

a definition gets, the more likely controversy will arise over its accuracy and comprehensiveness with respect to the phenomena being defined. Thus, one has to strike a balance. I adopt Rawl's approach (1971), starting with widely accepted (but weak) premises and moving to more specific constraints. Each of these premises by itself is plausible and in some cases perhaps even obvious, but taken together they define a framework for analysis with sufficient clarity to be useful in evaluating arguments (Rawls, 1971, p. 18). At each point, I show how the premises of a pragmatic framework for the evaluation of policy arguments are consistent with each other, with other research in the field, and how they are superior to the traditional alternatives.

### **Policy Arguments are Normative in Purpose**

The term "normative" refers to an advocate's attempt to convince an audience that an action ought to be taken using relevant value principles and facts of the policy issue. Normative argumentation is persuasive, practical, and has an action claim as its conclusion. It is the action claim in a policy argument that ultimately defines it as normative in purpose.

The study of normative reasoning and argumentation began with Aristotle's practical syllogism. The major premise of the practical syllogism commands one to adhere to a general value; the minor premise classifies a particular object as having that value; and the conclusion is the action regarding the object. Spragens (1990, p. 16) concludes that the practical syllogism is ultimately unenlightening. It is unenlightening because, in the attempt to fit normative argumentation into a deductive logic, it reduces reason to calculation by eliminating any question regarding the appropriate reasoning process. However, attempting to force normative arguments into the syllogism or another formal logical structure remains tempting to those who study reasoning and argumentation in policy analysis. Paris and Reynolds (1983), for example, succumb to this temptation. They define policy arguments as syllogisms, requiring only examination of the soundness of their premises and the correctness of the derivation of a conclusion from those premises (p. 4). The formal separation of premises from the logical rules used to move from premises to conclusion leads them to concentrate entirely on the premises and set aside adequate study of the logic of policy arguments.

A much more appropriate approach to understanding the nature of normative argumentation should draw upon the

“good reasons” school of meta-ethics (the study of methods in the philosophy of ethics). The good reasons school emphasizes the unique nature of inference in normative reasoning. Toulmin (1950) terms this “evaluative inference.” Wellman (1971) uses the term “conduction,” in contrast with deduction and induction. These have a direct basis in pragmatic thought, for example, in Pierce’s concept of abduction.

“Conductive inference,” which is the term I use in this article, is like induction because it justifies claims in terms of their consequences, including their fit with facts. Conduction resembles deduction because it draws a conclusion about an individual case from one or more premises concerning that same case without appeals to other like cases. But, unlike the syllogism, it is not fully deductive because it is inconclusive. In conductive argumentation, the premises may be true and the inference valid but the conclusion false. As Wellman notes, “In conductive arguments ... even a perfect fit of premises to individual case is no guarantee of the truth of the conclusion because additional information may be uncovered to outweigh the given premises” (1971, p. 53).

Conductive inference relies upon a much more informal notion of logical structure than do modern versions of the practical syllogism. It requires examination of the acceptability of premises, which are a combination of facts and value statements; the plausibility and appropriateness of the chain of reasoning leading from premises to conclusion, since a variety of types of argumentation may be employed; and a separate validation of the acceptability of the conclusion. Wellman concludes that a conductive inference can achieve that status of “true” only through an intersubjective consensus—when it has survived every challenge brought against it (1971, p. 92).

The difference between studying policy arguments as examples of normative reasoning with a syllogistic structure or as normative reasoning based on conductive inference is vast. The latter perspective is much better suited to the analysis of policy arguments. It also requires development of an open and extendible, dynamic, and transactional framework for the evaluation of arguments. This framework must recognize that the normative policy claim is supported with good reasons that include both factual and value statements; that arguments can legitimately employ a variety of logical and rhetorical forms; and that standards of evaluation must be flexible and contextual. The primary theoretical writings on the analysis of policy arguments—especially those by Dunn (1994), Fischer (1980;

1986), and Majone (1989)—recognize many of these requirements for evaluating policy arguments but do not fully draw out the implications for evaluating policy arguments as a form of normative argument.

### **Policy Arguments are Pragmatic in Nature**

Having defined policy arguments as normative arguments employing conductive inference, I narrow my definition further by stating that policy arguments are pragmatic in nature. I am not claiming that all normative argumentation is pragmatic, but that policy arguments, as one form of normative argumentation, are. Pragmatism connotes practicality, compromise, prudence, and a clear goal orientation in dealing with problems. There is also a philosophical school of pragmatism traditionally most associated with Dewey, Pierce, and James. More recently, pragmatism has been defended as a political philosophy almost single handedly by Anderson (1990). I use what I believe to be a general and widely held concept of pragmatic argument, drawing from both common connotation and the philosophical school to further outline a framework for evaluating policy arguments.

Pragmatism shares with the notion of normative argumentation the recognition that “deciding what to do” is the question to which policy arguments are presented as an answer. This means that both the facts and values offered as good reasons should be evaluated by the support they offer normative claims. Unlike the more positivist philosophies upon which policy analysis traditionally draws, pragmatism contains an integrated conception of intellectual enterprise in which the validity of moral and empirical arguments stand or fall together. Neither can be made relevant or useful to political decision-making without the other element being valid; both are relevant and useful only to the degree that they support the ultimate normative claim. The conceptions of normative and pragmatic argumentation also share the belief that the context in which the policy argument is made matters a great deal when applying an appropriate set of evaluative standards.

Indeed pragmatic philosophy contends that policy problems are only fully understandable and resolvable within a particular social context. As an example, the sets of conflicting values which govern a policy can be reduced, in this view, to a determination of the public interest only through the democratic process. According to Dewey (1903), scientific inquiry itself is given a highly contextual status, one not distinct in nature, if

different in purpose, from value inquiry. Anderson (1990, pp. 167-168), arguing for what he terms "pragmatic liberalism," notes that an authoritative policy decision cannot emerge merely from a collection of claims or points of view; rather, each policy argument must be assessed for its contribution to an ongoing collaborative effort to improve the performance of an existing enterprise. In addition, the pragmatic philosophy of politics, with strong emphasis on experimentalism, argues that proposals cannot be fully evaluated until they are actually experienced as ongoing concerns (Anderson, 1987, p. 351). This outlook is congruent both with the concept of conductive inference and with the contemporary field of policy inquiry since it recognizes the need for both prospective policy analysis and retrospective policy evaluation as necessary components of a complete inquiry.

In response to the pragmatic emphasis on practicality and context, a charge commonly leveled against pragmatism is that it reduces to a doctrine of sheer expediency in attaining unquestioned ends. If this charge is accepted as valid, a pragmatic framework for the evaluation of policy arguments would have very limited appeal as a tool in contemporary policy inquiry, where a value-critical outlook is more accepted now. I seek to draw fairer picture of pragmatism, one which illustrates its neutrality in typical ideological debates within politics while establishing its ability to engage in value-critical analysis, when appropriate.

Pragmatism takes a middle ground between philosophical liberalism, which values critique and reform, and conservatism, which values preserving existing practices and institutions. In contrast with liberal skepticism, Anderson describes pragmatism as "... a gentler, Aristotelian form of criticism, in which established practice is accepted as having inherent value, but it is subject to reconsideration in the light of critical analysis and reflection" (1987, p. 354). This represents a change in the burden of proof from the standards of skeptical liberalism where it is "... those who would speak for the established ways of doing things who suffer systematic disadvantage in argument" (p. 356).

The pragmatic outlook is also very different from the perspective of the political philosopher as social critic. This is an important point because bringing the political philosophy perspective to policy analysis has had very limited success. Paris (1988) details some of the incompatibilities of the two perspectives. Kress, exemplifying the political philosopher, argues that one should "adopt a posture of relentless criticism of contemporary politics and society" (1983, p. 117). Yet, the pragmatist is in a position unlike that of the foundational liberal

or critical philosopher who would evaluate society from outside, from an Archimedean point which can move the moral world by judging the basic structure of society (Gauthier, 1986, p. 233; Rawls, 1971, p. 584). The purpose of pragmatic discourse is not to critique but to choose a course of action and to do so within a political process where the arguers are not neutral but directly engaged in advocacy. Judging the basic structure of society is not impossible for the pragmatist, but would occur from within that society and only after a long process of identifying the failures of the existing structure of society at ever more fundamental levels. This makes the pragmatic perspective more suitable for the critical evaluation of policy arguments than that of the political philosopher.

While not foundationalist liberal like many contemporary political philosophies, pragmatism is not a particularly conservative philosophy either. It strongly supports the liberal principle of meliorism, which states that society can be improved by reforming political practices and institutions. Pragmatism is strongly experimental by nature, discarding processes that fail to achieve their purposes and substituting new and relatively untried institutions in their place. Lastly, while pragmatism is concerned with means more than ends, Dewey (1903) himself recognized that the means-ends relationship is a constantly changing one. The values accepted as an end at one point in pragmatic discourse may well be reexamined for sufficiency as means to more fundamental values at another. Thus, there is always room for critically examining ends in a pragmatic evaluation but this is only done when it will contribute to the practical goal of determining the best policy choice.

In summary, classifying policy arguments as examples of pragmatic arguments establishes that they are about adopting or justifying a practice within the context of a particular, ongoing political process. To the end of the normative action claim all other considerations are secondary. Each element of a policy argument must have practical utility in contributing to the claim. In fact, for most people "pragmatic argument" essentially connotes demonstrating the practical utility of means to a given end. Yet, the pragmatic perspective does not commit the analyst to a liberal or conservative ideological outlook.

## STRUCTURE: THE BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING POLICY ARGUMENTS

Recognizing policy arguments as normative in purpose and pragmatic in nature makes possible the identification of the

necessary structural components of a well-formed policy argument. As an argument employing conductive inference, we can expect that a policy argument offers good (i.e., convincing) reasons in support of its normative claim. These supporting reasons can be facts or values. They can also be statements of political feasibility. Each of the three supporting components will be briefly illustrated in this section. Because it is an example of *pragmatic* normative argumentation, a policy argument should be judged against its rivals by its value in contributing to the ongoing enterprise of political problem solving. The value of a policy argument is determined by the strength of the factual, value, and political feasibility components offered in support of its normative claim.

A policy argument should demonstrate how the policy it advocates or justifies is uniquely identified by the good reasons offered in its defense. For example, three rival means of reducing pollution may be advocated: the traditional regulatory approach, a tax on emissions, or a market of tradable pollution permits. Reasons offered in a policy argument for one of these policy alternatives must demonstrate how it is more likely to achieve desired ends than the others. Otherwise the policy argument has little value in the decision process. The evaluation of policy arguments is thus highly contextual: the quality of one policy argument is evaluated not against absolute standards but against particular alternatives within a defined decision process.

### **Factual Component**

A framework for the evaluation of policy arguments should lead to a determination of how one argument is superior to its rivals. The first, most obvious grounds for demonstrating superiority is that one policy is more congruent with the facts of the case. Thus, a policy argument for emissions taxes could argue that polluters are more sensitive to direct costs rather than to the threat of penalties posed by regulations, concluding that emissions taxes would reduce pollution more than would regulatory standards for allowable emissions. As Paris and Reynolds note (1983, p. 224), congruence with facts is a weaker criterion than scientific standards of truth, since more than one explanation can be equally congruent with the facts. The weaker standard of congruence must be tolerated because policy arguments are under-determined by empirical facts. This means that usually they cannot be proven uniquely true by facts alone.

It is also important to recognize that insistence on the most

rigorous standards of truth as the basis of evaluation would conflict with the criterion of practical utility and the spirit of pragmatism. To insist on accepting as well-formed only those arguments which can be proven true by their factual statements would severely hobble the search for viable solutions to problems of public policy. A good example of a more appropriate approach to evaluating the factual elements of a policy argument can be found in Majone and Quade's (1980) work on the pitfalls of policy analysis (comparable with fallacies of logic).

### **Value Component**

The second area in which a policy argument can be demonstrated superior to its rivals is in the realm of values. All three rival policies in the above pollution example seek to reduce the level of pollution. Perhaps all three are equally congruent with the available facts. An advocate of the market-based approach might argue that allowing polluters to choose between paying for the right to pollute or paying the costs of reducing their emissions is a fairer and more efficient approach than the others. This argument would seek to demonstrate the desirability of the market-based approach in meeting secondary values of "fairness" and "efficiency." Evaluating the valuative component of a policy argument is the subject matter of the last major section of this essay.

### **Political Feasibility Component**

A policy argument must demonstrate its superiority in terms of its factual and value statements. This alone is not enough to move from "is" and "valued" to "ought." The aim of normative argumentation is to persuade others that an act must be undertaken. For it to be persuaded of the action claim, the audience must be convinced that the action is feasible. It is a maxim of ethical philosophy that in a normative argument "ought implies can." In the case of policy arguments, what is implied needs to be made explicit. The "ought" has to be defended in a policy argument, in part by convincing the audience of the "can." A pragmatic framework requires policy arguments to demonstrate their political feasibility. A lack of emphasis on feasibility is a major weakness of the perspective that many political theorists bring to the study of policy arguments.

A well-formed policy argument must show that its action claim is a feasible one. Because the concern in this article is with

normative policy arguments, we must require the argument to convince the listener or reader that its claim is politically feasible (although other kinds of feasibility may be called into question). Thus, using the pollution example, defenders of the regulatory approach may argue that their policy is the only one that is politically feasible because of a broadly held and politically powerful environmental ethic that sees pollution as an absolute evil. This ethic would oppose the institutional legitimization of pollution as an acceptable product, which is implied in the other approaches.

Political feasibility is determined by how acceptable a policy will be to existing institutions. Often, it becomes more than just a question of acceptability, sometimes encompassing a policy's capacity to generate support for the institution or agency promoting it. Thus, the political feasibility of a policy claim should be assessed not only in terms of the likely success of that particular practice but for the effect it is likely to have on the continued viability of the political processes that adopt it. These are typical concerns of the policy analyst and the importance of political feasibility in policy analysis generally has been recognized in the field (Majone, 1989; May 1986; Webber 1986), although it has not been fully incorporated into the study of policy arguments.

### **Scope and Value of the Basic Framework**

The framework for analysis I am advocating recognizes a policy argument as an example of pragmatic argumentation defined by its normative claim to action. A defense of the proposed policy's political feasibility is offered to support the primary claim. Empirical and value-based supporting reasons are also offered in support of the normative claim. What kinds of possible policy arguments would this framework exclude because they are outside its area of competence to evaluate? What's an example of a complete policy argument? How does this framework improve on previous approaches?

A statement about or analysis of a policy that does not recommend a choice would be excluded because it lacks the essential normative claim. Thus, an examination of policy alternatives that does not attempt to rank or evaluate the alternatives would be excluded from study by the framework. Likewise, it would exclude a critical analysis that offers no recommendation for action or has an action claim so strong that it would require completely dismantling the political process within which the policy argument is being made. On the other

hand, an argument that makes no attempt to state the values it advances or does not consider the feasibility of its claim would qualify for evaluation by the framework. However, it would probably be judged as poorly made compared with its rivals because of the weakness of its other components.

An example of a policy argument with all of the expected components is provided by Lawrence Mead's advocacy of "workfare" (1986). Mead's normative claim is that welfare programs should implement work requirements for recipients. He offers empirical evidence of what he calls a decline of "functioning." Mead maintains that "today poverty often arises from the functioning problems of the poor themselves, especially difficulties in getting through school, working, and keeping their families together" (p. ix). He develops a valuative argument in support of his claim, contending that requiring welfare recipients to strive to function better furthers the end of government to maintain order (p. 5). Mead's extensive defense of the political feasibility of his "workfare" proposal has two major components. He seeks to demonstrate how the administration of welfare policy can be altered to overcome the resistance of those most directly involved in the current system, including employment staff, unions, and poverty lawyers (pp. 125-126). He also links his political feasibility argument to his valuative argument, arguing that the public supports programs that seek to maintain order.

Previous theoretical writings on policy arguments have not fully recognized the implications of evaluating empirical, valuative and feasibility components as secondary supports to a normative claim. Fischer (1982), who adopts a hierarchy of evaluative standards which were originally developed by Taylor (1961) for assessing moral (value-based) arguments, provides an example of an approach to evaluating policy arguments that places undue emphasis on the valuative component. Hoppe (1993) has also applied Taylor's hierarchy in practice. A policy debate may climb Taylor's hierarchy from simple verification to ultimate arguments concerning the rational choice among ways of life, or it may not. The rational choice among ways of life, while a central question in political philosophy, is not what a policy argument is *about*. A policy argument tries to persuade its audience that a course of action should be taken, not that a certain way of life is the best one.

Dunn (1994) offers a second example of an approach that does not fully recognize the normative purpose and pragmatic nature of policy arguments in its framework of analysis. Dunn

adapts a classification scheme from communications research to categorize policy arguments into eight different modes of claim-making: authoritative, statistical, classificational, intuitive, "analycentric," explanatory, pragmatic (unusually defined), and value-critical (pp. 100-101). These modes are descriptive of the way in which a policy argument might be made. However, this approach does not establish the purpose of policy arguments and thus makes it difficult to develop standards which could comparatively evaluate policy arguments employing different modes. These two examples show that a pragmatic framework for analysis is better tailored to the study of policy arguments.

### APPLICATION: EVALUATING THE VALUATIVE COMPONENT OF POLICY ARGUMENTS

To further develop the framework, appropriate and specific criteria for the evaluation of each component of a policy argument need to be identified. This article cannot complete this task because of length considerations and because it must be largely applied to specific policy debates. Yet, some standards for the evaluation of a policy argument's valuative component are offered in this section to show how a pragmatic framework aids in the evaluation of a policy argument, and how the basic framework can be extended. I offer similar standards for evaluating the empirical and feasibility components later.

The importance of the valuative component in policy arguments should not be understated. While it comprises only one component of a policy argument, the value component often sets the agenda for policy debates, defining the key issues. Yet value-based reasoning is an understudied topic in policy analysis, gaining respectability in the field only recently. Developing pragmatic standards for the evaluation of value statements requires addressing several issues: the kinds of value statements made, the inappropriateness of resolving value conflicts through foundational philosophical arguments, the criteria of evaluation for value statements, and the connection of the valuative component to the rest of the policy argument.

#### **Value Statements and the Limits of Rank Order and Casuist Methods**

The first topic that needs to be addressed is the use of specific political values in policy arguments. There is a reasonably finite and enumerable list of major liberal-democratic

values employed in policy arguments. These values include: equality, fairness, efficiency, freedom and autonomy (including individual political and economic rights), community and participation (including "the public interest"), authority, tolerance, and order. As Barry and Rae (1975, p. 379) note, there has been a "remarkable degree of stability" in the basic values over the last two centuries. Of course, this is a list of values containing a tremendous amount of centrifugal force: equality clashes with freedom, autonomy with community, tolerance with order, and so on. How are they employed and reconciled?

Each valuative argument made in support of a public policy takes a specific trajectory through basic values. For example, Charles Anderson summarizes what he describes as the classical liberal logic for valuative argumentation on political questions, saying,

The presumption lies with the rights of individuals to free expression, association, and action, which are represented institutionally through the ideal of contractual voluntarism and related marketlike arrangements. The burden then falls to those who would adjudge the worth or merit of the 'practices' that emerge spontaneously in the pluralist order to demonstrate a 'public interest' in them, to give good reasons for their suppressions or control or, alternatively, their protection or promotion through exceptional public measures. The warrant that might be offered in support of such contention include presumed flaws in the contractual nexus, various forms of market failure, considerations of the social efficacy of such a practice, or various overriding commonwealth interest and concerns for the provision of legitimate public goods (Anderson, 1987, p. 343).

A traditional, nonpragmatic approach to evaluating value statements would be to appeal to the frameworks of evaluation developed by political philosophers. These frameworks are characterized by their foundationalism; that is, they rank order political values prior to consideration of particular political conflicts. Rawls' (1971) serial ranking of liberty above equality provides the most well known example of a rank order of political values used to evaluate basic policy choices. However foundational political theory is not limited to liberal contractarians like Rawls and Gauthier (1986). The pre-political ordering of basic values can also be found in utilitarianism (Harsanyi, 1976; Rawls, 1971, p. 27ff.) and libertarianism (Nozick 1974).

Barry and Rae (1975) have studied the same question of a foundational rank order of values at length from the perspective of normative economics, evaluating six candidate standards for rank ordering values that are familiar to welfare economists: utilitarianism, equality, Pareto optimality, majority, minimaximization (in two forms), and dominance. They conclude that none of these principles, singularly or in any order would be universally acceptable (1975, p. 358).

A rank ordering of values, established prior to the policy debate, would make clear the choice of the best policy argument on value grounds. Not only would this be incompatible with the pragmatic conception of policy arguments, but a consensus among political philosophers on ranking political values has not been realized in the modern history of political theory. Given the decline in the popularity of foundationalist political philosophy, upon which a consensus would have to be based, it seems unlikely that it will (Herzog, 1985).

A second, less studied approach to choosing among value claims lies in the resurrection of casuist reasoning (also known as "case ethics"). The casuist method is composed of two primary elements, which are a central set of paradigmatic cases that are associated with and give meaning to a set of moral maxims, and a moral taxonomy. The taxonomy develops out of clarification of the exceptions which serve to vitiate the applicability of paradigmatic cases. The exemplary cases are clarified progressively by the social and cultural history of moral practice. While one brings to a case a set of moral principles, reasoning need take place only when these principles cannot be applied unambiguously, when different principles conflict, and when the case itself challenges the status of the principle (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988, pp. 306-307). Toulmin (1989) illustrates the relevance of casuistry to policy arguments in the area of human subjects in biomedical research.

While providing a system of analysis for value statements without the pre-political rank ordering of values required by foundationalism, the casuist approach also has a problem, which lies in classifying a particular policy into one of the paradigmatic cases of the moral taxonomy. The current conflict over the issue of "environmental racism" (also commonly referred to as "environmental justice") illustrates this well. The charge of environmental racism comes from the observation that many environmentally hazardous facilities, such as waste treatment plants, are located in urban areas with a high concentration of poor and minority residents. This has led to lawsuits "... but

advocates remain torn over whether to base such challenges on environmental or civil rights law" (Hardy and Wood, 1993, p. A8). On the other hand, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is limited by law to granting permits for sites based on the "technical and engineering merits" of the project (Hardy and Wood, 1993, p. A8).

How would this case be classified by casuists? Is it an issue of property rights, as a question of racial justice, as an environmental issue, or as a question of economic efficiency? The casuist approach can add new paradigmatic cases like the case of environmental racism to its taxonomy, but the political debate will be over defining the key values in the case that classify it. Thus, casuistry itself needs a set of standards for evaluating value statements in policy arguments.

The failure to develop some algorithm for the resolution of value conflicts within and among policy arguments, or a taxonomy for neatly classifying them, would not seem surprising if not for the centuries of effort devoted to it. Conflict over defining values is, in large part, the essence of political debate. The pragmatist realizes that this conflict could be narrowed, but not resolved, by agreement of the arguing parties to some pre-political standards such as a rank ordering scheme or the employment of a casuist approach.

### Criteria for the Evaluation of Value Statements

While a framework for the analysis of policy arguments should not exclude the use of a rank order or casuist meta-ethic for choosing the best policy argument based on value grounds, it should also be prepared to evaluate value statements without resorting to such methods. In the latter (much more likely case), there is a set of weak standards (relative to a rank ordering) that can be used. This set includes the completeness, relevance, and coherence of the value argument; the use of appeals to authority; and the use of appeals to aggregative principles such as majority rule. These same concepts can be the basis for standards applicable to many kinds of arguments. However, I will develop them here as specifically applied to value positions in policy arguments. I will show how a pragmatic framework for analysis can critically examine value statements in a way that contributes to the goal of making the best policy decision.

The first standard is one of *completeness*. Does the policy argument being evaluated address all of the important values involved with the policy? To answer this question the evaluator must be aware of the list of important values. These can be

determined by studying the history of the policy issue, looking at value critical responses to the advocate's position, and examining public opinion on the issue more generally.

Perhaps the greatest danger for the evaluator here is to rely too much on convention and tradition. It may be that important values have been excluded from debate over the policy issue, possibly because of an unjust process. Again, the case of environmental racism provides a good example. Opponents to the siting of waste treatment facilities in poor, minority neighborhoods complain that those neighborhoods are selected not only because of the low cost of construction, but also because the residents are "...all but powerless in local politics" (Hardy and Wood, 1993, p. A8). The most powerful interests involved—waste-treatment companies, local and regional governments, and the Environmental Protection Agency—define the key values as economic and environmental. However, the voices unheard in the process—those of local residents—would add a value of racial and economic justice. Thus, pragmatic evaluators of a policy argument must cast a wide net to identify the set of basic values that should be contained in a well-formed argument. The evaluators must be concerned with the nature of the process that produced the policy argument and not assume that it is fair.

A standard of evaluation closely related to completeness is that of *relevance*. Relevance is examined in two ways. The first question concerning relevance should ask if the values that the advocated policy embodies are the appropriate ones. While the relevance of values can be checked in the same manner as the completeness of values, it is even more difficult for the evaluator to rely on policy history or prevailing opinion to do so. This is because policy debates themselves often center around challenges to the relevance of existing values. This is certainly the case with environmental racism, which is primarily involves an effort to replace free enterprise and economic efficiency with racial equality as the key value in policy decisions. The second question of relevance, somewhat easier for the evaluator to handle, asks if the reasons offered in support of the value goals of a policy argument appertain to those goals. Are they really "good reasons"—ones that are persuade the public that the particular values being supported should be the ones to determine the policy choice?

The issue of the relevance of values looms large in policy argumentation because of a tendency in political discourse to couch policy claims with complex value implications in a very

general statement of value. Denton and Woodward (1990, p. 125) provide some examples of common ideological statements of value, taken from their survey of political communication in America:

In political terms, our ideologies tend to be populist ('Wisdom resides with the common person'), democratic ('Everyone should be equal under the law'), religious ('One nation, under God'), cautiously activist ('The state has an obligation to provide what people who, through no fault of their own, cannot provide for themselves'), libertarian ('I'll defend your right to disagree'), and conservative ('America is a land that preserves individual initiative.')

The evaluator of an argument employing one of these statements must examine to what degree the general statement of value relates to the specific policy claim and its implications.

Another standard for evaluating value positions in policy arguments is one of *consonance*. To what degree do the claimed values contradict each other? How coherent and consistent are they with respect to each other? I noted at the beginning of this section that liberal-democratic values certainly present the possibility of contradiction. As Paris and Reynolds (1983, p. 236) conclude, complete consonance is beyond the reach of actual political philosophies built out of these principles. Mead (1986) offers a good example of this conflict. The persuasiveness of his argument for workfare largely hinges on the reader's acceptance that the value of order can be reconciled with the value of freedom. Mead (1986, pp. 88-89) ultimately tries to resolve this consonance problem by arguing that order requires individual responsibility which, in turn, is a prerequisite for the realization of freedom. In assessing a policy argument like this one against its rivals, the evaluator should determine which policy argument has the minimum of inconsistencies in its value position.

There are two somewhat more specific areas in which standards can be discussed because of their ubiquitous employment in policy arguments. The first of these is the use of authorities for establishing values in a policy argument. Instead of making an explicit case in support of values, a policy argument may rely upon the authority of individuals or institutions for its values. In evaluating *appeals to authority* for support of a value position, a pragmatic perspective requires two questions to be addressed. The first is factual and interpretive: Are these the values of the authority? The other question is more complex: What makes this source authoritative in setting the values that

the policy embodies? When an advocate has made an appeal to institutional authority in particular, the evaluator needs to critically examine the way in which institutional values have been set. At its simplest an unexamined appeal to institutional authority reduces to "because we have always seen the problem this way." Questioning the legitimacy of the authority moves the evaluation of a policy argument to a second-order critical examination of values.

Mead (1986) provides another a good example of the use of individual authority and the kind of challenge that can be made against it. He appeals to political philosopher Thomas Hobbes to support his position that "... government's essential, if not only, purpose is to maintain public order" (1986, p. 5). The governmental value of order in turn defines the responsibilities of citizenship and, ultimately, the goal of welfare policy: to create citizens who conform to standards of education, family, and work. Why, the evaluator might ask, is Hobbes the proper authority to cite on the purpose of government, especially given that he was an opponent of modern democratic government? Mead does not defend his appeal to this authority rather than to others. However, he does support his argument for order as the key value in welfare policy by appealing to public opinion as well. While this could be interpreted as a different kind of appeal to authority, it will be more satisfactory to address it with a separate evaluative category.

Instead of arguing explicitly for a set of values or relying on authority, the valuative component of a policy argument might *appeal to an aggregative principle*, such as majority rule. Here there is really a single value: The values held by the majority are the values the policy is designed to realize. In this case, a pragmatic framework for evaluation again requires a specific set of questions be addressed. The first is factual and interpretive: Are these the values of the majority? The others are more fundamental and again move the evaluation to a second-order examination of values: Why is majority rule the correct rule of aggregation to employ? Why use a rule of aggregation at all? These questions are rarely addressed explicitly in policy arguments. As Barry (1979) illustrates, there are many possible circumstances in which majority rule may not be the most desirable decision process to invoke.

Finally, the valuative component of a policy argument connects directly to the empirical and normative components. Here the argument should be evaluated by the criterion of *coherence*. Do the three components make sense as a complete

argument or do they contradict one another? For example, advocating a market-based approach to reducing pollution by selling pollution permits advances the values of fairness and efficiency, but only if the structure of the industry is such that a free market in the permits will develop. The evaluator should ask if the advocate provides factual and feasibility evidence that is congruent with or contradictory to the valuative component.

These are rather general guidelines to be sure, but they provide the basis for an evaluation of any policy argument within the scope of the framework established in the present essay. They illustrate how a critical outlook can be incorporated into a perspective that maintains the pragmatic goal of selecting the best offered solution to a policy problem. More specific standards can only be specified when more context is present. "Context" refers not only to the substantive policy area (e.g., agricultural policy, defense policy, etc.) but also to the structure of the decision process in which the policy argument is being made.

## CONCLUSION

The pragmatic framework for the evaluation of policy arguments developed in this essay is simpler in structure and more general in content than most others (e.g., Dunn, 1994; Fischer, 1982). Yet it is also better integrated and more comprehensive in scope. The framework can be simpler largely because it is designed more for evaluation rather than description, resulting in a clearer, more constrained definition of what is recognized as a well-made policy argument. In taking the perspective that all policy arguments are pragmatic in nature and normative in purpose, my intention has been to provide a basis for evaluating one argument against another, regardless of the specific style or "mode" of reasoning employed. From this perspective, I have delineated a parsimonious hierarchical structure consisting of four elements: the normative claim (primary), the empirical component (secondary), the feasibility component (secondary), and the valuative component (secondary).

I have emphasized the importance of evaluating claims of political feasibility in order to assess the force of the ultimate normative goal of a policy argument. I have also applied the pragmatic perspective by identifying appropriate criteria to be used to evaluate the valuative component of a policy argument.

On these two points, the difference between applying the perspective of liberal or critical political philosophies and applying that of pragmatic philosophy becomes most clear. The traditional philosophical perspectives used in the study of policy arguments give too little weight to considerations of political feasibility and place too much emphasis on the fundamental critique of society. The pragmatic approach offers a way to incorporate feasibility concerns while retaining the ability to critically evaluate institutions and processes when this is appropriate to identifying the best policy argument.

The pragmatic framework for evaluation developed in this article certainly leaves room for the incorporation of other, more specific sets of standards that have been developed for application to particular types of policy arguments. These can now be brought under a single paradigm for the study of policy arguments that is, on one hand, ideologically neutral while, on the other, clarifying what a good policy should contain. This makes possible the widest array of applications as additional specific criteria for the evaluation of policy arguments are incorporated into the pragmatic framework.

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