

A r g u m e n t a t i o n

Participating in
the NEW DEBATE EVENT??
Read this!

THE A HA! EXPERIENCE OR A SEARCH FOR GEOFF GOODMAN

by
Bill Davis

[Publisher's Note: NFL has established a new debate event. What Bill Davis writes will help train contestants for the new event (and all the old events). If I had known what Bill Davis writes below, I would have been a much better debate teacher; my students would have been much better debaters. -- James M. Copeland]

Argumentation is the expression of the message -- the structure and aim of the message itself.

As the split in the forensics community widens, it is always interesting, if you can overcome the depression, to sit quietly and listen to the judges complain.

They complain about a lot of symptoms--rudeness and speed and that debate when they were around, why, that was when giants walked the earth. Meanwhile, the young coaches roll their eyes.

But the symptoms are a sign of sickness. And the complaining about the symptoms is not going to solve the disease. Here is one person's diagnosis -- the entire community, and all the events, not merely policy debate, suffer from *poor argumentation*.

Argumentation is the expression of the message--the structure and aim of the message itself. If you can accept the premise that the purpose of the community is communication, the study of the structure of the message itself should be a major component of our study. Yet I know that in my yea, so many years of teaching, until recently I was pretty ignorant of the ingredients of an argument. This is scary, since I was supposed to be teaching it.

So, I went back to my own debating days (cue the rolling eyes) to the debater that I remembered best as the source of tremendous argument. And I

decided, as I studied what a good argument should be, and how it applied to all the forensic events, that my idol could maybe tell me how he discovered great arguments and how to present them.

One problem--I had no idea where Geoff Goodman was, here in the late twentieth century, searching for a good argument.

Chapter One-- Why Iz Evrybuddy Always Pickin' On Me?

- A. An inflammatory essay
- B. Why you can't answer it.
- C. Exercise -- rationale
- D. Exercise I.
- E. You're copping out.
- F. You're still copping out
- G. Definitions
- H. Johari window
- I. Exercise II.
- J. You can't catch me.
- K. Why people can't stand you.
- L. Homework
- M. Alternate event homework.

He's gonna get caught. Just you wait and see. Why is everybody always pickin' on me?" --It's a rock classic, kid. Grab some cultural literacy.

A. Being an essay on Truth in Debate

Nobody much likes us out there.

Oh, sure, we have our good reasons why we think they don't like debaters. We're smarter than the average bear, and we speak our minds, and nobody likes that much, particularly when we are right and they are wrong.

Yea. Right. The fact is that people don't like us for the same reasons that they don't like lawyers (ouch!). They don't believe in the very premise that our passionate love is based upon -- namely, that in a clash of ideas, the truth will be revealed. No one else seems to see that in us.

And the real problem is, deep in our desperate souls, we know that the principle really IS flawed. We can see in major trials that the focus is not on the truth, but on the attorneys. (OJ who?). It is very clear that

neither side in a trial is interested in the truth if it gets in the way of winning.

Winning is the source of all distortion in debate, too. Look at our strategies: generic disads, squirrel cases, and critiques. Do any of these methods of winning move us any closer to the truth, except by accident? In fact, if you have ever had the pleasure of running a case with a high truth value, you probably have had the displeasure of being attacked for taking away the negative's ground.

Let's take the Ultimate Topic; Resolved: that the Status Quo should be changed. (I'll use this topic, hereafter called the UT, for my debate examples). If we ever decided to debate the UT, I'm sure every negative would lead off the INC with Topicality.

An example. I, the affirmative on the UT, propose that the space program should be discontinued. It is a waste of money, it creates an environment filled with falling space junk, and it removes the focus from the protection of Mankind.

How can you beat my affirmative? Well, I think you might run a T argument, that the Status Quo is all we have now, and therefore to change the Status Quo you must change everything within it.

And then, you would decide to run a Patriarchy Critique, since I had the ignorance to use the exclusive word "mankind". The risk of running either argument being zero, since if you lose them it doesn't hurt you, you say, why not? No matter that the T argument wants the judge to ignore a debate on substantive issues and at the same time set the precedent of voting against every other affirmative case, since no case could meet the demand.

And look at the hypocrisy of the other cheap weapon, the critique. The purpose of running the critique is not Outrage, as the language critique would have you believe. If so, the last point of the critique would not be "This is a voter". Nay, it would be- "I'm so angry, I can't go on."

Maybe, after five minutes of procedurals to try to win the quick cheap ballot, maybe we could get to the issue at hand. I doubt it. There's gotta be a generic d/a in here someplace.

Several years ago, a student of mine attended a national workshop. A college debater literally got into his face for claiming that an argument was "the truth".

"This isn't about truth," he sprayed in his victim's eyes, "This is about debate."

No wonder we are so misunderstood.

B. That Hurt? That Make you MAD?

Gosh, I hope so. If I did my job properly, you are of two minds -- do I deserve to be shot as a traitor, or will holding my head into the toilet and flushing a couple of times bring me to my senses?

I just applied the end product of this course to you, in an essay form. You may have the self confidence (some might call it conceit, but not we debaters) to think you can deny this argument easily. I remain confident that, if you are a high school debater, no matter how successful you may be, that you cannot beat my argument, BECAUSE YOU HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO TRAINING IN DOING SO. No one has EVER shown you how to attack an argument that has been prepared with the expectation that ignorant (ouch!) novice (that's a fightin' word buddy!) thinkers would attack it. It's this simple. I know something that you don't, and until you do, you don't have a prayer defeating me.

Now that's braggin' only if I can't back it up. And I'm going to let you prove it for me.

C. Exercises? What is this, math class?

Yes. Logic is math.

Friend, you can pass on the exercises if you like. But you will miss out on an incredible experience.

You ever had an A-Ha! experience? If you haven't, I mean a moment of breakthrough, where something incredibly important suddenly reveals itself in all its awesome splendor.

If you do the exercises, I promise you one. It may not leave you gasping for air like a beached fish, but it is better than sex. (All right, maybe not- just checkin' you for a pulse.)

D. Exercise the First. Right here, sucker. Right on the chin.

Write down every argument you can think of to destroy the essay above. Don't cheat yourself. Think. If your response to me is "But how do I do that?" You have had your first A-HA!

E. More! That's a puny list, and you're not thinking a critical thought - namely what is Truth?

Pilate thought it important enough of a question that he kept a mob waiting while he asked it. Look, I'm no Geoff Goodman. All you are keeping waiting is an old Dinosaur with dandruff.

F. No you're not ready for me yet.

Let's begin to analyze what you've missed.

G. The Parts of an Argument #1 -- Definitions.

I asked you to ask for a definition of truth. If you allow me to leave that definition as nebulous as the talent of the artist formerly known as Prince, you will never be able to pin me down long enough to do any damage.

This is obvious to anyone who has ever griped about school. I dare say that includes you. Whenever you say that something is a waste of time, without defining what IS worthwhile, you employ the same slimy approach as I, except your slime is not as well hidden as mine.

All arguments require definitions before they can be attacked. If you have ever watched an L/D round perform the "Two ships passing in the night" act, the responsibility generally rests here, on a lack of a definition.

H. So, I'll define truth.

Truth is reality, encompassing not only what is perceived by humans, but all of what is. In fact, I am taking the same philosophical approach as the Johari Window. Have you ever seen one?

Known to self Known to others	Known only by others
Known only by self	Known by no one

To be brief, the window says that the truth must be larger than any one or all of us.

Understanding all of the implications of the Window is not important, though it sure is fun to argue. What is important is that I must believe that A. The Truth exists and that B. No human can ever know it.

I. Exercise the Second.

A taste of blood? Go ahead. Make my day. Write down why

my argument must fail, now that I have stupidly defined Truth in this manner. But don't cheat. You have to be good and ready before you go on.

J. I did it to you again!

You can't pin me down with that definition -- I'll just smile enigmatically until you give up. Lookie -- if we don't know truth and can NEVER know the truth, then debate remains corrupt and contemptible. I will still win my argument, because the attackable premise is NOT anything about the Truth, but about debate and the truth.

K. Well, if you haven't torn up this paper in disgust by now, you just had an A-Ha! Experience.

Or I will give you one now -- that the slippery technique I used on you in (J) is why people can't stand debaters. I'm playing a game with you, even to the point of including trash talk to make you play stupid. What I want to teach you is analysis- of argument, or character, or speech, and then I want to teach you lateral thinking, a technique to improve your creativity in any event. In you will carefully stick with me, we'll do just that.

L. Homework before we meet again.

(For both policy debaters and L/D'rs) Think of five important conflicts that you have in your life. Number them Alpha, Omega, Epsilon, Greek, and Yo Mama. And place your attacks against the essay on the back burner; I promise you that by the end of the course, you will be just as convinced that my essay was trash as you are now. Except you will know why.

M. Homework for other events

1. Oratory -- take a well written essay, and attempt to make an outline refuting it. If the essayist was the speaker in front of you in a round, what could you say to defeat his/her thesis? Or, you can do the debate exercise above

2. Interps- yes, this is for you. From your scripts, find three conflicts between characters. Or, you can do the debate exercise above.

3. Extempers. The President of the United States faces choices all the time. Identify five of them. Or, you can do the debate exercise above. Do I hear an echo?

What was so great about Geoff Goodman?

Well, he had plenty of success -- he won the NFL National Tournament, and in college he made it to the semifinals of the National Debate Tournament, where he gave way to another team from Southern California. But there have been plenty of successful debaters, and I fear I must say that not all of them were great thinkers.

Chapter Two -- Playin' In the Sun With My Reverse Barometer

- A. Custer died for your arguments
- B. Exclusions
- C. Exclusions as cross-ex
- D. A dialogue on truth
- E. Exercise 1
- F. Good Arguments
- G. The basic map
- H. The issue

- I. Issues as questions
- J. Exercise 2
- K. Exercise 3
- L. A-Ha!
- M. The conclusion
- N. The dangers of anything lose
- O. The reasons
- P. The evidence
- Q. Evidence is not reason
- R. Evidence must be specific
- S. Braces on braces
- T. Homework
- U. Alternate homework

I will do exactly the opposite of what this man tells me to do. It's obvious what his game is. He wants to lead me away from his Indian friends. He is the perfect reverse barometer.

Isn't that right, Lieutenant?

Gen. Custer in *Little Big Man*, right before You Know When

A. Yesterday, we began our analysis of an argument with definitions. We then apparently destroyed the value of the definitions by showing how an argument could still be effective without them. Thus, we need to encounter the second part of an argument, that serves the function of a reverse barometer to definitions.

Hopefully, using this tool we will end up a bit better off than Custer.

B. The second part of an argument--Exclusions. A definition is intended to show what is going to be argued. To be effective, a definition should clearly hint that there are boundaries. What is NOT going to be discussed are the exclusions.

Take yesterday's essay. It is pretty obvious that I am speaking of policy debate, but wandering in are references that could mean that I am talking also about Lincoln-Douglas debate. Am I? Who cares?

The person arguing against the essay must, else she is again attacking a ghost. It is conceivable that I could even wiggle from talking about policy debate, since I never specifically say that policy suffers from this problem. All my examples are from policy, but never do I declare myself unequivocally. Yes, this is slimy. I'm sure you never do it. Pfui.

C. One of the miracles of cross-examination is that it allows the advocate to clearly demonstrate what the opponent is not talking about. This is not only important in policy debate, because everything that is excluded can no longer be claimed as significance or impact, but it is critical in Lincoln-Douglas because... well, you need to figure that out for yourself.

D. Let's enter into a dialogue about the essay. This is a tool that you can use to prepare yourself for advocating an argument or for attacking one. You play both roles, switching back and forth, doing the absolute best you can to represent both sides. Forget about being funny, or witty. Just be both advocates.

Idiot (I): Let's begin with this concept of truth. Tell me what truth is NOT.

Moron (M): Not Truth is lies.

I: And lies are intentional?

M: Not always. I could lie because I don't know any better.

I: Then everything is a lie. Take a look at the Johari window. Since we never can know all the truth, then there

would be a lie in everything we said.

M: Oops. O.K., let me try again. Not Truth is anything that does not lead directly to truth.

I: Huh? Give me an example.

M: Simple. If I intend to show you truth to the limits of my miserable abilities to perceive and communicate it, then that is Truth.

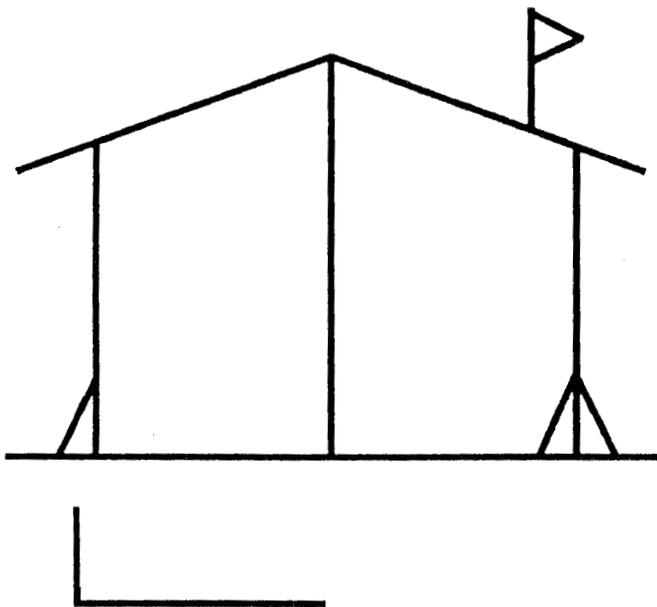
I: Truth seeking is equivalent to truth itself.

M: In this argument, yes. Don't roll your eyes. Even if we don't know what truth is, we DO know when we are intentionally attempting to walk away from it. And debaters do this with a grin, because it's all part of the game.

E. Exercise the First. Write a dialogue about the Alpha problem you have discovered. Try to clearly define and exclude. Again, do not try to WIN the dialogue. It's with yourself, for crying' out loud!

F. And now, argument mapping we go. When you are done with this course, immediately go buy *Good Arguments* by C.A. Missimer. Prentice-Hall is mighty proud of this book, if you catch my meaning, but it is revolutionary for us stupid people who have meditated on Toulmin and returned home spiritually ravaged. (Yes, that was a major overstatement. I learned a lot studying Toulmin. I just never could figure out how to TEACH it. The very first time I presented *Good Arguments* to my debaters, they were furious with me for never presenting it before.) Buy it and give it to your coaches -- do it a nonny mouse if you think you want to -- after all some coaches are as conceited as their debaters and think they know it all. I know that is hard to believe....

G. The basic concept is that an argument is like a house. I will show you what appears in the model that debaters can easily use, as a preview to what will come.



H. Parts of an argument -- third part: the issue -- the foundation of the argument. The issue is precisely what we are arguing. This can only be discovered after the process of definition and exclusion is completed: don't think that because definition and exclusion don't appear on the map that they aren't important. As a student told me, Definition and Exclusion are like real estate agents; they find where the house can be built and try to sell you the land, taking a percentage of the price, etc. etc, ad nauseum.

I. Issues are always expressed as questions. Statements cannot lead to conclusions -- they are conclusions. Therefore, the viewpoint of the issue is a critical factor. If I inquire "What is the best pizza?", am I asking as a consumer, a businessman, or as a teacher giving a folksy example to try to impress students as being a regular guy?

Consumer -- Well, the best pizza is one that tastes good, is affordable, and is served in a setting that doesn't invoke Italy too much.

Businessman -- Money? Profit? Money?

Teacher -- The best pizza is Tony's Frozen Pizza, because that's what I can afford.

J. Exercise the Second. Take the consumer viewpoint, and for a moment let's grant that the criteria mentioned are valid. You realize, I hope, that if you never allow an argument to get to the building state, that most judges will think you are the Johnny Cochrane of the debate circuit -- love his taste in suits, but picky, picky, picky!

Reflection should show you the difficulty of the exact wording of the issue. There are frightful consequences on either side: should you pick the Scylla of "best" as vital to your issue and then watch your opponent run amok? Or do you pick Charybdis, and get specific, paying the price of very little flexibility?

Again, my fanciful debaters returned to the model of a building for this comparison; do you build a fancy basement and spend your time constructing something many people will never see? Or do you slap your argument down on a slab of concrete, only to watch your opponent tunnel under it?

K. Exercise the Third. Carefully word the issues of each of the five problems you devised. If you don't mind making them public, then allow somebody to try to challenge them. Note your reactions as they seem to get more unreasonable than ever -- don't they want to argue? Isn't that the reason for even having an issue in the first place?

L. Now you may have had a A-Ha! experience as to why people can't stand lawyers and their cousins, namely us. The perception that we try to pick a ground that will avoid any significant discussion is justified. It is why few judges really WANT to vote on topicality, and why generic arguments are treated by so many with contempt.

M. Parts of an argument, fourth part -- the conclusion. The roof of the building, and therefore all that separates a house from being a ruin, is the conclusion of the argument. Often the conclusion is as simple as yes or no, or it may be a sentence fragment, or heck, I'm feelin' generous, it could be a sentence. But if your conclusion has to be longer than a sentence, you've misunderstood what you're trying to prove, and the responsibility lies within the issue to discuss. Your teachers will tell you that the biggest fault with your reasoning powers is that they start off proving that Nixon should have gone to China, and end up convicting him for Watergate.

N. The biggest danger that awaits the conclusion is the same as that within the issue -- loose wording. Go take a look again at (H) and (I).

O. The parts of an argument, fifth part -- the reasons. These are the walls, that hold up the ceiling of the conclusion. It doesn't take much to recognize that the reasons are critical. The model clearly shows the danger of an assertion. Responding to your argument with "bleah" is not sufficient to justify my own.

Further it shows that one reason, no matter how well devel-

oped, is a shaky excuse for a house. In Kansas, our department of parks fell in love with concrete toadstool picnic shelters. If you go to one of our state parks, there they are. There are even ironic postcards about them "Kansas Morels". Most of us do not want funny postcards made out of our arguments.

P. The parts of an argument, sixth part -- the evidence. This is the first place where Ms. Missimer proceeded to blow my mind -- yes! That is exactly what evidence does -- it braces up the reasons. This may not seem like an earth shaker to you, but consider--

Q. Evidence is NOT a reason. Facts, and quotes are neutral, and their existence do not create a reason for a ballot in and of themselves. Have you ever seen a debater wave a stack of evidence, and claim that is a reason to vote? Not you, right? Bah.

R. Evidence must prove the reason specifically. One or two connections are not enough. The effect of taking down a clumsy brace usually brings the wall down with it (Bob Vila, where were you when we needed you?)

S. Bracing a brace is a lousy way to build a house. A chain of evidence to prove a reason is just as weak. Consider the multiple difficulties of the generic argument. It is really a chain of arguments, and the fall of any part of any argument collapses the argument. If any quote falls, so does the chain. Pardon me, but I must say this -- the only reason why generics are successful is because the debaters have accepted them, not the judges.

T. Homework -- map the following arguments.

1. China poses the biggest threat of any nation to world peace. It possesses nuclear weapons, and the heartfelt belief that of all nations, it alone can survive a nuclear war. President Li Peng demonstrated this when he said to the Congress of Deputies "No one may attack the People's Republic of China, because they know they cannot defeat us."

2. Overpopulation will cause nuclear war. First, X tells us that overpop is critical to political instability. Second, Y screams that political instability is always a pretext for war. And finally Z whines that in a nuclear age, the incentive for any power that holds nuclear capabilities is to use them.

3. The US must stay out of Chinese internal affairs. History teaches us that the Chinese regard American foreign policy as a reverse barometer -- whatever they want us to do, why I shall do the opposite. Isn't that right, lieutenant?!!!! Duck your head! Ouch, he got the point.

Argument Maps for T., Chapter 2 next page

U. Homework for the other events

1. Interpers -- Take the three conflicts from the scripts you chose yesterday. Map those conflict.

2. Orators -- Map the arguments from the essay you chose yesterday.

3. L/D'rs -- Map the argument "Justice is the preeminent human value."

4. Extempers -- you are President Bush, discovering that not only does Iran have the nuclear bomb, but one is planted in the U.S. Senate. Map the argument to justify your decision.

I didn't see Geoff Goodman in high school while he was winning NFL in the late 60's. Instead I was a regular victim when he was debating for USC.

He seemed tall--at least I remember him as tall, and he had a perfect "natural" -- a 'fro for white guys. It added to his height.

And when he started to speak, it would bob and move as if it had a life of its own. My deaf girl friend, who watched one of Dr. Goodman's operations on my ego (while I was wishing for sixty minutes I too could be deaf), said he had "the mane of a snake charmer."

He also had a taste for theater. He liked to keep his audiences waiting -- I believe that we have prep time in part as a response to Geoff Goodman.

But he could think. I never saw him run a predictable argument. For a couple of decades since, I have tried to figure out where he found those arguments. At times I wanted to just ascribe it to talent, as if certain thinking could never be taught. I never gave up the idea that I could figure out his secret, because he had to have one. I kept the flowsheets, and transcripts of some of the final round debates where he appeared, and once in a while I dug them out and studied them for The Secret. No luck.

Chapter Three: Assume Nothing

- A. The assumption
- B. Examples of assumptions
- C. Comparing the homework
- D. Assumptions of the homework
- E. Exercise 4
- F. The answers - well, sorta
- G. Your assumptions arguments
- H. My assumptions arguments
- I. Assumptions in your arguments
- J. Homework
- K. Alternate event homework

"Children today are arrogant, gobble their food, and show no respect to their teachers."

-Socrates

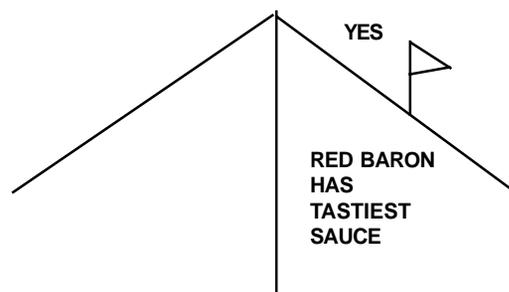
A. The parts of an argument-seven-the assumptions.

Up to this point, the argument model isn't too startling. In fact, it looks a whole heck of a lot like a flow sheet; the conclusion is the advantage, the reasons the subpoints, the evidence the, um, evidence, and the issue the resolution in question form. But now we enter the dirty little secret of arguments -- what it is like underneath the foundation, where the Good Arguments Are.

Assumptions are what must be true for the argument to be true. If the assumption is not true, then the argument must be faulty.

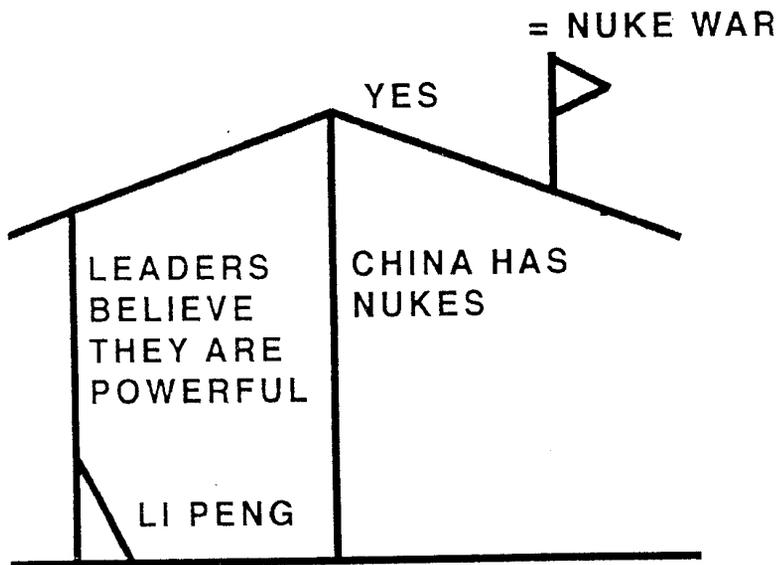
B. A couple of examples.

I tell you that Schwan's makes the best pizza. When you ask why, I tell you that Red Baron has the tastiest sauce. The assumption is that tasty sauce equals the best pizza.

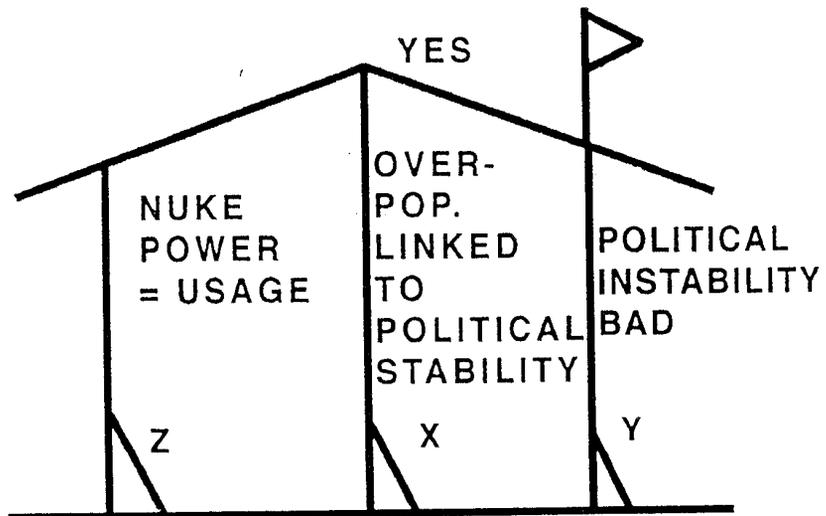


DOES SCHWAN'S MAKE THE BEST PIZZA?

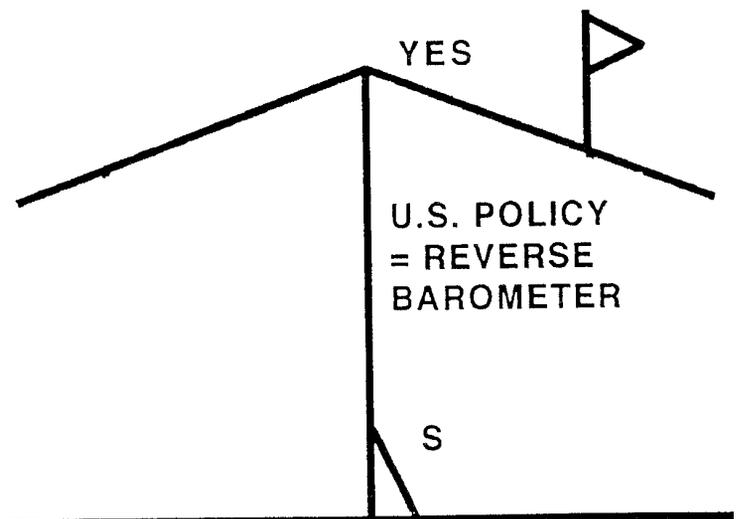
TASTY SAUCE = BEST PIZZA



CHINA A THREAT TO WORLD PEACE



DOES OVERPOPLULATION = NUKE WAR



SHOULD THE U.S. STAY OUT OF CHINESE AFFAIRS

ARGUMENT MAPS FOR T., CHAPTER 2