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## A PROCESS PERSPECTIVE OF DEFINITIONAL ARGUMENTS

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Frequently, debaters argue only on the level of "sound bytes," short isolated verbal tags, such as "freedom" versus "totalitarianism" or "environment" versus "economic growth." Debaters proclaim, "cross apply" without explaining the inter-relationship of the specific arguments. "Cross apply" becomes the explanation. Non-policy debaters may state that the "resolution is a fact" although these same debaters advocate the resolution is a value by stipulating a value criterion and arguing value issues.

Unfortunately, some argumentation scholars also ignore how debate constructs are interrelated. Scholars, such as Tolbert & Hunt, 1985; McGee, 1988; Leeman & Hamlett, 1989, never discuss the relationship between definitions and counter-warrants. Herbeck and Wong (1986) stipulate that measurement is the primary problem of debating value issues; nevertheless, their essay sidesteps any value measurement procedure by shifting their discussion to policy measurement.

As an argumentation laboratory, debaters and theorists must understand how constructs and issues are interrelated because a non-process perspective artificially inhibits our teaching and learning of argumentation theory. If we accept that all arguments are subsidiary of the resolution (Patterson & Zarefsky, 1983), then issues must maintain a consistent relationship with respect to a definitional interpretation of the resolution. Drawing upon this contention, this essay will concentrate on how definitional arguments interrelate with other constructs as a process. Specific focus will address the relationship between definitional arguments, criteria, and counterwarrants.

### Process

From a process perspective, a debater evaluates all arguments as if they are interrelated. Furthermore, the resolution is interrelated to all arguments and their corresponding issues. Patterson and Zarefsky claim "unless this relationship is kept in mind, attacks and defenses may do little or nothing to enhance the larger goal of proving the resolution probably true or false" (p.71). For example, definitions may offer one interpretation of the resolution while contentions support a totally different interpretation of the same resolution. Because arguments are constructed in isolation of each other, both the affirmative and negative teams may even agree that the resolution is a factual proposition in arguing definitions but argue value issues which cannot justify the existence of facts. Thus, teams may agree that the resolution, "Lee Harvey Oswald killed John F. Kennedy," is a factual resolution and argue a criterion of life even though a value criterion of "life" will not support or reject whether Oswald assassinated Kennedy.

### Process Perspective

A non-process advocacy allows debaters to argue and judges to decide issues independently of how these same issues impact each other as interrelated arguments. Thus, unastonishingly, debaters and judges frequently identify totally different pivotal arguments within the same debate. A non-process advocacy should typically result in teams advocating inconsistent arguments. However, if both teams view affirmative and negative arguments from a non-process perspective, these inconsistencies are either never discovered or discovered after the teams are free of the "sound byte" view of the debate.

As educators we should promote a process view of debate advocacy. Because definitions interpret the resolution, a process perspective originates with comprehending how definitions are an integral foundation issue in all other arguments.

#### Process and Definitional Arguments

Theorists (e.g., Ulrich, 1985; Cantrill, 1988) criticize how debaters argue definitions. Ulrich indicts the misuse of legal definitions and suggests that the case context of legal definitions delimit the application of the specific definition to other contexts. Interestingly, this essay maintains a relational view although it is infrequently applied to teams that abuse legal definitions. Cantrill believes that stipulative definitions, "context-relevant meaning(s) for all subsequent usage of a term" (p.49), would minimize current problems in arguing definitions. Underscoring stipulative definitions, Cantrill fails to address the relationship between definitions and other constructs. However, the essay claims that "most debaters seem to treat definitional issues as an isolated aspect of gamesmanship instead of examining definitions with an eye toward their holistic impact in the round" (p.50). Cantrill's statement suggests that abuses cannot be resolved by simply arguing context-specific definitions, but by also viewing definitions as the root issue for all other arguments. In fact, Cantrill states that "advocates should be required to 'flush all argumentation through the sieve of warranted definitions to secure any given ballot" (p.50); however, Cantrill never elaborates upon how stipulative definitions are related to any other issues. The essay only metaphorically asserts that definitions serve as a "sieve." The metaphor is stated in isolation of any theoretical discussion of the relationship of definitions to other issues. By not discussing how definitions and other issues are interrelated, Cantrill reinforces the non-process perspective that theoretical constructs can be understood in isolation, although the essay should be commended for asserting that a relationship exists.

Definitions establish more than a common ground. As a resolutional argument, definitions initiate the relational pattern between the affirmative's arguments and the resolution, as well as the negative's arguments and the resolution. Both the affirmative and the negative must maintain their own unique relational pattern to the definitions or their arguments may promote inconsistent claims regarding the resolution. Defining the resolution as "X",

the affirmative must maintain this interpretation as a premise for subsequent arguments. Likewise, the negative, if they accept "X" as a resolution, must maintain "X" as the target of their refutation. However, a negative counter-definition indicts both the affirmative's interpretation and the first affirmative constructive (IAC) supporting that interpretation. Thus, a counter-definition changes how the affirmative extends their original arguments. If the negative establishes that the resolution is "not X," then the affirmative cannot continue to advocate arguments supporting "X" as a justification of "not X." Additionally, a negative counter-definition can either broaden or narrow the affirmative's original interpretation. These counter-definitions should not significantly affect the affirmative argumentation because the definitions only broaden or narrow the affirmative's burden of proof and do not substantially change this burden.

Current practice isolates the definitional argument from other arguments. For example, if the IAC does not present a structure containing a definition, then the first negative constructive (INC) speaker usually claims that the affirmative failed to define the resolution. Meaning can be either denotative or connotative (Weaver, 1987, p.144); therefore, the affirmative provided a connotative definition of the resolution within the context of the IAC. The INC's indictment of "no definition" is actually only an indictment of "no structure." The second affirmative constructive (2AC) must extend the original definition established in the context of the IAC, or risk altering the relationship between the definition and the other arguments. In another example, the negative team may reject the affirmative's definition and offer a counter-definition. However, if the counter-definition does not change the relationship between the affirmative's arguments and the resolution, the negative's interpretation is not substantially different from the affirmative's interpretation or "X" is equal to "X".

Debaters also "operationalize" definitions. As Kerlinger (1973) states "an operational definition assigns meaning to a construct or a variable by specifying the activities or 'operations' necessary to measure it" (p.31). Kerlinger's definition is not restricted to empirical research. In fact, "plan mandates" in policy debates specify "operations" necessary to measure the resolution. In non-policy debate, however, such a "plan" rarely exists. Debaters assume a relationship that cannot occur without a plan. Although the term, "operationalize" was probably borrowed from policy debate, the "plan" or method of operationalizing was not. The problem is not simply a confusion of terms but rather a failure to view the relationship that existed between "operational definitions" and the "plan" as a more precise definition of the resolution. The solution is not operationalizing definitions through a formal proposal. The solution is understanding how issues are interrelated. For example, if the negative rejects the affirmative's interpretation of the resolution, the negative should argue other related issues, such as, topicality, prima faciality, and justification issues. These

issues strengthen their refutation of the definition. Currently, the negative diminishes their position by briefly challenging the definitions while refuting, for the duration of the debate, the affirmative's contentions that emerge from those same definitions. The time spent attacking the affirmative's contentions, which stem from their definitions, lends credibility to the affirmative's definitions. This may explain why some judges no longer consider topicality a voting issue. This strategy may appear to place all the eggs in one basket...It does! One overall basket that maintains the relational pattern between the affirmative's arguments and the definitions, as well as the negative's arguments and the definitions.

In summary, a process perspective begins by understanding how definitions are interrelated with all other issues. If "all arguments are subsidiary to the resolution" (Patterson and Zarefsky, 1983), then all arguments are subsidiary of the definitions as an interpretation of that resolution. Currently, debaters initially argue definitions and later ignore how definitions affect other issues. This practice should be replaced by analyzing how the acceptance or rejection of an interpretation affects other arguments.

#### Interrelationship of Definitional and Criteria Arguments

Criteria are defined as "factors that serve as standards or tests for evaluating the worth of a belief or course of action" (Keefe, Harte, and Norton, 1982, p.360). Criteria in non-policy resolutions of value establish evaluative standards for measuring conflicting arguments regarding values (Verch and Logue, 1982). By definition "criteria" establish value and not fact. Nevertheless, debaters will argue that the resolution is a factual proposition and advocate a criterion to adjudicate the resolution as a value proposition. During the spring 1988 CEDA topic, "Resolved: that the American judicial system has overemphasized freedom of the press," debaters argued that the resolution was a fact and that a criterion, such as national security or liberty, would resolve conflicting value issues. As a strategy the negative may claim that "freedom of press can never be overemphasized;" however, this strategy self-destructs if the negative accepts the definitional measurement of overemphasis because "overemphasis" cannot be equal to "emphasis." Thus, the 2AC should extend the resolution as a fact and demonstrate how the negative is inconsistent in accepting the definitions and arguing "freedom of press can never be overemphasized." Debaters also artificially isolate criterion from other value issues. As a measurement method, criteria do not prove or disprove the resolutive statement because criteria function only as yardsticks for the definitional arguments. Church (1986) writes:

The most effective kinds of definitions are ones which contain explicit criteria. For example, if the term "desirable" was defined with a dictionary definition such as "worthwhile," then no measurement or

evaluation would have been supplied. On the other hand, if the same term were defined conceptually in terms of cost benefit analysis and a goal or value of disarmament, then the question of measurement or evaluation is much easier to resolve (p.31).

Thus, teams that argue that "winning the criterion results in winning the debate" are assuming that the judge is only focusing on the criterion as a "sound byte."

Theoretical discussions of criterion have not clarified how a criterion is related to other arguments. Keefe, Harte & Norton (1982); Logue & Verch (1982); and Matlon (1988) relate criterion to non-policy resolutions of value while the more recent essay by Cole, Boggs, and Twohy (1986) apply criterion to all non-policy resolutions. Although Cole, Boggs, and Twohy never justify relating a criterion to all non-policy resolutions, the illusion of a relationship will confuse their readers and possibly result in a misapplication of their essay in a debate.

Cole, Boggs, and Twohy identify four burdens for arguing a criterion issue: explicitness, threshold, probability, and justification. Their essay promotes a non-process perspective of criterion by originally claiming that all four burdens are necessary conditions of a criterion and also maintaining that only two of these structures will justify the resolution. They write:

After the term "national security" was made explicit by specifying the territory most relevant for discussion, a threshold was needed to determine when censorship was justified. Establishing a threshold provided a demarcation point specifying what was required of the affirmative team in order to justify the resolution (p.39).

Cole, Boggs, and Twohy add to this inconsistency by stating that three of the burdens are sufficient proof:

it would be reasonable for a negative team, when confronted with an affirmative claim that any risk of future harm justifies the resolution, to demand explicitness, a threshold, and a high probability that this harm would actually occur. If the affirmative cannot answer all three of these burdens then the negative should win the debate." (p.40)

Because Cole, Boggs, and Twohy explicate each burden as an isolated structure, they fail to realize that their text was inconsistent. By labeling the fourth burden "justification," Cole, Boggs, and Twohy disregard that the three preceding burdens are requirements for justification. This fourth burden becomes redundant. This redundancy occurs because they isolate each of these burdens as individual structures. The problem is not simply redundancy but a failure to analyze how these four burdens are interrelated to definitions, a criterion, and to each other. Cole, Boggs, and Twohy claim that their four requirements are subsidiary burdens of Matlon's (1981) two stock issues, definitive and designative issues. Matlon also separates definitions from criteria. Matlon identifies the following two stock issues for value resolutions:

1. Are certain specific definitions or criteria available to justify the judgment claimed in the proposition? (definitive issue)
2. Do these beliefs, values, or facts in the proposition conform to the definitions or criteria? (designative issue) (p.49)

These questions separate "definitions" and "criteria" into two isolated constructs; however, this isolation is artificial if criteria provide measurement procedures for definitions. From a process view, debaters would ask:

1. Are certain specific definitions and their corresponding criterion available to justify the judgment claimed in the proposition? (definitive issue)
2. Do these beliefs, values, or facts in the proposition conform to the definitions and their corresponding criterion? (designative issue)

Instead of learning a list of "sound bytes," debaters and theorists need to interrelate definitional issues to a criterion as a measurement issue. Kerlinger (1973) writes that "measurement is a relation" (p.428); therefore, a criterion issue can never be advocated independently of the definitions as interpretations of the resolution.

#### Interrelationship of Definitional and Counter-examples Arguments

Another misemphasis of structure over process is the negative's use of "counter-warrants" to introduce "counter-examples." Even the term "counter-warrant" is unrelated to the theoretical use of "warrant" according to Leeman and Hamlett (1989). Tolbert and Hunt (1985, p.22) suggest that counter-warrants be used as "a tool for analysis of the resolution; however, they fail to discuss the link between counter-warrants and definitions. More recently, McGee (1988) analyzes "how counter-warrants should be evaluated in rounds once they have been introduced and accepted" (p.64). McGee also ignores how definitions affect how counter-warrant are evaluated. Because definitions interpret the resolution as an argument, definitions affect the way counter-examples are applied. Therefore, any theoretical discussion of counter-warrants that is not interrelated with definitions will only mislead debaters.

A reemphasis on analysis can eliminate the abuse of current counter-warrant practices. All examples are contingent upon the interpretation of the resolution. If the affirmative broadly defines the resolution, any narrowing of this context by specific examples can be refuted by the negative; (a) applying counter-examples against the affirmative's original definitions, and/or; (b) attacking the inductive reasoning of the affirmative. Any affirmative attempt to restrict the negative's counter-examples is preempted by the affirmative's initial broad interpretation of the resolution. To clarify the above strategies, they are applied

to the 1986 CEDA topic, "Resolved: that improved relations with the Soviet Union are a more important objective for the United States than increased military preparedness." If the affirmative broadly defined the topic but narrowed the example of military preparedness to include only the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a negative using strategy (a) applies the nuclear arms race as a counter-example of the original broad definition. The negative could employ strategy (a) alone or in conjunction with strategy (b). Although affirmatives could narrowly define the resolution in order to restrict examples, the sources typically used to define the resolution, dictionaries, result in broad definitions. For example, "artistic" in the fall 1990 resolution, regarding government censorship of artistic expression, is defined as "skillful." Although this is a broad definition, at least one team used it to argue that the skill of performing abortion was "artistic expression," thereby presenting a narrow example within a broad interpretation of the resolution. If the affirmative initially defines the resolution in a narrow context, the negative strategy is to; (a) reject the definitions and argue topicality or prima faciality, or; (b) grant the definitions and attack the inductive reasoning of the affirmative. Therefore, any prescription for attacking examples must begin by analyzing the relationship between the examples and the interpretation of the resolution.

Debaters and theorists falsely assume that the resolutorial statement can be understood in isolation of its interpretation. Ironically, even so-called "whole resolution" arguments depend upon the specific interpretation as the example of the resolution. McGee indicts debaters for not weighing the strengths of examples; however, examples cannot be understood, nor their strengths be measured, without a strategy rooted in the definition. Arguments regarding counter-warrant theory should be irrelevant if the affirmative presents a broad definition which will not preclude the negative counter-examples. Debaters, ignoring how definitions constrain the inductive use of examples, risk that critics will make isolated judgments regarding definitions and inductive use of examples. In isolation, critics can accept a broad definition and reject counter-warrants as a strategy by reacting to it as a "sound byte" even though the broad definition subsumes the negative's counter-examples. Critics reject counter-examples on the ground that "counter-warrants" severe the negative refutation from the initial affirmative arguments. Curiously, many of these same critics vote for the affirmative examples by isolating the affirmative example from the negative counter-examples, and severing both the affirmative and negative examples from the original definitions. Both debaters and critics must reemphasize the role of definitions as a foundation for debating examples, affirmative or negative.

#### Summary

This essay takes issue with a non-process perspective of academic debate. A non-process view allows debaters to argue and

judges to decide issues independently of how these same issues impact each other as interrelated arguments. If teams debate "sound bytes," a judge could decide that a team won the issue of "totalitarianism" verses "democracy" without ever understanding how this specific issue affects the resolution. The win is only on the "sound byte" level. The loss is on the argumentation level.

A process perspective is proposed that views definitional arguments as a root issue for all other arguments. "Sound bytes" are replaced by a debater viewing all issues, both affirmative and negative, through the definitional argument. Thus, a criterion is interrelated with the definitions as a measurement method, and counter-warrant examples are only contingent upon the interpretation of the resolution. This process perspective is not restricted to debaters, scholars must interrelate constructs in models and theory construction. A non-process perspective within a debate impairs the educational laboratory we call non-policy debate. And, a theoretical non-process view is even more destructive because it reinforces through publication an erroneous way of arguing.

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