THE AUDIENCE STANDARD

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A recurrent theme in discussions of the distinctiveness of CEDA debate has been its close approximation to public debating. Jack Howe has insisted upon CEDA's "emphasis on an audience-centered approach to debate."[1] James Tomlinson concurred that "CEDA stresses a focus on a public centered approach."[2] Thomas Holliham and others noted in 1983 that "CEDA coaches believe that their debate exemplar is the audience-oriented debater,"[3] and even more recently Jim Brooks remarked that "CEDA advocates are probably quite correct in arguing that CEDA debate provides important kinds of training for public advocacy."[4]

When this theme is taken seriously and CEDA tournament debates emulate the model of public debating, CEDA debate is consonant with vital societal functions. Public debating is manifestly functional for it assumes public participation in decision making as central to the resolution of matters ranging from seat belt laws to foreign military intervention. Public debate serves to develop the requisite informed and rational assent (or dissent) for significant social policies and values. Furthermore, the model exists in real life and is present for constant inspection in such varied forms as legislative committee hearings, the community forum, the op-ed pages, the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, and the campus convocation.

From such a perspective, CEDA debate is distinguished by its functions rather than by a list of discrete characteristics or by its mere contrast with NDT debate. The standard to which it subscribes is that of the public forum, and the goal of argumentation which it accepts is "to create or increase the adherence of minds to the theses presented for their assent."[5] This approach asks whether the arguments which are being used are suitable in nature and quality for public deliberation. In keeping with this model, arguments are expected not only to meet normal public standards of validity and probability, but also to be formatted in such a way as to facilitate intelligent evaluation by their audiences. Thus, the basic argumentative requirements for audience oriented debate are reasonableness and assessability.

Encompassed within the audience model are several interrelated "postures" for debate judges to choose among. (1) "I am your audience. Convince me." (2) "I represent an audience. Give me what I need in order to grant my assent." (3) "I am a forensic educator. I'll decide if you deserve to be allowed out in public."[6] It furthermore interlaces the postures of (1) this is what an audience would respond to and (2) this is what an audience <u>should</u>

respond to. And this perspective, by the way, is equally suitable for either policy or value (or even fact) debating. Such matters will deserve further exploration as experience sheds light upon their implications.

It is not necessary to contend that the audience perspective is better than any other model, for educational forensics has room for many approaches. The audience model is assumed to be definable, distinctive, and viable, and the following account will set forth some of the implications which flow from the acceptance of that model. Hence, considered here are (1) the influence of the audience model on the criteria for judgment, (2) the verification and grounding of those criteria or standards, and (3) some hazards in the implementation of the model.

Criteria for Judging

Under any system of competitive debate, the judge has a vital responsibility to determine which team has done the better job of rationally supporting its side of the resolution. Following the public debate model, the judge represents the audience demand for rational discourse and evaluates the debate from the point of view of public decision making. Then many subsidiary questions fall into place. We will ignore such minor puzzles as whether to examine cards after rounds or whether to entertain counter-warrants in order to concentrate on how judgments may be influenced in the areas of analysis, evidence, reasoning, style and delivery, and refutation.

Analysis

Analysis is the process of discovering the issues. An audience will want to know what essential issues should be considered when asked to grant or withhold assent to a proposition. The analytic behavior of the debaters and judges is derived from the audience's needs.

One implication of the audience-centered approach is that debaters are to deal with the whole resolution. At the end of an audience debate the participants are asked to give their assent to the proposition as stated. This does not mean that a given debate may not revolve around a significant paradigmic instance or that it may not boil down to a clash over a specific piece of vital evidence. It just means that the judge, like any audience, will ask which team has better supported the proposition to which it is seeking assent.

A further implication is that the judge will favor analysis which explores the heart of a proposition over that which explores its periphery. Although whether, indeed, the proferred issues are at the heart of the controversy is itself subject to dispute at any time, public debate takes place in a context where the issues have already taken a certain shape. We ask ourselves, then,

whether the matters presented for our consideration are the ones people talk about when they talk about this proposition.

Evidence

Rational public decision making requires trustworthy and relevant evidence, of course. The question for the CEDA judge to ask is what kinds of evidence and what techniques of evidence usage are most appropriate for public deliberation. Like any debate judge, the CEDA judge will insist that assertions be backed with evidence as well as reasoning, but in thinking like an audience the judge will look for judicious use of the best available evidence. Audience-oriented debate will be characterized by evidence that matters.

Since evidence in argumentation constitutes a starting point upon which general agreement may be expected, then it includes common knowledge and shared values as well as empirical snippets. The judge can assume some informed background on the part of the listeners he or she represents, so "Didn't you read that in the papers?" is valid documentation. From informed background, a well-regarded figure such as Thomas Jefferson may be acknowledged to have some authority in discussing the philosophy of democracy.

Reasoning

Many of those who describe the characteristics of CEDA debate do so at least partially in terms of its expectation of sound and lucid reasoning. Once again we refer to the expectations of a audience to determine what this emphasis will mean to a judge. Most audiences value advocates who are "reasonable." (Yes, exceptions exist.) Wild and improbable claims are out, and the judge may ask which of the teams is drawing the more judicious inferences. Highly valued is the ability to identify warrants for the audience and to suggest appropriate tests for the reasoning process. A team is permitted to utter, and a judge to entertain, the challenge, "Does that reasoning make sense to you?"

Delivery and Style

Some observers have apparently seen an emphasis on delivery as the solitary unique standard in CEDA. Once more, a reference back to the requirements of the audience will provide the judge with a balanced perspective in evaluating this and other elements in a debate. Basically, what audiences would find conducive to civilized deliberation will be rewarded, and what an audience would be likely to find incomprehensible or offensive will not be.

Audiences are not necessarily to be derogated for being influenced by voice, action, humor and feedback awareness. They may gain cognitive data from any such element when it contributes to the meaning of discourse, reveals attitudes, and suggests priorities. A CEDA judge may regard the happenstance that

tournament debates are presented orally as an advantage in a thorough deliberation.

The audience-oriented debater is expected to use effective style as well as delivery to give meaning to an argument. In evaluating vocabulary choice, for instance, the judge will use the same standard most audiences will use. The language which clarifies and enhances is good; that which would distract and befuddle most listeners constitutes poor argumentation.

Refutation

One more implication of the audience standard for judges and debaters has to do with the nature of refutation in CEDA. Clash is, after all, a main ingredient in the debate process. As implied above, however, clash for an audience will be clash which is responsive to major issues. (We'll leave out, for the moment, the important function of a striking refutation of a prominent "little" fact.) When we coach teams for audience debate, one of our most common admonitions is, "Don't try to answer everything. Reinforce your main points." CEDA debaters may well be rewarded for their skill in "dropping" inconsequential points. They will be required, rather, to find questions where the dispute essentially lies and resolve those clashes logically and lucidly in terms favorable to their side of the topic. Good judgment regarding what to clash about is more important than answering every tiny point.

Verification and Grounding

In order to validate and adjust its standards in the above areas, audience-oriented tournament debating profits from the availability of feedback from the larger system of which it is a part. As Steven Brydon pointed out, "If CEDA is to be an open system, it needs to interact directly with its environment in the form of 'real' audiences."[7] At least two easy-to-implement methods exist for informally validating the quality of tournament debate through audience response.

One procedure is to bring more lay persons (and perhaps more subject matter experts) into the tournament situation. Let there be audiences at debate rounds and large audiences at final rounds. A verification of the appropriateness of argumentative methods does not require the use of lay judges (though not precluding them either), but it does mean gathering reactions, informally and formally, from outside observers concerning what they thought was rational argument. By talking with listeners, both debaters and judges can get a better feel for whether they are engaged in and rewarding the same things which other public citizens find intelligent as well. More formal instruments may also explore what kinds of arguments influenced opinions about the proposition.

One can imagine that the announcement that a large audience would be attending the final round, including bright young professors of economics, government, astrophysics and communication who would expect to hear two teams producing the strongest and most substantial arguments in support of their respective sides of the proposition, might have considerable upstream effects on debaters and judges in earlier round.

A second procedure, of course, is to find lay audiences for CEDA debaters beyond the tournament situation. Audience-oriented debate should transfer easily to service club meetings and even college classes, which serve as good testing grounds for CEDA standards and practices. If insufficient feedback is available informally, questionnaires may allow listeners to record their responses and suggestions, thereby revealing how audiences actually process the messages which debaters address to them.

Stumbling Blocks

No perspective on competitive debate produces fool-proof or completely reliable results, and the audience debate model is no exception. Warning flags must be kept aloft in at least three areas.

Subjectivity

The topics being debated are not trivial, and the judge is not required to ignore personal values and experiences. There is an interventionist and maximalist tendency in audience-centered debate judging. This characteristic is not to be dismissed on the grounds that all judgment has subjective elements, but rather to be faced directly by means of instructions to judges concerning objectivity, through open comparisons of decisions and ballots, and through all the formal and informal CEDA judge networking through which standards will ultimately be maintained.

Audience Variation

Audience debating is inherently characterized by its adaptation to specific audiences, so judges and debaters may well have to decide what audience they are assuming in a given round. A judge may have a hard time evaluating an argument which would be good for one audience and poor for another. The dilemma may be more difficult in theory than in practice (MacNeil and Lehrer survive it), but exploration of both theoretical and practical implications of this phenomenon should be on the CEDA agenda.

Judge Attitudes

If public standards of rationality are to be maintained at a tournament, the judges are going to have to enforce those standards in their decisions. However, some judges may profess themselves unwilling or unable to do so, and

David Buckley has documented the finding that the more idealistic goals of CEDA "are not uniformly reflected in the judging behavior of a large number of the judges who can influence the direction of CEDA."[8] The implementation of the audience model at CEDA or other tournaments depends upon a consensus among the judges that debating which conforms to that model will be reinforced in their critiques and ballots.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our forensic activity is indeed "committed to substance."[9] By taking substantive public debate for its model, CEDA can maintain high and consistent standards of rationality. It is not contended here that audience-oriented tournament debating is any more valuable than specialized or game-oriented approaches, but three implications of the public debate model have been elucidated.

(1) Judging criteria are available. Judges can hold the argumentation they hear in rounds to the same high standards of rationality to which other intelligent audiences would hold it. In fact, they can apply to it the same criteria they would insist upon themselves if they were to encounter it in any other form.

(2) A reality-check is available. Audience-oriented tournament debate can and should expose itself to the sunlight of public scrutiny and should adapt itself systematically to the response it receives. This genre of debate has the function of facilitating the development of informed and intelligent public opinion, and we have to find out from concerned people whether the debate we are fostering is fulfilling that purpose for them.

(3) Finally, a dialogue is available. A continuing discussion can be maintained among all those concerned with audience-oriented tournament debating, taking into consideration the hazards and pitfalls as well as the considerable advantage and promise of such a perspective.

NOTES

[1]Jack H. Howe, "CEDA's Objectives: Lest we Forget," in The Philosophy and Practice of CEDA, ed. by Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1981), p. 1.

[2]James E. Tomlinson, "A Rationale for Developing a CEDA Program," in The Philosophy and Practice of CEDA, ed. by Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1981), p. 5.

[3]Thomas A. Hollihan, Patricia Riley, and Curtis A. Austin, "A Content Analysis of Selected CEDA and NDT Judges' Ballots," in Argument in Transition: Proceedings of the Third Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. by David Zarefsky, Malcolm O. Sillars and Jack Rhodes (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Assn., 1983), p. 872.

[4]Jim Brooks, "Current Problems in College Debate," Debate Issues 18, (December, 1984), p. 15.

[5]Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 45 and passim.

[6]The judge as "opinion-leader" is another posture which, though theoretically limited to value debating, is introduced in the context of "a more audience-centered conception of debate." Michael D. Bartanen and David A. Frank, "Creating Procedural Distinctions Between Value and Policy Debate: The Issues-Agenda Model," The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, Series 69, No. 1 (Fall 1983).

[7]Steven R. Brydon, "Judging CEDA Debate: A Systems Perspective," in CEDA Yearbook 1984, ed. by Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), p. 86.

[8]David C. Buckley, "A Comparison of Judging Paradigms," in Argument in Transition: Proceedings of the Third Summer Conference on Argumentation, ed. by David Zarefsky, Malcolm O. Sillars and Jack Rhodes (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Assn., 1983), p. 868.

[9]The phrase, though little else in this essay, is taken from a lively commentary on related matters by James Sayer, "In Defense of Rational Decision-Making," Debate Issues 17 (March, 1984), p. 15.