

THE ROLE OF JUSTIFICATION IN TOPIC ANALYSIS

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Debaters' use of counterwarrants in policy debate during the past decade has uncovered an issue that remains unresolved even after numerous articles, arguments, and debate ballots rendered on the subject. This issue concerns the role of the resolution in a debate round. Many debaters have argued persuasively that the focus of the debate should be on the resolution, rather than on the particular affirmative case. The judge, according to this argument, is required to affirm or negate the resolution. The affirmative case is therefore only acceptable if it is topical, typical, and representative of the resolution as a whole.

The limited success achieved with the counterwarrant strategy in NDT indicates that policy judges continue to side with the view that affirmatives have the right to choose narrowly drawn cases within the broader scope of the topic, unlike CEDA in which the absence of a delineated policy requires the affirmative to make a more generic defense of the topic.

The issue of justification, however, has provided a way for the negative team to deal with a case that falls within the topic, but which careful examination shows, is not truly representative of resolutorial intent. The argument of justification is a pre-counterwarrant position, based on the principle that the judge affirms or negates the resolution at the conclusion of a debate round, rather than accepting or rejecting the affirmative case. The negative, therefore, may opt to argue the case itself and/or utilize the justification strategy by arguing that even if the case is accurate, it does not justify acceptance of

the resolution. Justification, as surmized by its continued prominence, has met considerably greater success in NDT than the counterwarrant strategy, and the same may be said about its potential for CEDA.

The Role of The Resolution

Brownlee (1981) begins this discussion of the role of the resolution when he claims that topicality "has a prominent role in the tradition of CEDA". Clearly, in CEDA and all non-policy argument, the debate is not whether a given narrow policy is, on balance, better than that of the status quo. The debate is limited to determining the truth of the resolution, whether it be one of value, fact, or pseudo-policy. Paulsen and Rhodes (1979) write that "(t)he focus of any academic debate, in traditional theory, is the resolution. Goodnight, Balthrop and Parson observe that a 'debate team is arguing for only one goal, ultimately, the adoption of the resolution" (p. 205). In CEDA and other non-policy debates where cases have no specific plans of action or do not call for such plans, it seems logical that determining if the resolution is justified is the ultimate purpose of the argument. Ulrich (1984) notes the prevailing philosophy in CEDA: "If anything, there is a dominant viewpoint that the entire resolution should be debated in CEDA, not just a part of the resolution" (p. 470). This, in addition to the absence of a plan to rigidly delineate a narrower point of convergence for the debate requires that the resolution be the prime focus for a judge's decision.

Therefore, the issue at hand in topicality in CEDA is not merely whether the case falls within resolitional bounds, but rather, the issue is whether the resolution is proven true by the case.

The Construct of Justification

Turner's (1975/1979) discussion of justification identifies two types of misjustification which frequently occur in intercollegiate and high school debate--under- and overjustification. First, underjustification occurs when the significance states in the affirmative case calls for a certain degree of action which is exceeded by the affirmative plan. In other words, the reasons given are not enough to justify the proposed solution. "Since drug tests don't work well and often give false results, their use is unwarranted," is a typical underjustification that would occur if the Spring 1987 CEDA topic were a proposition of policy. This need (bad tests) is not necessarily enough to justify the action or value change proposed (elimination of their use). Tolbert and Hunt (1985) recognize a similar problem when they claim, "Topical justification suggests that should an affirmative present and win an example of the resolution, it still might not prove the resolution true" (p. 477). Just because drug tests aren't perfect doesn't mean they and their accompanying invasions of privacy are unwarranted. Even if the affirmative case is true, it does not prove the resolution true. The view of underjustification as an unreasonable affirmative practice is particularly applicable to CEDA.

Affirmative teams are often guilty of not presenting their arguments defending the topic at a resolitional level. In so doing, debaters rely on hasty generali-

zations and atypical examples of the resolution to justify the affirmative. Under the Spring 1986 resolution, Resolved: That membership in the United Nations is no longer beneficial to the United States, one atypical case might argue that the U.N. General Assembly's rhetoric condemning Israel undermines a staunch American ally. Granted, in this case, the specific example falls within topical bounds by illustrating a singular detrimental effect of the United Nations, but it does not justify the broader scope of the resolution which appears to obligate the affirmative to prove that the whole of the U.N. is no longer advantageous to the United States. The affirmative would be "topical" but would not justify adoption of the resolution as a truth. Without adequate reasons to justify the whole resolution, the affirmative has failed the test of the debate, to prove the probable truth of the whole resolitional hypothesis.

In CEDA because there is no policy comparison, the resolution must be the focus of the debate; and thus the resolution can be substituted for the "plan" in Turner's analysis. In CEDA the resolution is the only "proposition" the affirmative presents for "adoption" by the judge, and when a small, possibly atypical example of the topic is used as the affirmative argument for adoption of the resolution, that case has underjustified and not established the truth of the resolution.

Turner discusses overjustification, the second type of misjustification which can occur in academic debate. To illustrate from the U. N. topic, a team might have argued that the world is doomed in one way or another (nuclear war, species extinction, pesticide poisoning, greenhouse effect, etc.) and since the U. N. can't stop these disasters, it must be a failure. If it can be proved

that the U. N. is a proximate cause of the catastrophe to come, then such an argument would be legitimate. But establishing an overwhelming non-causal significance in order to justify a less expansive resolution is to commit a fallacy of overjustification (Turner, 1975/1979).

Teams may also present broad, sweeping ideological truths and claim, of which the resolution may be only a fragment of the argument. Such a case could be discovered in an examination of the Spring 1987 topic, Resolved: that regulations in the United States requiring employees to be tested for controlled substances are an unwarranted invasion of privacy. An affirmative might argue that privacy is an absolute right and must always be affirmed. If such an argument is made without showing specifically why drug testing would fit within that overarching statement, the resolution would receive only peripheral examination.

The policy debater violates such a standard when a case says that millions die from heart disease each year and therefore a one week seminar on CPR will be taught in elementary schools. In this case, the solution advocated by the affirmative would be inconsequential alongside the enormity of the problem. Similarly, in CEDA, a team may cite truthfully the problem of U.S-Soviet relations as the source of difficulty in the U.N., but the argument introduces extraneous issues into the debate round: the focus of the debate shifts from whether the U.N. has benefit to whether or not "there's a bear in the woods." Specificity and analysis are lost in the search for this type of "original" case. When the resolution is overjustified, the debate becomes blurred on resolitional issues and comes to focus on issues of less significance to the topic.

There have been complaints about the nature of the justification argument. Sklansky (1979) has argued that overjustification in policy debate is merely "the threat of a counterplan" (p. 81), arguing that another, broader resolution is justified by the affirmative need, leaving little reason to debate the solution in a resolutionally limited scope. This does not apply in CEDA, for the resolution must be accepted universally, and not just in certain instances. It is the affirmative burden always to show that the specific case is representative of the resolution. As Rowland (1983) suggests, "in CEDA the entire proposition is debated. The CEDA topics have implied a broad set of policies all of which must be defended if the affirmative is to win" (p. 825). Conversely, the affirmative burden should also include responsibility to show that the resolution is typical of the even larger truth stated in the case. If a team overjustified, the problems cited would justify an entirely new, broader resolution and minimize the relevance of the debate to the stated topic. Even Sklansky accepts the idea that underjustification, which he prefers to call simply "justification" or "subtopicality", is valid; for the affirmative, in such a case, is not giving adequate reasons for the judge to affirm the resolution even if the case is true and inside the boundaries of the topic (p. 81).

This is not to say that the affirmative must defend the truth of the resolution in every case. That, of course, would be unreasonable, and probably impossible unless the resolution was something like "Resolved: That nuclear war is harmful to human health." Even so, some examples might be found where people would not be harmed. What the affirmative must prove is that beyond reasonable doubt, a

standard generally understood as necessary to overturn presumption in a courtroom or in debate (Thomas, 1987), the resolution is true in a majority of cases that might be considered. If this requirement cannot be satisfied, the affirmative must demonstrate that the truth of the proposition in one case is more significant, on balance, than its absence of truth in others. If the debaters can prove that one small but integral facet of the United Nations leads to the extinction of mankind, then this fact would probably outweigh the elimination of malaria by the World Health Organization. Nevertheless, the affirmative must prove that the case area is representative of the resolution or face negation of the proposition and its case.

Affirmative Recourse Against the Justification Argument

As argued by critics of the counterwarrant strategy (Keeshan & Ulrich, 1980; Herbeck & Katsulas, 1985), justification's resolutive focus makes the affirmative burden in the debate much broader and more difficult to uphold. In fact, like counterwarrants, the justification argument might abusively be run with great frequency against cases that are very representative of the resolution's meaning. Yet affirmatives can guard themselves well against such unjustified attacks.

First, criteria can be strategically utilized to demonstrate how representative affirmative values are of resolutive intent. Deliberate preemptions of atypicality or overjustification arguments can be created in discussing the necessity of the affirmative suggestions to the retention of important values outlined in the criteria. This certainly should make negative debaters think carefully before undeservingly asserting that the affirmative

fails to adequately justify the truth of the resolution as a whole.

Secondly, a strategy used with some success is to present the affirmative case as a combined generic and specific defense of the topic. After observations regarding criteria, definitions, and existing conditions in the status quo, a first contention can be argued as a generic defense of the resolution, arguing that on the whole the topic is probably true. A second contention can be argued thereafter, giving a narrower, more limited example of the resolution. As an example, one case run on the drug testing topic argued in the first contention that privacy rights exist and that existing requirements to test violate those rights. The second contention claimed that urine tests could determine pregnancy among female employees, producing gender discrimination in promotions and wages. The second contention alone could not in any way be argued as representative of resolutive intent, and could easily be labelled a "squirrel" case. Yet in combination with a generic defense of the topic, this case makes the justification argument illegitimate without destroying the affirmative ability to select a narrow focus for discussion. The justification argument is a powerful strategy for the negative, but affirmative conformity to clear representativeness can shield against unreasonable justification attacks.

Benefits of the Justification Argument

Potentially some critics, notably those opposing use of counterwarrants, might argue that the use of the justification argument in CEDA would harm the quality of debate. Justification as a voting issue would limit affirmative case choice and could legitimize the use of counterwar-

rants through its similar assumptions on the role of the resolution. And truthfully, the negative could abuse the strategy. Keeshan and Ulrich among others point out that the counterexamples asserted by the negative could be less representative of the resolution's intent than the indicted affirmative case, creating around in which there is little hope for realistic comparisons of the resolution's relative truth. Tolbert and Hunt provide a skillful defense of the counterwarrant strategy and claim, "Negatives should not be allowed to be equally as guilty as affirmatives and run atypical, insignificant, esoteric counter-warrants" (p. 481). There is little hope of preventing all such abuse. But the ultimate test of the argument remains with the judge, and it must be assumed that reason will prevail in the final assessment of the argument.

On the other hand, justification can also avoid counterwarrant abuse since there need be no real debate of counterwarrants, demonstrating examples counter to the resolution. The negative in this strategy presents the argument that the resolution is the focus of the debate and then gives alternative examples, neglected by the affirmative, that are more typical and representative than the case presented. The negative does not proceed to the ultimate step of counterwarrants by arguing that those representative areas deny the resolution's validity. Rather than actually indicting the truth of the resolution, with the justification argument, the negative demonstrates the affirmative case's own failure to adequately represent the topic. This interpretation of Turner's conception of underjustification is similar to the hasty generalization argument outlined by Berube (1987), but the overjustification position exhibiting the fallacy of division has no parallel in other analyses.

The justification argument provides a broader theoretical insight on assertions of hasty generalization and adds the important new element of overjustification.

The benefits of adopting justification as a voting issue are numerous. As explained earlier, it would help eliminate incomplete presentation of the topic by underjustifiers, as well as exclude less important, extraneous arguments by debaters who overjustify. The issues of underjustification and overjustification in debate are analogous to the fallacy of hasty generalization and the fallacy of division. By delegitimizing the strategic soundness of these flawed lines of analysis, justification as a voting issue in CEDA would promote logical arguments and decisions. Adopting justification as such an issue would solidify the role of criteria in the debate round as a guide emphasizing issues, rather than promoting hasty generalizations. Quite simply, the issue of justification suggests that the affirmative case is less appropriate to the resolution than it is to a proposal of either far greater or far smaller scope. Whether or not the case falls within the topic, justification is a legitimate argument and is a useful tool for responding to cases that attempt to profit through obscurity.

Conclusion

With the issue of justification there is a clear parallel between policy and non-policy forms of debate. Underjustification as an argument can lend support to the hasty generalization argument. Overjustification presents a new issue which has been neglected, despite the use by affirmatives of overbroad cases. But most importantly, justification might provide a more acceptable method by which negatives can analyze the typical-

ty and representativeness of the affirmative case than the controversial and potentially abusive counterwarrants approach. Justification clarifies the role of the resolution in CEDA and provides a sound analytical approach upon which logical argument and decision in CEDA can be grounded.

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