TURNAROUNDS ARE FAIR PLAY: AN EXAMINATION OF TURNAROUNDS IN COMPETITIVE DEBATE

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The changes witnessed by participants in intercollegiate debate over the past decade are remarkable. One need only watch the elimination rounds at a recent major tournament to realize that debaters spend a significant amount of time debating the theoretical implications of their argumentation strategies. This increasing sophistication is a testament to creative coaching, critical thinking by debaters, an increasing level of competition and perhaps some degree of gamesmanship. Together these forces are producing a superior quality of argumentation, both in terms of breadth of coverage and depth of analysis.

As Hollihan (1983) noted, the innovative comments of debate theorists are indicative of the evolving practices of debaters, either by blazing new strategic territory or by closely following emerging tactics. Debate audiences commonly hear discussions of topicality, counter-warrants, add-ons, hypothesis-testing and conditional arguments. Yet, despite the progress that has been made in theoretical argumentation, one technique has received almost no sigificant scholarly analysis. Although experienced debaters toss the term around frequently, and the concept's use (and often misuse) is gaining popularity among novices, theorists have lagged behind their students in examining the uses and implications of turnarounds in competitive debate.

Sometimes referred to as "turning the tables," (Baird, 1978; Ehninger & Brockreide, 1978) turnarounds are a classic form of argumentation which traces its origin back to ancient Greece. Aristotle pondered the strategy of "using the utterances made by your opponent against you and turn[ing them] against him" (Cooper, 1960, p. 162). He called the device "singularly effective" because it not only destroyed the substance of the opponent's accusations while strengthening one's own position, but it also discredited the adversary and enhanced the speaker's ethos (Cooper, 1960).

This article will undertake a descriptive examination of turnarounds, followed by a discussion of their practical legitimate uses and theoretical implications. Finally we will suggest appropriate standards for evaluating turnarounds in the competitive debate setting. For explanation and clarification of our analysis, we will use the spring 1985 CEDA debate topic: Resolved, that the United States is justified in providing military support to nondemocratic governments.

Descriptive Examination of Turnarounds

A turnaround has been defined as interpreting the arguments or evidence offered by the other side in such a way as to prove one's own case (Baird, 1978). Although this definition seems self-explanatory, three necessary elements should be identified. First, a turnaround must make use of the analysis or evidence of the opposition. Merely clashing with the thesis of an argument or directly refuting the argument should not be confused with a turnaround. Likewise, a disadvantage or value objection that

offers a new evaluation of an advocate's position is distinct from a turnaround.

Second, a turnaround must reinterpret the analysis or evidence. Every substantial argument in a debate should consist of two components: A link to the issue at hand and an impact to the consequences of the claim. Therefore, turnarounds may be constructed either by reversing the link or by flipping the value of the resulting impact.

Third, the reversal must add support to one's own position. "A successful turnaround means that the negative not only loses the disadvantage but that the affirmative gains an advantage [or vice versa]" (Freeley, 1986, p. 204).

Turnarounds can be used by either team in the debate. Although most commonly used by the first affirmative rebuttalist to turn disadvantages or value objections, it is not unusual to hear turnarounds argued by the 1NC or in the 2NR responses to 1AR refutation or even in the 2AC. Unlike topicality, turnarounds are an equally useful strategic tool for affirmative and negative teams alike.

The Spring 1985 CEDA topic provides clear examples. (These arguments are used for illustrative value only. The authors do not express any position on the validity of the claims but rather use them to demonstrate a concept.) A popular approach to the military support resolution found affirmative teams justifying arms sales to nondemocratic governments because they would decrease the risk of nuclear proliferation in those countries (the link), and reducing that risk was desirable because third world proliferation could lead to a catastrophic nuclear explosion from an accidental launch, an attempted coup or a faulty design (the impact). Turnarounds provide two alternatives for the negative. An advocate could turn her opponent's link by arguing that arms sales actually cause nuclear proliferation by whetting a country's appetite for more advanced weapons. Or the debater could turn the affirmative's impact by claiming that proliferation is beneficial precisely because it would result in the detonation of a nuclear device which would initiate worldwide disarmament.

However, debaters may not legitimately argue both a turnaround to the link and a turnaround to the impact of the same argument. When taken together, the two turnarounds support the opposing viewpoint. To illustrate this point, let us continue with the military support example. In the event a negative team advances claims that arms sales do cause nuclear proliferation and that proliferation is advantageous for disarmament, the affirmative should indicate that their opponents are correct: arms sales lead to proliferation which results in a desirable outcome. The negative has provided an independent warrant for the resolution and is caught in a "double-turn."

As in this case, double-turns leave the affirmative advancing legitimate but necessarily inconsistent warrants for the resolution: their original case and the double turn (see appendix). Theoretical concerns about conditional claims as a possible escape from double-turns will be discussed later--for now it suffices to recognize that the trap exists.

Now suppose that the negative argued only a turnaround to the impact. When faced with the argument that proliferation is desirable because it leads to disarmament, the responding advocate may choose to answer the turnaround "straight up" (i.e., directly refuting the incentive for disarmament, arguing the repugnance of even a single explosion, indicating the source, etc.). Or she could turn the negative's turnarounds by

arguing that complete disarmament is bad because it lowers the threshold for conventional wars which are more devastating to human life than the mere threat of nuclear war. In the latter case, the debater has "turned the turnaround." Notice that unlike double-turns, a turnaround of an impact built upon another turnaround of an impact is necessarily consistent (see appendix). Whether a team is relieved of its prima facie burdens by winning this new independent justification is examined later.

With all these dangers of double-turns, turns on turns and concerns for turns, student advocates may wonder if it's worth the trouble (not to mention being a little dizzy). Used strategically, a turnaround is as "singularly effective" today as it was in Aristotle's day. First, it eliminates the potential damage of the opponent's claim. At the same time, a turnaround provides support for the advocate's position where direct refutation only neutralizes the opponent's argument.

Second, turnarounds enhance the speaker's credibility by displaying to her own advantage. At the same time, they discredit the opposition and strike a psychological blow by catching the competition unprepared to defend fully its own claims.

A third advantage is that turnarounds make efficient use of precious time in rebuttals because constructing a turn to either links or impacts relieves the speaker of an obligation to answer both. When appropriate, advocates will also find it quicker to accept multiple lines of analysis and turn them in a single stroke than to refute each one.

Having established an introductory framework for analysis, we now "turn" to address some theoretical concerns for competitive debate.

Theoretical Implications

The potential theoretical problems created by the use of turnarounds in debate are numerous. We will address what we perceive as three of the more significant areas: assigning weight to turnarounds, offering turnarounds as independent justifications and advancing conditional or inconsistent turnarounds.

The first problem area is whether a single turnaround, if won, ought to be outcome determinative. The contemporary practice among debaters is to label turnarounds "absolute voting issues" and insist that a turn to a single value objection is dispositive of the round. Although reasonable arguments have been advanced for single issue voting in the case of topicality (Vasilius, 1980), application of this criterion to turnarounds is misplaced. The mere ability to turn an opponent's argument does not guarantee a "winner-take-all" result. A critic in a round involving turnarounds must consider the entire scope of the debate and balance the competing arguments.

For example, suppose a negative team has argued two independent value objections against the affirmative case and the affirmative rebuttalist wins a turnaround against one value objection but has no answer to the other one or loses it in the course of the debate. This situation creates independent reasons for and against the resolution whose ramifications should be balanced by the teams with respect to the decision rules for the round. If the impact of the unanswered value objection is greater than the impact of the turnaround, then other things being equal, the negative team should still win the debate (Patterson & Zarefsky, 1983). Even in cases of a double-turn, the affirmative's new-found advantage should be weighed against the remainder of the negative arguments. Thus, the label "absolute voting issue" is misleading.

A more appropriate parallel is with the add-on advantage (Patterson & Zaresfsky, 1983). The affirmative would argue that the remaining impact of its case (after consideration of negative attacks on significance, causality, etc.) plus the turnaround outweighs the arguments the negative wins. This approach requires a comparison of the relative impacts of the two sides.

A related problem arises in a debate involving counter-warrants (Tolbert & Hunt, 1985; Paulsen & Rhodes, 1979; Rowland, 1983). A counter-warrant by its very nature ought to be a significant, topical and representative example of the resolution (Tolbert & Hunt, 1985). Therefore, when an affirmative team wins a turnaround on a counter-warrant, it creates a warrant for the resolution as a whole. Independent of the scope of its case, the affirmative team now possesses (with the negative's approval) a significant, topical and representative justification for the resolution that should be balanced against any other counter-warrants. Even if the affirmative loses its case arguments, the turned counter-warrant may outweigh the negative's caseside victory.

The resulting danger that a team may drop its case and argue only the turnaround brings us to a second theoretical issue: whether a turnaround may operate as an independent justification which relieves the affirmative of its duty to win its case. In other words, may an affirmative that wins a turnaround to a value objection or a counter-warrant jettison case and argue that the turnaround alone is sufficient to justify an affirmative ballot?

Burdens of a prima faciality might at first suggest an affirmative team is bound to defend the same reasonably compelling position throughout the round that it supports in 1AC (Keefe, Harte, & Norton, 1982). But prima faciality does not require a team to continue that position should it discover a stronger one, as long as the new position is still topical. Moreover, there is no requirement that the affirmative defend the best warrant for the resolution, only a reasonable warrant for the resolution. (Otherwise, all cases would be identical.) Whether an affirmative team should be allowed to defend a different approach than that argued in 1AC should be the focus of another article. Although we have reservations about the competitiveness of such a practice, we recognize that credible arguments can be made for both sides of this dispute.

However, if an affirmative does elect to jettison case and argue only the turnaround, several requirements should be satisfied:

1. The turnaround must be topical. If one accepts the premise that a judge can vote only for a topical affirmative warrant (Bartanen, 1983; Brownlee, 1981), then only topical turnarounds may justify an affirmative ballot in the absence of the original case.

2. The decision by the affirmative to drop its case and attempt to win the round on a turnaround must be announced no later than 1AR. To require any less would allow "inventive" 2ARs to take advantage of their final speaking position. Negative teams ought to have an opportunity to defeat the turn or to refute the validity of dropping the affirmative case.

To those who believe that allowing the 1AR to drop the case effectively renders the 1NC and 1NR meaningless, we would suggest that the first negative speaker is not required to present only traditional case arguments. The 1NC has the option to offer value objections or counter-warrants (Gotcher & Biggers, 1984). In fact, this tactic is particularly useful because it gives the negative team more speaking time to answer the turns.

Alternatively, the negative should anticipate turnarounds and run only those arguments least susceptible to them. Freeley has advised that "[i]f the negative advocates find that the disadvantage could be turned around against them, they should not use it." (1986, p. 204) (emphasis in original text). Finally, the 1NC could argue against the legitimacy of allowing an affirmative team to drop its case.

3. When a turnaround operates as an independent justification, its impact must outweigh the impact(s) of all the opponent's remaining arguments. Negative refutation that is specific to the case becomes inconsequential, but any argumentation against the resolution must be balanced against the single affirmative warrant.

The third theoretical concern is the use of conditional and inconsistent turnarounds. As outlined above, turnarounds, double-turns and "turns on turns" present potentially inconsistent positions when the contents of the claim are viewed collectively (see appendix).

One possible escape route is to argue the turnarounds conditionally. Valid arguments have been articulated both for and against permitting conditional positions in competitive debate (Boaz, 1980). We share Hollihan's (1983) concerns that conditional positions permit argument without risk, encourage shallow analysis and lessen the incentive for teams to plan a unified philosophy, but we recognize the merits of conditionality that a hypothesis-testing paradigm provides (Zarefsky & Henderson, 1983). Although the debaters themselves should debate the relative virtues of conditional arguments, we propose that when teams do adopt this approach, two requirements should be met:

1. The debaters should acknowledge the conditional nature in advance of presenting the turnarounds. They should not be permitted to respond after the fact. This standard prevents "inventive" final speakers and encourages advocates of both teams to use turnarounds with forethought.

2. Debaters should be required to choose between the conditional claims they propose prior to their opponent's last rebuttal. Demanding that teams eliminate contradictory claims while the opposition can still respond avoids the unfair advantage of speaking last. Nor will the debate be permitted to terminate with a team upholding conditional claims. Otherwise, critics' decisions would be considerably more difficult and arbitrary if they were to choose for the debaters which interpretation is correct. Such judicial intervention would be counterproductive to the goal of having students evaluate their own arguments and select from among the available means of persuasion those that are most effective.

Debaters and critics of argument should not mistake these requirements for conditional turns as a license to defend inconsistent positions. The key distinguishing element between the two is that in a conditional argument, a debater is arguing that a problem does not exist, but if it does, the affirmative is not the proper approach. However, an inconsistent argument arises when a debater or team finds itself presenting two contradictory positions (i.e., 1NC argues that nuclear proliferation is good and 2NC argues that nuclear proliferation is bad). Defending inconsistent positions is intellectually dishonest, intuitively illogical, and argumentatively fallacious. Advancing inconsistent positions represents a classical breakdown in argumentation, and when discovered and pointed out by the other team, should result in a victory for them on that issue.

So far, we have examined the functions of turnarounds, discussed their uses and limitations and suggested requirements to temper the potential theoretical problems they present. Now we will present two general guidelines for evaluating turnarounds as they apply to intercollegiate debate.

Guidlines for Judging Turnarounds

As eluded to earlier, "turnaround" is becoming a popular buzzword among college debaters. The attitude, "when in doubt, label it a turnaround," is unfortunate because misnomers contribute to the confusion and undue criticism of legitimate turns. To clear this fog, we encourage debaters to adopt the following practices and urge critics to enforce these standards and to indicate their expectations before the round.

One unfortunate practice is to proclaim an argument a "turnaround" without explaining the thesis of the turn and how it rebuts the previous argument. Because of the importance of turnarounds (both as a strategic device and as an educational tool), there is a duty upon advocates to elaborate on their responses. Debaters should state when a turnaround exists, whether it is a turn on the link or the impact and how it operates in the context of the round. These are not oppressive burdens, especially given the time-saving benefits of turnarounds discussed earlier. Furthermore, any imposition will be far outweighed by the improved quality and clarity of argumentation that is likely to result.

Our final recommendation relates to affirmatives that wait until 2AR to unveil a turnaround. Like conditional claims and independent justifications, new turns in 2AR denies the speaker of legitimate responses. We propose that critics adopt a strong, but rebuttable presumption against 2AR turns, allowing only those turns that answer 2NR responses and could not be presented prior to 2AR.

Conclusion

Properly used, turnarounds can add a new dimension of depth to debate and force student advocates to scrutinize more critically their opponents' and their own claims. Although we have examined the intricacies of turnarounds and suggested standards for their use, we certainly do not intend to discourage their popularity. Nor do we intend this discussion to be exhaustive. Additional analysis of turnarounds as pedagogical and strategic devices is needed to keep up with the evolving techniques of debaters. We hope our examination is a "turning point" toward developing a clearer understanding of turnarounds and their persuasive potential.

Appendix

Double-turns

Side 1: A leads to B; B is bad; therefore A is bad.
Side 2: A prevents B (turn to the link)
B is good (turn of the impact)
Side 1: A prevents B; B is good; therefore A is bad.

Result: Though the conclusions are the same Side 1's claims are necessarily inconsistent.

Turn of an Impact on a Turn of an Impact

Side 1: A leads to B; B is bad, therefore A is bad.
Side 2: B leads to C which is good; therefore B (and consequently) A is good
Side 1: C is bad; therefore A which leads to B which leads to C is bad.

Result: Side 1's claims are consistent.

Turn to a Link on a Turn to a Link

Side 1: A leads to B; B is bad, therefore A is bad.
Side 2: A prevents B.
Side 1: A leads to B.

Result: The arguments functions as direct refutation and only rebuilds the original claim.

Turn of an Impact on a Turn to a Link

Side 1: A leads to B; B is bad; therefore A is bad.
Side 2: A prevents B; B is bad, therefore A is good.
Side 1: A prevents B; but now B is good; therefore A is good.

Result: Side 1's claims are necessarily inconsistent.

Turn to a Link on a Turn of an Impact

Side 1: A leads to B; B is bad; therefore A is bad.
Side 2: A leads to B but B is good; therefore A is good.
Side 1: B is good but A prevents B; therefore A is bad.

Result: Side 1's claims are necessary inconsistent.

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