WHEN THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF THE PARTS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF HOLISTIC RESOLUTIONAL FOCUS

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Arguments based on an assumption of holistic resolutional focus are very much a part of contemporary academic debate. In a hypothetical debate on the topic "Resolved: That increased military preparedness is important," a negative utilizing a "whole resolution" viewpoint and debating against an affirmative case that advocated a "one-percent increase in the number of M-16 rifles stockpiled" might argue something like this:

> The WHOLE RESOLUTION should be the argumentative focus for this debate. There is a MISSING MODIFIER in the topic which would quantify the amount of "increase" we should discuss. In absence of such a modifier we should presume a qualifier of "generally" as opposed to "in certain specific cases" which has been implicitly inserted by the affirmative. While the affirmative might prove the need for a specific increase in M-16's, they do not prove the importance ON-BALANCE for generally "increased military preparedness." The affirmative does not meet its BURDEN OF PROOF. Attempts to use the affirmative case as an inductive proof for the resolution are flawed given the general problems with INDUCTION and given that in this specific case such an inference would be invalid because of the logical problems with FALLACY OF COMPOSITION and HASTY GENERALIZATION. Further, affirmative induction attempts would legitimize the same approach by the negative and we could run COUNTERWARRANTS. In conclusion, since the affirmative case is not TYPICAL, it is SUB-TOPICAL and should be rejected.

This hypothetical is a hybrid of a number of arguments currently in use that are consonant with a "holistic" view of resolutional focus. The unstated premise in all these arguments--the linchpin upon which the rest of the argument depends--is the advocacy of "whole resolution focus." Failure to make explicit the argument for holism however, is often problematic since there is "no agreement" on whether or not debaters must argue the whole resolution (Herbeck & Wong, 1986). The "holistic" view is one of two which currently dominate considerations regarding argumentative perspective in academic debate. The other approach, which I will refer to as the "parametric" approach, suggests that the resolution exists to place an outward boundary (or parameter) on advocacy and that as long as arguments selected fall within this jurisdiction, they are legitimate.

Traditionally, academic debaters argued the "totality of the resolution" (Kovalcheck, 1979, p. 31), and judges decided not on specifics but "on the general resolution" (Paulsen and Rhodes, 1979, p. 205). In fact, from "the beginning of the national resolution until about 1973-74 the entire resolution was normally thought to be debated . . . The 'demarcation line' approach is comparatively recent and seems to have no real theoretical underpinning other than current practice" (Rhodes, 1981, p. 493). The advent of the parametric view is then a relatively recent phenomenon which gained acceptance with the changing nature of topics (Kovalcheck, 1979; Pfau, 1979).

The shift toward the parametric approach has had significant effects on the debating process. An affirmative debating the "increased military" topic and utilizing parametric resolutional focus could, for example, legitimately advance a case discussing M-16's, the inadequacies of the Marine Corps Band, or the need for army boots. While these examples are obviously extreme, the reader should not miss the point that parametric focus makes these approaches theoretically (if not rhetorically) sound. The situation becomes far more problematic when the debater combines parametric focus with a more persuasive example. Given the thousands of possible interpretations of most topics,

it is not unlikely that hundreds would seem "significant" in a persuasive sense. The result is a significant increase in affirmative case possibilities. When parlayed with "the affirmative right to define," the parametric approach usually means that the affirmative may select a case anywhere within the resolutional boundary and that the negative must debate only this case. The result for the negative is almost certainly a slow and painful death. The forensic community has had two main responses to this problem: the invention of "counterwarrants" (Paulsen & Rhodes, 1979) and a shift from NDT to CEDA, where holistic focus would presumedly prevail (Rowland, 1983; Tolbert & Hunt, 1985; Tomlinson, 1981; Ulrich, 1984).

The Merits of Holistic Interpretation

Despite the wide appeal of whole-resolution focus within the CEDA community (Ulrich, 1984) and the exigency created by the drift of students away from it (Tolbert & Hunt, 1985), the rationales for holism are nevertheless poorly articulated in the literature. A number of authors, for example, discuss standards for induction or the legitimacy of counterwarrants (Berube, 1984; Biggers, 1985; Ganer, 1981; Rhodes, 1981; Simon, 1984; Tolbert & Hunt, 1985) but do so from a perspective which presupposes either the parametric or the holistic approach without critically defending that focus. The lack of agreement and the paucity of justificatory literature create a need for whole resolution advocacy. This author will offer two justifications for holistic focus. The first is that the more generic arguments are, the greater their educational utility. The second is that particularized interpretation legitimized by the "parametric" approach is inconsistent with "rules" for language interpretation developed in semantics and logic.

Educational Justification

Holistic resolutional focus is pedagogically preferable to the parametric approach. Academic debate is a powerful educational tool. In addition to the plethora of other process-based advantages, debaters are forced to learn a great deal substantively about significant contemporary topics in their world (Freeley, 1986). Once we accept that debaters will learn about the topics they debate, we must confront the question "What is it that we want them to learn?" Holistic topic focus promotes a more general education than relatively narrow parametric sub-topics. This stands to reason since the research, preparation presentation, and analysis of more general arguments is encouraged by a more general focus. The pedagogical question becomes: "Is a general or a specific educational focus pedagogically superior?" Murty (1963) argues that "unless a man is capable of thinking and planning for himself, and unless he is able to rise above the parochialism of his own time, race and society . . . he cannot lead a full and integrated life. General education alone can enable everyone to do this" (p. 44). Murty lists holistic and synthetic thinking as well as recognition of pattern and perspective among the fruits of a general education. This author favors general education for a number of reasons.

Initially, general education enhances content relevance. Ulrich (1985) suggests that arguing generics can force the debater to understand issues common to a wide range of affairs. Sawhill (1970) concludes that general education has importance far beyond its immediate concern. This is intuitive. It is very unlikely that our students will ever be asked to

decide the fate of a proposal for a one percent increase in M-16's; it is far more likely however that they will be asked to make decisions regarding the appropriate level of general military preparedness our nation should pursue.

Additionally, general education tends to have greater longevity (Goodlad, 1976) since "theories" tend to have more staying-power than "facts." Educators argue for example that "liberal education provides a general background which makes reorientation easier. By stressing the theory of a subject matter, it avoids imprisonment in the narrow applications which may soon be obsolete" (Eastman, 1981, p. 30). The general intellectual skills associated with a broad based education are quite valuable. Biscounti's research (1976) found that only 8% of graduates listed specific knowledge as the most important aspect of their education and that the number decreased as their careers progressed. "Instead they reported that general concepts of their majors, general learning in college, and the study experience itself were more valuable. These results suggest that, over time, the value of specific knowledge declines while the importance of general intellectual skills associated with liberal education grows." For example understanding the specifics of Reagan's military policies will have less relevance after 1989, understanding the merits of military preparedness however, will have utility for as long as there are militaries. General education is preferable therefore since it enhances the relevance and longevity of learning.

It is significant that both Eastman and Biscounti equate general education with "liberal education." This should not be surprising. While the term has been used in a number of different senses, "in contemporary nonphilosophic usage, any education accepted as relatively broad and general rather than narrow and specialized" is termed liberal education (Good, 1959, p. 318). Ever since Dewey (1925) argued that what made an education liberal was its breadth or generality, liberal education "can best be expressed as that of an education directed toward developing not specific skills and abilities but the general capacities" (Hirst, 1971). Dejnozka & Kapel (1982) agree that liberal education is "currently defined as a form of education that is broad and general as opposed to being specialized" (p. 301). Page & Thomas (1977) define the liberal arts as those academic disciplines "that are broader in their range and scope . . . they are presumed to develop general intellectual ability and a wide cultural background of knowledge." Liberal education has consistently been equated with broad and general education and contrasted with narrow or specialized education (Blishen, 1969; Carpenter, 1960; Dejnozka & Kapel, 1982; Dressel, Mayhew & McGrath, 1959; Greene, 1953; Gordon, 1963; Hirst, 1971; Mayhew, 1960; Menon, 1963; Murty, 1963; Page & Thomas, 1977; Simons, 1963; Venkataraman, 1963; Wenger, 1978). Little wonder that Averill (1983) argues that "Holism" is a term "which distinguishes the consensus about liberal learning, and it points to the range of competencies students must be assisted to achieve. By holism I understand, for one thing a rejection of unidimensional preoccupations . . ." (p. 10). He concludes by noting that "liberal education is, by its very nature, pervasive and holistic" (p. 74).

This author would suggest therefore, that to the extent that holistic resolutional focus promotes holistic education, it is in line with the best of the liberal arts tradition. But is a liberal education valuable? Fortunately,

this question has already been investigated by educational philosophers and researchers. Their conclusion? General, holistic, broad-based, and theoretical "liberal education" is preferable to specific, fragmented, narrowly focused, and factual "specialized education." Research suggests that that the more "liberal" education is, the more students achieve. Reporting the results of their research, Winter and colleagues (1978) note that:

> For more than 2,000 years a liberal education has been the ideal of the West . . . . The tradition goes back to Plato . . . . Our findings suggest that liberal education does in fact change students more or less as Plato envisioned . . . . [It] appears to promote increases in conceptual and socio-emotional sophistication . . . . students trained in the liberal arts are better able to form valid concepts, analyze arguments, define themselves, and orient themselves maturely to their world. (p. 69)

It is not this writer's intention to imply that the parametrical approach has no educational value. Debating specifics does not make it impossible to form valid concepts, analyze arguments, or to orient oneself to the world. Everything else being equal, however, the more general education is, the more one can expect such sophistications. Since a holistic topic focus produces relatively more generic learning than a relatively specific sub-topic, it should be viewed as pedagogically desirable.

Some have suggested that debating a number of specifics will "add up to" the same education as debating generics. It is this author's contention that debating a large number of sub-topics only adds up to the sum of **some** of the parts, nothing greater than the sum of the parts, and certainly not the whole. There were literally thousand of possible sub-topics on the "military preparedness" topic for example, but no debater was involved in more than 200 debates on this topic. Debating 200 different sub-topics provides a fraction of the depth of debating a single generic topic 200 times. In addition, debating 200 different sub-topics is not truly broad but rather repetitively narrow, in that some sub-topics are never examined and some boundaries are never explored. By encouraging the development of generic, holistic, integrative frameworks, the whole always exceeds the sum of the parts. The only way to encourage real breadth and depth--a true general education--is by focusing on the relatively generic topic rather than more specific sub-topics.

Language Justification

The second rationale for holistic focus is that generic interpretation is most compatible with "rules" of interpretation in light of a "missing modifier." Most of us would consider the proposition "birds can fly" as true even though we are aware of some that can't, because we intuitively insert the generic modifier "most" in front of "birds" or "typically/ generally" in front of "fly." This intuition is semantically "correct." Linguist John Lyons (1981) argues:

> What is meant by 'generic' may be seen by considering such sets of sentences as the following: 1) The lion is a friendly beast. 2) A lion is a friendly beast. 3) Lions are friendly beasts. Each of these sentences may be used to assert a generic proposition: i.e., a proposition which says something, not about this or that group of lions or about any particular individual lion, but about the class of lions as such . . ." (p. 193).

Lyons continues by indicating that the "kind of adverbal modifier that suggests itself for insertion" is one "that approximates in meaning to 'generally,' 'typically,' 'characteristically,' or 'normally'" (p. 195). While semantic rules support generic interpretation, the field of logic provides additional supportive "rules." Logicians tend to interpret "indesignate form" propositions with missing quantification modifiers as universal or as expressing "group tendency" (Barnstable, 1975). Van Der Auwera

(1985, p. 188) argues that when choosing "between the generic or the non-generic or particular" reading of the statement "A whale lives in the sea," that in "most contexts," the "preferred interpretation" is generic. He further argues that while interpretation should be guided by context that there "are some cases, however, where the choice is independent of context." He gives the statement "Kangaroos have no tails" as a statement which "is always generic." Logical conventions would certainly reject a particularized topic rendering.

Clearly, linguistic and logical conventions support generic interpretation. It is not this author's intent to imply that that academic debate must be bound by the conventions of ordinary language, but rather to suggest that an interpretation which is intuitively, semantically, and logically correct should have some presumption until arguments are established which reject generic interpretation.

Argumentative Implications of Holistic Focus

Despite the rationales for generic interpretation, some have objected to the whole resolution perspective. These objections are most frequently based on a misunderstanding of the implications of resolutional focus. Holistic focus DOES NOT: (a) eliminate all discussion of specific examples, (b) eliminate the affirmative "right to define," (c) require the affirmative to prove each and every example true, (d) justify counterwarrants, (e) unduly encourage "example stacking," or (f) favor the negative. Biggers (1985) states this author's position when he argues that most objections to holistic focus "are logically unsupportable" (p. 32).

Accepting a "whole resolution focus" does, however, have several implications for the evaluation of the probative force of arguments. The first implication is that generic arguments should take precedence. If the purpose of debate is to establish the probable truth of the whole resolution, then arguments which are more generic to the resolution should have greater weight than those less generic. If, for example, the negative wins objections to the resolution more generic than the affirmative case, then it should win the debate even if the affirmative wins its case, as the negative arguments would offer a more valid generalization about the truth of the resolution.

The second implication is that arguments from subset are not prima facie. By this I mean that a part is not on its face logically self-sufficient to prove the whole. Subsets do not necessarily support the larger claim. Tolbert and Hunt (1985) argue that:

> An area of argumentation related to hasty generalization is "topical justification." Topical justification suggests that should an affirmative present and win an example of the resolution, it still might not prove the resolution true. Rather, the affirmative example only would have been proven to be true and some subcategory of the resolution only might be true. In other words, the case could well be sub-topical (p. 23).

This does not mean that examples cannot be used. What it does mean is that "he who asserts" that one can infer the general from a specific example, should be required to prove the reasonability of that inference. Until and unless such proof is offered, a subset should be presumed to be nothing more. How might an advocate establish the reasonability of his/her inference? Biggers (1985) suggested several requirements for advancing a valid inductive argument:

> The argument consists of evidence (examples from a particular class about which a particular conclusion can be made), a warrant (a statement to the effect that what is true of a sample from the class is also true of the class as a whole), support for the warrant (a belief that the examples in the evidence are germane to the claim, adequate in number and fairly selected), reservations (any instances that reduce our faith in the probability of the con-

clusion) and a conclusion (the idea that what is true of the examples is also true of the class as a whole) (Toulmin, 1958). Each element in this chain of reasoning is critical and must be supported if the argument as a whole is to be accepted (p. 33).

Biggers continued by noting that "even if the warrant can be supported" in this way that the argument should be defeated if the opposition "offers examples that better meet the criteria outlined above and that support the counter-generalization" (p. 36). That is, once the debater attempts to prove an argument from example, she/he opens the door to the opponent using the same inductive approach to disprove the argument. Hence, if one side utilizes "example analysis," they legitimize the other side's use of the "counterwarrant."

A third potential implication of resolutional focus is for what has been called the "intrinsicness" argument (Bryant, 1982). This argument suggests that an opponent's claim does not justify the affirmation/negation of the resolution unless the claim is unique to that side of the resolution (or its absence intrinsic to the other). In policy debate, counterplans are a pragmatic implication of this theoretical standard. CEDA debaters have suggested that the same theoretical basis justifies "intrinsicness" arguments in non-policy debate. It is further argued that to disallow intrinsicness arguments shifts the focus of non-policy debates from inherent worth of values to the coincidence of current policies. On the fall 1986, topic for example, some debaters argued that the disadvantages of underground nuclear testing did not disprove the value of military preparedness, since these disadvantages were not "intrinsic" to military preparedness. Military preparedness could, after all, be increased without increasing underground testing. Holistic-resolution focus buttresses this intrinsicness argument in cases where an advocate utilizes a relatively narrow temporal, spatial, or political context when the resolution makes no such limitation. The "Republican Senate" argument, for example, held that military preparedness was uniquely valuable in the weeks preceding the 1986 elections but, as no such temporal limitation was mentioned in the topic, this argument may well have been a hasty generalization.

Conclusion

Academic debates traditionally utilized the "whole resolution" as their point of departure. While "holistic" focus is still explicitly espoused and implicitly embraced in many arguments, it has recently been challenged by a "parametric" view of topic interpretation. This trend has resulted in a relative shift from generic argumentation to more narrow intellectual pursuits. This development is unfortunate for at least two reasons. The first is that the more generic arguments are, the greater their educational utility. The second is that particularized interpretation legitimized by the "parametric" approach is inconsistent with "rules" for language interpretation developed in semantics and logic. While some have objected to resolutional holism, the complaints are most often based on misunderstanding of its implications. The adoption of the holistic perspective does have three implications for the probative force of an argument. First, the more generic an argument is to the resolution the greater its value. Second, arguments from subset example do not have self-evident strength. Finally, arguments which are not intrinsic to resolutional conditions should be seen as inductively weak.

The rationales for resolutional focus have received insufficient attention. This author has suggested that knowing the rules is more useful than knowing an exception to them. It is hoped that this effort can serve as a springboard for further discussions in debate rounds, in the literature, and within the topic selection process regarding the the appropriate

role of the resolution in academic debate.

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