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Pre-Fiat vs. Post Fiat Kritik Implications Debate, Cost Benefit Analysis Criterion, or Just Water the House Plant?: National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence Judging Paradigms

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes judging paradigms submitted for the National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence (NPTE). The method for analysis is a simple coding strategy. Common themes are described and criticized. A sketch of the 2005 NPTE judges is illustrated. Categories include: the tabula rasa judge, the kritikal judge, the ultra-liberal judge, the stock-issue judge, the communication-centered judge, and the interventionalist. The frequencies of judging style as well as the implications of the way judges claim to view debate are offered. Finally, implications of these different styles on debaters are proposed and recommendations are made for NPTE debaters.*

Introduction (Status Quo)

As a speech instructor, one of the first things I stress to my classes is the importance of audience analysis. The importance of this concept was demonstrated to me time and time again in my competitive forensics career. It took very little time for me to discover on my own that a successful argument in a parli round in front of a former champion CEDA debater and successful parli coach was not the same as a successful argument in a parli round in front of a former champion oral interper and successful IE coach. It also took little time for me to come to the conclusion that, in the real world, the ability to adapt to either extreme would be a useful skill. From conversations with coaches and judges alike, it has come to my attention that many not only favor one perspective of argumentation over another, but usually wish to stifle or even quash other perspectives. Hence, I was prompted to investigate what is believed by many to be the most prestigious National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) tournament in the forensic season: the National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence (NPTE).

Literature Review (Harms and Inherency)

From experience and a review of the literature in this area, it is clear that debaters and judges are quite diverse in their abilities and as well as their perspectives. For example, Edwards, Bello, Brandau-Brown, and Hollems (2001), found that people who are high in verbal aggressiveness have a difficult time communicating. It is conceivable that highly verbally aggressive debaters may be neurotic introverts who are simply hard to please interpersonally (McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). Swift and Vourvoulias (2005) found that there is a difference in levels of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness which correlated with biological sex. Females in their study scored an average of over a point lower than males in verbal aggressiveness and an average of nearly a point higher than males in argumentativeness. This finding was contradictory to the findings of Infante, Rancer, and Jordan (1996) who reported higher levels of argumentativeness in males than females in their study. An increased understanding of expectations of judges as well as their methods of analyzing debates may decrease levels of hostility in parliamentary debate rounds.

Debate is an activity supported by many communication scholars. Williams, Hagy, & McLane-Hagy (1996) argued that parliamentary debate can and should be taught in the argumentation classroom. Bellon (2000) argued that more research needs to be done to make a stronger case for adopting debate in more fields. Understanding how debate is judged on the parliamentary debate circuit could increase the chances of debate being introduced. There has been a recent trend to incorporate communication across the curriculum, so the author conjectures that debate will be soon to follow. Debate is an excellent forum for argument training—in any classroom. Bellon further suggested that the most effective way for students to learn is through immersion, personally meaningful challenges, and intensive analysis.

Mitchell (1998) wrote a critical analysis about the way debate educators teach academic debate. The author argued that there is a need for more agency in argumentation because argumentative agency fuels academia through the pursuit of democracy. This agency may be best gained if granted by teachers and judges alike. One way that debaters could gain more agency in competitive rounds would be to be enabled to view their judges as people and increase their understanding of their judges. Argumentation agency links skills together and provides understandable contexts in which these skills can be employed by making use of pragmatic action. As Mitchell suggested, debaters need to be more involved in the world around them; therefore, our survey is solely for competitive debaters. Additionally, most studies with reports of perception report on the perception students have of instructors or superiors. Weaver (1977) discovered that there is a great disparity between perceptions that coaches have and those of debaters.

Method (Plan)

To conduct this study, I printed the judging philosophies of all the 2005 NPTE judges. In all, seventy-four philosophies were analyzed. I coded the philosophies with descriptive words to indicate to myself later what I thought the overall philosophy of each judge was. After the initial coding process, I reviewed the philosophies and came up with 6 categories: *tabula rasa*, *kritikal*, ultra-liberal, stock-issues, communication-centered, and interventionalist.

Results (Solvency)

Tabula Rasa

Judges in this category consistently claimed to keep their own biases out of debate rounds as much as humanly possible. Presumably, these judges do their best to keep their own knowledge, opinions, and preferences out of debate. These judges tend not to focus on delivery as much as content. They desire to make a decision based solely on the arguments present in the particular round that they are adjudicating. Persons who fit this category responded "My decision is based solely on how the debaters argue I should decide; I avoid using my own decision-making philosophy as much as possible," in the section of the judging philosophy that questioned how they made their decision. In terms of assessing arguments, this group found that line-by-line is the most important part of the debate, followed by the big picture, and did not find style/persuasiveness to be of much consequence at all, except in terms of speaker points. In terms of personal preferences, these respondents wrote "none," "it's your round," or "I don't have any." These judges also had little to say in terms of strong viewpoints and were ready to accept generic or typical arguments if not responded to during the round. There were nineteen judges that fit into this category, or twenty-six percent of the pool.

Kritikal (Critical)

These judges tend to always see themselves as a policymaker in debate rounds. They want to see policy rounds and want to vote to improve the world in some manner. The ballot, in these judges' minds, is a tool that could encourage some actual real-world change. In terms of decision making approach, these judges claimed, "I use a policy maker paradigm," "I focus on the comparison of outcomes between the teams," or "I try to apply a number of weighing mechanisms, including magnitude, risk, time frame, etc." These judges varied in personal preferences, but their judging philosophies stressed the idea that the impacts of arguments on the real world were of the utmost importance. There were seventeen judges that fit into this category or twenty-three percent of the pool.

Ultra Liberal

The judges that self-define as liberal and blatantly punish debaters

for “close-minded” or conservative arguments make up this category. These respondents literally wrote that they are of a liberal mindset and would punish debaters in terms of either speaker points or the ballot if the judge deemed the team’s arguments to be “exclusive,” “closed-minded,” or “too conservative.” One judge suggested that debaters, “use a liberal lens of common sense, decency, tolerance, and acceptance,” to win his ballot. In terms of the impact of gender-culture-orientation neutral or promotional language, another judge wrote, “I do believe that language shapes and influences our unique realities . . . we must not run away from terms because it only empowers them.” Another judge used the judging philosophy sheet to performatively demonstrate his liberal position. In terms of making his decision, this judge wrote, “Three Words: Magic Eight Ball.” This group of judges seem to find debate the forum for promoting their own (liberal) ideals. There were ten individuals that fit into this category or thirteen percent of the pool.

Stock-Issues

These judges expect the stock issues of each genre of resolution to be appropriately addressed. They may intervene, but only when a team is failing to meet the stock issues of the given resolution. From these judges’ perspectives, there are three mutually exclusive types of resolutions: fact, value, and policy. They see that each of these types of resolutions has a separate set of burdens to be fulfilled, and expect that government teams will do so accordingly. These judges came right out and stated that they decide rounds “based on stock issues.” They also dislike especially fast delivery, “unwarranted topicality,” “kritiks,” and “generic disadvantages.” These judges appear to reject gamey positions in general. There were 12 that fit into this category or sixteen percent of the pool.

Communication-Centered

Commonly referred to as “houseplants” or “lay judges” by many debaters, these judges fancy debate as a public speaking event first and an argumentation event second. They do not like rapid delivery, overuse of debate jargon, or arguments that are not relatable or hard to understand for a lay audience. For instance, one judge stated that, “I try to make my decision based on the arguments in the round, but I do require real arguments and I am not tabula rasa when it comes to real world events and argumentation theory.” Another judge wrote in regard to fast delivery, “A simple speed kritik will wipe out most of your case.” A third judge stated, “You should always have clear structure.” These judges tend to view debate similarly to the way a general public audience might. There were seven judges in this category or nine percent of the pool.

Interventionalist

Some of these judges claim not to be interventionists, and some

accept that they are. In either case, these judges admittedly allow their own opinions about issues dictate their decisions. These judges differ from those in the ultra-liberal category, because they do not specifically intervene based on liberal ideals alone. One judge, for instance, wrote a four page response about how competitive parliamentary debate "ought to be." Another judge indicated to "avoid interpreting resolutions as resolutions of fact." A third judge claimed, "I have no predisposition except against idiocy and lying." Another judge explained that weak or bad arguments in his rounds are "automatically given the weight they carried at the point of dropping." There were nine in this category or twelve percent of the pool.

Discussion (Impacts)

After exploring the above analysis, it is imperative to note that this breakdown has an impact on debaters, coaches, and the activity as a whole. While all of these are inherently linked, there are specific impacts on each separately as well.

Impacts on Debaters

Given that at the most prestigious, hardest to qualify for NPDA tournament in the nation judges cannot agree on a paradigm, debaters have a lot of work to do. For the tabula rasa judge, debaters (presumably) just need to argue well. For the kritikal judge, debaters must prove how their arguments actually effect the real world. For the ultra-liberal judge, debaters must agree with (or at least argue in favor of) personal, liberal beliefs of the judge. For the stock-issues judge, debaters must understand and execute traditional parliamentary debate theory and practice. For the communication-centered judge, debaters must abandon debate jargon, "talk pretty," and make sense to a person who may not understand (nor want to understand, for that matter) the nuances of competitive parliamentary debate. For the interventionalist judge, of course, there is very little that can be done on behalf of debaters to garner their ballot. Hence, in order to be as successful as possible and for the experience to be as pleasant as possible (for judge and competitor alike), debaters must be willing to adapt.

Impacts on Coaches

Clearly, given that debaters are charged with this vast burden of understanding and adaptation, coaches must train their debaters to adapt to a variety of perspectives. Because coaches also serve as judges, however, they have far more agency and power in this matter than debaters do. Coaches can change the inconsistency of judging philosophies by conforming their own philosophy to the norms.

Impacts on NPDA Debate

For the organization, this analysis may, in fact, add a bit of legitimacy. Adaptation in social situations is one of the most valuable skills

one can gain during his or her college experience. Because NPDA competition demands this adaptation, this may be a bragging point for the organization. Conversely, however, this demand for adaptation may not be what the NPDA would like. As a national organization, NPDA may prefer some form of consistency in judging, especially at the national tournament. If this is the case, the NPDA in conjunction with the NPTE ought to publish judging criteria or guidelines as well as require judge training sessions.

Conclusion

This exploration of judging paradigms leaves room for several future studies. While the 2005 NPTE judges fit into the categories of *tabula rasa*, *kritikal*, ultra-liberal, stock-issues, communication-centered, and interventionalist, it would be interesting to see if this holds true for other years of NPTE, NPDA, and other regular-season NPDA tournaments. Because of the superior coaching I received as a competitor, I believe I was well-prepared to adapt to different judging styles. While I may not have picked up a champion CEDA debater and successful parli coach's ballot or former champion oral interper and successful IE coach's ballot every time, I at least, as debaters ought to be, was willing to adapt.

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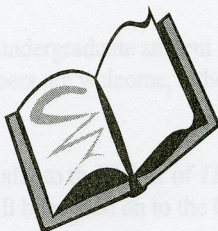
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