Figure 2 - Format of Parliamentary Debates in the G.U.U.

Each debate is broken into two sections. The afternoon section will start at one o'clock and usually finishes at about half past five. Usually clubs then dine together and often evening speakers will consider their position in light of the afternoon's debate. The evening round begins at seven o'clock or so and will usually continue until around midnight.

After mid-evening, an opportunity exists for any Member to introduce, with the agreement of the Chair and Prime Minister, a "Private Member's Bill." Such a bill must be on a topical issue and contain firm proposals in a style similar to the main bill. After a five minute supporting speech from the bill's sponsor, speeches of two-and-a-half minutes' duration may be made by speakers on either side rotating sides. The sponsor will make a two-minute summation speech. After no more than half an hour or so of debate, the House will divide.

Such bills provide an opportunity for future Prime Ministers to receive some experience in proposing a bill; however, this can also be achieved by other means, for example by participation in the Opening Afternoon round. Such bills often distract from the main debate and therefore are rarely proposed or acceded to by the Prime Minister. Should the day of the debate coincide with a momentous event in current affairs, however, they may be used as a way of allowing members to comment on that affair before proceeding with the main debate. The most recent example was in February 1996, when the Irish republican terrorist group, the I.R.A., announced the end of its ceasefire and immediately detonated a 500lb bomb in London. This was on the evening of a full parliamentary in the G.U.U. and a Private Member's Bill on the topic was debated.

In the Closing Evening round, the Prime Ministerial Speech is expected to encompass the whole of the day's debate and so is of unlimited duration. In this way it is similar to an elongated Prime Ministerial Rebuttal from the U.S. system. Typically a Prime Minister will speak for between thirty five minutes and an hour. After this speech, a vote by acclamation is taken, but the result (almost inevitably a victory for the Ayes, or Government) is immaterial in the Glasgow system.

After each debate a Post-Debate party ensues with free drinks for participants. This provides a strong social focus for the debating community. Importantly, it also ensures strong attendance and a busy gallery during the evening rounds. Although the incentive for this presence is questionable, the significant crowd which it often generates adds to the atmosphere of the debate.

Style

British parliamentary debate has been the subject of extensive discussion elsewhere (Ruane, 2001) and broadly these comments apply to the Glasgow full parliamentary system. In addition, there are a few

features of the system which deserve special mention because of their heightened significance within the full parliamentary context.

Because of the rigidly structured role of each round, Glasgow debaters attach a singular importance to addressing the correct number of clauses in the speech and leaving most of the last minute of their speech for peroration. Any speaker for whom the final minute bell rings who has only just begun discussing the final clause (or worse), will be mercilessly taunted by the swift collective intakes of breath from both sides of the House. In this respect, the non-negotiable importance of the structure is different to the trade-off between humor, rhetoric and well-organized argumentation which allows more fluid structure in modified parliamentary debating (Sather & Hutton, 1999: 3)

The Glasgow system makes special allowance for novice speakers in a way which the modified parliamentary system cannot do, at least not with the same effect. The unpointed rounds, as well as only covering one clause, do not carry the potential burden of contributing to the overall score awarded to the club for the debate. In addition, the House is expected to extend an unusual level of courtesy to speakers in unpointed rounds, and the Speaker will often take a dim view of senior members who are seen to have violated this code during an unpointed speech.

Finally, the full parliamentary style offers a debating experience which is unparalleled amongst other student debating unions in terms of the ferocity of rhetorical exchange. Whereas a modified parliamentary debate may have eight participants and North American parliamentary debate four, full parliamentary debate can have a chamber of eighty or more people actively participating in the debate, giving speeches at some point in the day or offering points of information during the remainder. Especially in boisterous evening rounds where well-known members address the House, the level of heckling and supporting cheers can be voluminous. This is especially so since a Government speaker may, on some clauses, have dozens of members of no less than four clubs (the three opposite and one on his own side) in opposition to his club line and frequently on their feet offering points of information. Rodden reflected well this energetic element of full parliamentary debate:

> A full parliamentary debate can be a tremendous emotional and intellectual experience. Each speaker is challenged throughout the debate by a rowdy gallery and by raucous Opposition speakers shouting questions and demanding floor time from his speaking time. To ignore all questions risks disapproval from the House. . . The full parliamentary debate is a thoroughly serious affair, albeit laced with humor and invective (310).

To be successful in such an environment, a speaker needs to be able consistently to combine concise analysis with rapid fire razor wit.

CONCLUSION

The full parliamentary system which has developed at Glasgow University over more than a century is a complex one both procedurally and in terms of organizational structure. It requires significant planning and work from a large number of people for it to be successful. The institution, however, has an unparalleled record in competitive parliamentary debate and much anecdotal evidence suggests that this is because of its continued use of the rigorous full parliamentary system.

A full critique of the system would not be appropriate at the present time, since so few North American coaches are familiar with it. By providing a narrative overview of its key features, it is to be hoped that some thought may be given by forensics coaches as to what, if any, elements of the Glasgow system have something to offer the burgeoning "parli" movement in the United States.

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Missing

Parliamentary Debate as Social Argumentation: A Quasi-logical Perspective

STEVEN J. VENETTE

Abstract: *Competitive parliamentary debate has seen exceptional growth over the last several years. Forensics scholars continue to weigh the educational merits of the activity, and have attempted to assess its outcomes. Many critics have inappropriately used formalist and mechanistic perspectives of argument to evaluate this form of debate. Parliamentary debate, however, is best viewed using a quasi-logical, social lens. Changes may be required to ensure that students are learning proper argumentation theory and skills. This article addresses some of those possible changes.*

As soon as we try to pass from agreement *in abstracto* to some concrete applications, controversy begins. The fact that all admire and respect truth, justice, and beauty does not mean that all agree on what is to be qualified as being true, just and beautiful" (Perelman, 1967, p. 72). Certainly these words could not be more applicable than they are to the use of evidence in parliamentary debate. There appears to be division in the community about how to arrive at the end of truth, justice, and beauty. While some argue that if the event is debate, the focus should be on argumentation. Others maintain that the focus, rather, should be on the skills of public discourse (Young, 1998). From either perspective, the use of evidence must be critically examined to ensure not only proper skills of competition, but also to promote sound educational practice.

In an effort to bring together these divided groups, some common position must be discovered. This essay will center on analyzing parliamentary debate as quasi-logical, thus providing a reasonable means to evaluate the use of evidence in this style of debate. First, parliamentary debate will be placed in the quasi-logical perspective. Second, criteria will be established for the evaluation of the use of evidence. Finally, in the hopes of creating further discussion, conclusions will be drawn with an emphasis on possible changes to current practices. In the end, there certainly are limitations with the use of evidence in parliamentary debate, but these problems may not be as extreme as some critics would argue.

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Quasi-logical Perspective

One could assert that viewing argument as an interpretive process began with Ehninger and Brockriede (1963) and grew through Scott's (1967) "rhetoric as episteme" perspective, where Scott argues that truth arises from cooperative critical inquiry. Although looking at the rhetorical power of arguments was not new, it became more common for arguments to be studied as a process to create meaning in a community. Using this work as a base, scholars have been studying argument as an interaction to create meaning. Argumentation does not have to be observed only from a logician's position, as if arguments took place in a vacuum.

Chaim Perelman, in the *New Rhetoric*, proposed a connection between the contextual, interactionist viewpoint and formal logic (Perelman and Olbechts-Tyteca, 1969). Some attempts at persuasion seem complete and may move an audience, but fail a test of logic. Other times, arguments are logically sound but do not persuade. This grey area between rhetoric and logic is what constitutes the quasi-logical. More specifically, Dearin explains that quasi-logical examination centers on "...certain schemes of argument that appear formally valid, but which, when submitted for analysis, turn out to be specimens of nonformal reasoning" (1982, p. 78).

Parliamentary debate can be seen most clearly when viewed as quasi-logical. If this form of debate is approached only as an exercise in formal logic, it quickly becomes mired by discussions of fallacies and tests of validity in an attempt to discover truth. Also, the formal perspective emphasizes form over practice, and all but eliminates consideration of the social aspect of argument. The speaker and audience are irrelevant to the text. If the purpose of parliamentary debate as a forensic event is to focus on the <u>art</u> of persuasion (Young, 1998), then formal logic does not seem to be the most appropriate model.

The mechanistic approach to argumentation focuses on the strategic nature of persuasion. Any statement that convinces or persuades an audience is a successful argument. Forensics scholars generally approach debate from a mechanistic perspective, even when developing theory. Mechanistic analysis, however, is inappropriate when applied to parliamentary debate, and thus much of the criticism of this format is unwarranted. Traditionally, the mechanistic approach focuses on adapting claims, data, and warrants to the particular audience. Conversely, the rules governing parliamentary debate are designed to limit positions to those that are common knowledge. This restriction de-emphasizes particular proof for specific claims. Finally, the call for judges/audiences that have little or no debate background may be evidence for the parliamentary community's rejection of the mechanistic approach.

The narrative paradigm might be considered as a logical alternative because the focus is on the social creation of meaning. At the same time, it is fairly obvious that the goal of parliamentary debate is not

on the development of a story, or narrative, per se. While debaters may draw on shared texts and meanings, the standards that normally apply to the narrative paradigm fail to describe the development of meaning in the context of the parliamentary style.

Conceptual Framework

If parliamentary debate is best observed from a quasi-logical perspective, then criteria to study and evaluate arguments generally, and evidence specifically, in this context must be established. An appropriate contextualist perspective is presented in Klumpp's (1990) exploration of the qualities of public argument. His work represents an extension of Habermas' language of critique, and provides six concepts that may serve as a lens to examine the use of evidence in quasi-logical debate: the material, the moral, the historical, the social, the political, and the rhetorical.

The Material – Material evidence is factual or concrete information, which is presented free of interpretation. Because the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution can be interpreted in many different ways, it would serve as poor evidence for an unlimited right to bear arms. No one, however, would be wise to contest the existence of the Second Amendment, because it is a material fact. Another example is the controversy surrounding crop circles. While debate continues over whether crop circles are made by extra-terrestrials, there is no denying that circles do appear in crops around the world. Material evidence is important because it serves as a foundation that can be shared by the debaters and the audience. Once the material is established, then interpretations are at least grounded, and are not simply assertions.

The Moral – Discussion about the moral dimension of arguments is based on the underlying philosophical assumptions of a claim. Even a simple statement such as "It is a fetus" carries powerful philosophical undertones: the word "it" implies that the fetus is not human. In quasi-logical debate, exploring the philosophies behind arguments allows for an understanding of why people take particular positions, and may indicate that additional material evidence is required in the debate. If a debater argues that the United States should pressure Brazil to protect the Amazon rain forest, an underlying assumption is that the environment deserves protection. The goal of protecting the environment tells why the original position was advocated. Additional material evidence may be needed to demonstrate that pressure would cause Brazil to change environmental policies.

The Historical – History is important to social argument because it provides a context not only for the debate, but for the evidence itself. When debating a resolution concerning aid to Russia, information should be presented about not only how the U. S. views Russia now, but also about our histories. It would seem wise to discuss the cold war, and how that period continues to affect current relations. Only with background information, setting the resolution in context, can

the debaters reasonably approach the issue at hand.

The Social – The debaters and the audience must view the matter being discussed as socially significant, and not something that is merely a personal decision. For example, some politicians in recent elections have tried to downplay the impact of abortion by claiming that the decision should be left to the individual. At this point, they are attempting to remove the social significance of abortion and place emphasis on personal choice. If a matter is a personal choice, it usually is not germane to social debate. It is rare that someone would try to persuade an audience that blue is the best color, simply because the likelihood of persuading anyone to change their existing preference is small. Further, an audience may be open to debate about legislation affecting abortion because policies are socially significant; however, research indicates that people are not open to persuasion about their personal orientation to this topic (Smith, 1982).

The Political – Postmodern theorists explain that arguments reflect and reinforce the dominant power structure of society. Understanding of the power structure and the hegemonic nature of arguments can serve as a basis for critique. For example, if in a debate about funding research for breast cancer, one debater provides evidence that focuses only on women, the opposition would be correct in discussing how ignoring male breast cancer reflects a negative mindframe. In a social debate concerning entitlement programs, debaters might consider how the term welfare may belittle, or even dehumanize, those in need.

As a side note, it is interesting that critiques of this nature are often dismissed when viewed from formal or mechanistic perspectives. In traditional competitive policy debate, judges often ignore critiques because they seem irrelevant to policy decision making. When viewed from the quasi-logical perspective, parliamentary debate encourages critiques, and may be the logical context to develop theory of the practice of social criticism.

The Rhetorical – The rhetorical standard is used to examine the way information is shared. A criticism of traditional collegiate team debate (E.g. NDT/CEDA) is that speakers are almost always communicating to a highly trained audience. This audience often not only allows extremely modified (fast) delivery, but also encourages it. An audience member who is not experienced at listening to this style of delivery may not be able to understand what is being presented. Even when the audience is trained, there are times when debaters fail to articulate or fail to deliver a comprehendible message. When understanding is limited by the manner in which the information is presented, the rhetorical power of the argument is lost.

These six concepts, articulated by Habermas, provide the basis for evaluating parliamentary debate from a contextual perspective. Certainly, there are implications for the parliamentary debate community. Some changes may be required to improve the ways debaters

attempt to influence audiences. Audience members, particularly judges, may need to adapt paradigms to allow quasi-logical evaluation of argument.

Limitations and Problematic Issues

One limitation of parliamentary debate is the claim that this style promotes sophistry. The aim of this form of debate is still towards acceptability, not truth. If after the debate, the audience believes that pigs fly, then pigs fly. Many people are satisfied with the understanding that there is no truth (at least not one absolute truth), and if an audience, within the context of the debate, perceives pigs as being able to fly, then there is no real harm. For those who still seek the truth, use of material information would limit the presentation of such questionable positions, because finding acceptable, common-knowledge examples may prove difficult. The quasi-logical framework advocated in this essay, because it tells debaters to focus on material facts, should provide at least a partial solution to the problem of sophistry.

Ultimately, those who have power to change the rules of this style of debate should consider allowing limited use of outside sources to support claims made in competition. As in public speaking, evidence is an important part of any presentation (Grice and Skinner, 1993). Thus, evidence could also benefit social debate. If a speaker's presentation is nothing but a loosely tied string of quotations, it loses rhetorical power and would naturally be discouraged in parliamentary debate, especially when using quasi-logical standards. If one goal of this type of debate is real world application (Williams and Guajardo, 1998), then real world skills, such as the use of outside sources of evidence, should be encouraged.

Another troubling aspect of the quasi-logical approach is that arguments seem formal, even though they are not. This aspect often leads formalist critics to take social argument less than seriously (Klumpp, 1990, p. 114). For instance, quasi-logical arguments sometimes simply appear to be unsupported claims. Social argument is not viewed most appropriately through a formalist's lens, but formal structure does have application. In practice, formal rules must be linked to quasi-logical structures. For example, a debater may claim that a hasty generalization has been made by an opponent. The cry of hasty generalization may be sufficient rationale for dismissing an argument from a formal perspective; however, in social contexts, fallacies in reasoning usually are related to the way information is presented, and thus the opposition is really pointing out that the argument fails the rhetorical test.

Suggestions for the Future of Parliamentary Debate

Ultimately, formalist critics will begin to take social argument more seriously if the debaters are able to clearly explain the rationale for accepting or rejecting a position. Quasi-logical concepts serve as the

basis for these rationales. If an unresolved contention centers on a question of fact, judges should evaluate this as a strategic error. The debater who advocated the position was unable to support the argument based on data which is "common knowledge," or the position could not be reasonably argued without outside evidence. Either way, the argument fails.

In the end, critics will judge the ability of a style of debate to teach argumentation based on application in competition. Because the emphasis is on practice (Eubanks, 1986), coaches and parliamentary debaters should concentrate on application of quasi-logical analysis. In traditional policy debate, understanding the concept of topicality does little good if one cannot structure a topicality argument and defend it in competition. The same is true in social debate. The material must be placed in the context of the deliberation and communicated in a way that it is plausible to the audience.

Judges also need to provide feedback to the competitors that reinforces the goals of the activity. Because parliamentary debate is contextual, having some knowledge of the audience would allow debaters to formulate more focused or targeted analysis. Audience members should consider using a brief amount of time before the round, or alternately allow teams to use some of their preparation time, for an audience analysis period.

Not only should proper feedback be given during competition, but judges also need to use the ballot as an educational tool. Indicating that one team lost because they were ill-informed about the topic area may not be helpful, considering that the teams are allowed only fifteen minutes to prepare, and cannot be expected to have a deep understanding of all possible topics. More helpful might be comments about the failure to establish factual information on which to base arguments, or about the strategic weaknesses inherent in basing a case on material that is never actually presented in the round. Just as debaters have the responsibility to present clear rationale for their positions in the debate, judges should be obligated to provide reasons for decisions that are as specific as possible.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, resolutions must be written in a way that supports substantive debate. A topic at one tournament was "This house stands resolved that we should get jiggy with it." Creative debaters might be able to uncover some reasonable interpretation of the resolution; however, the likelihood that the debate would center on unimportant concepts is great. The framers of this resolution, and those like it, are baiting the speakers to move the discussion away from social significance. Topics should allow debaters to discover and construct arguments that would be reasonable and acceptable in a realistic context.

While there are problems with the teaching and practice of parliamentary debate, there are opportunities for revision and growth. As it stands, competitors are allowed an opportunity to practice social, or

contextual, argumentation. With change, the event can be made stronger. Theorists and practitioners must focus on the strengths of contextual argument. Using a quasi-logical perspective, rather than a formalist or mechanistic one, would provide a more appropriate lens to interpret and practice this form of argument.

Everyone may agree that the aim of parliamentary debate is truth, justice, and beauty. But just as Perelman warned, not all agree on how best to arrive at that end. Exploring parliamentary debate as a practice in constructing meaning socially is enlightening because it provides not only context, but also a means to evaluate informal argument. In the end, using this perspective will allow the community to move closer to truth, justice, and beauty.

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