DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 608 CS 508 780

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TITLE Public Debate and the Validation of Human Judgment.
PUB DATE 22 Nov 94
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Response; *Cultural Context; *Debate; *Debate Format; *Evaluative Thinking; Higher Education; Public Speaking; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Cross Examination Debate Association; Debate Tournaments; *Reflective Judgment

ABSTRACT

It is possible for any forensics organization or other body to center its activity upon public debates. Academic institutions have done so and will continue to do so on the basis that audience debates constitute an appropriate training for citizenship in a democracy and for participation in the economic world. The public debate before real audiences provides three important benefits: accountability; revitalization of the public sphere; and connection with a rich rhetorical heritage for standards and criticism. General interest has been renewed in human judgment as a contributor to academic epistemology as well as in the reconstitution of the political sphere. Ronald Beiner, in "Political Judgment," provides the clearest picture of the functions of judgment: "Judgment allows us to comport ourselves in the world without dependence upon rules and methods, and allows us to defeat subjectivity by asserting claims that seek general consent." In practical terms, a distinction between human judgment and "technical rationality," or disembodied adherence to external rules, will be a useful touchstone. The ways in which public debates validate and contribute to consensual meanings and decisions may be divided into four categories: (1) context; (2) knowledge; (3) intuitive thinking; and (4) human interests. The manifest values of public debate with live audiences suggest the possibility that they might somehow be reflected in competitive tournament debate as well. (Contains 11 references.) (TB)

PUBLIC DEBATE AND THE VALIDATION OF HUMAN JUDGMENT

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Presented at the Speech Communication Association Conference

New Orleans, Louisiana November 22, 1994

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This paper explores the special characteristics of public debate, defined as argumentation addressed to audiences whose attitudes, values, or actions are at stake. Such argumentation is situated in specific cultural and political contexts where the contested territory has already been opened up. The debate taking place builds upon Perelman-type "starting points" as well as the associational processes of argument, all of which presuppose audience agreement. Advocates must adjust themselves to variations from one audience to another and to the composite nature of even the most homogeneous group. The ultimate grounding of argumentation in public debate, it will be contended, is to be located in the human judgments produced by the audience members themselves.

It is also contended that a public debate rationale can be implemented in CEDA tournament debate, where it represents a conviction that the judge and speakers will come to the debate with the same expectations they would bring to discourse in any other public forum. They expect the debate to be both sensible and comprehensible. They want to be reasoned with like the intelligent human beings they are. And they would be glad and proud to invite their friends and

colleagues to come and observe and profit from the occasion.

Here we will do three things: (1) Delineate the values of public debate in general, especially audience debates between college teams; (2) explore some important and relevant characteristics of human judgment which can be said to ground the public debate paradigm; and (3) discuss specifically tournament applications of the audience standard.

The Values of Public Debate

It is possible for any forensics organization or other body to center its activity upon public debates. Academic institutions have done so and will continue to do so on the basis that audience debates constitute an appropriate training for citizenship in a democracy and for participation in the economic world. If one's aim is to produce educated and articulate individuals, then the forensic opportunities should reflect this aim.

Of the numerous values which public debate before real audiences provides for the students and for the forensics program, three are worth special mention.

The first value is accountability. Accountability is demanded of all educational enterprises these days, and in public debate the pathway to accountability is clear. Audience debates by definition take place out in public. If we are claiming that debate promotes excellence in communication, depth of educational experience, and pre-professional training (Colbert and Biggers), we can freely invite examination of our claims by, among others, those who support our activity. Sunshine is the order of the day, and individuals who come to our debates provide abundant and useful feedback.

A second value is the contribution public debate can make to the revitalization of the public sphere. A richly textured democratic discourse calls for argumentation as well as nose-counting, and for wide participation rather than mere expert fiat. Documentation of the deterioration of such discourse is now a commonplace, and calls for revival are persuasive. Debate training which develops the skills of public deliberation prepares students for more active and meaningful participation, and the active sponsorship of genuine debates addressed to the public helps to provide necessary deliberation and citizen participation in decision making.

A third value of public debate is derived from the fact that debate conducted from a public perspective draws upon a rich rhetorical heritage for standards and criticism. The processes of audience influence and participation , with provision for the probable and indeterminate and the recognition of audience differences, are matters of continued academic significance and interest. Public debates provide a laboratory for the further explorations of classical and modern rhetoric. Argumentation theories are taking on a notably more rhetorical tinge, and public debate is in keeping with current trends.

Human Judgment

General interest has been renewed in human judgment as a contributor to academic epistemology as well as in the reconstitution of the political sphere in society. Worth exploring at this point are the dimensions of human judgment, avenues for its validation, and the contribution it makes to academic and political discourse.

Thomas Farrell's provocative *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* puts us on the trail of a

"judgment centered conception of rhetoric," where *phronesis* (judgment) is developed through practice and the forum stabilizes rhetorical practice (8). Ronald Beiner, in *Political Judgment* provides the clearest picture of the functions of judgment: "Judgment allows us to comport ourselves in the world without dependence upon rules and methods, and allows us to defeat subjectivity by asserting claims that seek general consent" (2). For our purposes a distinction between human judgment and "technical rationality," or disembodied adherence to externalized rules will be a useful touchstone.

Among recent works, Stephen Toulmin's *Cosmopolis* is most lucid in tracing the rise and decline of what he refers to as "unreconstructed Modernity." This unreconstructed modernity, which we conflate with technical rationality, rested upon foundation stones of "certainty, formal rationality, and the desire to start with a clean slate." (183) After examining the weaknesses (and admitted successes) of the modern program and the reintroduction of human judgment into human affairs, Toulmin concludes with an observation with which we concur and which we feel has substantial relevance to conceptions of rationality as manifested in educational debate: "In our day, formal calculative rationality can no longer be the only measure of intellectual adequacy; one must also evaluate all practical matters by their human 'reasonableness'" (185). The humanizing of modernity should be an important agenda item for forensics as well as the more general academy.

To delineate the dimensions of human judgment would take us back historically at least as far as Plato and Aristotle. Plato in his work describes a kind of judgment deliberately detached from human experience and universal rather than particular in its concerns. His influence lives on. Aristotle, on the other hand, in his ethics, politics, and rhetoric may be said to valorize probabilities, the contingent, pluralism, and lived human experience. Thus Plato's limited and

disciplined mode of judgment can be contrasted with Aristotle's full range of individual insights.

We can locate a similar divide in the rise of Galilean science and its Cartesian counterpart centuries later. The physical sciences triumphed apparently through an insistence on empirical evidence and rigid logic, discarding and discounting moral, religious, or subjective imperatives. The so-called social sciences as they developed were inescapably drawn to this sanitized and technically disciplined version of judgment, still leaving much human experience on the outside. Renaissance humanism and practical reason were largely discredited and left behind.

Contemporary thought is once more challenging technical rationality. Reality is being conceived as a social construction, and even the realm of pure science has been found to be susceptible to structural transformation through personalized influence. Dreyfus contrasts "calculative rationality" with expert judgment. Common sense, intuition, experience, and expertise are seen not as inconsistent with rationality, but as contributing constructively to it.

Thus we have at this time two visions of what is desirable in human judgment. The scientific model of what we are calling technical rationality still exerts a strong influence. As shortcomings of the modernist program have become apparent, however, a wider scope has been allowed to individuals, and rationality is ascribed to their more complex and less formalized judgments.

Both approaches have their strengths and their shortcomings. Here we will especially pursue the rather neglected area of judgments made by individuals operating within the public sphere More specifically, we will concretize the public sphere as consisting of the face-to-face and editorial aspects of public discourse, including legislative deliberation, radio call-in shows, exchanges of letters to the editor, formal debates whether mediated or not, and drawing room and

barroom talk. In the public sphere, standards of rationality are derived from the thinking of the participants, who are involved and unique, more than from abstract and universal detached rule application.

Some Constituents of Public Judgment

Audiences of public controversy validate the legitimacy of arguments partially through what they themselves bring to the event. Participants are accountable to one another.

Thomas Farrell sets out to apply norms of competence, performance, coherence and distance to the rhetorical culture of our era, norms applicable to the discourse of public argumentation. Here we will limit ourselves to a brief exposition of the ways in which real audiences in public debates validate and contribute to consensual meanings and decisions through four significant and generally inherent pieces of equipment they bring to the interaction, namely (1) a context, (2) knowledge, (3) intuitive thinking, and (4) human interests.

Context

Any proposition subject to significant public debate has already developed an argumentative context. The debate is already under way. An audience, whether viewing a controversy on the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour or attending a program presented by a college debate team, provides contextualization which is too often missing in argumentation relying entirely upon technical rationality. They can judge what kinds of arguments belong in a discussion of a given issue.

From a public point of view, propositions have functions and historical settings. Interpretation of the meaning of the proposition as well as a sense of the relevant lines of argument have been developed. Propositions are never debated in a social vacuum, and audiences are aware of why a certain matter has become problematic. They know what is at stake and at this level are seeking to discover what will help them in their own attempts to resolve the controversy.

In *Cosmopolis*, Stephen Toulmin employs the phrase "the myth of the clean slate" to refer to influential philosophical efforts such as those of Descartes to ignore context and start from scratch in the search for truth (175-180). Toulmin's myth is obviously represented in the intercollegiate debate world's myth of the *tabula rasa* judging paradigm. Although audience members as fully aware human beings may strive to maintain open-mindedness, they are not expected to start from scratch. They may legitimately value relevant and central arguments and discount or ignore (even unanswered) contentions which strike them as trivial or irrelevant.

As an example, in a public debate on whether women should be subject to the military draft, a negative team set forth a powerful and logically impeccable response that no one (including women) should be drafted. Audience members were properly put off by the fact that the current concern about the cultural, physiological, or legal status of women, which is what they were trying to make up their minds about, was completely ignored.

Audience members are part of a society which has work to do and issues to resolve. Public debaters are expected to be aware of their real concerns. The debate is well under way when they enter it.

A Knowledge Base

An audience of any size will arrive at a debate with a substantial base of knowledge which they can bring to bear upon the topic at hand. At a campus debate, for instance, there may well be professors and advanced students who are experts in their own right. A community debate will attract a range of age groups, economic classes, and certainly of human experience which gives them knowledge which they can contribute to the deliberations, respond to on the basis of allusions by other speakers, and employ as a resource in the judgments they make. In general, public debate tends to attract persons who are interested enough in the topic to have informed themselves about it to some degree already.

Speakers should be able to assume a fund of common knowledge among their listeners. Audience members know about Baby Jessica, canings in Singapore, O.J. Simpson. Reference can be made to the Constitution, the New Deal, and trade imbalances. They have general impressions of conditions in the inner cities, the efficiency of official bureaucracies, and the adequacy of the public schools. Everyone has been to school, has heard some things, has talked with people, and has experienced life. Sophisticated audiences know a lot which advocates can build upon without meticulous documentation.

As far as human judgment goes, each individual is able to put together a unique evidential base from which to draw conclusions. The argumentation presented by the speakers can and should augment, and even correct, this base with new and fresh information, and this can be digested and combined with the background the individual audience member already possesses. The human judgment arrived at by any person will be based upon the knowledge which that

person has.

Intuitive Reasoning

Any human beings toward whom discourse is addressed have had years of experience in thinking and reasoning about public and private matters. They have made judgments which have served them well and judgments which they have lived to regret. The experiences they have undergone have included judgmental components. Thus a certain kind of wisdom has emerged from their human nature as well as their unique and individual lives. They have learned a thing or two about evaluating fresh phenomena.

Argumentative rhetoric has historically been denigrated, classically as subscribing to conclusions which were merely probable rather than necessary, and in the modernist perspective for lacking positive premises and being too intuitive. With the contemporary rhetorical turn, however, argumentation has opened a legitimate door to informal logic, consensual standards, and intuitive judgments. While the thrust for systemization is still strong in argumentation theory, and appropriately so, influential scholars such as Toulmin, Wayne Brockriede, and Chaim Perelman encourage a fuller play of human judgment in the process. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* is a compendium of cognitive strategies ranging from the "quasi-logical" to dissociational techniques. The range of what may be regarded as reasonable has expanded greatly and human judgment as the bottom line has been legitimized.

As an example, one much neglected metaphor for the reasoning process, which inherently varies from individual to individual, is "the weight of the evidence." Individuals learn to weigh

competing arguments which are addressed to them. Granting appropriate credence to competing claims is a ubiquitous function of human judgment and of argument generally. While the process may be reduced on occasion to a cost-benefit analysis, it is normally a much richer endeavor than that. It may include both very personal decisions and philosophical judgments of the most sophisticated kind. It provides reasonable judgments about the unquantifiable.

Audience members at a public debate in any event reasonably ask themselves which of the arguments they hear "make the most sense." They are to trust their own judgments when making their decisions.

Human Interests

The attempt to detach the thoughts and actions of individuals from the interests which impel them, the "natural interests of life and their irritating influence" (Habermas 303), has become increasingly problematized. For any participants in the public dialog, their knowledge and judgment processes are ineluctably affected by their own interests. As they should be.

All participants have some kind of stake in any argumentative confrontation. On a narrow basis they may therefore consult what they regard as their own self-interest in processing the arguments and arriving at decisions. The consideration of one's self-interest (in, say, self-preservation) could well be rationally legitimate, a constructive contribution to the on-going debate. The examination of apparently detached propositions in the light of one's own concerns and position in life is one of the attractive opportunities inherent in public debate.

However, human interests are not static. One choice for an advocate in a public debate is

in effect a reconstruction of the audience through the establishment of a different or broader frame of reference. Loyalty to a given membership group or ideological construct may be transferred to a different group or a more universal justice upon further consideration. It is possible for narrow and immediate appeals to be transcended (although even such transcendence is open to appropriate challenge).

The interests of the audience members create for them ties to their own realities, in turn contributing to the rationality of the total process as well as to the reasonableness of their tentative decisions at a given moment.

Tournament Implications

These and other manifest values which adhere to public debate with live audiences suggest the possibility that they might somehow be reflected in competitive tournament debate as well, and there is considerable evidence that the impetus for the early development of the Cross-Examination Debate Association was provided by this vision. These are good reasons for putting audience debates at the heart of a sound forensics program and for valuing an organization such as CEDA for its ability to nourish and sustain real life debates.

We might note that the public communication model for debate competition has achieved enough stature by now to be worthy of denigration in the literature. Robert Trapp has expressed the fear that Bartanen's concept of "public communication" unduly centers communication at the expense of argument (26). Rowland complains undeniably that "there is no certainty that all

members of a rational audience would necessarily identify the same evidence and reasoning as reasonable" (123). Gass accuses its proponents of a "romanticized portrait of the ordinary citizen" (82). It has not been our purpose to respond to such critiques here, but rather to further explore a frankly more problematic feature of public debate, namely its fundamental reliance upon human judgment.

Suggested earlier were three primary values of public argumentation addressed to live audiences, namely that the discourse is subject to accountability standards, that it contributes to the public sphere, and that it profits from the rhetorical tradition of argumentation. These represent advantages for any forensics program so oriented. The matter for the forensics community to explore is whether these values might be furthered by an audience-oriented approach to tournament competition. If debate is regarded as argument suitable for the public, debate judges might well adhere to the same standards which other audiences would apply.

Forensics experience could be enhanced by a vision which centers upon human judgment as the ultimate resource for performance and judgment. This is the standard which audiences are asked to apply. It incorporates the practical reason described by Wenzel, where "argument products are now understood as pragmatic products, conditioned by people, purposes and contexts" (3).

Finally, the forensics community might consider further the possibility that debate judges could bring to an encounter much of the same equipment that regular audiences are expected to bring, the sense of context, some knowledge of their own, an acceptance of intuitive reasoning, and recognition of their own interests. Community expectations and professional responsibilities would be a factor in such a move, but intervention need not be mindlessly decried in academic

forensics.

None of this requires throwing out the baby with the bath. A long and solid tradition has been built up regarding rational evaluation and decision making. We can still look for analysis, evidence and response. These are established expectations of rationality which are as much a part of human judgment as any intuition or expert knowledge. We do not need to insist on a claim that human judgment is so inherent that it cannot be improved, and Farrell has suggested the appropriate but broad path for its development.

In the final analysis, the test of excellence in argumentation is itself a product of human judgment. We can at least begin to look for signs of a consensus concerning what kind of rationality is acceptable and productive.

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