

The Role of the Artistic Proof in Contemporary Debate

*David L. Worthington**

Concern over the direction and practice of CEDA debate has been a consistent topic in recent years of both journal articles and convention papers. The yearly CEDA publication typically focuses on the continuing debate over the introduction of NDT practices into CEDA rounds,¹ various judging paradigms,² and strategies for debating specific forms of affirmative or negative positions.³ However, rarely do the authors of articles, convention papers, or books devote attention to the construction of argument. This paper focuses on the notion that affirmative case construction suffers from a lack of explicit analysis, that which is presented in the debate round.

This essay will discuss: 1) an examination of Aristotle's notion of artistic and inartistic proofs, 2) an analysis of first affirmative constructive speeches, and 3) a discussion of how the artistic proof can be introduced into affirmative case building.

The Artistic Proof

Forbes Hill interpreted Aristotle's division between artistic and inartistic proof thus:

Since Aristotle considers rhetoric to be an art, he clearly delineates what lies within the scope of the art and what lies outside of it. Proofs lying within the art are "artistic," those outside are "inartistic." This distinction constitutes the first attempt to separate argument from evidence. The latter term refers to the facts that the speaker must find, the former to the interpretations he [she] must create by reasoning from the facts. Aristotle lists five inartistic proofs: laws, contracts, witnesses, tortures, and oaths. Had he made this distinction today, he would have eliminated tortures and included photographs, statistical surveys, experiments and various kinds of government documents.⁴

An analogy may be drawn to the painter who has a pallet of paints. The potential for art exists; an artistic product may be produced, such as a seascape or a portrait. But until the colors are combined and a picture is produced, they remain inartistic. Similarly, after a debater culls the library for the best evidence avail-

**The National Forensic Journal*, VI (Spring, 1988), pp. 51-57.

DAVID L. WORTHINGTON is a Lecturer in Communication Studies at San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192.

able on a debate topic, he or she is left with a pile of quotations that have been *decontextualized*, removed from their artistic setting (that of the original author), and need to be reconstructed in a different context. This process calls for the debater to use the quotations as his or her pallet of paint, to create with, not to use as artistic creations in and of themselves. More specific to debate rounds, as Billy Hill notes:

Many CEDA debaters seem unable to use productively the evidence they introduce. Many CEDA debaters seem to assume that the knowledge and information contained in their index cards or briefs is somehow magically beamed to the judge who is both an expert on the topic area and a humanoid computer capable of processing, applying and evaluating their evidence for them.⁵

In other words, the debater has failed to explain the new context within which the quotation is being used. Rather, it is expected that the critic will be able to divine the debater's intention from the evidence without an artistic evaluation (analysis) of that evidence.

Forbes Hill expands on this limitation of inartistic proofs:

None of these kinds of documentation speak for themselves. They all require interpretation before they can be applied to the particular case in hand. The arguments that interpret the facts are the substance of rhetoric: they alone belong to the art.⁶

Arguments are thus developed initially through the dialectical process of discovering information, considering refutation, and understanding the issues involved in a proposition. The rhetorical aspect of debate is advocating those positions which a team finds most plausible and coherent. Evidence is the backing of credible experts to support those positions developed during the analysis of the topic.

Within this artistic and inartistic framework we can assess the format of affirmative case structure commonly found in debate rounds and suggest methods for affirmative teams to avoid building cases based primarily on the inartistic mode of proof.

The first inference one might form is that debate rounds might be dominated by inartistic affirmative case construction. If this were the case, coaches and critics would be limiting students to the technical function of researching evidence and merely arranging it in a coherent manner. However, debate should be a form of rhetorical practice for students which prepares them for real-world situations in their careers, social activities, and political lives. As Wilbur Samuel Howell notes:

Rhetorical education has always rested upon the assumption that practice in communication is necessary for the development of proficiency, and that practice must involve experience with the typical patterns of communication in civilized life.⁷

One way that we can contribute to this education is to insist that both those teams which we coach and those which we judge are developing their analytical skills.

Before going further, it should be noted that I do not advocate nor sanction debate cases constructed solely out of analysis. The use of evidence is crucial backing for any argument. Indeed, "CEDA recognizes that careful, systematic analysis and reasoning blend with evidence to form the persuasive weapons of the debater's arsenal."⁸ However, "deficiencies in analysis and reasoning decrease the quality of debate and represent a disregard for responsible advocacy."⁹

The major criticism of many affirmative teams is the use of evidence to represent arguments, as opposed to constituting the backing. David Thomas defines argument in *Advanced Debate*:

There are two senses of this term important to debaters. In the first sense, an argument is a message consisting of a conclusion supported by a reason documented by evidence. The emphasis is on credible proof and logical structure. In the second sense, an argument is a confrontation between two parties in disagreement over a claim.¹⁰

This definition of argument varies little from Aristotle's description of the artistic proof. However, debaters seem to believe that arguments are inherent in quotations. Again, turning to Billy Hill:

Perhaps the biggest culprit is the debater who is misguided by the assumption that reading a 4 x 6 card and making an argument are synonymous. "Why explain the card?" this debater asks. "If I do that, I only waste time, and the judge knows what it means anyway." Cross-examination frequently makes this problem painfully obvious when our debaters are asked to explain what a piece of evidence says and can merely respond by re-reading the card.¹¹

Now, let us turn to a more detailed examination of the inartistic affirmative as it tends to appear in debate rounds.

The Inartistic Affirmative

What follows is an outline and explanation of the inartistic nature of most debate cases. Most affirmative teams breeze through definitions, criteria, and "observations" to get to the substance of their case, the affirmative contention(s). Typically, a contention

heading is read, followed by a series of "tag lines" meant to support the contention; each of these "tag lines" is followed by two and sometimes three quotations. Outlined, it appears as follows:

- I. Contention Name (The United States currently has the capability to deter a Soviet first strike.)**
 - A. Tag Line (The United States has enough nuclear weapons to deter the Soviets.)
 - 1. Evidence
 - 2. Evidence
 - B. Tag Line (The United States can deter a conventional attack.)
 - 1. Evidence
 - 2. Evidence

This process is then repeated for all succeeding sub-points and contentions. Analysis of the contention name (what the affirmative is claiming it will prove) is not simply lacking, but is often nonexistent. Without this analysis it is extremely difficult to know what the affirmative team intends the contention to mean. (A counter-force or a counter-value strike? Under what circumstances? Is it the quantity or the quality of the weapons? Does capability mean that the Soviets *will* be deterred, or that it is *possible* that they will be deterred?) By failing to explain clearly their contention, the affirmative team has sown the seeds of confusion which inevitably take root at the evidentiary and "tag-line" levels.

Inartistic case construction also falters at the level of causal analysis, the "links" for which debaters so often cry out.¹² This is further complicated when the affirmative team, either because they do not know how or are not willing to take the time to analyze clearly their evidence, take a key phrase from their evidence to serve as a tag line. When that phrase is put into the affirmative case, it simply serves as a preview of what the evidence already (presumably) says. The danger is that, since the evidence is not interpreted, the argument is lost. What effectively happens is that the affirmative team is doing little more than the much-criticized negative "spread." An assertion is made, evidence is read, and the rationale of the argument is not developed.

This type of case obscures the debate from the outset, since few warrants are then offered for adoption of the resolution. The critic is then faced with the unenviable task of sorting out evidence and trying to create a coherent argument out of it simply so a ballot can be awarded.¹³

The Artistic Affirmative

The artistic affirmative differs from the inartistic affirmative in one specific way: the artistic affirmative places an emphasis on the element of **explanation**¹⁴ which, as I pointed out earlier, is absent from the inartistic components. The explanation step allows for development of causal links (when possible) and also clarifies the entire argument in a single, clear paragraph.

An example of the artistic affirmative follows:

I. Media coverage of terrorist activities perpetuates terrorist action

Terrorist action is undertaken by individuals with specific political objectives. One of these objectives is publicizing their cause. By allowing media coverage of terrorist activities, we are allowing terrorists to propagate their ideas. Inversely, if the media did not have access to terrorist activities, the very acts themselves would lose much of their impact.

- A. Terrorists want media coverage
 - 1. (evidence)
 - 2. (evidence)
- B. Media coverage exacerbates the problem of terrorism.
 - 1. (evidence)
 - 2. (evidence)
- C. Limiting media coverage would reduce the likelihood of terrorists taking hostages to propagate their beliefs.
 - 1. (evidence)
- D. Due to the necessity of media coverage to the objectives of terrorists, limitations on media coverage would reduce the likelihood of terrorist activities taking place.

This structure has several advantages. First and most obvious is the inclusion of the "explanation" step. The explanation allows the affirmative team to link an argument together without backing up each statement as it is presented. For the critic, this approach allows an assessment of the validity and reasoning of the affirmative position without having to string together a series of unlinked statements. Second, the affirmative team should, when possible, include causal statements, such as "because" and "therefore" in the affirmative case; this should require the negative team to refrain from attacking the affirmative merely on the evidentiary level. Third, the affirmative team can limit its evidence to those statements in the explanation which clearly need to be supported. Some statements will be made which will be accepted by both the negative team and the critic without further support. However, for those statements which will clearly need support, the "tag line"

may be drawn directly from the explanation, therefore supporting the entire affirmative contention. Fourth, the extension of the affirmative case, both in second affirmative constructive and in rebuttals, should become simplified, since affirmative speakers can encompass the substance of the contention and remind the critic of the holistic nature of the contention. A single negative position on one subpoint of the contention would probably not constitute a voting issue for the negative team without encouraging an explanation of the impact of that argument in terms of the entire contention.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to introduce the Aristotelian notion of the artistic proof into affirmative case construction. It should not, however, be limited to the affirmative case. This same analysis can go into the preparation of all affirmative and negative briefs, including value objections.

The central philosophy of this essay has been one of communicative clarity. Debaters should be able to articulate their position beyond what their evidence says. The artistic affirmative offers a model of case construction that exploits their knowledge and understanding of the topic and provides them with a means to articulate that analysis.

Aristotle described the division between artistic and inartistic proofs 2300 years ago. This division remains a fundamental form of argument whether the argument is in the form of a term paper, editorial, thesis or dissertation. Within intercollegiate debate (which many view as a rhetorical activity), there are good reasons to maintain and adapt the artistic proof as a primary mode of argument.

Notes

¹For example, see Jack Howe, "CEDA's Objectives: Lest We Forget," *Contributions on the Philosophy & Practice of CEDA*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1981), 1-3; Jack Howe, "It's Time For Open Season on Squirrels!" *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1985), 14-20; Bertram Gross, "A Case for Debating Propositions of Policy," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), 7-10; M. Anway Jones and Stephen Crawford, "Justification of Values in Terms of Action: Rationale for a Modified Policy-Making Paradigm in Value Debate," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), 11-15.

²For example, see David Zarefsky, "Criteria for Evaluating Non-Policy Argument," *Perspectives on Non-Policy Argument*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1980), 9-16; Michael Gotcher and Thompson Biggers, "An Alternative Approach to Negative Speaker Duties in CEDA Debate," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), 40-47; James R. Hallmark, "Towards a Paradigm for CEDA," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), 89-92; Walter Ulrich, "Eliminating the Abuses of CEDA Debate: The Debate Judge as a Referee," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed., Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1985), 39-42.

³For example, see Don Brownlee, "In Search of Topicality: Definitions and Contexts," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1981), 32-34; David Berube, "Debating Hasty Generalization," *CEDA Yearbook*, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1984), 54-59; Thompson Biggers, "A Single Swallow and Other Leaps of Faith," *CEDA Yearbook* ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1985), 32-38.

⁴Forbes I. Hill, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle," in *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (Davis: Hermagoras Press, 1983), 26.

⁵Billy J. Hill, Jr., "Improving the Quality of CEDA Debate," *National Forensic Journal*, Fall 1986, 107.

⁶Forbes Hill, 26.

⁷Wilbur Samuel Howell, "English Backgrounds of Rhetoric," in the *History of Speech Education in America*, ed. Darl R. Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), 23.

⁸Billy Hill, 111.

⁹Billy Hill, 111.

¹⁰David A. Thomas, "Glossary of Debate Terms," in *Advanced Debate*, 3rd Ed., ed. David A. Thomas and Jack Hart (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co., 1987), 547.

¹¹Billy Hill, 107.

¹²It is recognized that not all arguments are causal arguments. My position here is that most debaters argue that harms have occurred in the status quo. These harms generally imply causal relationships. The inartistic affirmative does not provide a clear picture of those relationships.

¹³This is not suggesting that critics should have to piece together evidence, rather, that all too often our notes contain little else.

¹⁴The reader may note that the terms "name," "explanation," "evidence," and "analysis" are similar to Toulmin's use of "claim," "warrant," and "data." The reader may, if he or she chooses to, use these terms synonymously. I have chosen the language which I believe is most descriptive of the concepts being discussed.