

MONASH DEBATING

R e v i e w

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an annual
publication
of the
monash
association
of debaters

the tabulation of major tournaments

bob nimmo

adjudication team sizes

art ward

debating and social reality

colin etnire and lelia glass

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MONASH University

MONASH DEBATING R e v i e w

EDITOR-IN CHIEF

Sam Block

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Anat Shapira

Europe, the Middle East, and Africa

Colin Etnire

The Americas

Chris Bisset

Asia and Australasia

PUBLICATION MANAGER

Stephen Moore

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Vice-Chancellor's Office, Monash University
Monash Association of Debaters

LAYOUT

Sam Whitney

MONASH DEBATING REVIEW

LEVEL ONE BUILDING 10
MONASH UNIVERSITY
CLAYTON VIC 3800
AUSTRALIA

mdr@monashdebaters.com
www.monashdebaters.com/mdr

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	6
 TOURNAMENT ORGANISATION	
On the origin of delays, by means of tabulation dysfunction <i>/ Bob Nimmo</i>	8
A little goes a long way: some thoughts on the make-up and size of adjudication teams for large international tournaments <i>/ Art Ward</i>	24
Not a judgement call: why we simply shouldn't use lay adjudicators <i>/ Sam Block</i>	34
 SCOPE OF DEBATING	
Theology and the average reasonable person of british parliamentary debating <i>/ Tim Lees</i>	39
It's not all balls <i>/ Rob Mars</i>	58
 ANALYSING DEBATE	
Fighting to construct social reality: a sociolinguistic analysis of american parliamentary debate <i>/ Lelia Glass and Colin Etnire</i>	77

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of the *Monash Debating Review*. It has been a great privilege to be involved in the editing of this volume, and I can speak for myself and all the Associate Editors in saying that the process has been both interesting and fulfilling.

As editors, we wanted this issue to contain pieces worthy of an academic journal, and which went beyond how-to guides to debating of the sort which are widely available. Setting stringent criteria in our call for articles, we were rewarded with some really excellent pieces which we are proud to present here. While they range widely in their content and emphasis, these essays are united by the fact that they extend our knowledge of an area of debating, and promote discussion, rather than contracting it.

Bob Nimmo and Art Ward add to a vital debate about how tournaments should be run with two articles, Nimmo's on tabulation and Ward's on the composition of adjudication teams. Both draw upon myriad personal experiences to make arguments in favour of changing current practice. At the same time, both convey a wealth of information valuable to anyone considering running a debating tournament. Nimmo's article in particular is, we believe, the most comprehensive guide to tabulation ever printed, and the only one of which we are aware that deals with tournaments of the size that Bob has regularly worked on. Ward's article is equally timely, and as the makeup of adjudication teams continues to change, we hope this piece will start a much-needed conversation on how to produce the right ones.

Colin Etnire & Lelia Glass's joint piece takes a very different look at debating. By examining speakers' deployment of language and its inflections to construct a social reality favourable to their argumentative position, their essay brings a much-needed refocusing to the descriptive analysis of competitive debating. While this is far from a how-to guide, it will serve debaters and judges alike well to broaden their conception of debating through this lens.

Finally, Tim Lees and Rob Marrs examine two types of topics and arguments generally held at – or beyond – the periphery of debating. Lees' examination of theological argumentation in the context of British Parliamentary debating casts a new light on the set of argumentation traditionally considered acceptable and makes a strong argument in favour of admitting new types of reasoning. By contrast, Marrs' piece argues for the acceptability of motions about sport and engages with some familiar objections to them. Both address important questions about what sorts of topics we should set, and how we should evaluate speakers addressing them.

Taken together, we hope that this Volume has something to offer anyone interested in serious thinking about debating, adjudication and tournament organisation. We hope that they prompt discussion, both written and oral, and build the knowledge we as a community can draw on.

Sam Block

TOURNAMENT ORGANISATION

MONASH DEBATING Review

ON THE ORIGIN OF DELAYS, BY MEANS OF TABULATION DYSFUNCTION

*or the
extermination of schedules in the struggle for data*

by Bob Nimmo

Tabulation of debate tournaments has undergone a series of changes over the last 25 years. This seems to have been driven by the increased size of competitions such as WUDC, the resulting need for increased professionalism of tab teams and the huge increase in the availability of personal computers and software for managing data. However, despite the increasing sophistication of the systems available to Tab Directors, there remains an expectation that ‘the tab’ will cause delays. This is mostly an accurate reflection on the consistent delays which plague debating competitions, both large and small, which is in turn contributed to both by a lack of understanding about what happens in a tab room and lack of reference material for those new to tabbing.

This article aims to draw from the experience of being in the tab room for WUDCs 2009 and 2012 and EUDCs 2004¹, 2008, 2009 and 2012 with a view to offering a guide to future Tab Directors. It is heavily based on my own experiences and while I have discussed it with some other tab directors, any mistakes remain my own. It also makes a number of (in places unrealistic) assumptions about the availabilities of people, space and equipment but should serve as a starting point for those looking to run tabs of their own, or to better understand what a tab room looks like.² It is categorically **not** the only, or even necessarily best way to run a tab, but simply the best I have come up with, so far.

I aim to discuss three major areas. Firstly, the equipment and set-up of a tab room in order to run efficiently; secondly, what a typical round will look like and what

¹ As assistant Tab Director.

² I don’t think I’ve ever had a setup that looked *exactly* the way I wanted it (in no way due to a lack of co-operation from Org Comm), but I’ve always had a setup which worked. This simply represents an idealised vision.

a Tab Director is likely to need to be doing; and finally, why I believe that the current expectations of tab teams are unrealistic and that a somewhat significant change is needed, especially as competitions grow in size. The first two of these may be of interest to those looking to move from smaller competitions to tabbing larger ones. The last is more likely to be of interest to future hosts of large regional championships when considering the organisational structures they may wish to put in place.

Much of this article is based around my experiences using Tabbie, which I regard as the most sensible choice for a major competition. That said, the vast majority of the information should be applicable to any system.

ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Chief Adjudicator.
DCA	Deputy Chief Adjudicator.
DoO	Director of Operations
EUDC	European Universities Debating Championships
Org	Organising
Comm	Committee
Tab	
Director	Egotistical, Narcissistic Control Freak
WUDC	World Universities Debating Championships

2. Setting Up The Tab Room

The primary responsibility of a Tab Director is to collect data, input it to whichever tab system they are using and produce a draw for the next round in as accurate, quick and efficient a manner as possible.

The following represents a suggested setup for a tab room based on the assumption that the Tab Director is using Tabbie and has unlimited access to space, people and equipment. Constraints of space make it necessary to assume a certain familiarity with both computer networking and the Tabbie software. I am very happy to discuss this in much more detail by e-mail.

2.1 Materials

- 1 Tab Director
- 4-5 tab assistants
- ~15 computers

3+ fast printers³

1 local area network capable of linking all the above⁴

Paper – ideally in a different colour for each round, and not the same colour as any of the feedback forms which the adjudication team (A-team) may be using⁵

1 (large) tab room – next to the A-team room. An interconnecting door is ideal

A connection to whatever system is used for registration at the start of each day/round⁶

While not strictly a part of the tab team, the presence of some system of volunteers for delivering ballots to the tab room is assumed.

Other useful things include lots of USB sticks for backups, large format copies of the timetable and a whiteboard for note taking.

2.2 Setup

2.2.1 Software and Hardware

Install copies of (the same version of) Tabbie on two separate computers and connect them both to the network. These will be used to host the primary and secondary databases. As such, they should be fairly fast, and can be placed as far out of reach as possible. Consider using a laptop to guard against power cuts.

Set up four computers for data entry. All they require is a web-browser and a connection to the network.⁷

Install a copy of 'Acetate' on one of the database computers and configure it to

3 Typically, the tab room needs to print several hundred sheets of paper per round. Doing this via one inkjet printer will not do good things for the timetable...

4 My preference has always been to avoid wireless networks since the consequences of an incorrectly secured network are potentially catastrophic.

5 Pastel colours work best. The frustration experienced when reading dark blue pen on a dark blue ballot is difficult to describe.

6 An internet connection and a link to a Google doc is the usual.

7 Tabbie was written with Firefox in mind. It also seems to work well with Safari and Chrome. Don't use Internet Explorer. Strange things will happen.

compare the two databases.⁸

Connect a computer to the network to display Acetate.

Connect a number of computers to the network with sufficiently long cables/a switch such that they can be placed in the A-team's room for use during judge allocation.⁹

Connect printers to the network such that all the tab room computers can print to them.

Set up a computer (usually not on the tab-room network) to monitor registration.

The system described here uses two separate databases, hosted on different computers. Each of those databases can be accessed by any other computer on the same network.¹⁰ This offers a number of advantages.

Firstly, multiple computers can be simultaneously used to enter results, which greatly reduces the time taken for data entry. Secondly, by using two independent systems, the two databases can be quickly checked against one another, further assuring accuracy.¹¹

My own experiences have been that two independent systems are sufficient to catch any input errors in team points, which might affect subsequent draws.¹² However, there is no reason why this system could not be expanded to cover a third, fourth or fifth system (with obvious slight time penalties due to the extra steps involved).

8 Acetate is a piece of software written by Giles Robertson for Talinn EUDC which compares two separate copies of a Tabbie database against one another and highlights differences in team and speaker points between them

9 e.g. De la Salle WUDC used six, Belgrade EUDC used five, the Cambridge IV used two.

10 Subject to who else has access to said network and your level of control, you may want to spend some time restricting access by IP addresses, passwords etc.

11 Using Acetate (mentioned above).

12 Performing a triple check of all entered ballots between rounds (and so without time pressure) in Tallinn, Cork, Newcastle, Manila and Belgrade (somewhere well in excess of 2,000 ballots) found no team point errors and only two speaker point errors (both of which were corrected before the break, and neither of which affected any round draws). While it is, of course, possible errors existed and were not found through this triple check; it seems unlikely.

2.2.2 Layout Of The Tab Room

The four data entry computers operate as in teams of two. A sample layout is shown in Figure 1, with the lower two computers connected to the primary database and the upper two connected to the secondary database.

2.2.3 Data Entry

Figure 2 sets out a system for the flow of ballots through the tab room.

Ballots are delivered to the desk between the lower pair of tab data entry stations (which both feed into the primary database). Once any given ballot has been entered by either of that pair, they then place it on a stack between the upper pair of data entry stations.

This allows the same ballot to be entered into the second, independent system before being deposited on a stack of ballots which should now have been entered into both systems.

Data Entry Speed

A reasonable target for dealing with a ballot is ~30 seconds. For two teams of two, this would suggest that data entry for something the size of current rounds of WUDC ought to take 25 1/2 minutes.¹³ That makes the (naïve) assumption that all the ballots will be completed and returned at the correct time, but is nevertheless a reasonable rule of thumb when calculating time needed provided a small safety margin is added for dealing with potential missing ballots, low point wins or other minor problems. Furthermore, so long as the slowest 20% of ballots arrive before the other 80% have all been entered (an additional 20 minutes in the example above), the last ballot will still be entered on time.¹⁴

My experience has been that teams of two are sufficient for data entry until competitions exceed about 300 teams. The objective is to be finished with all the ballots before the adjudication team are ready to look at the next round draw. Since they have to a) judge their own debate, b) give an oral adjudication, c) come back to the tab room and d) update judge ranking based on previous rounds feedback, the time taken by the tab team is typically not the limiting factor at

¹³ 100 ballots; $t \approx (\text{time for one ballot} \times \text{number of ballots} \div \text{number in a single team}) + \text{time for one ballot}$.

¹⁴ Of course, if **everyone** takes an extra 20 minutes, you can kiss the timetable goodbye, so this cannot be considered justification for not enforcing whatever time limit is set on judging.

Figure 1

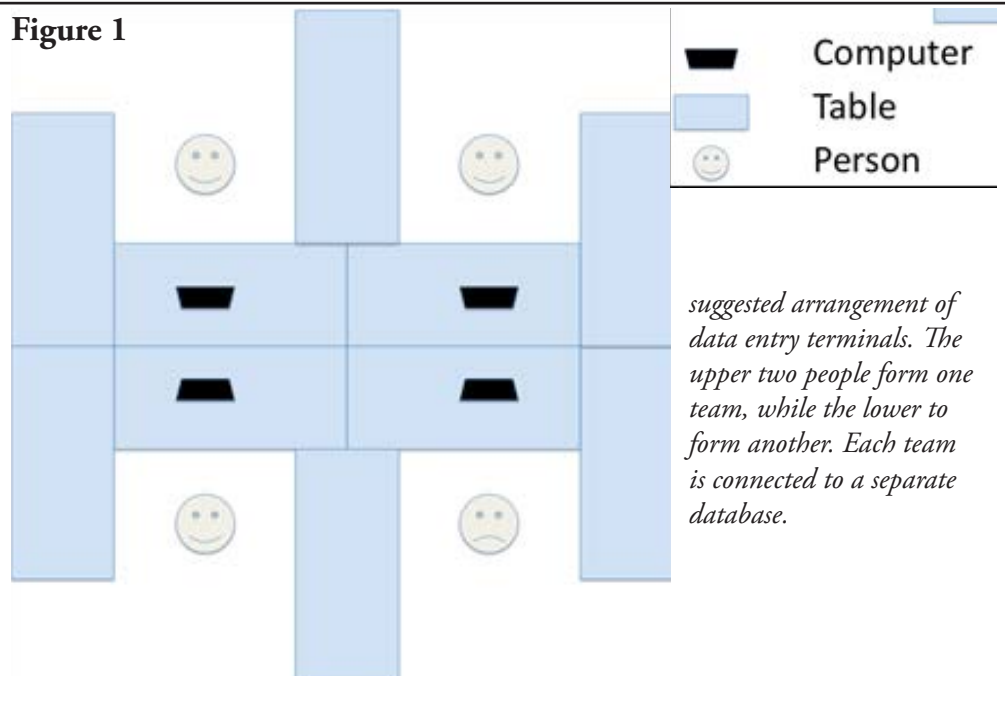


Figure 2

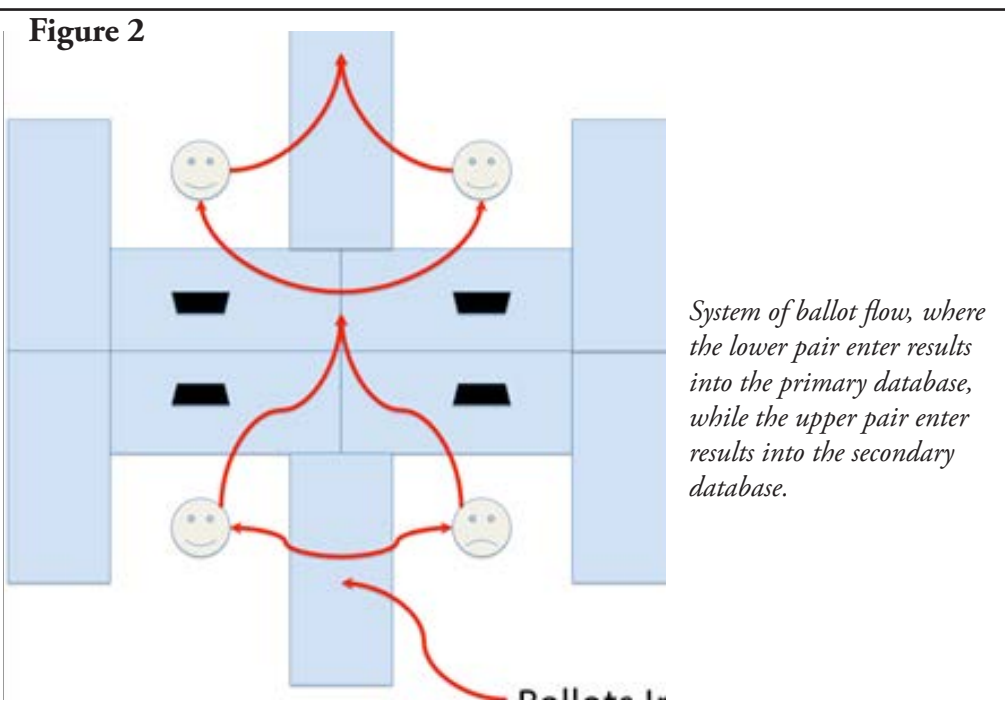
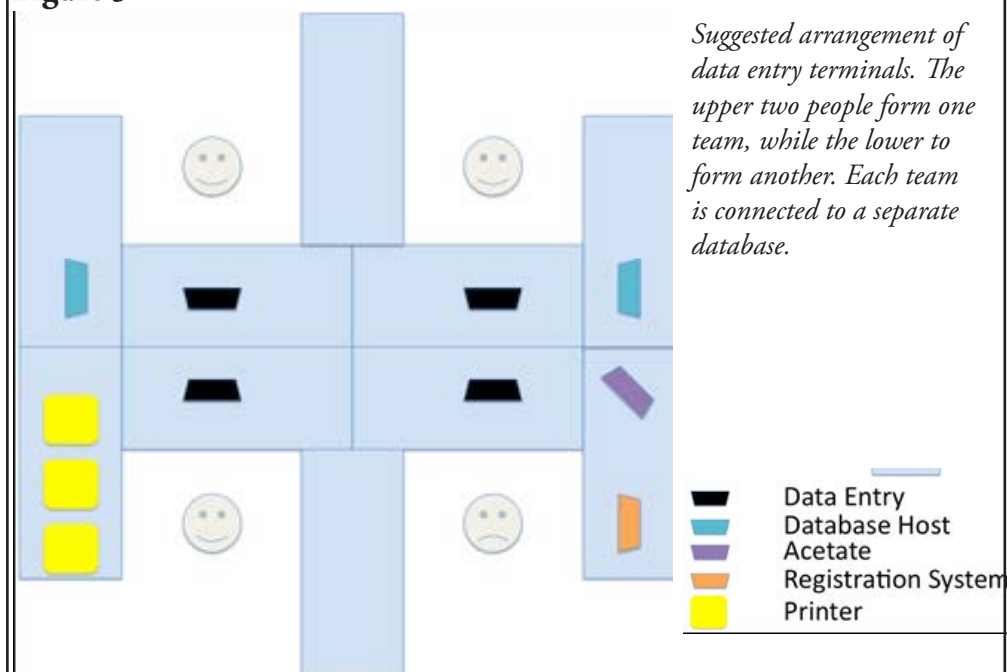


Figure 3



competitions of under 75 ballots. After that point, it may be worth considering increasing the size of each team to three but this must be balanced against an inevitably limited pool of suitable candidates for data entry.

2.2.4 Ballot Running

Ballot running is not, strictly, the responsibility of the tab room, but is critical for the smooth functioning of the tab. Typically, Org Comm will detail volunteers to bring any given ballot to the tab room within a very small number of minutes of the judge completing it.

The one, critical, interaction between volunteers and the tab room occurs when a judge has made an error in filling in their ballot. This tends to be discovered by the volunteers themselves, but occasionally one makes it all the way to the tab room. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to have a system of radios which make it possible to very quickly contact the building where the ballot originated and arrange for the judge to be brought to the tab room once she has finished oral adjudication.¹⁵

¹⁵ The most common system is a single person, with a radio, detailed to each floor of a building and who

2.2.5 Tab Butler

One way of managing contact with the runners is to detail a single assistant to act as a “Tab Butler”. Instead of carrying out data entry, they can act as an intermediary between the Tab Director and the volunteers. They would typically sit at the entrance to the tab room, tick off ballots as they arrive and handle the details of arranging for any judges to be found and brought to the tab room when alerted to problems by the Tab Director.

In this way, the Tab Director can concentrate on data entry, while someone else is able to handle any lengthy radio messages and monitor the arrival of ballots (and where bottlenecks are appearing).

2.3 Practicalities of a Round

The following list of steps represents most of what I find myself needing to do during any given round. Obviously, for the first round of the day, there is an added registration step, and following the last round of the day, there is no need to turn round the tab quickly.¹⁶ Specific timings are not given, since they will vary based on the layout of rooms, the time allocated for judging decisions, the time required by the adjudication team and the size of the competitions

2.3.1 Sample round - step by step guide

[Draw hits the screen]

Co-ordinate simultaneous release of motion in different announce venues (if applicable).

[Motion hits the screen]

Radio volunteers that they may open their envelopes of ballots and distribute them to rooms such that they are waiting for judges when they arrive.¹⁷

does not leave that post until after all their ballots have been returned.

Recalling judges becomes more difficult during closed rounds and usually requires an announcement by a member of Org Comm.

16 Though if you dare to take more than five minutes to check your data before announcing a break, you are clearly a Bad Person™ and facebook will whine at you.

17 The ballots typically have the motion written on them, and so are better kept sealed until the release of the motion.

Hang around to answer questions from those who missed their room.

Go back to tab room.

Answer radio queries about lost teams/judges.¹⁸

[Round officially starts]

Make decisions regarding missing judges and dispatch swing teams.¹⁹

Check all rounds have actually started.

[All rounds have actually begun]

Go and talk (in person) to as many of the following as possible:

Convenor. They'll want to know about any upcoming problems and whether things have thus far been running to timetable. They may also be able to give advanced warning of any upcoming issues (e.g. lunch is going to show up late, so the timetable needs tweaked).

Head of the Volunteer Teams. Are you providing them with enough copies of the draw? Are the ballots getting distributed and returned fast enough?

As many volunteers as possible. Volunteering at worlds has to be one of the most underappreciated roles relative to importance. Go and check if you can make their lives easier and say thank you. Lots.²⁰

Any other members of org comm who want to tell you things. E.g. such and such a team is ill, and wants out of the tab. Or was ill, but has now come back.

Return to tab room.

18 Ideally, most of these can be handled by pre-printed copies of the draw given to volunteers who then do not need to ask the tab room where people should be.

19 In principle, what to do about missing judges should be the A-team's call. They are, however, usually all judging and cannot be contacted by the time this becomes a problem. It is helpful to get them to issue guidance and give permission to fix these problems for them.

Available swing teams (who have been preping the motion) should be gathered within earshot of the tab room at the time the round is expected to be starting.

20 Hypocrisy alert: I've never been as good at this as I'd like, or as I think I should have been.

Overwrite the second copy of the database with a copy of the current draw.²¹

Await ballots.

Start entering ballots.

Radio relevant volunteer teams to collect chair judges of ballots which are wrong (e.g. low point wins etc). Ideally, the Tab Butler can handle details of this after 'problem rooms' are identified.

As members of the A-team come back, remind them that they can be updating judge rankings using their own computers in the A-team room.

Finish entering all the ballots (on both copies of the tab).

Check the two sets of results match using Acetate.

(Hand-examine any ballots which are in dispute. The overwhelming majority of mistakes are due to handwriting interpretation, which can typically be resolved by the tab team, but may require locating the chair judge to clarify).

Check whether the A-team have finished updating judge rankings.

Ask what they want the automatic allocation to look like.²²

- *How should their chairs be assigned from top to bottom of the tab?*
- *How strong should the panelists be in relation to the different strengths of the rooms throughout the tournament?*
- *etc.*

(Tabbie has a number of ways of prioritising different factors in judge allocation, which can be used to accommodate a wide range of desires on the part of your A-team).²³

Convert what they want into an appropriate set of allocation parameters.

²¹ Data entry requires both copies of the tab database to have the same draw loaded into them. The secondary database will currently contain only the results from the previous round. Since the draw and allocation is performed only on the primary tab, the second copy will need to be overwritten with the new draw data from the primary so that the results entry screen reflects the current round.

²² This conversation should have happened days before, but it's worth checking since they may have changed requirements based on progress to date.

²³ For a more detailed explanation, see the text on the 'Adjudication Parameters' screen of Tabbie, or feel free to contact the author.

Backup.²⁴

[Draw made]

‘Sense check’ from the A-team.

A ‘sense check’ is a quick examination of the draw by members of the A-team to see whether the automatic allocation is close enough to their eventual aims for it to be worth moving to manual tweaking, or whether they would like the judge allocation re-done with the parameters mentioned above adjusted to give a better starting point. This process can be repeated several times. Generally, it is faster to do so than to perform a manual allocation where a large proportion of the judges need moved.

(If necessary, reload the most recent backup, which was made just before the draw was created (see immediately above). You can then adjust the parameters by which the tab assigns judges and re-draw in an attempt to get a better match with the desires of your A-team).²⁵

Backup.

[A-team start making manual judge changes.]

Check the current status of lunch and for any unforeseen problems which will affect the targeted draw-announce time with the convenor/appropriate member of Org Comm (if the A-team have extra time based on food queues, tell them).

Extract an estimate from the A-team as to how long they need to finalise their allocation.²⁶

Leave A-team alone to make manual changes.

²⁴ Tabbie has the ability to save an entire copy of the database very quickly and, if necessary, revert back to it at a later point. I **strongly** recommend doing this before performing any action which would be difficult or impossible to reverse (such as drawing a new round).

²⁵ Based on the way Tabbie is programmed, this will not affect the way teams are sorted into rooms. So, for example, the same teams will be pulled up during a redraw and will face the same teams as before. Only the judge allocation will be affected.

²⁶ *From the perspective of the tab room*, the most important skill for a CA is the ability to tell the truth when asked this question. Given the number of things which will be set in motion based on the answer, the accuracy of the answer is far more important than a prediction which makes it (briefly) look like you’ll run to timetable.

Arrange for volunteers to collect copies of the draw and ballots in x minutes.

(x is however long the A-team need, plus however long you think all the printing will take.)

Let convenor/members of org comm know that a draw should be ready in y minutes and check that it is practical for the competitors to assemble by that time. *Where practical*, announcements by the org-comm or A-team can be made *before* the draw is actually ready to display on the screens since neither of those groups need to be in the tab room during printing or powerpoint presentation generation.

(y is x plus however long you need to get to the announce venue with an assembled powerpoint.)

With 5-10 minutes to go, check the progress of the A-team.

(If necessary, contact convenor/org comm./volunteers to adjust x and y mentioned above.)

Get someone to check the projectors are switched on and warmed up (if necessary).

[Get finished allocation from the A-team]

Backup.

Finalise the draw.²⁷

Backup.²⁸

Load printers with a new colour of paper.

Print ballots.

Print copies of the draw for a) the A-team, b) volunteer teams, c) helpdesks, d) anyone else who wants one.

Distribute copies to the appropriate people.

²⁷ 'Finalise' is a technical term from Tabbie, whereby the draw is locked, no further changes can be made and the program automatically arranges a scrolling display of the draw for you.

²⁸ This is the backup which will need to be copied across to the secondary tab database for results entry for the most recently created round.

Generate the round display.

Go to the announce venue.

Start the draw.

[Draw hits the screen]

4. Proposed Changes

4.1 The Problem With The Status Quo

While the above represents my experiences of a number of EUDCs and WUDCs as Tab Director, and is largely how I would plan to do any future such competitions, I am increasingly of the opinion that it is a bad way to do things.

It has been my experience that while the importance of pre-planning for as many contingencies as possible cannot be stressed enough, the events between the arrival of delegates on-site for the first round on any given day and their departure back to hotels/socials are inevitably chaotic and require constant monitoring and compensating for. In order to run to time, the tab room, the A-team and the volunteers coordinating both registration and ballot-running must all function efficiently and as part of an interlocking machine, while also adjusting to any timetable variations imposed by refreshments between rounds, illness, lost ballots and the myriad other unplanned events which can throw off a timetable.

With the setup described, both the convenor and the tab room are each often in possession of much, *but not all*, of the critical information regarding how the day is progressing. Typically, the convener has a good appreciation of how things are running at an organisational level (how registration is going, when people might come back from lunch) since they tend to act as the head of the OrgComm side of proceedings. The tab room has all the information on what the A-team are doing, where all the ballots are and how soon they can realistically expect to be able to announce the next round (assuming delegates are ready to be announced to) since they are in the room where most of those factors are determined.

This tends to lead to these two individuals having to chase each other trying to find out what the other knows and make decisions accordingly. However, neither

of these people is in a very good position to devote the time needed to liaising with the other.

The convener is impeded by the very many other things they need to worry about aside from the running of debates on any given day. They usually have to juggle the needs not only of rounds, but also issues arising from socials, catering, accommodation, the attentions of sponsors and a host of other details which I, as tab director, haven't even noticed.

The tab director is supposed to be coping with between 50 and 100 ballots, the complexities of a room full of computers, translating the desires of the A-team into a reality regarding automatic judge allocation and generally managing the hardware and software. Increasingly, tab directors are from outside the host institution and so are unfamiliar with the buildings, the volunteers and many of the members of Org Comm. While I believe that this can be accomplished while still maintaining an awareness of how events are proceeding outside the tab room, in the event of any problem in the tab room requiring their full attention, other responsibilities will inevitably be neglected and communication starts to break down with predictable consequences.

4.2 Proposed Solution

I would therefore like to recommend the creation of a new post by future rounds of WUDC, EUDC and larger national competitions.²⁹ Such a 'Director of Operations' would be responsible for coordinating tournament events on site between the arrival of the first delegate and the departure of the last one. Essentially, they would take on all aspects of the tab master's job which do not relate directly to managing the tab room itself, while freeing the convener to concentrate on a larger picture.

Exactly who this person should be has been the subject of some discussion.

The DoO must:

be at least passingly familiar with the operations of a tab room,

²⁹ I also think it would be a good idea for other major competitions, but while I have spoken to a small number of non-European organizers about their experiences, I can't speak authoritatively about regional competitions I've never attended.

be able to relate to the adjudication team as an equal (not necessarily in terms of debate CV, but in terms of mutual respect),³⁰

have or gain sufficient familiarity with the members of OrgComm to be able to work smoothly with them once debating starts.

have as much experience of the organising and adjudication of major tournaments as possible.

(Thus the ideal candidate is a former convenor, tab master *and* CA or DCA of worlds (a description which fits no-one I know)).

I have suggested that the DoO should be drawn from within the host institution in order to guarantee their familiarity with the site and organisation. This does run the risk that their pre-existing relationship with the A-team will be limited and the pool of available candidates with experience of major competitions is likely to be limited, especially after the host appoints a convener who is likely to need similar experience.

A (superior) counter-proposal is to appoint, from outside, a relatively senior member of the debating community (a former CA or convenor, for example) in order to guarantee their past experience with major competitions and their ability to interact with any 'larger egos' on a tab team or A-team. Such a person would travel out before the competition, in order to meet the relevant members of Org Comm and familiarise themselves with the tournament venues since they are unlikely to be familiar with both.

Clearly, WUDC and similar competitions can run without such a post. However, the problems which face each new host institution continue to grow with the size and complexity of the tournament. A Director of Operations is far from a universal solution to all those issues, and any volunteer organized competition with over 1,000 delegates will almost inevitably encounter delays and unexpected problems. However, I do believe that it is a course of action which seems likely to smooth the running of the first three days of debating.

30 While I would love to believe that every member of the A-team and OrgComm is dedicated to working harmoniously to produce a smoothly run tournament, it is a sad truth that there are a number of enormous egos (not least my own) in debating and under stress, not everyone is listened to equally.

5. Concluding Thoughts

The first two sections of this article can be seen as an introductory guide to what a tab room looks like, and what factors must be considered by a Tab Director both before (section 2) and during (section 3) a competition in order to run an efficient operation.

The appointment or otherwise of a DoO will not greatly affect the majority of the advice given above, though it will reduce the amount of liaising a Tab Director needs to fit into their schedule.

Whether future competitions decide to adopt the post of DoO will doubtless be influenced by the availability of *willing* candidates as well as the additional cost of travel and accommodation for such a person. Nevertheless, it remains my belief that the role of Tab Director has become demanding to the point where failure in at least one of their responsibilities is almost inevitable in the event of any problem which requires the majority of their attention. If WUDC is to remain at the current scale or have the option of further expansion, and if tab teams are to deliver the increasingly professional standards (rightly) expected of them, it is my opinion that a structural change of this sort is necessary.

Acknowledgements

While this article (and any error within) is based on my own experiences, I am indebted to Richard Coates, Simone van Elk, Stephen Goodman, Michael Plygawko, Giles Robertson and especially Sam Block and Art Ward for very fruitful discussions.

Tabbie is an open-source tabulation program, which has been contributed to by a number of developers over the years. Despite persistent rumours, none of those developers were me. Acetate was written by Giles Robertson.

Tabbie will be re-released online in the new year. Until such time, copies of both Tabbie and Acetate can be obtained from (among others) myself.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

Some thoughts on the make-up and size of adjudication teams for large international tournaments

by Art Ward

Over the last ten years of the World Universities Debating Championships and the European Universities Debating Championships the numbers of teams competing has increased from just over 300 to almost 400 and from 72 to over 200 respectively. Along with this increase in team numbers has come a large increase in the default size of adjudication teams. In some cases this has been an increase in Deputy Chief Adjudicator numbers¹, in other cases it has taken the form of an increase in the number of Chief Adjudicators² and in some select cases, both of the above have occurred simultaneously.³ This article will posit that this level of increase is neither necessary nor helpful, and is only one facet of a larger problem with bid competition, which should be prevented.

It is worth making three brief notes at the outset:

Firstly, the purpose of this article is to provide what I hope is a reasoned perspective on this issue, having seen first-hand various incarnations of adjudication teams at large tournaments (from a Convenor's perspective for WUDC 2009, from a DCA's perspective at WUDC 2011 and from a CA's perspective at EUDC 2012).

Secondly, only WUDC and EUDC will be directly referenced in this article. There are two reasons for this: firstly, they are comparable tournaments (both being large, international and in the British Parliamentary (BP) format). Secondly, I have direct experience of these tournaments in a way not true of other international competitions. The fact that competitions in other formats are not directly comparable, such as the Australasian Intervarsity Debating

1 Newcastle EUDC, Galway EUDC, Belgrade EUDC

2 Berlin WUDC

3 Chennai WUDC, DLSU WUDC

Championships⁴ means that claims or suggestions made her put forward may not be applicable to all international competitions such competitions.⁵ As a result, the discussion will be limited to WUDC & EUDC.

Thirdly, this article is not meant to be an attack on the fine and dedicated people I have had the chance to work alongside at various tournaments over the years. It is merely a frank (and hopefully useful) set of observations that I have conglomerated through my time in debating. I hope it is taken as it is meant.

A Brief History Lesson

In 2004/05 WUDC held by MMU in Malaysia consisted 312 of teams and was overseen by an adjudication team of 4 (1 CA⁶ and 3 DCAs⁷). The upcoming WUDC in Berlin, Germany (2012/13) consisting of 400 teams will be governed by 2 CAs⁸ and 3 DCAs⁹. The following year in Chennai, India (2013/14) consisting of 360 teams will be governed by 2 CAs¹⁰ and 4 DCAs¹¹. The last WUDC on record held in Manila, Philippines, consisting of 396 teams, was overseen by an adjudication team of 7 (2 CAs¹² and 5 DCAs¹³).

The number of teams at these championships has expanded steadily over the years, hitting a high watermark in at Assumption WUDC, Thailand of 396 teams. Each tournament held had the same number of rounds, the only alteration being the expansion of the ESL break, and the creation of the EFL break – at most the creation of 5 extra rounds of debate, all knock-out rounds ('out rounds').

The story is extremely similar when examining EUDC. At Durham EUDC in

4 The physical debating format and the sheer number of motions required being just two differentiating factors

5 However, to the extent that they do apply when it comes to how to think when constructing an adjudication team for a bid, all the better

6 Logan Balavijendran

7 Kevin Massie, Praba Ganesan, Jeremy Brier

8 Sharmila Parmanand & Douglas Cochran (Berlin);

9 Victor Finkel, Isabelle Fischer, James Kilcup

10 Harish Natarajan & Michael Baer

11 Ely Zosa, Stephen Whittington, Fiona Prowse, Michael Shapira

12 Sam Block & Lucinda David

13 Joe Roussos, Tim Mooney, Cormac Early, Masako Suzuki, Art Ward

2003, there were 72 teams overseen by an adjudication team of 2 (1 CA¹⁴ and 1 DCA¹⁵). Next year's EUDC set to take place in Manchester, England featuring 220 teams will be overseen by a team of 6 (1 CA¹⁶ and 5 DCAs¹⁷) and the last EUDC on record which took place in Belgrade, Serbia and featured 212¹⁸ number of teams in 2012 was overseen by a team of 5 (1 CA¹⁹ and 4 DCAs²⁰).

What is clear from these two tournaments is that team numbers are increasing, though not extraordinarily so, but the numbers of members of adjudication teams are increasing at an extremely high rate. Some of this increase can be attributed to the expanding number of teams at these tournaments, some of the rest of the increase to the corresponding increase in the number and size of extra breaks at these tournaments. However, I would suggest that the largest part of the increase is due to competition between bids, and that the other factors such as increasing team numbers or 'representing more regions' are in fact neither sufficient reasons for allowing these increases to continue nor, even, of worth in and of themselves – as will be detailed below. Realistically bids do not think 'we have a high team cap, therefore it is incumbent upon us to have a very large adjudication team in order to cope with the issues that this will create'. Sadly, the thinking is normally 'let's win the bid first doing whatever we need to in order to secure votes, and we will sort the rest out when the dust settles'.

The Myth of 'Regional Representation'

Before moving to look at what are common defences to the expanding size of adjudication teams, there is one that I feel arises so often that it should be dealt with separately.

The most rhetorical and common defence of the appointment of larger and larger numbers of adjudication team members is wheeled out a lot at the council meetings of both EUDC and WUDC. It is that we need more and more DCAs in order to ensure representation of all of the regions' views, opinions and concerns on an adjudication panel – and, vitally, that those views, opinions and concerns

14 Tom Hamilton

15 Mila Turajilic

16 Shengwu Li

17 Omer Nevo, Leyla Orak, Filip Dobranic, Dessislava Kirova, Joe Roussos

18 Rounding upwards due to the inclusion of swing teams

19 Art Ward

20 Isabelle Fischer, Stephen Boyle, Filip Dobranic, Benjamin Woolgar

are best (or only possibly properly) put forward by a member of that debating community.

There are a variety of problems with this line of thinking. Firstly, if we followed it adjudication teams would be astronomically large.²¹ Secondly, it assumes that just because a given person is from a given region they are necessarily the best advocate for the issues of that region. While that may hold true some of the time, it is not a good metric for deciding on a DCA appointment, especially where applicants lack a track record of such a level of advocacy for issues arising specific to that region. Thirdly, and I think most importantly, it fetishises *regional* issues above all other issues in deciding what needs to be represented on an adjudication team. I completely understand that to some extent adjudication teams should be diverse, insofar as they don't simply constitute a bunch of people who operate on the same circuit week-in week-out, but beyond that, the issues facing debaters in different continents (or the issues which they should be worried about) are not dealt with by DCA appointments.

The important issues such as appropriate understanding of language considerations,²² the allocation of funding to independent adjudicators, the screening of motions from different circuits to prevent unfair advantages being given etc., are ones which should be dealt with in a different way. Funding issues should be dealt with via clear and accountable systems of how funding is allocated (*cf* the process by which adjudicators were funded for DLSU WUDC in 2011/12 and the report submitted to WUDC Council re same²³). All adjudication teams should be screening motions to avoid repeating those recently run at major tournaments regardless of the regions they are personally from. It is not aided by someone from a given region being at a certain tournament during the year.

In summary, adjudication team members do not 'represent' the world debating community in a traditional sense. They are basically trustees of the debating aspects of the tournament. We should appoint them based on their skillsets and how much trust we place in them overall first, with any and all other considerations coming afterwards.

21 At last count EUDC could be said to have had close to 10 'regions' represented at it

22 The specific appointment of a DCA from an ESL or EFL speaking background may be a viable route to solve some of this issue, but a full discussion of that type of appointment is beyond the scope of this article

23 Council was informed of a large amount of information concerning the process, including but not limited to: the amount of money available for distribution, the process by which it was distributed, the various stages in the allocation process and what was done in the event of funding becoming available late on due to drop-outs, cancellations, who received funding and where those who received said funding came from

Some Problems with Larger Adjudication Teams

Bid Inflation

The increase in the number of universities who are willing to pursue the extremely arduous task of bidding to host large scale international competitions is to be celebrated. However, as more and more become willing to try to play host, the competition between bids escalates. While this may have some very useful consequences (fact-checking of claims in bid documentation is more strenuous, people are more fastidious in general when they have someone with whom they can be directly compared, competitors tend to get more for their money as bids have to offer more to win votes, etc.), it has created an unfortunate situation where bids have begun to compete on the size of the adjudication team which they hope to offer.

Let me be quite clear in what I mean by this – I do not mean that they are competing on the sheer quality of their candidates (obviously appointing a strong CA for a bid is an extremely good thing); I mean that they are competing based on the size and makeup of adjudication teams in bids. One bid offers to appoint 3 DCAs, the next offers to appoint 3 plus 1 to come from guaranteed region X. In some cases, bids appoint a variety of people (qualified or not)²⁴ whose primary purpose at that point is to straddle the map and grab as many votes as possible in the competitive bidding process. This is the aspect of bid competition with which I have a substantial issue.

The process of CA/DCA bid inflation has some serious drawbacks. Firstly, when bids are in direct competition quality candidates who could prove to be extremely beneficial for competitors at the tournament (wherever it is held) are aligned with one bid, and against the other(s) – i.e. they become part of bid A, which loses and are then unable to contribute to the eventual tournament. While some element of this is unavoidable (e.g. the bid needs a CA in order to be viable) it is avoidable in the case of DCAs to a very large extent.

Secondly, when DCAs begin to be appointed to bids in a flurry of activity when competition begins to step up as the bid presentation date commences the focus can very easily shift to a less than thorough examination of the given merits of the candidate beyond a) having a substantial CV of one kind or another (recently this

²⁴ Very seldom are these candidates entirely unqualified, but there is a definite lowering of the quality bar in some cases to garner some more votes

is shifting more and more towards people with strong speaking CVs as opposed to general adjudication experience or previous adjudication *team* experience) and b) being from a place with voting power or just being able to tie up a given region. This has happened countless times in the run up to both EUDC and WUDC, both in the guise of adding people to bids or, at extremely short notice, altering the number of DCAs that a bid will commit to appoint.

Thirdly, it can lead to the unfortunate situation of bids appointing individuals for the purpose of depriving a different bid of their participation. This is obviously not to say that the individual in question may not add value to the bid they end up as part of, in the vast majority of cases they will, but they are being appointed strategically *first* and on their merits *second*, which is entirely the wrong way around. The candidate being added to their bid can provide them with value, but a significant proportion of that value comes from that person's unavailability to the other bid now.

Often DCA roles will be type cast – there may be the person who has lots of previous adjudication team experience, there may be the person who is a hot commodity off the back of recent successes – but often there are a couple of people who fit the bill for a given role. By appointing two similar candidates (strong candidates both, but both not required) firstly the team grows in number, which is hard to row back from (see below for further discussion of this point), secondly the other bid in the process is deprived of a candidate who would have provided much more marginal utility for them than that candidate provides for the other bid, or eventually, tournament.

Lasting Practice

The problems mentioned above would not prove to be as troubling if they were contained in a single tournament. However, the process of adjudication team inflation appears to have a lasting effect. Despite certain years of team numbers leveling off, or in fact decreasing, we see no correlative decrease in the overall size of adjudication teams. With the demand for team spaces at EUDC and to a greater extent WUDC, this issue is only going to be brought more sharply into focus. WUDC survived for many, many years with a single CA and 3 DCAs,²⁵ when team numbers varied substantially.²⁶

²⁵ 2005-2011

²⁶ 312-296

The efficient running, or otherwise, of the tournaments that took place during this period, was not dictated by the number of DCAs present. It was dictated by the quality of the DCAs and to an extraordinarily large degree by the quality of the tab setup used at the various tournaments. The same analysis can be applied to the recent EUDC and WUDC tournaments where efficiency of tournament running is very easily decoupled from the size of the adjudication teams in charge. If we look at tournaments with lower number of DCAs that ran extremely well as opposed to others with large teams that did not. Again, this is not to say that tournaments cannot run well with a large adjudication team (they obviously can and have so done previously) but given that a) there are downsides to larger teams that don't exist with smaller teams and b) tournaments can demonstrably run well with small teams, the preferable scenario seems clear.

It becomes extremely difficult for tournaments to suggest a structure much smaller than other tournaments (even if that is only returning to the old numbers) when other bids are offering more DCAs covering every corner of the globe, or promising to appoint X number of DCAs from a given region, where that region looks like being the origin of the swing votes at council. The longer successive tournaments continue to have larger and larger teams, the less likely it is we can ever return to more manageable numbers and the more problems that are likely to be caused. The idea of limiting the numbers during the bid stage has already gained momentum at EUDC, recognition, in part at least, of some of the harmful consequences of ever expanding numbers of adjudication team members being announced during the bidding process.²⁷

Decision-Making & Workload

The final substantive issue I would like to discuss in relation to problems with larger teams is how larger numbers begin to affect decision-making. The more people there are, the more ideas that are generated, the more input you get on your ideas – or so the conventional wisdom seems to be saying.

Being perfectly frank, this is only true to a point when it comes to the generation and wording of topics. A solid, experienced CA, coupled with a solid and experienced team of DCAs (numbering no more than 3 in my view) should be perfectly capable of creating, constructing and crafting motions in such a way as to make them viable for use at a large international competition. As the numbers begin to grow, so do the alterations necessary to get a version of a motion that

²⁷ See below for a further discussion of this constitutional amendment

everyone is happy with. Obviously I am not against refining of motions, but the more voices in the room, the more drawn out and fraught the process tends to become. While conversations can be facilitated well in large groups, and I have personally seen so at times done effectively, it is something which specific thought and effort has to be put into to ensure it happens, whereas with the more nucleated adjudication team this is less of a concern.

As a precautionary note – for tournaments who do have large teams already in place, or for future tournaments who decide to run contrary to the advice here and put in place a large team – it would be very wise to place serious thought and consideration into the ability of the CAs of such a bid to control and facilitate useful discussions among large groups of people.²⁸

Moreover, the larger the number of voices in the room when it comes to motions, the more likely it is that discussions will lead to situations of horse-trading. The ‘I know you’re not keen on this one, but you can run your motion about X if you will let us run this one’ conversation becomes more likely. This is not to say that it happens in all large teams (or that it never happens in smaller teams) but it becomes more likely in larger teams due to larger groups banding together on a given motion or wishing to pacify someone in the obvious minority.

Suggested Alternatives

In the case of competitive bid processes

The European debating community, to its credit, has attempted to legislate on this issue to prevent some of the ills, which I have outlined above. They have amended the constitution governing EUDC to state that when a bid is created that it is embargoed from appointing more than 1 CA and 1 DCA before being awarded the rights to host the Championships. This prevents bids adding large numbers of DCAs in order to shore up votes.

This seems like a common-sense solution to a large proportion of the problem – and I wholeheartedly hope that someone will table an amendment to the WUDC constitution to the same effect. However in spite of these benefits, it does not deal

²⁸ This may appear trite, but it not a skillset which is often (if at all) referenced during any bid or appointment process

with the general idea of tournaments appointing large amounts of DCAs as they feel it simply makes the tournament look better. DCAs should be chosen to fulfill very specific needs – motion setting, organisational ability, overall competence in the role – anything else should be subordinate and very much ancillary.

To substantiate this point, look at the questions people are now asking when they hear an institution is bidding. The first question is usually ‘who have they got on their team?’ The ability to answer this question with a host of big names is appealing to bids, grants a given bid a larger sense of stability.²⁹

To be very clear – the point here is not that just sheer large numbers of DCAs wins votes, the point is that appointing lots of DCAs to shore up votes from different areas/constituencies does win votes. But the sheer process of doing so consistently ups the numbers (which brings the attendant problems discussed above).

In the case of uncontested bid processes

I would recommend that bids construct themselves as conservatively as possible. A single Chief Adjudicator is all that should really be required in order to represent the adjudication quality one can expect at a tournament should a bid be successful. Bids should spend a very large amount of time considering exactly who they want to head up their bid and then in consultation with that CA what DCA structure they wish to operate, making this the focus of the adjudication issues at the relevant council meetings. Bids should also restrain themselves once they have won the bid and only appoint as many DCAs as they feel are necessary to properly perform the various tasks making up an efficient tournament. To do otherwise while using the money of the tournament is at worst, misuse of that money, or at best inefficient.³⁰

A Danger & an Exception to the above

The Danger

The primary danger with structuring bidding processes is that the formal appointment of DCAs is replaced with a cloak-and-dagger/nod-and-wink/jobs-

²⁹ This hits at the idea that when people see big names signed up they assume that the bid must have lots of other things in order/in place

³⁰ Said monies being made up in large proportion by money coming directly from participants

for-the-boys (pick whichever idiom you prefer) system of appointments where there is a CA formally appointed and people are 'promised' DCA slots after the process is complete.

This should be combated in two ways, one far more effective than the other. The first (and less effective way) is for bids to heavily self-regulate. Restricting teams size is for the overall benefit of the debating community as a whole and the efficacy of the tournament in question. Bids (and CAs in particular) should see them as such. Secondly, all tournaments should adopt the application -> shortlist -> feedback process -> appointment model used in recent years by WUDC. It is an excellent way for the community to have their say, to weed out potentially viable but potentially problematic candidates and it makes the entire process both more transparent and instills more confidence in the tournament overall.

The Exception

One exception, which I think it is very necessary to outline, is in relation to the appointment of a second CA or 'internal CA' in situations where this is appropriate. On certain occasions it may be necessary for a bid to appoint a CA who is 'local', either to the host University or host city in order to secure support from the debating society bidding or from the University itself. While I maintain that where this isn't necessary it should not take place, it is an understandable exception to the cases outlined above. Without allowing for such an exception the debating community could easily find itself in a situation where they are unable to find Universities who are able to bid. It can also often guarantee the non-participation of less well-known debating institutions who could host excellent competitions, but may not have the international reputation enjoyed by other institutions – obviously a very poor reason for them not being able to compete in a bid process.

NOT A JUDGEMENT CALL: WHY WE SIMPLY SHOULDN'T USE LAY ADJUDICATORS

By Sam Block, Editor in Cheif

The editorial to this Volume ends with the hope that this journal can be part of a process that builds our understanding of speaking, judging and organising tournaments. The premise of all this – of the whole enterprise of this journal – is that what we do – whether that be speaking, organising, judging or all three – is difficult: that these are complex challenges which reward considered reflection and our collaborative effort through writing like this.

All of us who have done it – or watched others – know that speaking is difficult; most of us know that practice and reflection makes a difference. The same goes for running tournaments – the round of applause for convenors at the end of competitions confirms our mutual recognition of the challenges involved. These facts require no emphasis.

Here I make the modest claim that judging is similarly difficult. This is intended partly as an injunction to myself and others to continually reflect on what we do and thereby improve, but also as a response to recent currents in adjudication academia and practice that argue for, or implement, laypeople judging debates.¹ This, to me, can only be a good idea if we believe those laypeople have the skills to judge those debates, which can only be the case if those are generic, widely-held skills. I believe that is not the case, as judging is, almost without exception, extremely difficult.

This is not an argument against having inexperienced judges on a panel - this is a valuable aspect of judge development, and is to be welcomed. Rather, this

¹ By 'laypeople', I mean 'individuals without familiarity with competitive debating and, in particular with adjudicating competitive debates'. I explicitly do *not* include novice judges who are in the early stages of gaining this familiarity, whose involvement in judging I hold to be unquestionably essential.

is intended as a refutation of the fetishising of the ‘layperson’ and a realistic presentation of the skills judges all need to continually develop.

Following debates

Following a high-level debate requires rapid understanding of complex concepts as they are explained, and an ability to identify the relevant aspects of what is being said in order to record them. It then requires note-taking far more rapid than that generally required in, for example, a business context.

It may be pointed out that debaters are supposed to make themselves readily understood to the ‘ordinary reasonable voter’ (ORV) – surely expecting any specialised skill to follow them jars with this? This is somewhat true: we need not ask judges to understand more than the ORV would. What we do ask of them, however, is that:

- They make sufficient record of the debate to adjudicate it. This means quickly identifying the key elements of what someone says, noting each analytically-distinct line in often-complex argumentative structures, and writing it down at quite some speed. This is hard. We can tell that by the very fact that experienced judges develop shorthands and systems for doing it to enable them to judge to a sufficient standard. The ORV does not note in this way, and does not need to – she can be persuaded or unpersuaded by arguments without it. By contrast, few would claim judges needn’t keep sufficient record for a reasonably detailed discussion of the debate.
- They remember exactly where lines of argument arise. Adjudications are influenced not only by how persuasive people are, but by which team gets credit for which argument or minute line of rebuttal. Particularly when comparing teams of the same bench, this can be vital. Said another way, being an able assessor of who has best persuaded the ORV is a different task to *being* the ORV.

Without compromising our commitment to judges judging as the ordinary reasonable voter, then, we should require a special skillset of rapidly following & recording a debate. Competent non-specialists cannot be expected to have these skills.

Applying a complex ruleset

The rules of debating are very complicated. We underestimate this because so much of this ruleset becomes internalised through practice. These rules are not adequately summarised by ‘which side you agreed with’, or even ‘who was most persuasive’. Knowing, for instance, that the debate is not about the motion, but about opening government’s definition thereof, or that we are not supposed as judges to simply discount what we deem ‘bad arguments’, are as vital to correct adjudication as they are non-intuitive to laypeople.

It is not enough to correct lay adjudicators during deliberations, because mistaking elements of the ruleset like these alters the whole way you watch a debate. Nor is it simple to simply tell a first-time judge what these rules are and expect them to adjudicate according to them straight away – if it were, judges who had attended briefings would always perfectly fulfil those guidelines. Experience suggests that is not true, intuition that it would be grossly unfair on them to expect it!

Acting as the Ordinary Reasonable Voter

In my view the hardest aspect of judging BP debates is alienating yourself from your own preconceptions. Judging not as any one individual but as an abstracted person who does not have prior opinions on the topic at contest, and who represents no particular section of society or set of experiences, requires conscious and continual effort. We get better at this by trying, by being called out on our mistakes by teams and other judges, by reflecting on this and finding ways to improve. I know that I, as a judge, read into debates now much less than I did when I started judging seven years ago, and I can track this to particular efforts I’ve made to avoid my preferences interceding in adjudication – efforts I know I need to continue.

Adjudication means avoiding siding with the team you agree with, and equally avoiding allowing your own prioritisation of arguments (which can seem ‘just true’ to you) to influence what you reward. This is really quite distinct from efforts to be disinterested or judicious elsewhere in society. It is not just about avoiding your own personal interests impacting your judgement of what is right: it is trying to stop your judgement of what is right impacting on your evaluation of the *process* of disputation. Outside debating, we spend so long judging what is right that it can be difficult to avoid reading into debates as a judge – adjudication asks us to think in challenging and novel ways.

While it might be appealing, then, to say the ‘ordinary reasonable voter’ standard makes lay judging a good thing, in fact judging as *the* ORV is very different from getting a *particular* ‘reasonable voter’ to make the call. Moreover, we often have debates about things where there is, in fact, a strong social consensus one way or the other; this would be represented in a group of actual reasonable voters. Our ORV does not, by contrast, come in with any particular view. As judges, we learn how to judge as that – imaginary – person.

Following debates, applying complex sets of rules and acting as the ordinary reasonable voter takes a particular skillset and reflective practice. Lay judges are unlikely to have developed the former, and cannot access the latter. Of course, if we find a layperson with those requisite skills, we should assess them just as we would a non-lay judge. What we should avoid – in academia or practice – is claiming that lay judges are suitable *because* they are laypeople. Certainly, sometimes a cash-strapped tournament may have to make a compromise by having lucrative sponsors judge its final, or *somesuch* – far be it from me to say they are wrong to make such difficult decisions. In general, however, we must recognise the technical challenge of judging debates, and select our adjudicators accordingly. This might mean being honest that what we are doing is no mimesis of public discourse; but it will mean that we do what we *are* doing a good deal better.

SCOPE OF DEBATING

MONASH DEBATING R e v i e w

THEOLOGY AND THE AVERAGE REASONABLE PERSON OF BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING

by Tim Lees

Introduction

Imagine a truly awful novice debate. Closing Government both pass out in a drunken stupor mid-way through their Whip speech; the Member's speech consisted only of incomprehensible rambling, which apparently greatly amused the speaker (if no one else). The Member of Opposition panics and runs out of the room without saying a word, closely followed by the Opposition Whip. As an adjudicator, you are forced to choose between the opening-half teams.

The teams have chosen their own motion: 'This House would reintroduce the death penalty.' Opening Government essentially repeat 'murderers should be punished so that they suffer; if you have taken someone's life, you should lose your own' for the whole of their two speeches. Opening Opposition base their entire case on the Biblical injunction 'Thou shalt not kill'. They assert that the Bible is the basis of morality, and that, accordingly, the state should not kill people. You are thus forced to reward either badly explained retributive justice, or badly explained Biblical ethics, with first place.

Perhaps you find both of these positions so unpersuasive you would toss a coin. However, I would suggest that the conventional approach here is to side with retributive justice. The average reasonable person of British Parliamentary debating (see WUDC World Parliamentary Debating Rules 3.3.2, the '**Average Reasonable Person**') *might* be convinced of the merits of retribution. By contrast, the Average Reasonable Person is in practice disposed to discount theological arguments as irrelevant, except perhaps in explaining how religious groups will behave.

In this article, I want to begin by considering how the Average Reasonable Person is constructed. Then, by way of illustration, I will consider two possible justifications for deliberately excluding theological arguments from that construction:

- 1) belief in God is irrational, and, accordingly, theological arguments have no place in debating as a mode of rational discourse; and
- 2) debating should privilege non-theological arguments since they are accessible to those of all religious beliefs and none.

In doing so, I hope to persuade my reader that theological arguments are in fact not inherently unamenable to British Parliamentary debating. For the avoidance of doubt, it will not be possible within the scope of this essay to consider *every* possible reason for excluding theological arguments from British Parliamentary debating. However, I hope my reader will be able to at least sketch a reply to other objections based on what is contained here.

Following this, I will then seek to demonstrate that the norm against theological arguments is harmful to debating. Finally, I will suggest how these problems might be addressed.

By ‘theology’, I shall refer primarily to Christian theology. This is both because it is the tradition with which I am most familiar, and because in order to make my case it will be helpful to give definite content to the idea of ‘God’; the Thomist colouring to the discussion reflects both my own interests, and important trends in contemporary theology, both Catholic and Protestant. It should also be clear, however, that the arguments I make could apply equally to any of the major world religions with a little adaptation. Whilst I think that the exclusion of theological arguments is troubling in itself, my broader aim is to use theology as a ‘test-case’ to illustrate why debating would benefit from being more receptive to ideas that do not fit comfortably within a secular liberal ‘bubble’, the origins of which we consider in the next section.

The Construction of the Average Reasonable Person

Good judges and the beliefs of the Average Reasonable Person

Who gets to determine the standard of the Average Reasonable Person – and why? In one sense, this standard is determined in each individual debate by the panel there present. Two panels can, of course, come to different conclusions after viewing the same debate. But equally, tournaments rely on a degree of consistency between panels in order to allow the ranking of teams who do not

face each other, and to provide the sense that the same ‘game’ is played across different debates covering radically different subject matters.

Part of the role of the Chief Adjudication team is to ensure such consistency, in so far as possible, by putting ‘good’ judges in the chair and keeping ‘bad’ judges away from debates that are likely to decide the tournament. A good judge will possess technical qualities, such as the ability to follow a fast-moving and sustained argument and to articulate their reasons for preferring particular teams. However, in order to deliver a result consistent with other judges, they also need to understand common expectations about the Average Reasonable Person’s ‘beliefs’, by which I mean ‘claims that are taken to be true’.¹

Note that the Average Reasonable Person *does have* beliefs. If they did not, debating would be impossible. At a very basic level, the Average Reasonable Person must believe that the words uttered by the speakers have particular (if overlapping) meanings – otherwise adjudicators would be unable to distinguish between relevant, well-made arguments from a random pattern of noise. Beliefs thus provide the framework within which arguments can be evaluated.

Less abstractly, consider a team who in proposing the motion ‘This House believes that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union’ argues that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union and join ASEAN owing to the United Kingdom’s South-East Asian location, supported by extensive discussion on the benefits of geographical proximity with respect to geopolitical blocs. Whilst the proposition team would not automatically lose the debate, particularly if none of the other teams pointed out their error, an opposing team who (rightly) pointed out that such arguments favoured remaining in the European Union would be hamstrung if the Average Reasonable Person had no prior geographical beliefs. Perhaps they could produce an atlas, but this should hardly be necessary (and moreover the proposing team could (successfully) argue that the atlas was a European conspiracy unless the Average Reasonable Person had prior beliefs about reliable geographical authorities).

This is not to imply that the Average Reasonable Person’s beliefs are confined to questions of geography, or ‘factual’ matters more generally. Shengwu Li (2012) has suggested that good judges tend to adopt a ‘moderate liberal position’, which includes:

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, I am deliberately trying to sidestep any epistemological distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’.

‘... a defeasible belief in Mill’s harm principle; that is, insofar as an action affects just the actor, the judge has a presumption against government action. That judge believes that important moral questions should be resolved by reasoned deliberation, not appeals to unquestionable divine authority. This is because a good judge is an open-minded individual of the sort likely to think that debating is a worthwhile activity.’

The idea of a *defeasible* belief is particularly important: whilst the Average Reasonable Person must have beliefs, any *particular* belief they might have ought to be justified, and might be overturned given good reason precisely because they are a ‘Reasonable Person’. As such, their beliefs might change during the course of a debate as they are provided with arguments in favour of believing other things, and accordingly they might be persuaded to value arguments differently than they otherwise would. However, such arguments are precisely arguments, and will be evaluated within the framework created by the Average Reasonable Person’s beliefs prior to the debate (their ‘**Initial Beliefs**’). As reasonable people within the debating community (whether ‘average’ or not), we ought to consider carefully the reasons undergirding those Initial Beliefs. Whilst ‘*unquestionable* divine authority’ might not be a legitimate foundation for an argument, ‘divine authority’ (in some other senses) might be.

The formation of a ‘liberal’ bubble

The Average Reasonable Person is a construct of the debating community, and therefore of the power dynamics operative within it. Power at any particular debating tournament is concentrated in the hands of the Chief Adjudication team – they set the motions, allocate the judges, and are extremely influential in deciding the winners of the debates that will determine the tournament. The Chief Adjudication team plays an important and often explicit role in defining the Initial Beliefs of the Average Reasonable Person at particular tournaments, and to the extent that they carry broader influence, more generally. This is in one sense beneficial: it provides the common standard teams need in order to be ranked against one another at particular tournaments, and to some extent between them. However, there are at least four levels on which such influence is problematic.

First, debating is made prone to ‘groupthink’. Irving Janis (1982:9) defined groupthink as:

'A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.'

Groupthink would thus clearly be inhibitive of critical reflection on the Average Reasonable Person's Initial Beliefs. Its causes include homogeneity of groups and strong concern with social-status (Janis 1982:242-259; Hart 1991:257-259). Across tournaments, Chief Adjudication teams are typically drawn from a relatively small elite cadre of debaters, hailing from a relatively small number of elite Universities, often concentrated within a few degree disciplines: a comparable lack of diversity perhaps plays a role in corporate groupthink, which (for example) allows 'deal fever' to take over when considering mergers leading to companies over-paying for businesses they subsequently struggle to integrate into their own (Roberto: 2009).

Moreover, whether an adjudicator gets to be a Chief Adjudicator, or further to judge the top rooms, depends on how perceivedly adept they are for such a role. I would submit that these perceptions are not wholly informed by an adjudicator's technical abilities, or even their understanding of expectations about the Average Reasonable Person's Initial Beliefs, but by their social status within the debating hierarchy. Such pressure can only make debaters, particularly those who wish to hold Chief Adjudication positions, less likely to forward contrarian views. To the extent that the Average Reasonable Person's Initial Beliefs are irrational, they are unlikely to be challenged.

Second, strong debaters will generally gravitate towards the easiest way to win any given debate, and thus seek to challenge as few of the Average Reasonable Person's Initial Beliefs as possible. Indeed, an effective strategy is often to argue that there is no trade-off between apparently competing beliefs – for example, that a particular punishment for criminals will both be more effective as a deterrent and as a rehabilitative tool than the alternative – so as to leave both sets of beliefs unchallenged. With practice, debaters get better at making such arguments, and as arguments formed within a 'moderate liberal' framework become increasingly finessed and persuasive, both panels and speakers become genuinely more-and-more convinced of their merits. This makes it harder still for debaters to see the merit in alternative perspectives. Moreover, Chief Adjudication teams are placed under pressure to set motions that readily admit of such arguments so as to produce 'good debates', perpetuating this cycle further.

Third, whilst judges' technical abilities develop over time and often with considerable effort, it is quick and easy to adopt views that are (perceived as) similar to the Chief Adjudication team's, and thereby to inflate one's position as a judge – either by directly coming to an 'accurate' conclusion in the eyes of the Chief Adjudicator(s), or indirectly through receiving positive feedback from other 'good' judges, who themselves have an incentive to pander to the Chief Adjudication team's perceived biases. In the middle-to-bottom of the tab, one is thus attacked with a barrage of 'autonomy' and 'self-actualisation' and 'externalities', divorced from any sense of their meaning or even relevance. Having once been such a debater, I don't think teams make arguments like this (merely) because they want to sound like the better teams: they make them because, especially in rooms still further down the tab, judges reward them for using buzz-words rather than for actually debating. This stifles the emergence of new and different arguments from debaters outside contemporary elites, who might bring radically new and disruptive perspectives to debating.

These three effects together produce the debating equivalent of the internet filter bubble – where search engines provide users with content that reinforces their pre-existing world views by focussing their search results on those sites commonly selected by those with similar search histories. I will happily concede that the debating bubble shifts steadily over time as Chief Adjudicators nudge its boundaries with their pet topics. However, I would suggest that we really want this bubble to explode, or at least froth into a multiplicity of bubbles in which novel forms of rational discussion can take place.

On a fourth level, and specifically with respect to theology, we should note that debating elites emerge within a particular historical context, primarily the Western academy. Where once in the West 'there was no secular' (Milbank 2006:7) and theology provided a unifying vision, in particular to the University (D'Costa 2005:1-5), developments such as:

- Duns Scotus's conception of Being apart from God, such that God could conceptually 'not exist'² (Pickstock 2005:esp. 550);
- certain late-medieval wars branded (sic) as the "Wars of Religion" which, notwithstanding that Catholics and Protestants routinely fought on both sides, allowed the State to supplant the Church in its prior role as guarantor of the peace in both

² The relationship between 'God' and 'Being' is discussed further in the next section.

the popular and even the ecclesiastical imagination (Cavanaugh 1995); and

- the emergence of Enlightenment philosophy out of those Wars, with a vested interest in displacing theology against which it emerged, and which posited supposedly neutral reason (i.e. its own domain) as the foundation of public discourse (Milbank 2006:74-144),

all contributed to the construction of the modern secular Western academy, and to popular Western conceptions of religion more generally. Together, they lead to the widely-held view that religion can safely be, and perhaps ought to be, excluded from public discourse. However, it is not clear that these specifically European and specifically Christian/post-Christian developments that moreover rely on particular conceptions of Christianity prevalent circa the Reformation, should inform the approach taken to theological arguments (including here those drawing on other faiths) in general. Indeed, a Christian heresy,³ a mislabelled war, and philosophy faculties at best no more disinterested than the theologians they supplanted hardly seem like sound bases on which to construct such an approach, however relevant they might have seemed in their day. A reassessment of theological arguments is thus in order. Whilst a return to the 'single light of Christendom' (Milbank 2006:7) might not be appropriate to debating as a global activity, neither, I would suggest, is a fixation on the shadows of its occlusion.

Religion and irrationality

Debating requires reasoned argument and deliberation. No matter how the Average Reasonable Person is constructed, therefore, they will not, nor should they, be convinced by arguments that are clearly and obviously irrational. For present purposes, irrationality can be understood in two senses. In one sense, an argument might be irrational because its conclusion fails to follow from its premises – for example 'Killing is always and absolutely *wrong*, and therefore we should go to war against [Country A]'. In a second sense, those premises themselves are such that no reasonable person could accept them. For example, 'Killing is always and absolutely *right*, and therefore we should go to war against [Country A]'. Whilst this premise irrationally entails the speaker's own immediate

3 'Scotism' is at very least arguably a heresy (see esp. Pickstock 2005).

death, I suspect that almost everyone – and probably the Average Reasonable Person – is more convinced of the wrongness of universal killing than any reason they might give for it.

Notwithstanding that many ordinary religious people have irrational theological beliefs in the first sense, just as many ordinary believers in science have irrational scientific beliefs (see Goldacre 2009), almost nobody thinks that theological arguments *inherently* fail to follow from their premises. I shall thus concentrate on the second kind of irrationality. My thesis here is that theological arguments are *sufficiently rational* to be incorporated into British Parliamentary debating.

Rationality and belief – the Evidential Problem

A full proof of God's existence, assuming it were possible, would be beyond the scope of this paper – much as would a full proof of the existence of, e.g., 'universal human rights', 'other minds', or 'the past'. However, I want to at least *complicate* the view that belief in God is an *inherently* irrational premise by considering the 'Evidential Problem' with the existence of God, since the Average Reasonable Person is and ought to be concerned with the presence (or absence) of reasons for a particular position.

The Evidential Problem has been aptly illustrated by Bertrand Russell (1969:6):

'nobody can prove that there is not between the Earth and Mars a china teapot revolving in an elliptical orbit, but nobody thinks this sufficiently likely to be taken into account in practice. I think the Christian God just as unlikely.'

In other words, it is not that the existence of God is impossible; it is just that there are no reasons think that God exists. Accordingly we ought to live, and in turn debate, as though God does not.

However, for orthodox theology, God is not relevantly similar to a teapot.⁴ Nor indeed is God relevantly similar to an invisible, intangible, inaudible unicorn; or to two enormous green lobsters called Esmerelda and Keith who might be supposed to transport the world through the cosmos (c.f. Dawkins 2008:75-78), amusing as these images might be. Rather (*per* e.g. Augustine (2011:XI.x), Anselm (1998:5-81) and Aquinas (2010:I.QQ.8-10)) God is he who *exists in/*

⁴ 'Orthodox' in the sense of 'right-teaching', not Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox etc.

brought himself. Creation *participates* in God's existence in a sense derived from, though perhaps not identical with, the Platonic notion of objects existing in so far as they *participate* in an ideal Form.

A different analogy might help make sense of this idea. It is impossible to draw a perfect circle, and no such circles exist in nature. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that 'circles don't exist'. Objects are *circular*, to varying extents, in so far as they approximate to an ideal circle. For classical theism, God is *inter alia* the ideal Form of existence; things exist, to varying extents, depending on how closely they approximate God in this regard.⁵ It is not so much that God is a 'necessary being', but rather that God is 'Being' itself. This view is orthodox, though not uncontested – one might say it is debatable. It is not, however, a clearly and obviously irrational belief.

Special revelation?

Being is, of course, not the sole quality (or better, activity) ascribed to God – his goodness, love, mercy etc. are all critically important. Perhaps the ascription of these qualities to Being is clearly and obviously irrational through lack of evidence?

How we might come to have knowledge of God is a topic of ongoing controversy among theologians. On one approach, known as 'natural theology', God's qualities can be extensively determined from nature alone. Arguments of this type are necessarily complex, and perhaps always unsuccessful; as I read him however St Anselm's *Monologion* is a far more credible attempt at this approach than he himself suggests in *Proslogion*. In any event, they need not be repeated here. On another approach, knowledge of God is entirely dependent on grace – indeed, for Karl Barth, knowledge of *anything at all* is dependent on God's first having revealed himself as its creator, such that common experience and scripture form a single continuum of revelation with different species of revelation appropriate to different kinds of knowledge (1958:350-362). The broader question of whether there can be a 'pure nature' devoid of grace remains contested (see e.g. Milbank 2005; Long 2010; Feingold 2010) – one might even say 'debated'.

This caveat notwithstanding, a common approach is to use reason – whether understood as inherently grace-filled or not – to *interpret* 'revelation' (in the form of Scripture and/or more personal religious experience). As Aquinas put it (1987:Q2.1):

⁵ The idea of existence not being a binary concept may seem strange, but debaters invoke precisely this idea when speaking of 'self-actualisation'.

'For although matters of faith cannot be demonstratively proved, neither can they be demonstratively disproved.'

Note that this logic cuts two ways: sacred doctrine is true, and if your beliefs about it are false or absurd, then you do not truly believe sacred doctrine. It is possible then to make *bad* theological arguments, which can be rejected on their own terms (even if obstinate people will still cling to their ostensibly theological beliefs when these become theologically insupportable). One cannot, for example, consistently hold that the Bible is historically true in its entirety. The problems with this view begin on page 1: the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:3 (which places the creation of men and women on the sixth and final day of creation) contradicts the narrative that begins in Genesis 2:4, where Adam is created before any of the plants or animals, and Eve is created last. Similarly, it is possible to make bad scientific arguments, for example that African potatoes are an effective AIDS treatment, which can be rejected on their own terms (African potatoes apparently cause serious health issues in AIDS patients) even if certain obstinate people, such as former South African Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, insist that they are effective (see Goldacre 2009:187-188).

Suppose then that whilst reading the Bible, you are overcome by a sense that you are 'saved'. Let us further suppose that your understanding of such salvation is not irrational on its own terms, in the sense described above. However, you recognise that other people have not shared your experience, and might never do so. Whilst you might be justified in your *private* religious belief (see Plantinga 1998:Ch.5), can such non-universal experiences form any basis for public-facing rationality (cf. Lee 2010)? It will help to compare theological arguments to something particularly niche. For example, someone might form an elevated view of abstract art after understanding Wassily Kandinsky's (1914:Ch.4) analogy between painting and music.⁶ This is not irrational on a private level – such a person has reason to hold this view. Nor is it irrational to make broader arguments about the purpose of art, aesthetics, and perhaps ethics more generally following from this; notwithstanding that others have not read that book, or seen any abstract art, or that some people are born blind and/or deaf, and so incapable of appreciating the analogy (at least in full), particularly in so far as such persons *ought* to recognise that other people have had and/or could have such experiences. In a debate adjudicated by such people it might be easier to choose a different line of analysis, and this will often be the most prudent approach, adopted by good

⁶ i.e. that just as music need not to have a definite form or subject in order to express the inner life, and indeed would be limited if it were, neither does painting.

teams. However, most debaters will have seen a well-explained yet unfamiliar argument winning a debate owing in part to its captivating unfamiliarity, and the difficulty thereby presented in responding to it. Theological arguments ought not to be treated any differently (notwithstanding that they ought to seem less obscure).

Universality and theology

However, even if there is no reason to *exclude* theological arguments, perhaps ‘secular’ arguments should be credited far more highly because of their neutrality on matters of faith, thus avoiding the risk of discrimination against those of other religious backgrounds or none.

As I will argue below, such an approach is plainly not theologically neutral, and moreover leads to the Average Reasonable Person being especially biased against theology as compared with secular worldviews.

The non-neutrality of the secular

The contention that non-theological arguments are neutral is problematic on two levels. The first level relates to ‘space’. A secular-humanist might admit there are appropriate places/contexts (i.e. spaces) within which theological arguments could be made, for example in Church; but a debating tournament is not such a space – only arguments that do not reference God can be made there. But the contention that there is such a space where God is not present is not theologically neutral, and indeed is contrary to an orthodox conception of God which considers God to be pervasive. Such contradiction is self-evidently not theologically-neutral.

A second level relates to the problem of moral dogmatism between differing ethical systems.⁷ In a good debate, one might expect each side to enter into the other’s thought-world in order to defeat their opponents on their own terms, regardless of the ideological differences between them. But what if this were not possible?

By contrast with the example from the Introduction, imagine a debate in which the Prime Minister gives a flawlessly executed speech, grounded in utilitarianism: she leaves everyone in the room in no doubt that the policy will advance the sum

⁷ I hope what follows will clarify this problem for those readers who are unfamiliar with it.

of human happiness (in some nuanced sense), and everyone clearly understands the grounds of her contention that this is the State's role. Then suppose that the Opposition Leader gives a flawlessly executed but explicitly theological Thomist counterproposition: everyone is left in no doubt that the counterproposition will lead to a more virtuous society, in an equally nuanced sense, and is left with an equally clear understanding of why this is the State's role.

How might the (utilitarian) Deputy Prime Minister respond to the Opposition Leader? Perhaps 'we don't care about your magical cloud fairy and his imaginary conception of virtue.' Equally, what response might the (Thomist) Opposition Leader and his Deputy give to the government's utilitarian case? Perhaps 'we don't care about your warped conception of human happiness, spuriously divorced from the Good.' Neither side's argument is even *potentially* persuasive to the other, each deeming their opponents to have taken into account irrelevant considerations, and ignored relevant ones. Tragically, the criteria by which 'relevance' is judged are integral to each side's position: there is no 'neutral ground' between which the two can be judged.

Of course, the role of the speakers is to convince the panel – theoretically, the Average Reasonable Person – that their position is correct. Because the Average Reasonable Person is disposed to find religious arguments unpersuasive or irrelevant, the utilitarian team would likely beat the Thomist team *even if* the former's mechanistic logic were defeated. The Average Reasonable Person is thus prejudiced *against* the Thomists, which is once again not neutral.

Theological vs. non-theological arguments

Before considering why this is problematic for debating as an activity, one further observation needs to be made. Suppose that the (theistic) Thomist in the above example were replaced with an atheistic Rawlsian; or an atheistic Kantian; or an atheistic (i.e. Left) Hegelian.⁸ A similar problem of non-comparability arises, since the adoption of an ethical framework is itself an ethical choice: any comprehensive ethical framework must justify itself *in its own terms*. There is nothing special about theological ethics that renders it inherently more or less accessible to its non-adherents than any non-theological ethical framework – except, perhaps, a lack of familiarity among the current cohort of debaters. The Average Reasonable Person is thus *especially* biased against theological arguments versus systems with

⁸ Broadly, 'Right' Hegelians believe that Hegel's system is compatible with Christianity; Left Hegelians do not.

which they are more familiar – predominantly secular ones.

Consequences of excluding/admitting theological arguments from British Parliamentary debating

I am quite certain that other objections could be raised against admitting theological arguments as such into British Parliamentary debating. For now, however, I want to ask what the consequences of their exclusion are. The following two consequences seem particularly relevant.

Exclusion of religious people

Religious people, especially those attending universities, are (in my experience) very interested in debating as an activity. They are interested in questions about how people should live, and are used to listening to people talk about such ideas, even debating them. A debate I chaired between members of the theology faculty at Nottingham on the motion ‘This House believes that salvation is by faith (in Christ) alone’ attracted around 100 audience members, far more than would attend a typical public debate at the time, in spite of being (or perhaps because it was) directly of interest only to Christians and/or those interested in contemporary Christian theology. Many of the audience members, including those who were not theology students, asked insightful questions.

Whilst Christians, and indeed other religious people, *are* interested in debating, they often *aren't* particularly interested in secular-humanist accounts of the self, the State, and the interaction between the two. Their position is loosely analogous to that of a secular-humanist required to debate, if at all, within constraints dictated by the Catholic Magisterium, or the Iranian Guardian Council (albeit that their plight might not be as grave). Readers who are already immersed in debating will be able to think of reasons why the secular-humanist would benefit from participation, such as ‘understanding the system’ and ‘learning how to convince people they are wrong’, even if these reasons are finely balanced by other considerations. Indeed, the secular-humanist might participate, perhaps masking their beliefs in order to ‘fit in’. However, the benefits of debating are less likely to be apparent to someone with little prior exposure to formal debating. Faced with their views being disparaged rather than discussed, and with having to hide their real identity, they might well decide to do other things.

Otherisation of religious people

Note that such exclusion cannot be justified in the same manner that excluding groups such as racists might be, unless theological arguments were likely to prove so (justifiably) offensive to atheists that their participation would no longer be possible. Indeed, the relative absence, or at least silence, of religious people in debating makes them an easy target, particularly combined with a widespread view that religion is inherently irrational. Arguments of the type ‘religious people are just irrational’, or further ‘they have a mental illness’, and therefore ‘we don’t need to take account of their ridiculous views’ are worryingly common. They are, I think, strikingly parallel to arguments such as ‘gay people are just irrational’, or further ‘they have a mental illness’, and therefore ‘we don’t need to take account of their ridiculous views’. The latter arguments were probably relatively common in the past at Western universities, and perhaps remain so in certain non-Western debating communities. Both types of argument *are* offensive, if perhaps not equally so.

Whilst such offence furthers the exclusionary effect referred to above, a further consequence is that debating loses access to arguments of real interest. Consider the motion ‘This house would require Churches to marry homosexuals’. The Proposition might assert that religious belief is irrational, and whilst people should be free to pursue their irrational fantasies if it makes them happy, this freedom does not extend to discriminating against homosexuals. The Opposition would likely be on thin ground if they sought to argue that religion is both rational and discriminatory; they are most likely to accept the irrationality premise and focus on the risk of a ‘backlash’. Opposition could do better arguing that the emotional harm of being forced to marry gay people is greater than the harm of not being able to get married in a Church, although they are disadvantaged by the need to substantiate this claim versus the Proposition who can apparently assert their irrationality premise. The debate probably runs short of arguments quite quickly.

Suppose instead that the Proposition argues (as it is possible to do – see e.g. Hauerwas 1998; Rogers 1999) that the historical Christian aversion to homosexuality is an imported pagan commonplace, and not integral to the faith. The Church’s real concern ought to be with sin, understood as broken relationships with each other and with God; a brokenness which stable, committed relationships such as properly-Christian marriages help repair – whether between people of different sexes or the same. Proposition then contends that the role of the State, according to the Church, is to bring about virtue, and that accordingly (following some

consideration of how laws change behaviour) Churches should be required to marry homosexuals, on their own terms. There is now rather a lot to discuss e.g. whether this is the correct theological position; who gets to determine what the correct position is;⁹ whether the State's role is to bring about virtue, regardless of the Church's view; and, still the question of a 'backlash'. Perhaps some of these arguments could have been made even given the initial Proposition approach. If this is so, they are at least more relevant in the second debate where they directly, rather than tangentially, engage with the Proposition case.

Perhaps better debaters than I can think of more arguments to run on purely secular grounds. But a deeper issue relates to the purpose of debate. I suspect (hope) my reader will agree that one of debating's many merits is its power to immerse participants in novel ways of thinking. As such, it promotes mutual understanding over indifference and/or fear; the reassessment of our own ideas, so that they may be grasped more honestly and perhaps refined, or else abandoned; and the ability to talk *with* those with whom we disagree, rather than merely *about* them (e.g. in snarling Facebook statuses, as certain liberally-minded debaters have been wont to post regarding religious groups taking positions different than their own), opening up the possibility of actual persuasion rather than badger or coercion. Just as it is valuable for capitalists to learn to argue not merely for, but *within the logic of* socialism; and Kantians to argue within Utilitarianism; and, indeed, the faithful to argue within atheism: so too, it would be valuable for atheists to learn to argue *within* the logic of (various) faiths.

Bursting the bubble: making debating broader

I hope I have gone some way towards showing why the exclusion of theological arguments is not *inherently* necessary to debating, and further that their exclusion is problematic in so far as debating ought to be both widely accessible and mentally expansive. If these problems arise with Christian theology, it is very probable that they arise with respect to other faiths and worldviews more broadly. What can be done about this?

9 NB: states quite routinely make this distinction, at least to some extent, in granting special rights to religious groups *qua* religious groups – the state has to be able to determine which rights are requested for religious purposes, even if it does not afford religious groups *carte-blanche*.

A suggested solution

What would happen if we ‘killed’ the Average Reasonable Person, doing away with their Initial Beliefs and the conventional approach to debates that follows thereby? Almost certainly, disaster: nobody would know how to judge any debate. We would, ironically, be like Nietzsche’s madman following his declaration of the death of God. ‘Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing?’ (Nietzsche 1974:181) Judges would still probably ‘light lanterns in the morning’ to borrow from Nietzsche again (1974:181) – a dim version of the liberalism they knew before, readmitting the same standards only less clearly.

I strongly support moves to increase the diversity of judging pools. However, unless the pressure to conform to the secular-liberal model of the Average Reasonable Person is addressed, the effect this will have will be limited, and those with no interest in this worldview will continue to be shut out.

A more achievable measure in the short-term would be to establish a soft convention of tournaments fielding *at least* one motion from the perspective of a non-Western-Liberal-Democratic entity (recognising that debaters’ idea of Western-Liberal-Democratic entity is both fictional and incredibly broad). This would function much like the soft convention for having at least one International Relations motion, or one analysis debate.

Motions such as ‘This House, as the Roman Catholic Church, would ordain women’, ‘This House, as the Southern Baptist Convention, would advocate pacifism’, and ‘This House, as a large international Islamic aid agency, would not partner with non-Islamic organisations’ are all pertinent to topics of general interest. There are moreover theological issues on both sides of the debate, which are (I think) interesting in their own right, and moreover would help debaters engage more constructively with people of faith were they understood. Whilst I think theological motions would be particularly helpful, it might also be helpful to debate (more) motions set from the perspective of e.g. the Chinese Communist Party, Bedouin tribes, or the FARC rebels in Columbia.

Objections

Three objections might be raised against my suggestion. First, such debates, at least initially, could be awful. Novices often struggle at debating because they know relatively little about the motions which are set. However, they are then

motivated to learn more about such topics by the prospect of doing better at debating (this has at least been my experience). I submit that it would be good for debaters to learn to inhabit new moral frameworks. It might initially be necessary to pre-announce motions to help debaters prepare to do so, but over time a wider knowledge-base could be expected to develop.

A second objection arises in relation to judging. Won't judges struggle to evaluate arguments made within traditions with which they are radically unfamiliar? Once again, this might be the case at first; but this provides teams with an additional incentive to explain their positions clearly, and perhaps moreover to explain the relevance and importance of their arguments to their panels.

Alternatively, won't judges continue to import liberal presumptions into the debate, owing in part to their ignorance of other criteria? This problem often rears itself when a motion such as 'This House, as the Catholic Church, would allow the use of contraceptives' ends up being won on essentially secular-liberal grounds (e.g. reducing population growth and the spread of STIs) rather than on specifically Catholic ones (e.g. the divinely ordained right of married persons, whether HIV-positive or not, to enjoy sexual union with their spouse): the Average Reasonable Person's 'moderate liberal' Initial Beliefs contaminate the decision. Pre-announcements should once again help overcome this issue; Chief Adjudication teams should moreover reward judges who do their homework, and penalise those who don't.

A third objection is that my suggested solution does not solve the problems I have outlined: implicitly, theological arguments would remain excluded from most debates, in an unjustified and discriminatory manner. I readily concede this. But in order for the relevance of theological arguments to win wider acceptance, they first need to be understood; and moreover, for the cosy liberal paradigm within which debating takes place to be disrupted. Targeted motions seem most likely to achieve this end by forcing debaters and judges to engage with new ways of thinking. With increased understanding, I am confident that more innovative speakers than myself will find novel ways of applying theological (and other) ideas in surprising contexts, to great effect; and will be aided in doing so by the Average Reasonable Person's Initial Beliefs becoming broader and/or less stable. Moreover, this targeted approach would at least open up new spaces where arguments of interest (hopefully) to those already engaged in debating, but also at least some of those who are currently left out.

Conclusions

To reiterate: the monolithic Western-Liberal-Democratic bubble is understandable, yet arbitrary and damaging. Something ought to be done about it.

Will my suggestions (or similar measures) be implemented? This depends on whether debaters, and in particular debating's elite, want to merely win *at* debating, or to win *from* it. If we want debating to entail the rehearsal and refinement of essentially the same arbitrarily chosen ideology(ies), and moreover their universal imposition upon a global debating culture, then we should continue with the *status quo*.

On the other hand, if we want to challenge ourselves to think freely by opening ourselves to ideas that might not readily pass through the filter of our (idiomatic) Western-Liberal-Democratic framework; if we recognise that as important as any debating tournament is, who we become or are capable of becoming outside of debating is far more important; and if we want to take baby-steps towards a kinder, more understanding world, then we ought to force ourselves to inhabit worldviews radically different from the Western-Liberal-Democratic framework, so that we can start to build the bridges that will make real understanding possible. A few bad debates, a few undeserved fourths, seems a small price to pay.¹⁰

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10 Although I might not *feel* this way immediately after watching you give a terrible speech, or after you give me a fourth that I did not deserve.

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IT'S NOT ALL BALLS

by Rob Marrs

What unites bombing Mecca, trying Ariel Sharon and six Englishmen starting for Manchester United?

From time to time a debate motion causes controversy across various forms of social media. In the old days - when I was still a competitive debater - I caused some controversy on the British Debate email list by promoting a debate the Glasgow University Union was hosting on the motion 'This House Fears Islam'.¹ Similarly, the Durham Union Society sparked controversy when it once held a debate at its intervarsity which is now known simply as 'the Mecca motion'.²

It is easy to understand why both of these motions caused hackles to be raised and internet warriors to rush to the barricades. The nexus of religion and debate is generally a heated place.

At the 2009 World University Debating Championship (WUDC) in Cork another motion caused similar controversy. This was neither about some ethical dilemma³ nor tied directly to a topic which may have made it difficult for the debaters present to return to their home countries.⁴ The debate was the ESL final and was about quotas for domestic players in soccer.

1 This now looks hopelessly naïve and old-fashioned. I would note that it was one of the best attended debates I ever ran at the GUU and, given the charged narrative immediately after 9/11, was embraced by the Glasgow University Muslim Students Association as a chance to quash many misconceptions. Happily, opposition won by a landslide.

2 This house believes that the USA should immediately adopt an unequivocal policy that in the event of a significant terrorist attack committed against US interests that can be credibly linked to Islamic fundamentalism the USA in response will carpet bomb Mecca.

3 A debater in the late 1990s refused to debate at WUDC on a motion about the existence (or lack thereof) of God.

4 I have heard that a debate about placing Ariel Sharon next to Slobodan Milosevic in The Hague caused Israeli debaters problems in 2003 whilst the 'This House Would Assassinate Vladimir Putin' at the 2008 World Championships caused similar issues for Russian debaters.

A number of people opposed this motion for a variety of different, though related, reasons.

The first group did not like the motion purely because it was a sporting motion and believed that sporting debates should not be debated at intervarsity tournaments at all. Their motivations may have ranged from intellectual snobbishness through being uninterested to a genuine belief that sports motions do not generate as high-quality debates as others. Regardless, their belief was clear: sports motions have no place at intervarsity debating competitions.

A second group acknowledged that sporting debates are acceptable at intervarsity debating tournaments, but should not be utilised for break-rounds or grand finals. This may have been because they felt such motions lack prestige or because of a perceived unfairness regarding the need for specialist knowledge in sporting debates.

Some within the second group focused more obviously on the idea that the adjudication team would never have selected such a motion for the Open Final – thus indicating a lack of respect for the prestige of the ESL and/or EFL competition. This claim is impossible to test. It is certainly the case, however, that sports motions are not widely set as final motions (particularly grand final motions). The selection of a sports motion for a final appears is clearly out of the ordinary.

A third group felt similarly to the second, but had a particular objection to sports debates being set for ESL and/or EFL Finals. These people thought that the perceived unfairness regarding knowledge in sports debates would be heightened when individuals were not debating in their first language.

These groupings are loose and each individual will have had different specific motivations. This submission will address the concerns of each of these groups, and in doing so will examine the underlying antipathy to sports debates. To begin with, some important distinctions between types of sporting debates need to be made in order to reject the suggestion that sports debates require specialist knowledge. This analysis will also cover whether some sports debates are more problematic than others and whether or not specialist knowledge in sports debates is different to specialist knowledge in debates on other policy areas.

Dr Vengloš: Or why debaters should stop worrying about knowledge and learn to love sports⁵

Most moderately-experienced debaters should be able to debate well enough without detailed knowledge of a particular subject. Debaters do this all the time. First principles analysis can often substitute effectively for specialist knowledge and there are very few sports debates that rely solely on knowledge of sports.

Using the Cork motion as a brief example: If a debater has a basic understanding of economics, how quotas work generally (particularly in a business context), why and when quotas might be introduced and how regulatory intervention can affect businesses, then they should be able to set out a decent case. I would think it reasonable to assume that ‘the average debater’ should be able to debate about those concepts. It is certainly reasonable to assume that a debater who is talented enough to reach a grand final can debate about those concepts.

I think sporting debates can be broken down into four areas:

- i. using sports to effect change in another state or show moral outrage,
- ii. using sports to affect social policy within a state,
- iii. equality-based motions, and
- iv. debates about the nature and conduct of sport itself

As with any typology, there may be some disagreement on categorisation and some motions may fit multiple categories. I think, however, this is a useful categorisation and one that may help debaters and adjudication teams.

Whilst the Cork motion is not a classic example of any within the typology, I think it straddles *equality-based motions* and *debates about the nature and conduct of sport*.

Type 1: Using sports to effect change in another state or to show moral outrage

Rarely will these debates require sporting knowledge to a great degree and the arguments that run through these debates will be similar, if not quite the same, as any boycott or sanctions debate.

⁵ Dr Josef Vengloš is a Slovakian soccer manager who, among many other teams, managed Czechoslovakia, Sporting Lisbon, Aston Villa, and Celtic. No debater needs to know that to debate about soccer.

Moreover, these debates will typically relate to a major political issue of which ‘the average debater’ would reasonably be expected to have an understanding. ‘The average debater’ should have no real problem with these debates.

Type 2: Using sport to affect social policy within a state

It is more difficult to make a definitive statement regarding whether ‘the average debater’ will deal successfully with this type of motion. This is because the range of motions is necessarily larger.

A debate on fast food chains advertising at sporting events (or sponsoring teams) does not rely on sporting knowledge although it does require the debaters to analyse the role and influence of sport on society.

A debate about outing homosexual sportspeople is a general ‘outing’ debate and does not rely much on specialist knowledge to place it in a sporting context. It may require some understanding of how sport deals with homosexuality. Knowing that certain environments (e.g. the military and sports) have traditionally had problems dealing with homosexuality and have had widespread, often institutional, homophobia is not particularly specialist knowledge. This debate relies on this fairly basic level of knowledge and the ability to build arguments around it.

‘The average debater’ should be able to debate introducing a UEFA-widesalary cap on soccer teams.⁶ Whilst some specialist knowledge might be helpful, it certainly would not be debate winning.⁷ This debate is largely about market forces, fairness within the game of soccer and the long-term sustainability of important social entities (football clubs). Is the specialist knowledge that might be helpful unfair? I do not believe so and – as we shall see – certainly no more ‘unfair’ than any other motion that requires specialist knowledge. A knowledgeable debater in proposition might be able to explain why money from the Arab world (Manchester City, Malaga and Paris Saint Germain) and Russia (Chelsea) is distorting competition and leading clubs without that wealth either to be left behind or go bankrupt trying to keep up across UEFA competitions. They could further explain that football clubs, such as Heart of Midlothian, are important to their local community and the impact of them going out of business is different to that of other businesses.

⁶ The Union of European Football Association is the administrative body for association football in Europe and, partially, Asia.

⁷ Examples of some useful facts include that other sports use salary caps (rugby league), the high salaries of footballers and the impact of such salaries on football club balance sheets.

This, however, can be attacked easily on first principles: that any cap could be got around fairly easily; that it is likely sanctions against offenders wouldn't be high enough to discourage them; that the likelihood of getting caught is low; that a per player salary cap wouldn't work; that it isn't the state's role – or governing bodies' – to police the pay of players; that over time oligarchs will get bored and the bubble will deflate; that money doesn't always equal success; that the excess of others isn't an excuse to run a business badly; that football has always been dominated by a relatively small group of clubs and all that is happening now is that new clubs are encroaching on that group; and that players will leave UEFA-competition to go and play somewhere that will pay them enough. None of that requires particularly specialist knowledge. Moreover, one does not need specialist knowledge to know that football clubs pay their players handsomely, nor that some teams (most obviously those owned by billionaire businessmen) impact the market by paying particularly high wages. Debaters may need to know the end product that they are arguing for and that will require them to make arguments about the wider, and broader, principles of sport including sporting competition. As I have shown above, there are first principles arguments here.

There is an argument to say that the important examples for these kinds of debates are not as obviously reported in the mainstream press and are instead limited to media designed primarily for consumption by sports fans. It cannot be denied that these examples will be highlighted in specialist sports media. It is also highly likely that this material will be covered by leading mainstream newspapers and not solely within their sports coverage. Indeed, where there is a nexus between sport and social policy non-sports media is likely to cover the event.

Type 3: Equality-based motions

'The average debater' again should have no problem with equality-based motions because the arguments here are similar to any other equality motion that debaters will come up against. As with most equality debates one side tends to argue for equality whilst the other side argues for the importance of something else, in this case the unequal nature of sport or the value of high-performance sport.

Are equality-based sports motions more difficult for debaters to engage with than non-sports equality-based motions? Although the debates do not rely on an intrinsic knowledge of a given sport, they may rely upon the opposition knowing why they are opposing equality (usually some level of sporting 'good'), which may not be as obviously as apparent as would be the case with non-sports equality-

based motions only because sports debates focusing on equality are rarer. With preparation time, I think it is reasonable to assume ‘the average debater’ can work this out.

Type 4: Debates about the nature and conduct of the sport itself

This is the toughest category to define and to defend. The motions outlined in Appendix A in this category are essentially schools-level motions. Debaters who struggle with the idea of banning boxing, or legalising performance-enhancing drugs in sport, or banning child athletes performing are likely to be very inexperienced.

This is the category, though, that can slip into overtly specialist knowledge and this is typically where problems begin. In order to lead to fair debates, such motions must be fair, deep and balanced (as all motions should be) but also accessible to ‘the average debater’. Will they – or, at the very least, could they – have been exposed to this in the quality mainstream media? Are there obvious first principles arguments to be made?

At one end of the continuum within this categorisation, we have “This House Would Ban Boxing”. At the other end, we have “This House Would Ban Welsh Sides From Playing In The English League”. One is accessible, the other obscure, mired in historical and trivial detail and not a live issue.

In the area between those debates, however, the distinction is less obvious. The debate outlined below – on domestic quotas – is within the realm of understanding for most debaters. A debate on goal-line technology is perhaps a step too far. This is, perhaps, the best example of the difference between a debate linked to wider sporting and societal issues and a debate about how a particular sport is actually played on the pitch. The former is likely to be covered outwith specialist sporting media, the latter is not.

Motions such as ‘This House Would Merge The Belgian and Dutch Football Leagues’ or ‘This House Would Allow The Old Firm To Join The English Premier League⁸’ cross this divide, as would a debate about the laws of a particular sport. They rely on a deep knowledge of sport and sport that would normally feature in specialist sports magazines, not mainstream media. Some would contend that

⁸ The Old Firm is the collective name for the two powerhouses of Scottish football: Celtic Football Club and Rangers Football Club.

the Cork motion belongs solely in this category. I disagree. I think there are enough first principle-based arguments that ‘the average debater’ can make a strong case without specialist knowledge whereas the three examples above are all about specialist knowledge. Moreover, in the build-up to Cork Worlds, the topic was covered in *The Irish Times*, had featured extensively in quality news media in Britain and across Europe, and had featured in *The Economist* at least twice in the months preceding the tournament.

Some of the motions above may rightly seem to be a step too far and most fair-minded people would think that debating those topics may not be very fun for people with little or no knowledge. A sports fan’s retort may be ‘If we’re going to accept – and we may not have to! – that topics can be about Rwanda then others can learn about goal-line technology’⁹. After all, Rwanda may feature less often than goal-line technology in quality media. It may be fair to ask wider questions about how appropriate specialist knowledge is elsewhere in debating.

As interesting as I find the idea of merging the Belgian Jupiler Pro League and Dutch Eredivisie or seeing the two Glasgow giants join the English Premier League, adjudication teams should stay away from sports motions which are so obviously outwith the ken of most debaters.

Rolled eyes in the auditorium

Why debaters don’t like debating about sport?

Considering all of the similarities to other debates discussed above, a cruel voice might suggest that debaters don’t like debating about sport simply because they were the last people picked for soccer during school lunchtimes.

A fairer voice may posit four more credible reasons:

- i. debaters generally aren’t interested in sporting matters in their own lives. Some contend that it is because sports fans are comparatively rare in debating.
- ii. that within the debating community the ‘sport’ policy area is not viewed at the same intellectual level as other policy areas such as law, economics, ethics or politics.

⁹ Matt Handley, Oxford Union Society debater.

- iii. those debaters who are interested in sport have an unfair advantage in sporting debates. Some contend that debaters who are interested in sport have a greater advantage in such debates than do interested parties in other areas of debate.
- iv. Sports debates are viewed as requiring knowledge about sport or about the rules of sport (which, as we have seen, they generally do not) rather than about policy matters.

It is a generalisation to state that debaters aren't as interested as the general population in sport. The anecdotal evidence for this is not particularly strong and it has not been reliably tested. Even if it is true, debaters are often required to debate on matters they find uninteresting. Debaters are also required to debate about topics they have no knowledge of and have to rely on first principles.

A fairer analysis is that the perception that debaters are not interested in sport has led to a culture of rolled eyes when a sports motion is announced. Sport is not debated frequently and, therefore, is not viewed in the same way as more frequently-discussed policy areas. This undoubtedly is true, but is not a justification for avoiding important debates because such cultures may break down if sports debates became more common.

Points (iii) and (iv) can be challenged by exploring why debaters fail to view questions of sports policy in the same light as policy questions from other fields. As we have seen, sports debates are very rarely about sport itself and fewer still are about the technical matters of how games are played. One mustn't know what a Cruijff turn is to understand a debate on domestic quotas in football. Indeed, one could argue about domestic quotas in football without reference to the 'three foreigners rule' which existed until the mid-1990s in European soccer. As long as the debates are fair, balanced, deep and accessible then debaters should accept them. As outlined above, only debates focusing solely on how a sport is played or on obscure or trivial policy matters relating to sport should be viewed skeptically.

Upon seeing a sports motion, too many debaters assume that they cannot debate it and that they will not enjoy it. My contention is that with some thinking about first principles arguments, a little consideration of similar policy areas in search of analogies and some generic knowledge they should be able to debate sports motions perfectly well. As shown above, 'the average debater' should be able to oppose a motion on salary caps in soccer without too much difficulty.

An adjudication team considering a sports motion should therefore consider the following distinction: debates about how the sport is played on a pitch, or square, or court should be avoided; debates about wider sporting issues or how sports interact with other areas of social policy are fair game. It is true that the Cork motion is teetering on the edge of that divide but I think, as we shall see, it falls into the latter category.

The Quizmaster's conundrum and 'the average debater'

My contentions are that debaters should not shy away from sporting debates simply because they are not fans of sport and that adjudication teams should not shy away from sporting debates simply because of rolled eyes in the auditorium. We live in a debating world where many of the motions that we debate about are on the edge of reason rather than on the edge of policy.¹⁰

It seems odd that we can debate about interesting policy proposals that may never actually occur, will never be considered in mainstream political discourse, will rarely be considered outside specialist academia, and at the same time reject debates about a form of enjoyment enjoyed by billions of people around the world, accessible to millions more, and that is featured in depth in every quality newspaper in the world every day.

The popularity of a subject area is important because debating should be about matters which affect people's lives and should have some relevance to the real world.

All that said: adjudication teams are faced with the quizmaster's conundrum: how do you know what other people will know?

There are legitimate concerns about specialist knowledge in debating particularly on matters relating to sport. It is noticeable that these concerns do not seem to surface elsewhere. Few would complain if a DPhil philosophy student specialising in Ethics won a debate on abortion. Fewer still would complain if Oxford Politics, Philosophy and Economics students debated on politics, philosophy or economics or if Middle Temple, or Harvard Law School, won a debate on law. It seems odd to suggest that people who have knowledge obtained via a hobby gain some

10 From a quotation by the founder of the Adam Smith Institute, Dr Madsen Pirie 'We propose things which people regard as being on the edge of reason. The next thing you know, they're on the edge of policy'

form of advantage whilst those who are studying a subject in depth at a leading university do not have such an advantage or, if they do, it isn't something worth considering.

Some made the argument after the Cork debate that grand final motions, in particular should not favour individuals with specialist knowledge. That, surely, is impossible unless we revert to the days of Sydney WUDC where the motion was an abstract and equally accessible for all.¹¹

The natural, and logical, extension of this argument is that we should avoid motions that give advantage to a select group of debaters with specialist knowledge. Alternatively, we could just accept that sometimes debaters will benefit from their studies, from their experience or from their hobbies. If we accept that for law, politics, medicine and economics – as we do and as we should – we should do so also for sport.

Debaters who are opposed to the idea of speaking on sporting matters will contend that sport just isn't like law, ethics, economics, politics or policy. That may well be true of debates about the technicality of sport but the very best sporting debates often focus on politics, policy, economics, law and business.

They also miss the larger point: sport gives us an excellent vehicle to discuss wider social matters. Just as setting motions about robots and aliens is a useful way of having debates about meta-ethics in disguise, so sports debates can be used to look at a policy problem through a different lens.

Location, location, location

Whilst my typology may be useful, it would clearly be impossible to draw up a list that defines which motions are debatable and those which are not.

As well as the general principle that we should veer away from debates about the technical matters of how sports are played it is also clear that location matters.

In New Zealand, for instance, it might be perfectly acceptable to have a debate on the motion 'This House Would Abolish Māori All Blacks Rugby Team'. Māori All Blacks is a rugby team that traditionally plays international teams touring New

¹¹ This House Believes Marx Would Have Approved Of The Internet

Zealand. To be eligible to play for Māori All Blacks a player has to have some level of Māori genealogy. All players have their ancestry, or whakapapa, verified before selection to the team.¹²

No one in the debate needs to know about the intricacies of rugby – they are not having a pub debate about the constant changes of the laws regarding the breakdown or how the International Rugby Board has emasculated the maul. There is a need for understanding about New Zealand culture and history; how Pākehā and Māori interact;¹³ how best to promote minority groups within societies; and whether a team based on ancestry (or the wider, and deeper, concept of whakapapa) should be continued in the modern age. There are good arguments on both sides and there are big questions at the heart of the debate.

This is a good motion for a New Zealand intervarsity tournament.

Equally, if this were to be set in the United Kingdom or the USA, it would be a bad motion. The motion relies upon a smattering of sporting knowledge but, crucially, social policy knowledge which would be outwith the ken of most debaters in those nations. It would be similarly cruel to pick a similarly New Zealand specific policy motion ‘This House believes successive government have failed Maori’ in the UK or the USA.

‘The average debater’ in New Zealand should be able to debate both motions. ‘The average debater’ in the UK could not reasonably be expected to debate either.

Place, and setting, therefore matter – and will affect the adjudication team. It is, of course, not always apparent in these days of global travel to IVs who will be attending.

In his excellent blogpost on ‘Advice for new CA’s setting motions’, Shengwu Li gives a number of recommendations to help get good motions for competitive debating.¹⁴ Perhaps the most important recommendation is his third recommendation (‘Test motions thoroughly for balance and depth’. He then goes

12 Whakapapa is often considered to be the Māori word for genealogy or ancestry. It is deeper and wider than that and is a fundamental principle that is important throughout Māori culture. It isn’t solely a genealogical tool. It should be viewed as a paradigm of cultural discourse which can provide a basis for establishing, enhancing, and – in some cases – challenging relationships between individuals, families, local tribal entities and regional tribal bodies.

13 Pākehā is a Māori language term for New Zealanders who are “of European descent”.

14 <http://trolleyproblem.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/advice-for-new-cas-setting-motions.html>

on to offer six further sub-points outlined below).

If we apply Li's criteria to two illustrative examples.

Example 1: This House Would Out Gay Sportspeople

- a. Would a person who reads – but doesn't remember every detail from – reputable mainstream news sources know what the debate is about? Yes. The ethics outing of homosexual people is discussed in mainstream news sources reasonably often. It is also a fairly standard debate at intervarsity tournaments. The only twist here is it specifies sports people rather than celebrities more generally or politicians.
- b. Are there (at least) five logically distinct, individually persuasive arguments on each side of the motion that are accessible to non-specialists?
- c. Yes. In proposition the following arguments might be made (i) outing gay celebrities makes the debate about gay equality politically mainstream; (ii) in sports, where we see that homosexuality is uncommon and repressed, we get rid of that narrative; (iii) sports people, particularly high profile ones, are well placed to break down misunderstanding and prejudice – moreover, it allows the general population to be sympathise with and understand the cause; (iv) that the rights of individuals should be superseded by wider societal objectives.
- d. There are many strands of thought and rebuttal for the opposition side.
- e. *Does either side have a silver bullet?* No. Some debaters with a deep knowledge of football may contend that Justin Fashanu killed himself because the abuse he suffered as the first openly homosexual footballer. This is a useful and emotive example. However, as Fashanu committed suicide in at a time when society viewed homosexuality differently (particularly in the sport arena) and when football grounds were very different places, it cannot

be reasonably described as a debate winning example. Moreover, he was not 'outed'.

- f. *Would experienced debaters – whose only concern was victory – split roughly 50-50 on whether they would rather be proposition or opposition?* I believe so.
- g. *For early rounds in the tournament, check that there are few ways for Opening teams to doom Closing teams by their incompetence?* No more than other debates on outing homosexuals.
- h. *Is it possible for opening teams to 'break' the debate via sneaky definitions or policies?* Again, no more so than most other debates on outing homosexuals. The only obvious squirrel would be to out players once they have retired from active sport but this would be outwith the spirit of the motion as 'sportspeople' suggests current activity.

Example 2: This House Would Introduce Domestic Quotas For Soccer Teams

- a. *Would a person who reads – but doesn't remember every detail from – reputable mainstream news sources know what the debate is about?* Yes.
- b. *Are there (at least) five logically distinct, individually persuasive arguments on each side of the motion that are accessible to non-specialists?*

Yes. In proposition the following arguments might be made:

- i. The motion would restore the national identity of football clubs who have increasingly resorted to fielding foreign players in their squad.
- ii. National (and local) identity is particularly important for soccer clubs.
- iii. There is a growing gap between big and small football teams (both within and between leagues); that this is making domestic leagues and European competition uncompetitive

or narrowly competitive; and that this is distorting the market both within domestic leagues and across European football.

- iv. The market is further distorted by the richer European clubs 'hoarding' talent (e.g. by buying more international class players than they need – or could possibly play – thereby stopping potential usurpers)
- v. In some nations young local talent cannot break through the ranks of established footballing talent and this has a knock-on effect on international competition and national sides more generally
- vi. European clubs harvesting talent from South America and Africa undermines the development of their clubs into globally competitive entities.

All of these have effective rebuttal points and there are compelling arguments for the opposition.

- c. *Does either side have a silver bullet?* Whilst introducing such a system would almost certainly contravene various aspects of EU competition and labour law such a line of argumentation is generally eschewed in competitive debating.
- d. *Would experienced debaters whose only concern was victory would split roughly 50-50 on whether they would rather be proposition or opposition?* I believe so.
- e. *Are there ways for opening teams to doom closing teams by their incompetence?* No more so than any other quota debates. Indeed, there is sufficient room in this debate for extension (the role of sport, the historic and cultural importance of football clubs, football clubs being an extension of their local communities and the relationship with those communities in an era of a global fan-base).
- f. *Is it possible for opening teams to 'break' the debate via sneaky definitions or policies?* Not as far as I can see.

Li goes on to say ‘The point of a tournament is to see who debates well across a variety of interesting issues. You should strive for both superficial variety) as well as ‘deep’ variety’. I would contend that sports debates should be part of that panoply. He also states that ‘there is nothing that levels the playing field between old hands and young talent like a debate about killer robots’. Maybe so. It is surely just as true that nothing levels that playing field like a debate about sport.

We should be wary of using Li’s rules as a gold standard but they are clearly useful and competent. We can safely conclude that if we accept Li’s advice then many sports topics would pass the requirements of balance and depth. That said, there is also a necessary difference between using these rules to establish whether a motion is good to debate and whether it is good enough to debate for a show-piece final.

Clearly there are other considerations that must be considered when setting a final motion. Will it lead to a good debate for an audience to watch? Is specialist knowledge in a final different to specialist knowledge in other debates?

Was the ESL Final of Cork WUDC a fair, deep and balanced debate? The answer, surely, is yes. Can it lead to a good quality debate? Again, yes. It isn’t just about how the game is played on the field. It is also about wider sporting matters most obviously competitiveness, the nature of modern corporate sport and the business of sport. I would contend that debaters good enough to get to a WUDC Final should be able to debate those matters and have a grasp of each element.

Is it a motion worthy of a final? That is more difficult. Clearly, it is fair, deep and balanced. I do not think it requires specialist knowledge but there is disagreement on this matter. Moreover, there may well be concerns about how interesting any quota debate would be for an auditorium full of people. Perhaps this is a question not about ‘sports debates’ but about the type of debates we see as suitable for finals.

Conclusion

Sports debates get a very bad and unfair press. At their best they can allow debaters to analyse large national and international policy issues through a different prism. There is nothing of which to be scared. There is rather a lot to be enjoyed.

As Harish Natarajan wrote in this journal in 2011: ‘Competitive debating requires

that experts temper their knowledge for their audience – failing to do so could result in losing debates to those who are just better able to explain why their arguments are correct and why they are important'.¹⁵ Amen to that. It is perfectly possible, and plausible, for a sports hater to beat a sports lover in a competitive debate.

¹⁵ Harish Natarajan 'Debating the global financial crisis'. Monash Debating Review 2011.

Appendix A: a typology of sporting debates

Using sport to affect change in another state or to show moral outrage	Using sport to affect social policy within a state
<p>These debates will generally be about banning a certain team from a certain event or will be twists on this theme.</p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Zimbabwe From International Cricket Tournaments</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Not Attend Sporting Events Held In Oppressive Regimes</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Oppressive Regimes From Attending The Olympics</i></p> <p>A further twist might be to use a sporting event to enact a political outcome or be specific:</p> <p><i>This House Would Boycott The Euro 2012 in Ukraine unless Yulia Timoshenko is released from prison</i></p>	<p>These debates are generally about using sport to promote some wider societal good.</p> <p><i>This House Would Make Football Clubs Responsible For The Behaviour Of Their Fans</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Out Gay Sportsmen</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Fast Food Chains From Advertising at Sporting Events</i></p> <p><i>This House Believes Sporting Bodies Should Penalise Teams When Their Players Commit Criminal Acts off the Field</i></p> <p><i>This House would introduce an EU-wide salary cap on soccer teams</i></p>
Equality based motions	Debates about sport itself
<p>There are a number of motions that relate directly to equality.</p> <p><i>This House Would Force The Media To Display, Promote and Report Women's sport equally to men's sport</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ensure That National Sporting Teams Reflect The Diversity Of Their National Populations</i></p>	<p>These debates are typically about a given sport rather than about intricacies of the sport.</p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Boxing</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Allow The Use of Performance Enhancing Drugs in sport</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Child Athletes</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Countries With Very Harsh Training Methods From Participating In International Competitions</i></p> <p><i>This House Would Ban Mixed Martial Arts</i></p>

ANALYSING DEBATE

MONASH DEBATING Review

FIGHTING TO CONSTRUCT SOCIAL REALITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

by Lelia Glass and Colin Etnire

Introduction

American parliamentary debate may seem like a formal, controlled forum where arguments are given centre stage. However, such academic argumentation only provides a backbone for a much richer, subtler sort of competition: to win the power to construct social reality.

Social reality is the way that different voices, narratives, individuals and groups are construed, accepted, or silenced. In the context of debate, social reality is how the judges and audiences construe the debaters, the case, the arguments and the competition. A successful team will lead their audience to see them as authoritative, calm and intelligent. They write the narrative of the case in a way that favours their side; cast their arguments as tight and organised; frame their opponents as muddled. The successful team will even lead the audience to interpret itself as sympathetic to their side and to construe the event as a victory for their team. Therefore, a team does not just win by floating an airtight argument. They win by recruiting the audience to accept their narrative of reality.

In this paper, we catalogue the dimensions of social reality that debaters try to shape, and we pinpoint the linguistic strategies that they use to do so. We aim to use current research in linguistics to explicate what good debaters already know implicitly: that debate is a semiotic wrestling match, and the pure arguments are just the mat. We explain what social meaning is and how it manifests in every aspect of parliamentary debate.

We hope that this discussion offers debaters a new perspective on their art. Currently, the performative aspect of debate is viewed with suspicion, perhaps because it appears nebulous and emotional in a field that values concreteness and reason, or because it seems like a cosmetic distortion of the real goal, the ‘flow’ of one argument to another. But here, we show that the construction of social

reality influences debate just as much as pure argumentation, and requires just as much skill and subtlety. We hope to illuminate this facet of debate not only so that individual debaters can use it, but also so that the whole community can decide whether to embrace it or resist it as part of the art.

Furthermore, we hope that our analysis will shed light on the construction of social reality more generally. We feel that debate provides a controlled environment to investigate this phenomenon. In normal life, people have all sorts of social goals, which they pursue with very different assumptions and from very different positions of power. But in debate, everyone has the same goal: to win. Debaters all begin with the same resources: each one has seven minutes to address an attentive room. And they are cast in similar positions of power: they are all about the same age, highly educated, and participating in a competition that aspires to be fair (although, as we discuss later, even this regulated playing field is far from level, as reputation and appearance influence how they are perceived). Therefore, perhaps a broader audience might be interested in debate as a controlled case study of the ways that people use language to construct social reality.

This research draws on Colin's career as a debater and judge and Lelia's analysis of videos on ParliDebate.com. Our observations are impressionistic and incomplete; we have no quantitative data, and we do not address the wide range of debating styles that can be effective. We hope, however, that at the most theoretical level, this analysis will illuminate at least some aspects of debate in a new way.

The analysis is structured as follows. Section 1 draws on sociolinguistic literature to define social reality and discuss how it interacts with language and power. Section 2 explores how debaters use language to attempt to shape the social reality of the debate. Within this, Subsection 2.1 explores how debaters use language to construct their own identities. Subsection 2.2 looks at how they style their arguments as organised and compelling. Subsection 2.3 explores the ways they construct the narrative of the case. Subsection 2.4 looks at how they characterize their opponents and their opponents' arguments. Subsection 2.5 zooms out to look at how they recruit the audience and judge into a particular role, positioning them as sympathetic to the debaters' case; and Subsection 2.6 remarks on how debaters even try to customise the debating event as it unfolds and influence the norms of debate as an institution. Section 3 is the conclusion.

1. Social reality, social meaning, and how they come about

In this section, we introduce the notions of social reality and social meaning as they have been studied by social theorists and sociolinguists (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, Goffman 1959, Goffman 1981, Silverstein:2003, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992a, Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Eckert 2008). We then explain how these concepts interlock with language and power.

1.1 Social reality

Social reality consists of the groupings, divisions, assumptions and hierarchies that underpin our daily practices. For example, perhaps a group of kids sees more prestige in qualifying for a travel soccer team rather than playing for a community team. Perhaps the travel team kids have enough power to make this distinction salient for the whole grade at school. Then those kids may use their prestigious team affiliation to establish themselves as the popular ones, granting them insider information, social access to one another, and attention at their school.

1.2 Power

Social reality interlocks with power. Power is part of social reality, but it is also the ability to shape social reality in a way that reciprocally maintains one's power. Ultimately, the most powerful people live in a social reality that serves their interests and shares their assumptions. Even if the unpopular kids don't personally like the popular kids, they recognize that those kids are well-liked in their school; the unpopular kids inhabit a social reality that conflicts with their own opinions. But the popular kids have privilege of inhabiting a social reality where their own high opinion of themselves is the norm.

Transposing this idea to a more theoretical level, as Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992a) put it, social dominance 'is sustained by privileging...a particular perspective..., obscuring its status as one among many perspectives, and naturalizing it as neutral or 'unmarked' (483). People in power 'can judge other positions while supposing their own to be invulnerable to less privileged assessment' (483).

Clearly, then, debaters want power over social reality. Within the community of people in that room for that hour, debaters want to shape the background assumptions about the case, the status hierarchy among the competitors, even the norms of debating. They win the debate when they have aligned this community's social reality with their perspective.

1.3 Social meaning

Social reality emerges from a mosaic of social meaning. Social meaning consists of the symbols, styles and actions that people use to create social reality -- to reflect affiliation, to highlight opposition, to establish or subvert authority. For example, someone might wear a running watch to signify affiliation with the track team, slouch into class late to challenge the teacher's authority, or use slang to create an unpretentious persona. Social meaning is therefore 'co-constructed by participants, emergent from particular social interactions' (Ahearn 2001: 111). And these social meanings aggregate to form social reality.

1.4 Language as a way to negotiate social reality

If one wants power over social reality, one must control the construction of social meaning. Since one realm of social meaning is, of course, language, language is therefore an essential source of power. As Bourdieu puts it, people speak 'not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished' (Bourdieu 1977: 648): to increase their power.

According to many sociolinguists today, language and power form a feedback loop. On the one hand (as Bourdieu 1977 observed), language can be used to negotiate social reality and increase one's power. On the other hand, to speak and to be listened to, one needs power. For example, a teacher who says 'please take out your textbooks', is heeded because he has authority, but his words also reinforce his authority by reminding people that he is in a position to issue orders.

1.5 Ideas for analysing social meaning

We have now explained how social meaning (including language) aggregates to form social reality. We have also looked at how power arises from social reality, but also shapes it through many means, including language.

All of these concepts revolve around the idea of social meaning, so if we want to understand how they emerge, we should begin with this most fundamental component. Therefore, next we highlight some ideas that researchers use to understand how people construct social meaning. These are indexicality, performance, and recruitment. Once these abstractions have been introduced, we explain how they are used in debate.

Indexicality and the indexical field

The first idea for understanding social meaning is called indexicality (Silverstein 2003, Eckert 2008). Indexicality is the idea that a given symbol can point to a cloud of potential meanings known as the indexical field. And an indexical field is the affiliations, connotations, and associations that cluster around a particular symbol. These ideas are best illustrated with examples: a nose ring might index feminine, Indian, bohemian, tough, but it comes across as merely feminine and boho within the context of a particular person's style.

Building on the notion of indexicality, researchers also invoke a concept known as bricolage (Levi 1968, Bourdieu 1984, Hebdige 1979). Bricolage means constructing a body of meaning from a set of pre-given parts by recombining them in a new way. For example, imagine a man wearing a Ralph Lauren logo with a pair of Air Jordans. This combination might overlay the indexical fields of golf, privilege, leisure class and basketball, African American, tough, trendy, athletic, expensive. The effect might be to style this individual as wealthy enough to dress like a WASP but also tough, modern and street-wise.

Performance

Next is the idea of performing one's identity. This idea became popular within the field of gender studies, when Butler 2004 famously destabilized our notion of gender from a fixed, binary category to an active verb. Previously, people might have interpreted the behaviour of women (for example) in order to shed light on what women are inherently like. But in Butler's framework, how women behave is what it means to be a woman. On her view, the attributes that we associate with a gender 'constitute the identity that they are said to express or reveal'" (Butler 2004: 115).

In social reality more generally, this idea of performing identity captures a powerful way that one situates oneself in society (Goffman 1959, Goffman 1981, Hymes 1975, Bucholtz & Hall 2005). As sociolinguists Bucholtz and Hall put it, 'Identity is the social positioning of the self and other' (586). It is 'a discursive construct that emerges in interaction' (587). On this view, then, one creates one's identity every day in the activities one engages in: working, relaxing, and of course, speaking.

Recruitment

The final idea, from Silverstein 2003, is recruitment. This notion complements performance because it focuses not on how an individual creates her own identity, but how she characterises her audience. Recruitment is best illustrated in how a text addresses a reader, but the idea easily transposes easily to speech. The claim is that a text has an actual reader - you, right now - but also implies and characterises the sort of person who is intended to read that text. In so doing, the text 'recruits' the reader into assuming, for the moment, the perspective and identity of this constructed reader. For example, when Lelia reads Vogue, she knows she personally cannot spend four thousand dollars on a leather jacket, but part of the magazine's aspirational charm is that it addresses her as if she were the type of person to buy such things. In the same way, a speaker can try to recruit her audience to try on a particular identity.

Now that these tools have introduced, we show how they are used to create social reality in parliamentary debate.

2 Debate strategies for constructing social meaning

Here, we explain how debaters use language to shape many facets of their narrative.

2.1 The self

Most obviously, debaters shape their own identity.

They perform several overlapping roles in their narrative of social reality. At the most basic level, they perform the role of the best advocate for a particular case. Everyone knows that debaters are arguing for assigned positions in a constructed context, and yet debaters enact this fiction with conviction. Debaters often close a speech with We are proud to oppose, as if they are personally committed to that position. They pace, curse and become agitated on behalf of their case. But this role is only one layer in the swath of identities that debaters perform.

Debaters also enact more subtle identities. They try to establish themselves as authorities on the facts and arguments of a case. It is almost a cliché to say I wrote my thesis on this, explicitly claiming authority on the topic. But there are many more subtle ways that debaters construct their epistemic authority. American

debaters use pronunciation and vocabulary to highlight their education and thus legitimize their authority. They use high-level vocabulary to seem well-read. They adjectivise philosophers' names (Hegelian) to index familiarity with this prestigious field. They style themselves as educated and worldly by citing facts from history and current events.

But sometimes they also take up the opposite strategy. A debater might style herself as the voice of reason that comes to clarify a messy case. In this role she might speak slowly and use simple words (What's really going on here is...) in order to characterise herself as a calm, pedagogical authority figure. In the same vein, debaters use colloquial diction (so there's this dude; that's just straight-up what happens), suggesting that they are particularly familiar with the facts and styling themselves as unpretentious and straight-talking.

Next, we turn to how debaters build on this authority to establish themselves as good debaters. First, they establish themselves in the debating community. Even before a debater begins to speak, the judges/audience already has an idea of who he is based on his reputation, university's name, clothing and demeanour. Successful debaters try to use as many of these factors as possible to create a promising first impression.

And once they begin to speak, they have many more tools at their disposal for performing their narrative of social reality. At the beginning of a round, it is common for American debaters to thank the audience, organizers and fellow debaters. This brief speech not only encourages the audience/judges to feel warmly toward them, but also provides an opportunity for the debater to remind people who they're affiliated with (a well-known team, for example) and how well they know the community. During these thank-you speeches, debaters use their voice and body language to suggest that they are speaking casually and personally. They do not pace, open their arms or take up as much space as they do during the round. Instead they stand still and speak more quietly and casually. During a round, they say we to speak on behalf of their team; but in the thank-you speech, they use I if they refer to themselves at all. These tactics suggest that they are representing their real-life personality even more than during the round. But just like their persona during the round, this identity can be seen as a performance, in the role of a confident, established debater.

Then once the round begins, debaters use a bricolage of registers and styles to suggest that they embody the gold standard of debating, but also that they are

nonchalant and entitled to this identity. To craft this complex persona, on the one hand they use stock formal phrases -- ladies and gentlemen; Mr./Madam Speaker; our side of the house. Such scripted language characterizes debate as a ritual occasion and casts the debaters as the vestry of that ritual. On the other hand, when debaters use colloquial diction and expletives (That's fucked up), they show that they are sufficiently comfortable in their status that they feel entitled to play with the norms of this ritual occasion. They use humour not only to win over the audience, but to create a sanguine persona.

Debaters also establish their identity in how they interact with their opponents. They may treat the opponent's argument as a cliché - of course they bring up famous Rawlesian veil of ignorance..... - to characterise themselves as experienced debaters who see through their opponents' tired tricks. To questions from the opposition, debaters may respond scornfully, as if the opponent's question is barely worth their time; or affably, as if they're secure enough to enjoy themselves; but they always strive to appear in control of the situation. Similarly, when they allow the opponent to pick a side (in an op-choice round, where one team presents a case and allows the other to choose a position), they react to the opponent's choice quickly and with pleasure - Great! So we argue that...- to suggest that they, as excellent debaters, are prepared to defend any position at a moment's notice.

2.2 One's arguments

Independent of an argument's content, how it is packaged and presented help determine how the argument shapes the debate's social reality. Therefore, debaters use language to style their arguments as organised, sophisticated and compelling.

To cast their arguments as organised, debaters use we to suggest that the paired team is presenting a unified case. They explicitly refer to their arguments as substantive or independent points and allude to, e.g., our first subpoint..., labels that brand the arguments as strong and organised. Prefacing an argument with 'What's really going on here is' or 'But when you really get into the nitty-gritty...', likewise, frames that perspective as a particularly lucid one. Finally, by speaking with energy and emotion, they act as if they truly believe their arguments in order to encourage others to do so as well.

2.3 The narrative of the case

Next, debaters need to convince the house to believe their interpretation of the proposition. Since American mechanisms are only about a paragraph long,

debaters have room to flesh out the narrative, give voice to the characters and even make claims about what could counterfactually have happened within this embedded fiction (The general could have resigned; he didn't have to implement immoral orders).

This endeavour uses the notion of performance in a new way. Not only do debaters perform their own identities, but they perform the narrative that they want to legitimise. To accomplish this, debaters heroise the characters they defend, demonise the ones they oppose, and even shape the background assumptions in the narrative - for example, about what motivates the characters or what alternatives they faced. An especially powerful strategy is to convince others to share these presuppositions without ever making them explicit. For example, if a debater says 'She shouldn't have become a drug dealer if she has a moral problem with drugs', he presupposes that this character had other alternative careers, although for a given poor person, that might not really be true. If everyone in the room accepts this presupposition, the debater succeeds in shaping this aspect of how the house collectively interprets the narrative.

In constructing the narrative of a case, debaters also use language in a more prototypically performative way, impersonating their story like actors. They sometimes adopt the pitch and vocabulary of a character in the case: 'and then the homeowners are gonna be like, 'but we live here! Why are you destroying our community?'. In this way, debaters literally give voice to the narrative that they want to legitimize.

2.4 The opponents and their arguments

Just as debaters construct a narrative about the case, they also try to characterise their opponents in an unflattering light.

In the logical content of their speech, debaters may try to dismantle the opponents' arguments on philosophical grounds. But debaters also undermine the opposition in the realm of social meaning. They act like they've heard the opposition's line before. They might cast an argument as too self-evidently absurd to address explicitly. Using notes as a prop to suggest an objective record, a debater might pretend to repeat an opponent's argument while actually spinning it in a new way. It is common for American debaters (but, we are told, rarer elsewhere) to impersonate the opponent's viewpoint ('And Sara gets up here and she tries to tell you, 'You don't have a right to your property!') using an affected voice to portray the opponent's view as absurd. They also reinterpret opponents' arguments in

explicit terms: 'The first thing he said that makes any sense is...'. In all of these ways, debaters try to sabotage their opponent's attempt to construct an alternate social reality.

Debaters also use meta-debate (debating about the debate) to derail their opposition. Even if the opposition's arguments are logically sound, a given team can try to subvert these arguments by rendering them irrelevant. Therefore, debaters try to reshape and defuse the opposition's case. They say, 'What the opposition has to show is...' and then fill in the version of the case that fits their narrative.

Debaters do not only reshape the opposing arguments, but they also cast their opponents as poor debaters. They might address them in a condescending tone, question their facts, or cite their arguments with scorn - in other words, treating them as if they were incompetent in order to make it seem true. If their opponents are famous and seem polished, a team might try to demystify them, mocking them and questioning them to cast them as vulnerable.

2.5 The audience

Debaters also recruit the audience and judges into their narrative (in the sense of Silverstein 2003). In reality, many different parties are listening to the debaters, each containing many individuals with their own opinions about what is happening. But in the social reality that debaters want to construct, all listeners embody the role of educated, serious person who sees this team as the clear winner.

As one strategy for audience recruitment, debaters use particular linguistic forms of address. It is common for debaters to address the house as 'Ladies and gentlemen', styling listeners as honoured guests at a formal event and encouraging them to take the occasion seriously. Debaters also refer to their own team using the word *we*, which in English might or might not include the hearer. When they say 'We think that...', they leave open the possibility that this statement applies to the audience as a whole. Further, debaters refer to their teammates and their opponents all by first name. This address is informal, suggesting that a debater is familiar with the community. It is also the form one uses to refer to a third party, so that debaters don't talk to each other directly, but rather talk about one another to the house. This system of address reflects that the debaters' true addressees are the judges and the audience. The point is not for debaters to convince one another that their arguments are right, but to convince the judges that they should win.

2.6 The debate itself

Finally, debaters attempt to shape the social reality of the debate as it unfolds. They do this not only by constructing all of the characters, as we discussed above, but also by attempting to narrate the debate itself as a victory for their team. In the broadest sense, they even try to shape the standard of good debating.

First we look at how debaters try to shape the particular round. They sometimes make statements not to describe reality, but to try to shape it. When a debater says ‘This case is really about the purpose of punishment’, she tries to tie this concrete case to a larger moral debate where her side is the correct one. When she says of her opposition ‘They don’t really have a case’ or ‘That’s where they lose the debate’, she is not saying something that is independently true, but something she wants to make true.

This notion of speaking to make truth has been explored by the philosopher J. L. Austin (Austin 1962). Austin pointed out that you can only use language in this way if you have power. If a king says ‘I hereby name this boat the H. M. S. Pinafore!’, then something will happen: the boat’s name will change. But if a drunk peasant carouses up to the boat and shouts the same declaration, people will laugh at him and the boat will not get a new name. With power behind it, language can literally dictate social reality. Thus debaters hope that they have garnered enough power to call the debate as it unfolds.

Finally, we turn to how debaters negotiate the very standards of debating. Since debate is not judged on a rubric, the competition is really about which team best instantiates some collective notion of good debating on a particular occasion. The standard is dynamic, emergent, and constantly negotiated. Therefore, a team’s narrative of social reality will try to pin down this moving target. Styling themselves as good debaters, they try to shape this standard by simply embodying it. Further, they try to establish their opponents as bad debaters - which is not just a claim about their opponents, but an attempt to define good debating with a counterexample. For example, Colin once quoted an opponent’s argument back to the audience - ‘I think the quote was ‘fucked up’ - with a sarcastic comment (‘very eloquent’) in order to suggest that this use of profanity was imprecise and inappropriate. In aggregation, individual comments like these shape the norm of good debating for the whole community.

3 Conclusion

We have illustrated that parliamentary debates are lost and won not just by the most lucid arguments, but by the most persuasive actors in our collective narrative of social reality. We have identified the ways that debaters wield social meaning as they actively shape themselves, their opponents and the event as a whole.

Our claim is not a normative one. We think both argumentation and social manipulation are worthwhile arenas to compete in. Rather, in identifying the social side of debate, we hope that the debating community will become slightly less suspicious of this aspect of itself, and perhaps even come to respect it.

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MONASH ASSOCIATION OF DEBATERS

www.monashdebaters.com

Founded in 1962, the Monash Association of Debaters (MAD) is one of the oldest clubs at Monash University. MAD is the largest debating club in the Southern Hemisphere, boasting of over 500 members. Prominent public figures such as Bill Shorten MP, Workplace Relations Minister, have been members of past MAD Executive Committees.

The club has had a rich history of success in tournaments across the world. In January 2011, and again in 2012, MAD was crowned World Debating Champions, defeating teams from Oxford, Harvard and Cambridge Universities. MAD has been Champions of the Australasian Debating Championships (Australis) eight times in the last fifteen years, and is the only club other than Oxford University to win the World Championships (Worlds) in consecutive years.

The Association has a strong commitment to innovation that we apply to all of our initiatives. We are proud to be the club that created the world's only academic journal on debating, the MDR; the only club to run a comprehensive international debating training program- the Monash Asia Tour- and the first club to implement equity policies which ensure diverse participation at international tournaments



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