

# RESOLUTIONAL FOCUS IN POLICY ARGUMENTATION: THEORY AND APPLICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

While virtually everyone in the forensic community agrees that the resolution plays a significant role in the academic debate process, its precise function is the subject of an increasingly heated dispute in policy debate circles.<sup>3</sup> Case-specific debates are now quite rare as negatives are seemingly unwilling to invest significant amounts of time and effort to research the plethora of affirmative cases; preferring instead to run off-case argumentation such as generic disadvantages and counterplans as well as procedural violations. Many observers feel that this trend is due in large measure to the fact that for many years, policy debate resolutions have been broad in nature. With the advent and acceptance of debate practices which allow affirmative teams to select only an "example" within the resolutional area, literally hundreds of affirmative cases are created each year, leading affirmative and negative teams to play an intricate game of "cat-and-mouse" throughout the debate season.

At present, a significant number of affirmative teams, hoping to gain or maintain a competitive advantage, adopt and abandon cases from month to month; even from tournament to tournament. This practice contributes little to the meaningful discussion of the resolution because by the time negative teams have researched that particular case, it is too late; there is a new, hot "case of the week" to hastily research. The unfortunate result of this process is that substantive debates on the resolution rarely occur because current debate practice actually encourages affirmative teams to select peripheral examples of the resolution and to change examples often. To enable negatives to be competitive, current debate practice forces negative teams to research an unending list of potential affirmative cases and to place emphasis on off-case arguments as well as procedural violations.

The current policy debate topic on U.S. foreign policy toward the People's Re-

public of China continues this broad-topic trend and presents an opportunity for the forensic community to re-examine the underlying assumptions of the purpose of the resolution in policy debate. The position this essay takes is that contemporary debate theorists ought to reconsider their assumption that the resolution is merely a parameter from which the affirmative can choose examples (hereafter referred to as "parametric" analysis). The resolutionally-focused argumenta

...contemporary debate theorists ought to reconsider their assumption that the resolution is merely a parameter from which the affirmative can choose examples...tive approach was the dominant practice in policy debate for many decades until the mid-1970s. In values-oriented argumentation, the idea of resolutionally-focused debate has theoretical recognition<sup>4</sup> and, at least at first glance, there appears to be no reason why this approach should not be utilized again in policy argumentation.

This essay will present a framework for evaluating whether or not the affirmative team has met its initial argumentative burdens under the resolutionally-focused argumentative approach. After an initial defense of the position, the authors will propose that the affirmative must utilize one of three strategies: 1) defend the proposition as presented; 2) allow reciprocal use of argumentative approaches; or 3) provide and defend a justification position explaining why the resolution is merely a jurisdictional boundary from which the affirmative has the exclusive right to select. Unless one of these options is utilized, the affirmative will have failed to meet its prima facie burdens and should lose the debate round. The essay will conclude that presumptively, the resolution ought to be the focus of debate.

## RESOLUTIONALLY-FOCUSED ARGUMENTATION DEFENDED

Within the narrow constraints of this essay, it would be impossible to present and

explain all the rationales for preferring resolution-ally-focused argumentation.<sup>5</sup> With these limitations in mind, however, this essay will discuss three strengths of a resolutionally-based argumentative approach.

### Improved Logic-Based Analysis

The most important duty for advocates to uphold in any argumentation activity is to answer the question before them. This is the nexus of the resolutional function debate; what should the question be? At first glance, this dilemma is easy to resolve. When considering the resolution:

"Resolved: That the United States government should substantially change its foreign policy toward the People's Republic of China,"<sup>6</sup> nearly all would agree that the debate should revolve around whether the U.S. should change its foreign policy toward the P.R.C. More controversial is the claim that the only subject which can be discussed in the debate round is the example of the resolution chosen by the affirmative. This approach represents a logically-flawed line of reasoning for at least two reasons. Initially, it is an interpretation which runs counter to how language is ordinarily interpreted. While recognizing the fact that this is a descriptive claim, this objection is still valid because language is one of the few areas where commonality is essential. It is important to consider the fact that language is usually interpreted in a general way within our society.<sup>7</sup> For example, when someone claims that "birds can fly," the claim that "penguins cannot fly" would not cause us to reject the general statement. This is because we presumptively interpret statements holistically,<sup>8</sup> even though we know that exceptions might exist. By the same token, debate topics ought to be argued as general statements, with examples only becoming relevant if they are shown to be typical of the resolution under consideration.

Another reason why it would be logi-

cally correct to consider the resolution as the focus of the debate is the presence of alternative phrasing possibilities.<sup>9</sup> The term "resolved" has appeared in all contemporary policy debate resolutions and a review of the literature indicates that the term implies a firmness or determination in reference to the claim which is being upheld.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation would seem to render atypical examples irrelevant because no firmness or determination could be demonstrated in reference to the statement to which "resolved" applies. At an absolute minimum, there is no linguistic reason to believe that the resolution is meant as a boundary from which the affirmative is free to pick any example. Indeed, the authority of the topic selection committee to phrase the topic any way it wishes would seem to indicate that they at least have the option to permit the possibility of resolutionally-focused debate. The committee could have phrased the resolution as:

Resolved: That a plan of the affirmative's choosing should be adopted by the United States government which would substantially change its foreign policy toward the People's Republic of China. or the committee could have utilized a format frequently used in collegiate debate organizations and phrased the resolution as:

Resolved: That the United States government should substantially change its foreign policy in one or more areas toward the People's Republic of China.

Indeed, several potential topics utilizing the latter type of topic phrasing were on the 1995-96 high school policy debate ballot<sup>11</sup> and rejected.<sup>12</sup> Considering the availability of these alternative phrasing possibilities to the topic wording committee and even more so, their presence on the National Federation topic ballot, it would be illogical to assume that anything in the resolution legitimizes a purely jurisdictional approach to resolutional analysis.

#### Increased Accessibility to the Activity

While recognizing that some important differences exist between collegiate and high school forensics, perhaps some lessons can be drawn from the recent crisis in collegiate policy debate. Throughout the 1980s, the number of college programs which have expressed a preference for CEDA debate over NDT debate most likely reflected a preference for some of the customs which were popular in each of the activities. Although clearly not the sole factor, one ma-

ior complaint expressed by many students as well as coaches in the past concerning NDT debate has been the extremely high research burden necessary to compete at even a moderately successful level. The authors do not believe it to be unreasonable to hypothesize that at least one of the reasons for the enormous popularity of Lincoln-Douglas debate at the high school level is the comparatively modest research burdens associated with the activity. Many debate coaches, including the authors who themselves competed and coached with some success in both value and policy debate, believe forensics to be one of the most valuable activities in which a high school student can participate. The high school forensics community can avoid making policy debate "inaccessible by commitment" in part by making the transition from parametric analysis to resolutional analysis.

An understandable concern expressed by opponents of resolutionally-focused debate is the fear that the quality of debate will decrease with lower research burdens and greater numbers of participants. This would not necessarily be the case. It is possible for people who wish to conduct greater amounts of research to channel their efforts toward depth, as opposed to breadth, in argumentation. This should satisfy all parties involved because those who have limited facilities or time will have a minimally sufficient amount of material from which to debate. For those debaters who have the time and inclination, their in-depth research will lead them to more intellectually rigorous lines of reasoning which should enable them to win more rounds. With resolutionally-focused debate, the key difference is that the research material inequity between the affirmative and negative would be significantly reduced, allowing the negative to once again focus the discussion on the resolution. In such rounds, negatives would not be forced to adopt indirect argumentation strategies such as running the many variants of topicality, conditional counter-plans, and speciously-linked generic disadvantages. This approach also avoids the embarrassment of the negative having nothing to say against an especially narrow but logically-flawed interpretation of the resolution. At present, victory for an affirmative based on the element of surprise and an expectation that opponents will lack material from which to argue against an overly-narrow case is indeed a hollow and intellectually-bankrupt concept.

Even if concerns about the decreased quality of holistic and generic argumentation were to be true in the short run (a conclusion which the authors certainly do not share), they must be kept in perspective. When we as coaches appeal to school administrators for funding we do so in the name of improving the quality of education for the students involved. As educators, nearly all coaches and judges would like to help as many students as possible. Perhaps it would be beneficial to accept a slight short term decrease in argumentative quality to increase quantitative student participation. When we consider that one reason why many very intelligent students do not participate in debate is because of the great time commitment, in the long run here might actually be an increase in the argumentative quality of the activity.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, resolutionally-focused debate would allow many debaters to become involved in other valuable activities, further broadening their educational experience as well. By encouraging holistic argumentation, debate programs can enjoy the best of all worlds: "hard-core" debaters can still distinguish themselves by conducting in-depth research; "multi-activity" debaters would find debate more enjoyable and still have time for other activities; and more students would participate in an activity they find less intimidating both at a time and commitment level. This result alone would do much to dispel the increasingly common perception that policy debate is an elitist activity.

#### Improved Critical Thinking and Decisionmaking Abilities

Although enhancing communication skills is an essential part of the debate process, its potential benefits the areas of critical thinking and decisionmaking should not be overlooked. The National Forensic League claims to "Train Youth For Leadership"<sup>14</sup> and an important part of that goal involves cultivating the kind of analytical reasoning skills which people who have been involved in academic debate so often sport. When one considers the impressive number of attorneys, journalists, educators, and policy-makers who debated in high school, the relevance of that mission takes on an even greater sense of importance. The authors do not think it is unreasonable to claim that if debate does have an impact on the lives of its participants, the type of critical thinking skills and patterns they develop

are a substantial part of that impact.

Resolutionally-based argumentation enhances decision making skills at both a substantive and abstract level. Initially, it is educationally superior to search for broader conclusions and theories, as opposed to discussing issues with a limited application in either time or subject area. For example, it would

be more desirable for a student to learn about the broader issues involved in the animal rights debate than to discuss the specific policies of one laboratory. According to Bile:

...general education tends to have greater longevity since "theories" tend to have more staying-power than "facts." Educators argue for example that "liberal education provides a general background which makes reorientation easier. By stressing the theory of a subject matter, it avoids imprisonment in the narrow applications which may soon be obsolete."<sup>15</sup>

The implication of this argument is that in terms of the substantive information which is retained over a long period of time, general argumentation is educationally superior.

The critical thinking benefits derived from a holistic, re-resolutionally-based approach to debate go far beyond the literal retention of information. In terms of a person's mode of thinking, the type of analysis taught by parametrically-influenced reasoning is logically inferior. A simple classroom analogy makes this point relatively clear. If a teacher assigns a term paper on the topic "Does President Bill Clinton have a high degree of ethos as a public speaker?," the expectation is that the students should draw a general conclusion about Mr. Clinton as a speaker. If a student turned in a paper discussing the first two minutes of the second Bush-Clinton-Perot presidential debate, without explaining why it was typical of Clinton's performance as a public speaker, it would almost certainly receive a poor grade. If we as educators condone the belief that looking at a potentially random example of a phenomenon allows a person to draw a general conclusion, what are the implications for the kind of minds our forensic activity produces? Logicians Eisenberg and Ilardo explained the risks when noting that:

...the fallacy of composition...holds that what is true of the parts is true of the

whole...This wrong kind of reasoning is the root of prejudice and stereotyping. The colloquial expression, "seen one, seen them all" is the essence of this fallacy. Minority groups have had to bear such unjust accusations for too long. The best remedy for this kind of sloppy reasoning is exposure on sight!<sup>16</sup>

While this type of reasoning is certainly not the sole cause of racism, it would be naive to believe that it does not strongly contribute to perpetuating the problem. Several public awareness campaigns targeted against racism in the workplace attempted to break the cycle of stereotype perpetuation by pointing out that "one bad worker does not mean that all like him (or her) are that way." At an absolute minimum, educators who are concerned about the decisionmaking skills developed in debate should give serious thought to the message that parametric argumentative strategies impart.

#### ARGUMENTATIVE APPLICATION

Having explained a few of the many rationales for resolutionally-focused debate, the question of how to integrate this approach into the contemporary debate format must still be considered. It is the position of this essay that the affirmative should have to commit to one of three argumentative options in the first affirmative constructive speech: 1) defend the proposition as presented; 2) allow reciprocal argumentative options for the negative; or 3) offer an *a priori* defense of parametric theory with presumption resting against a purely jurisdictional approach.

While this essay attempts to present a preliminary defense of these standards, it does so with two caveats in place: First, these standards presume that the resolution is presumptively the focus of the debate. An initial defense of that viewpoint was offered in the first section of this essay so that this section can concern itself with how best to argumentatively impose that standard. Second, this essay has been undertaken as a starting point for discussion. It does not claim to have discovered the definitive standards for assessing whether correct propositional burdens have or have not been met, nor will it answer all resulting criticisms of this position. It is the hope of the authors that significant discussion about how to refine these standards will result from the points raised in this essay.

#### 1. Defend the Proposition as Presented

If the resolution is the focus of debate, then it would seem obvious that debating the resolution as presented would be the preferred mode of analysis for the affirmative. Advocates can do this by either presenting "generic" or "typical" arguments. Generic claims are those which apply to the resolution most of the time. Many opponents of resolutional focus argue that the presence of a generic plan would serve to make the debate process extremely boring. In most cases these individuals mistake the utilization of a generic plan with a limitation on the harm areas eligible for discussion. There is no reason why this outcome would be the result. For instance, an example of a potential claim springing from a generic plan on the topic:

Resolved: That the United States government should substantially change its foreign policy toward the People's Republic of China

would be a case which argues that the basis of foreign policy toward the P.R.C. should be based on human rights instead of economic factors. Another example would be a case which argues that the U.S. should change its foreign policy from a "One China" to a "Two China" policy; recognizing both the P.R.C. and Taiwan. Yet a third example is that the U.S. should adopt a policy of military containment while developing trade relations with the P.R.C. In short, argumentative ground need not be reduced by generic claims. It is likely, in fact, that it will ultimately be increased once affirmatives lose their ability to "screen out" generic disadvantages by claiming that the positions do not link to their particular case area.

Although generic claims are argumentatively preferable, resolutionally-focused debate does not eliminate the use of examples. All that would be required to avoid the fallacy of hasty generalization or composition would be for the affirmative to demonstrate that their example is typical of the claim in question. At this point, the affirmative claim would become a valid induction<sup>17</sup> and would be sufficient to answer the resolutional question. A common objection to a typicality standard is the difficulty in finding a micro standard for determining typicality. Although it is a problem-

atic, there are ways of determining whether an example is typical. One such method would be to utilize an evidential micro standard (EMS). If the affirmative can present evidence indicating that their program is at the core of the subject area of the topic, this would seem to be sufficient. For example, if a case on the US/PRC topic had evidence indicating that the plan would cover most U.S. policies dealing with the P.R.C., as well as possessing the characteristics of most foreign policy programs, then the specific example would be deemed typical.

The potential difficulties in establishing typicality in the context of an affirmative case causes many theorists to argue that the entire resolutional focus viewpoint is tragically flawed due to the vagueness of its standards. First, the standard is not impossible to meet. A quick glance at some of the evidence contained in handbooks on the US/PRC topic demonstrates that several cases could meet this standard rather easily. Second, even if a typicality standard is impossible to meet for this specific resolution, it would not be a valid reason to reject the broader standard of resolutionally-focused argumentation. Instead, it would simply mean that the affirmative should utilize generic claims instead of attempting to produce typical examples.

## 2. Allow Reciprocal Argumentative Options for the Negative

If the affirmative feels that it is unreasonable to take on the burden of defending the entire resolution in IAC, another argumentative option exists: Counter-warrants. Simply put, if the affirmative does not want to deal with all the resolutional ground at the outset of the round, there is no reason why the negative should not be allowed to widen the scope of the discussion (assuming they stay within the bounds of the resolution).

This essay offers two rationales as to why the use of non-inducible examples should be reciprocal. Initially, fairness would seem to require that if the affirmative gets to present their narrow examples, that the negative be allowed the same privilege. Without this right, the negative is placed at a serious disadvantage which, as Bile explained, usually results in "a slow and painful death."<sup>18</sup> Even if the negative is able to overcome this competitive disadvantage, the fact that the playing field is no longer level clouds our ability to determine the better debaters in a given round. Another rationale for permitting counter examples in response to a non-inducible affirmative

case is derived from the often-claimed "search for truth." Even the most cynical affirmative teams usually attempt to prove that their example is truthfully a wise policy option. If the resolution is the focus of debate, then a counter example which expands the amount of resolutional ground discussed in a given round should be welcomed as moving us closer to determining the truth of the proposition under consideration.

If one peruses contemporary debate publications, there is no shortage of writings about the desirability of counter-warrants.<sup>19</sup> Virtually all who are critical of the concept, however, assume that the resolution is not the focus of debate; it exists only as a parameter for discussion. Once the desirability of focusing on the resolution has been established, few serious objections continue to exist. One concern that possesses a great deal of validity is that allowing counter-warrants will result in example-stacking by both sides. Herbeck and Katsulas explain that:

[i]n such an argumentation contest the affirmative lists examples supporting adoption of the resolution, while the negative lists examples against the adoption of the resolution. Inevitably such a debate degenerates into a series of unsubstantiated assertions and counter-assertions. No matter how one views the nature and purpose of the activity, such a debate is a disaster."<sup>20</sup>

The authors are in complete agreement with Herbeck and Katsulas that such a debate would be highly undesirable. Perhaps it is better to find a logical way to prefer one example over another rather than throwing our hands up in despair and depending on the good nature of any given affirmative team to provide a mutually-agreeable example. If example-stacking were to become a legitimate concern in high school policy debate, we should then treat examples as we would definitions and prefer the "better" example offered in the debate round. The most logical micro standard (LMS) for adjudicating a "better" example debate would be one of how much resolutional ground is considered. Quite simply, the warrant which is more applicable to the resolution should be the focus of discussion.

By refocusing the debate to the more resolutionally-orientated examples under consideration, concerns about clash and example-stacking can be alleviated, while still allowing the debaters to enjoy the ad-

vantages mentioned earlier. If an affirmative runs a narrow case, the counter-warrant can serve as a check against abuse. Rhodes and Pfau offered further explanation in noting that:

Herbeck and Katsulas also overlook the point that it is to the advantage of negative in a counter-warrants round to present reasonable and solid examples, since the negative hopes to show by comparison that the affirmative example is isolated and unrepresentative."<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, if the affirmative runs a broad case, it can prevent negative teams from presenting similarly abusive examples. Paulsen and Rhodes explained that:

[t]he counter-warrant would be dangerous only to an affirmative using broad definitions and a narrow case area. Should the affirmative choose, they could present a "stock" case. A broad affirmative case would place the negative at a disadvantage in trying to find countervailing examples of resolutional areas, especially examples of similar or greater importance."<sup>22</sup>

By utilizing a "better" example standard, problems stemming from diminished clash are also resolved. In fact, it is not altogether clear that the affirmative is at a competitive disadvantage when operating within this framework. The affirmative team would maintain the option of running a broad case and defending its example as being "better," or granting the jurisdictional superiority of a negative example and then "turning" it against them.

If the affirmative were to permit use of reciprocal examples from the outset, concerns regarding their *prima facie* requirement could be set aside because of the shared advocacy role of both sides. In addition to restoring fairness in the utilization of non-inducible examples, analyzing counter-warrants at a "better" example level will increase the level of strategically-oriented thinking and add an extra dimension to debates which all too often are decided by the element of surprise, rather than superior argumentation and persuasive skill.

## 3. Prove the Superiority of Parametric Analysis

It is the position of this essay that argumentation focused on the resolution is clearly superior to debates confined within a parametric framework. At an absolute minimum, however, the reasoning presented in the first section of this essay establishes that resolution-ally-focused debate should enjoy strong presumption when in conflict with competing frameworks for analysis.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, this third argumentative option is intended as a compromise position between those who prefer generic debate and people who are firmly wedded to their belief in parametric debate. If the affirmative team feels strongly enough about preserving their exclusive right to present non-inducable examples, then they ought to have the option of defending their viewpoint within the debate round. But, in order to insure both fairness and high quality argumentation, several logically necessary requirements should be imposed on the affirmative: 1) the defense of parametric analysis should be initiated in 1AC; 2) if the defense fails, it should constitute an *a priori* voting issue; and 3) the defense should reflect primarily normative (as opposed to descriptive) reasoning.

That the affirmative team's defense of parametric analysis should be presented in the 1AC makes perfect sense if the debate is supposed to reflect good argumentation. The question being asked in a debate round, at first glance, is whether or not the resolution is true. This is how both a logician and an average person would perceive the situation.<sup>24</sup> If the affirmative team wishes the judge to view the dispute from a different perspective, they need to explain and justify what that perspective should be. Absent such a justification step, the affirmative case constitutes only a random claim with no standing in a debate round with a previously agreed upon question for discussion. Accordingly, such a claim would be *non-sequitur* to the question before the debaters and the affirmative team would have failed to meet its burden to present a *prima facie* case (presumptively in terms of the resolutional question) in the 1AC. Of course, such a claim would not have to be entirely proven at the outset of the round, but it still must be present. Otherwise, the debate case would take on the appearance of a geometric proof with a crucial step missing; it would be logically nonsensical. This approach is not as radical as critics often claim, for if the affirmative cannot ultimately prove that parametric analysis is the best perspective to adopt in the debate round, they would lose the round in the same way that a non-topical case would be disqualified within a parametric framework.

A major reason why debates over issues of resolutional focus often become very difficult for judges to resolve is that both sides argue from very different perspectives. Affirmative teams often advocate claims which are descriptive in nature.

For example, "The affirmative has the right to define" is a claim which is descriptive because the claim is that the affirmative's view on definitional argumentation is commonly held at the time. Negative teams, on the other hand, often advance normative claims when arguing about the issue of resolutional focus. An example of a normative claim is: "The affirmative should not have the right to define." This claim is normative in nature because it addresses the issue of how things should be, rather than how they are presently. It is the position of this essay that when these two claims come into conflict, normative claims should be preferred to descriptive claims<sup>25</sup> because they enhance argumentation skills and avoid *ad vericundium* fallacies. Descriptive claims have been used to justify slavery, denying women the right to vote, and the belief that the earth is flat.<sup>26</sup> Normative claims at least have logic and reason as a check on their conclusions.

One of the primary arguments advanced against focusing on the resolution in policy debate is that tradition indicates that the affirmative example is the focus of debate. Herbeck and Katsulas wrote that "...debate practice alone is sufficient reason to support the contention that debate focuses on examples of the resolution and not on the broader resolution."<sup>27</sup> In addition to being an overtly descriptive claim, it is also an incorrect claim. While it is true that in recent years, parametric analysis has become an accepted practice in policy debate, it is a hasty generalization to conclude that when considering the entire history of academic policy debate in the United States, that the resolution was not the focus of debate. Indeed, up until the 1970s the resolution was generally considered to be the focus of debate. Bile explained that:

[t]raditionally, academic debaters argued the 'totality of the resolution' and judges decided not on specifics but "on the general resolution." In fact, from "the beginning of the national resolution until about 1973-74, the entire resolution was normally thought to be debated...the [parametric viewpoint] ... is comparatively recent and seems to have no real theoretical underpinning other than current practice"<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, tradition is given meaning within the eye (and age) of the beholder.<sup>29</sup> It is the hope of the authors that the debate community can move beyond this problematic and anti-argumentative framework and discuss the issue of resolutional focus at a normative level.

## CONCLUSIONS

This essay has taken the position that resolutionally-focused reasoning should be considered superior to parametric analysis of the resolution in high school policy debate rounds. This conclusion has been reached because of the potential benefits to students in the areas of improved logic-based analysis, increased accessibility to the activity, and the development of superior decisionmaking skills. The implications of this conclusion are that affirmative teams should be obligated to choose, at the outset of the round, from one of three options regarding resolutionally-based burdens:

1) Defend the proposition as presented. This would involve presenting a case which is either generic or typical in terms of the resolution; or

2) Allow the negative reciprocal argumentative options. The implication is that if the affirmative is allowed to present non-inducable examples, the negative should have the same right. In order to avoid concerns about example-stacking, a "better" example standard should be utilized, with the example which covers the most resolutional ground being considered preferable; or

3) Prove the superiority of parametric analysis. This should be done in the 1AC, be considered an *a priori* issue, and rely on normative as opposed to descriptive claims.

Although many valid objections and concerns exist regarding a resolutionally-focused method of reasoning, the adaptability of holistic analysis to policy debate does not seem to be one of them. It is not unusual for affirmative teams to make the claim that debating the resolution, as opposed to their example, "destroys policymaking" and policy debate in general. Interestingly, Murphy pointed out that:

[w]hile many teams are apprehensive to argue counter-warrants or whole resolution as a separate position, many still argue resolutional focus through collective noun topicality violations.<sup>30</sup>

In short, policy debate thrived and grew using resolutionally-focused analysis for most of its institutional life and has been able to survive forays into resolutionally-focused analysis when parametric analysis became the fashionable trend. Under the framework presented in this essay, if debaters wish to advocate a specific policy they can still do so, the policy would only have

to meet the burden of typicality or else the affirmative team would have to give the negative a reciprocal right to present their own examples.

Even if fears about a decrease in traditional policymaking education were to be true, it would only result to a shift toward a more valid form of policy debating. Paulsen and Rhodes explained that:

To use the analogy of parliamentary or legislative debate, an advocate trying to win support for a vague, broadly worded resolution through a single, carefully-selected, and limited example probably would not find his opponents willing to agree to limit themselves to only the example he provides. They would instead draw from other examples which deny the validity of the resolution and would perhaps not even address themselves to a specific example provided by the affirmative advocate. Rather than (or in addition to) denying the specific, therefore, they would offer other specifics. Either strategy would lead the uncommitted observer, or critic to reject the resolution before the house.<sup>31 32</sup>

Finally, assuming the very worst, that resolutionally-focused argumentation resulted in a net decrease in policymaking education, it might very well be preferable to suffer those consequences than to actually encourage anti-logical thinking in today's students (who the authors assume will be tomorrow's leaders). Frankly, the authors would rather help produce a student who could think logically but lacked specific policymaking skills, when the alternative result is a student who is adroit at suggesting specific policy actions which turn out to distressingly illogical.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most valuable skills which competitive debate can help develop in high school and college students is the ability to think critically about the questions with which they are confronted. On an issue like resolutional focus, which plays a significant role in shaping the kind of critical thinking skills that the activity will impart, it is important that coaches, students, and judges try to utilize those skills in resolving this theoretical dilemma. It is the hope of the authors that this essay will serve to spark some very necessary discussion on this very important issue. Although many people will have different opinions, the only intellectually unforgivable act is not to give any real thought to one's viewpoint on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The purpose of this essay is to introduce the resolutional focus discussion to the high school debate community and to stimulate discussion on this important issue. To achieve these goals and due to the nature of collaborative work, the ideas presented herein are not necessarily the personal or professional viewpoints held by one or both authors.

<sup>4</sup>For an in-depth discussion on the theoretical legitimacy of resolutionally-focused debate, see Jack Rhodes and Michael Pfau, "Resolution or example: A reply to Herbeck and Katsulas," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 21 (1985): 147.

<sup>5</sup>For those who wish to seek out more information regarding the resolutional focus debate, two sources in particular stand out: First, the Cross-Examination Debate Association's CEDA Yearbook has included excellent articles on the subject written by Jeff Bile, Brian McGee, and David Berube; and secondly, The Journal of the American

Forensic Association (now titled Argumentation and Advocacy) has featured groundbreaking articles by both Jack Rhodes and Dale Herbeck, both of whom have written for the publication with various different authors.

<sup>6</sup>This is the National Forensic League's official 1995-96 Policy Debate Topic. See National Forensic League, "1995-96 Policy Debate Topic," Rostrum 69.10 (June 1995): 3.

<sup>7</sup>Jeff Bile, "When the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: The implications of holistic resolutional focus," CEDA Yearbook 8 (1987): 8-15.

<sup>8</sup>Use of the term "holistically" in this instance refers to viewing the subject under consideration as a whole, as opposed to the term "generically," which refers to viewing the most common attributes of the subject under consideration.

<sup>9</sup>James Paulsen and Jack Rhodes. "The counter-warrant as a negative strategy: A modest proposal," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 15 (1979): 210.

<sup>10</sup>The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1966) defines "resolved" as "determined; firm in purpose" and Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1981) defines "resolve" in terms of "fixity of purpose."

<sup>11</sup>National Forensic League, "National Forensic League Debate Topic Area Ballot: Proposed Topic Areas and Resolutions for 1995-96," Rostrum 69.4 (December 1994): 3.

<sup>12</sup>National Forensic League, "1995-96 Policy Debate Topic," Rostrum 69.10 (June 1995): 3.

<sup>13</sup>Mr. Luong serves as an academic director and faculty member in the Junior Statesmen Foundation of America's JSA Summer School program in addition to teaching at summer debate institutes. JSA programs emphasizes leadership as well as debate training and attracts the same type of student which forensic programs seek to recruit. Although a very small number of students participate in activities sponsored by both JSA and NFL, one of the primary reasons why many students participate in Junior Statesmen activities instead of forensic competition is because of the significant time commitment.

<sup>14</sup>This motto appears in official National Forensic League publications.

<sup>15</sup>Bile 10.

<sup>16</sup>Eisenberg and Harbo. Argument. 2nd ed. Inglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980.

#### ENDNOTES & REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Nicholas J. Coburn-Palo holds a

<sup>17</sup>Induction is most easily understood in the context of two additional, but somewhat distinct, concepts. Deduction is reasoning from a broader conclusion to a more narrow one; generic argumentation involves answering the question directly; and induction is reaching a broad conclusion from a smaller example.

<sup>18</sup>Bile 9.

<sup>19</sup>Many of the issues discussed in the counterwarrant debate are considered in the general resolutive focus debate. Interested parties in that particular part of the resolutive focus debate should seek out the McGee article in the CEDA Yearbook, the Paulsen and Rhodes article in Jafa, and the Herbeck and Katsulas article in Jafa.

<sup>20</sup>Dale Herbeck and John Katsulas, "The affirmative topicality burden: Any reasonable example of the resolution" Journal of the American Forensic Association 21 (1985): 135.

<sup>21</sup>Rhodes and Pfau 148.

<sup>22</sup>Paulsen and Rhodes 210.

<sup>23</sup>Bile 12.

<sup>24</sup>Bile 11.

<sup>25</sup>Like much of the reasoning in this essay, the ideas presented have been advocated by others. In the case of distinguishing between normative and descriptive claims, this idea was generated from several discussions between Nick Coburn-Palo and Jeff Bile.

<sup>26</sup>Rhodes and Pfau 146.

<sup>27</sup>Herbeck and Katsulas 135.

<sup>28</sup>Bile 8.

<sup>29</sup>Carmendale Fernandes, former NFL President and legendary coach of many championship teams was Mr. Luong's high school speech and debate coach at Fremont HS (Sunnyvale, CA). As a coach who successfully guided teams through both the resolutive focus and parametric approaches, Ms. Fernandes often commented about the increasing frequency of parametric cases during the 1970s and expressed concern regarding the lack of underlying logical support for that approach in several discussions over the years with Mr. Luong.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Murphy, "Debate propositions as claims: Argumentation and resolutive focus," Paper given at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association. November 1990. Chicago, IL.

<sup>31</sup>Paulsen and Rhodes 207.

<sup>32</sup>The authors did not feel it was appropriate to correct gender-specific language if it appeared in the original transcript from which we were quoting. It is their sincere hope that no one is offended by its presence in this essay.

<sup>33</sup>The policymaking aspect of academic debate provides a framework from which to learn and practice critical thinking and decisionmaking skills, among others. Mastery of these fundamental skills are necessary before effective policymaking can occur. Few high school debate coaches would claim that participation in policy debate teaches actual policymaking skills as other institutions such as law and public policy schools are better equipped to handle such tasks.

<sup>34</sup>Many people were instrumental in the preparation and completion of this essay: Nick Coburn-Palo credits discussions with Jeff Bile (Southern Illinois University), Chris Carey

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