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SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DEBATING PROBLEMS¹

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SO far as debating involves rhetoric and oratory, it is an art, in which standards of taste and general suggestions, without any system of rigid and explicit directions, are permissible; but, so far as it involves logic, as it does in the analysis of debating problems, it is a science, and like every other science, should not tolerate haphazard methods of procedure in its analytic operations. At present, however, such methods are tolerated, either because we want to be unencumbered in our thinking processes by any definite standards, or because we have not yet found a practical means for putting system into the analysis of debating problems. Either, as artists, we want to dabble in science, or, as scientific investigators, we are very frankly at sea with no other guide than intuition.

As a means for securing system in the arrangement of arguments, the brief, of course, is invaluable; but as a means for securing systematic analysis of the problem that is to be briefed, it does scarcely more than to emphasize the necessity of finding what we are looking for. To be sure, it makes all-important the discovery of the issues; and it requires that all material shall be tested by its relevancy to these issues; but it does not really help us in the practical operations of analysis, because it does not tell us *how* to find the issues. The brief really presupposes that the work of analysis has been done, and it is in itself the means of preserving in crystallized form the thought that has been analyzed. With all the rigid requirements for brief-drawing, there is no general division of the brief or group of divisions that force the brief-maker to be exhaustive in his analysis. The brief, it is true, demands certain well-recognized main headings in its Introduction, from which the issues are supposed to be derived, as for instance, a definition of terms, a history of the case, a statement of admitted matter, irrelevant matter, and opposing contentions; but any teacher of debating knows that these headings may be filled in, and except in very

¹Read at the Eastern Conference, Princeton, N. J., April, 1916. Since this paper was written the author has published, through Ginn and Company, *The Brief-Makers' Note Book*, developed from the principles here set forth.

unusual cases, are generally filled in with matter that does not lead up to the issues, and, in fact, with matter that has little vital relation to the case; and the so-called issues are chosen arbitrarily without any reference to these introductory statements.

In consequence of the failure of the brief to compel a systematic and thorough analysis of debating problems, textbooks on Argumentation attempt to give explicit directions for finding the issues. Almost all texts agree upon the substance of some such general directions as these: Learn all there is to be known about the question; separate the relevant from the irrelevant matter; exclude admitted matter; select points on which there is or may be a controversy; separate the major points from the minor points, and these major points will be the issues. Such directions, however, are neither systematic nor logical. They are suggestions such as you would expect to receive in an art rather than in a science. They give the student no definite standard for determining when he has learned all there is to be known about the question; and what is much worse, by demanding a separation of the relevant from the irrelevant matter, they presuppose a knowledge of the very issues for which a search is being made. The result is, that the student does not discover the real issues; he manufactures so-called issues out of what is uppermost in his mind; he wastes time developing *ad infinitum*, until he is exhausted, one or two phases of his problem to the exclusion of others; and frequently, he remains blissfully ignorant that there may be phases of his problem that have never been touched in print, which he must develop from his own resources.

The only possibility for creating systematic methods of analysis for debating problems lies in our ability to discover all the hypotheses by which our separate problems may be solved, so that, from these, we may obtain standards to determine what will be relevant and what will not; and if we are to fix upon these hypotheses in advance, we must do it by grasping the inherent possibilities within all sorts of propositions. A proposition, in itself, must be the key to the solution of the problem it contains, because it is obvious that the proposition is all that is given us from which to work. It behooves us, then, to discover what the various types of propositions are according to the hypothetical issues they involve. If this list were a long one, of course, it would be objectionable on that account, but fortunately, we can classify all debating proposi-

tions under four heads, as follows: Propositions of Classification, Propositions of Cause and Effect, Propositions of Comparison, and Propositions of Policy. All propositions under any one of these types will contain the same hypothetical issues.

A proposition of classification is a statement that asserts or denies that an individual belongs to a class, as for example: A is a thief. A proposition of cause and effect is a statement that asserts or denies that one thing is the cause or the effect of another, as for example: A's sudden prosperity shows him to be a thief. A proposition of comparison is a statement that asserts or denies that one thing is greater or less than another in respect to a common quality, as for example: A is a greater thief than B is. A proposition of policy is a statement that asserts or denies that a specified course of action, in preference to other possible courses of action, should be adopted, as for example: A, the thief, should be pardoned.

Propositions of classification will have hypothetical issues that correspond to the well-known tests for arguments from generalization or from analogy; in other words, their issues will correspond to the tests for the syllogism. They will always be of the following nature: suppose the proposition is: A is B; then the issues will be

First, Is B, C?

Second, Is A, also C?

To put this in general terms and then make it concrete, we must first define the general class to which the individual is said to belong, then define the individual, and then see if the definitions agree in the essentials that make up the class. To illustrate, suppose the proposition is: A is a thief. The issues are:

First, Is a thief one who steals?

Second, Does A steal?

Propositions of cause and effect will have hypothetical issues that correspond to the well-known tests for arguments from sign and from antecedent probability, or to the tests for causal relationships. Suppose that we have a proposition that says that one thing causes another, the issues will be,

First, Is the chain of reasoning complete between the cause and effect?

Second, Does not some other fact counteract the cause to prevent its working to the alleged effect?

Third, Does not this cause really produce an opposite effect?

Fourth, Is not this effect really derived from another cause?

To make this concrete, suppose the proposition is: A's sudden prosperity shows him to be a thief. The issues will be of the following nature:

- First, Did A steal anything valuable?
- Second, If A were a thief, would not fear prevent his manifestations of prosperity?
- Third, If A were a thief, could he become prosperous so soon?
- Fourth, Is not A's sudden prosperity due to a recent legacy that he has received?

Propositions of comparison are slightly more complex than those of the first two types, but in the same way, they will have the same hypothetical issues, and these issues will always correspond to propositions of cause and effect, and propositions of classification. Suppose the proposition of comparison is: A is a greater thief than B is. The issues will be of the following nature:

- First, Is A responsible for the theft of one thousand dollars?—a question of cause and effect.
- Second, Is B responsible for the theft of nine hundred dollars?—a question of cause and effect.
- Third, Is the extent of a thief's plunder a proper measure of his criminality?—a question of classification.

Propositions of policy are more complex than any of the other types, and yet, they, too, in each instance, will have the same hypothetical issues, which are in themselves questions of classification, questions of cause and effect, and questions of comparison. In questions of policy it is possible that there may be three or more plans of action demanding consideration at the same time. These plans may be designated as the present system, the proposed plan, and the Negative's substitute plan or plans. The hypothetical issues will always be of the following nature:

- First, Are there existing evils?
- Second, Are existing evils due to the present system?
- Third, Is the proposed plan different from the present system?
- Fourth, Will the proposed plan remove the existing evils?
- Fifth, Will the proposed plan produce other evils than those we now suffer?
- Sixth, Are evil results ascribed to the proposed plan really evils?

Seventh, Will evil results of the proposed plan be greater than existing evils?

Eighth, Is the Negative's substitute plan different from the existing system?

Ninth, Is the Negative's substitute plan different from the proposed plan?

Tenth, Will the Negative's substitute plan remove the existing evils?

Eleventh, Will the Negative's substitute plan produce other evils than those we now suffer?

Twelfth, Are evil results ascribed to the Negative's substitute plan really evils?

Thirteenth, Will evil results of the Negative's substitute plan be greater than evils we now suffer?

Fourteenth, Will evil results of the Negative's substitute plan be greater than evil results of the proposed plan?

To make this concrete, suppose the proposition is: The thief, A, should be pardoned. There are, of course, three or more possible actions that might be taken on the case. A might be kept in jail; he might be pardoned; or he might be dismissed on probation. The issues will be of the following nature:

First, Is A being made degenerate in jail?

Second, Is A's degeneracy due to his association with other criminals in jail?

Third, Will his home environment be free from the degenerating influences of the jail?

Fourth, Will his home life counteract his growing degeneracy?

Fifth, Will he become a burden on his family?

Sixth, Will his support by his family really be regarded by them as a burden?

Seventh, Will this burden on the family be harder for them to bear than the contemplation of his degeneracy?

Eighth, If he is dismissed on probation, will his life be free from degenerating influences like those in the jail?

Ninth, If he is dismissed on probation, will he be practically exempt from further punishment for his former crime, as he would be under a pardon?

Tenth, Will dismissal on probation counteract his degeneracy?

Eleventh, By dismissal on probation, will it be possible for him to commit more crime?

Twelfth, Is the possibility in his case that he may commit more crime really a hazard to society?

Thirteenth, Is the remote possibility of his committing more crime, if he is dismissed on probation, more to be guarded against than the certainty of his becoming degenerate in jail?

Fourteenth, If he is dismissed on probation, is the possibility of his committing more crime greater than as if he were pardoned?

This system of analysis which provides in advance exhaustive lists of hypothetical issues under every type of proposition is extremely valuable, in that it eliminates the necessity of struggling through the same elementary logical processes with each new question in laying out a case. This fundamental work is done once for all, and when the hypothetical issues become familiar, not only does every question drop mechanically into its proper mould, but all matter in any way associated with the proposition seeks that ramification of the mould in which it fits.

At Dartmouth College, this theory of analysis has been applied to a system of loose-leaf note-taking, and the test has proved eminently satisfactory to instructors and students alike. The system of note-taking that has been adopted is arranged for propositions of policy only, on the ground that this type of proposition is most common in school and college debates and in the world-at-large, and also, because, for the solution of problems raised by such propositions, questions of every other type must be debated as issues. This system differs from other loose-leaf systems in that the student does not make classifications for the material he selects, but he adopts a classification based on pre-determined hypothetical issues, for, in this system, each loose-leaf blank form is headed by a hypothetical issue, called a phase.

It is almost impossible for a student to use this system unintelligently, if he has any degree of mental perception whatsoever, and yet it is worth while to give students certain cautions in using the system. No matter whether a student is debating for the Affirmative or for the Negative of a question, he should investigate every phase of the proposition from the point of view of the side that has the burden of proof before he investigates the other side.

The student should not neglect to investigate any phase; but, on the other hand, he should not expect every phase to turn out to be an ultimate issue in every proposition. If the student's debate originates in a problem for which he is seeking a solution in a proposition that he may present to others, he should begin his investigation with Phase I, and proceed in order through the other phases. If, however, the student's debate originates in a proposition whose merits he is trying to determine, he should begin his investigation with Phase III, which distinguishes between the proposed plan and the present system; he should then proceed to Phase IV, which gives the benefits to be derived from the proposed plan; and then he should return to Phase I, which should be filled in with evils that are opposite to the benefits enumerated in Phase IV. After filling in the first four phases, the student should do his reading for a time, not so much with a desire to fill in a definite phase, as with a desire to sort out the material that he does find under the several phases. Finally, when the student has exhausted all the available reading on the specific proposition, he should seek to fill in by his own resources the phases that remain untouched.

Against this scheme of note-taking, objection will probably be raised, that it destroys spontaneity in the debater. This objection, however, cannot stand. In the first place, it is no real objection, for this system applies only to analysis of debating problems, which is admittedly a scientific function in which spontaneity is not so much in demand as accuracy and thoroughness. In the second place, it is impossible to employ this system without some degree of spontaneity, if spontaneity is in any way synonymous with original thought. The system, in fact, demands more original thought, than other systems which really are not systems at all. In this system, every bit of material, no matter from what source it comes, has to be assimilated and transformed by the debater to fit a predetermined niche in his case, whereas, under other methods, or under no methods, material is borrowed in wholesale quantities by the debater and incorporated without change, without receiving any impression from his personality, in his case. Reference to the blank forms will disclose the fact that provision is made for compelling the student to be original. Every general expression that is to be used as a formula and which is therefore printed in italics, is to be translated into something that is peculiar to the proposition. For example, the expression in italics: *specific conditions unde-*

sirable in themselves, must be translated into a term of the following nature, poverty, ignorance, infant mortality, drunkenness, or bribery.

Some of the advantages to be derived from such a system as this are: First, that it makes a student employ a loose-leaf system of note-taking intelligently; Second, it enables him to investigate details of his case without losing his grip on the general problem; Third, it enables him to write his brief directly from his notes without any rearrangement of them; and finally, it crystallizes the student's methods of analysis for all future cases. It may be adopted by an instructor in his classes as a system by which he may require daily reports of progress from his students while they are preparing cases. If it is employed in this way, the instructor will find it valuable as a means for measuring a student's work in preparation for his debates, and it will also enable the instructor to help students at critical points in the construction of their cases before their arguments assume the rigidity of the brief.

Several of the students who have used the system have expressed their opinions of it in this way: different ones have said, "I never realized how much the same all debating propositions are." "Under this system, you cannot escape the issues." "Why, by this method, we can develop cases with the same accuracy that is possible in a report of a physics experiment." "When these phases have been filled in, there is nothing more to say." And, "This scheme is so fundamental, I wonder that it has not been used before."