

## **Parliamentary Debate**

by

Robert Trapp

Professor of Rhetoric

Willamette University

*This is a draft of a chapter written by Robert Trapp for a volume entitled Intercollegiate Forensics by T.C. Winebrenner and published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company. Used by permission of the publisher.*

My own idiosyncratic understanding of debate began in high school and college in the 1960s. By that time, a single style monopolized intercollegiate debate in the United States. Every summer, one representative from each of five organizations--the American Forensic Association, Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha, Pi Kappa Delta, Phi Rho Pi, and the Speech Communication Association--met during the summer and crafted five propositions, one of which would be selected as the single topic that colleges and universities would debate for the entire year. Today, when my students ask me about the kind of debate I did as a student, my answer is easy. At the time, there was only one game in town.

From the time I took a sabbatical from debate in the early 1980s until I returned in 1989, a great deal of diversification had occurred. Not only were some colleges and universities continuing to debate the national debate topic as I had in the 1960s, others were debating two topics per year under the sponsorship of the Cross Examination Debate Association. A few other schools were beginning to compete in Lincoln Douglas debating. I thought these organizations were quite diverse. I even worried that so much diversity might lead to divisions which would pit one group against the other having harmful effects on each organization.

Little did I know that much more diversity existed in debate world wide. One day in the fall of 1990, I was sitting in my office when I received a call from a woman from Oxford University in England. She was encouraging me to send a team to a tournament hosted by the Oxford Union (note 1). Our conversation did not go well. I asked her what style of debate they would be using and she answered that they would be using the American format (which I wrongly assumed to be cross-examination). I asked her about the topic and her answer completely confused me. I could not understand how one would prepare to debate "a variety of topics." I did not know then that she had attempted to introduce me to the American format of parliamentary debate.

I never cease to be amazed by how much Americans (including myself) think the world revolves around us and ours. I was soon to learn that parliamentary debate flourishes all over the world. This kind of debate is very strong in the British Isles and Australia. Our neighbors to the north also participate in parliamentary debate through the Canadian University Student Intercollegiate Debate Organization (CUSID). Two organizations sponsor parliamentary debate in the United States. The

American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA) has members generally in the Northeast United States but also in the Midwest and in California as well. The National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) has members in the West, Midwest, and South, but also in the East. During the New Year's holiday, approximately three hundred debate teams from all over the world get together at the World Universities Debating Championships, a tournament that moves from one country to another every year. So this form of debate which is relatively new to the United States is in actuality the oldest form of debate in the world and is still the most widespread.

Parliamentary debating is rapidly gaining in strength in the United States. Tournaments sanctioned by the APDA sometimes exceed one hundred teams. The first championship NPDA tournament held in 1994 at the Colorado College was attended by about fifty odd teams. In 1995, the second NPDA Championship at Willamette University included over seventy teams and in 1996, the tournament moved to Rice University where one hundred and fifteen teams participated. The Championship tournament returned to Colorado College in 1997 where one hundred and ninety six teams competed--almost four times the number competing in 1994.

Still, this form of debate is relatively new to many in the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a starting point for those who wish to learn more about the activity. Of course, a single chapter cannot begin to cover every concept important to parliamentary debating. The goal of this chapter is to begin a discussion of a few of the essentials. In that vein, the chapter will cover four main ideas: the nature of parliamentary debate, the parliamentary debate format, constructing a case for the motion, and constructing a case to oppose the motion. These concepts are not introduced as the ultimate "how-to guide" for debating, but as one system which some students have found workable. The beauty of parliamentary debate is that it has the capacity to incorporate multiple forms of argument. Students and teachers must be encouraged to pursue forms of argument that match their personalities and intellectual styles.

### **The Nature of Parliamentary Debate**

What I have to say about the nature of parliamentary debate is a mixture of what I believe parliamentary debate could be and what it is at its best. Parliamentary debates which exemplify extemporaneous, reasoned, informed, public debates qualify as being among the best and approach the norms toward which I believe the activity should strive.

#### *Focus on Extemporaneous Debate*

One element that unifies parliamentary debate--whether the North American, European, or Australian variety--is the extemporaneous nature of the debate. Parliamentary debate focuses on topics usually framed as motions before the house. Examples of motions might include "This House rejects affirmative action," or "Be it

resolved that U.S. action in Bosnia is an abuse of power." Ordinarily, parliamentary debaters argue about a different motion in every debate.

The extemporaneous feature of parliamentary debate is one of the primary differences between it and cross-examination debate as practiced in U.S. secondary and post-secondary institutions. Cross-examination debate organizations select one or two topics for debate during an academic season. Students research those topics and carefully prepare arguments on both sides of those topics. The research and preparation is so extensive that the debates are not ordinarily extemporaneous events. In fact, major arguments on both sides are usually written in manuscript form and read to the judge. In parliamentary debate, topics vary with each new competition and preparation is limited to fifteen minutes. The focus of parliamentary debate is on informed, reasoned argument more than on volume of research.

Each team consists of two debaters. One team, called the Government, argues in favor of the motion and the other team, called the Opposition, argues against the motion. The tournament director or the judge presents the motion to teams of debaters approximately fifteen minutes prior to the beginning of the debate (Note 2). After the preparation time has expired, debaters are forbidden to take published materials into the debating chambers for use in the debate. The combination of a short preparation period and the ban on taking published materials into the debating chambers for use during the debate assures that debates will be spontaneous and extemporaneous.

#### *Focus on Informed Debate*

When other things are equal--regardless of the format of debate--better informed debaters have a better chance of success than less informed debaters. However, a well-informed parliamentary debater typically differs from a well-informed cross-examination debater.

Because they debate a single topic for an entire year, cross-examination debaters are able to gain a competitive edge by conducting in-depth research. Students typically prepare their cases and arguments prior to the debates and actually take their research materials to the debates where they read extensively from briefs prepared from published materials. The well-informed cross-examination debater prepares by collecting a volume of research surrounding one specific topic area. The best parliamentary debaters also do extensive research, but not on a specific topic. Frequently, as a part of their preparation, debate teams are assigned to research and construct arguments on a variety of current events topics. Students then gather at preappointed times to share their ideas in "round-table" discussion forums. In this manner, each student becomes more informed on issues that might arise in debate motions. In addition to research actually conducted to prepare for debate, parliamentary debate is perhaps unique in that information gleaned from classes and other aspects of the students' lives also is useful in actual debates. As a

result, a well-informed parliamentary debater prepares by studying a wide and eclectic survey of topics.

One major difference between the use of information in cross-examination debate and in parliamentary debate involves the reliance on published sources of information. Both before the debate and during the debate, cross-examination debaters rely almost exclusively on published sources. Beginning with the extensive research already mentioned, published information is the sine qua non of cross-examination debate. During the debate, cross-examination debaters are required to cite the source of every bit of information they use.

Parliamentary debate does not rely exclusively on published sources of information either in the preparation prior to the debate nor in the actual debate itself. While no rules prohibit consultation of published materials during the fifteen minutes of preparation time between the announcement of the topic and the beginning of the debate, the small amount of time allowed for preparation means that the most effective use of time is spent on argument construction instead of consultation of published materials. From a practical point of view, parliamentary debaters might have time to consult a dictionary or a recent news magazine, but little more. Thus, parliamentary debate places a premium on what debaters can do with information they have rather than on how much information they can amass. One outcome is that the quantity of information in a parliamentary debate is ordinarily less than in a cross-examination debate (note 3).

Additionally, the rules of both APDA and NPDA disallow debaters' use of published materials during the actual debate. As a result, parliamentary debaters must rely on the information they have obtained through general research as well as their general knowledge of history, philosophy, and current events. Thus, the reward structure focuses primarily on having substantial knowledge in a broad range of areas. The best and most successful parliamentary debaters are, in my opinion, among the most well-informed students in the university.

The kind of research in cross-examination debate as opposed to parliamentary debate is analogous to the differences between a college or university's major requirements and their general-education curriculum. Typically colleges and universities require a sequence of general-education courses to ensure that students have a breadth of knowledge. To fulfill this set of courses, students take a range of subjects like math, science, social science, arts and humanities. Most colleges and universities require students to complete course work in a major in order to ensure their depth of knowledge in an academic field. These courses will all fall under a single department and may have close ties with one another. While the general education courses provide some depth, their specific purpose is to promote breadth. Likewise, courses in the major provide some breadth but their goal is to provide depth in a specific field of study. The contrast between breadth and depth is a both/and rather than an either/or distinction. Good major programs have a degree of breadth as well as depth. Good general education programs also strive for a

balance of breadth and depth as the requirements direct students to a broad range of courses, each of which a topic in depth.

Research in cross-examination debate is analogous to the major while research in parliamentary debate is more clearly analogous to general education. That is not to say that cross-examination debate research involves no breadth and parliamentary debate involves no depth. In their examination of a single topic, cross-examination debaters broadly investigate all of the issues that might connect to their topic. People familiar with cross-examination debate understand how broad this investigation becomes. Similarly, the best parliamentary debaters attempt to understand each of the topics they research in as much depth as possible. The different kinds of research conducted by parliamentary debaters lead to different kinds and uses of evidence in parliamentary debate. All forms of argument require evidence, and parliamentary debate is no exception. Most frequently, evidence takes the form of value or factual premises.

Value premises consist of statements about what conditions are preferred over others. Life is preferred over death; freedom is preferred over slavery; wealth is preferred over poverty. Debaters begin with these kinds of value premises to construct arguments about value hierarchies. In this case, would we prefer life or freedom? Free trial or free press?

Factual premises consist of information debaters learn in their readings for classes and in the information they research to be better informed debaters. Debaters use these factual premises as evidence to provide support for their arguments. Factual premises are effective as evidence if they are a part of public knowledge. Public knowledge is the kind of knowledge that one would expect well-informed and liberally-educated members of the public to understand and acknowledge as "true." But what of those occasions when debaters need to use a factual premise as evidence when that premise is not based on generally known information included in this public knowledge? These premises, sometimes called "specific information" or "specialized knowledge," are under certain conditions, appropriate as well in parliamentary debate (note 4). The conditions under which specialized knowledge is appropriate in parliamentary debate are 1) when the debater is able and willing to share the source of this information with the audience and opposing debaters, and 2) when the debater is willing to take the necessary time to explain the specific knowledge in detail.

First, debaters must be willing to share the source of specific information with the audience for reasons that are similar to those requiring a writer to cite sources of information (note 5). Debaters as well as writers cite sources in order to give their listeners and readers the opportunity to check the information in more detail at a later date. Citing sources also is used by debaters and writers to make a statement about their own personal integrity. By inviting the audience to check the authenticity of their information, writers and debaters are staking their personal integrity on the fact that the information is as represented. Debaters who earn the

reputation of representing information inaccurately will lose their credibility quickly.

A debater's willingness to take additional time to explain the context of specialized information is a second way to ensure that specialized knowledge is not used as a device to win by withholding information. If a person cites a study that says, for instance, capital punishment deters substantial numbers of murders each year, that person would be obliged to explain the methodology of the investigation, thus giving the Opposition team an opportunity to challenge the details of the information. Requiring a debater to fully explain specific information gives the opponents and audience a context to evaluate the premise and its connection to the debater's claim. Being well informed is essential to being an effective debater. By being well informed, one is able to command a greater quantity and quality of factual and value premises. But commanding these premises is not sufficient to being an effective debater. An effective debater also understands the connections between data and claims. These connections are the primary focus of the topic of reason.

#### *Focus on Reasoned Debate*

While the focus of argumentation in all forms of debate ought to be on reason (note 6), anyone who has listened to political debates is aware that elements such as invective and humor are just as likely to take center stage. Even though invective and humor can be persuasive elements, debate simply cannot occur without reasoned argument. While parliamentary debate accepts and encourages elements such as humor and delivery as appropriate methods of persuasion, debaters should attempt to keep the focus on reasoned argument as the central feature of debate. Saying that argument is an essential feature of debate is ambiguous because argument takes so many forms. Argument can focus on evidence, reason, or both. Although all forms of argument must contain, at minimum, evidence and reason, some forms of argument focus more on one of these elements than the other. At times, an arguer will focus on evidence when patterns of reason are less necessary. At other times when evidence is uncontroversial or consists of values or evidence that the audience and arguer already share, arguers may focus more on reason and less on evidence.

By focusing on the evidentiary elements of argumentation, some forms of debate (particularly cross-examination debate as practiced in high schools, colleges and universities) concentrate on evidence instead of the process of making inferences between evidence and claims. Because cross-examination debaters have researched their topics in such depth, their focus on evidentiary elements of argument should come as no surprise. The focus on evidence probably evolved because cross-examination debate uses one (or no more than two) topic for an entire academic year. These forms of debate do not ignore the role of reason and inference; they simply place inference in the background and evidence in the foreground. Parliamentary debate, on the other hand, focuses on elements such as the structure of reason. Parliamentary debaters focus on the structure of reason and inference in order to learn how to construct arguments so those arguments are logical and

persuasive. Persons who choose this form of debate do so for a variety of reasons, among them the desire to learn how to argue in everyday situations which require extensive spontaneous argument construction and the ability to use existing argument resources. Additionally, some people became concerned that the evidentiary element in cross-examination debate had replaced other equally important elements of debate. These people prefer a form of debate that focuses on those elements. So for these reasons, parliamentary debaters exert a great deal of effort learning how to quickly structure various kinds of arguments so those arguments are logical and persuasive.

Cross-examination debate differs from parliamentary debate in that the former focuses on the content of evidence with the inference between evidence and claim in the background while the latter focuses on inference between evidence and claim with the content of evidence in the background. In cross-examination debate, the "facts" are the foregrounded elements in the debates; in parliamentary debate, what the debater does with the facts is foregrounded.

An additional contrast between cross-examination and parliamentary debate involves the role of refutation. Refutation in both forms of debate is an important element of argument. In cross-examination debate, an unrefuted argument is considered "true" regardless of the intrinsic quality of the argument. Parliamentary debaters, on the other hand, are expected to refute only the main lines of analysis of their opponents' cases. Thus, point-by-point refutation is a less important element in parliamentary debate than it is in cross-examination debate. Frequently, parliamentary debaters refute their opponents' claims by weaving a tapestry of argument that includes refutation of their opponents' main lines of argument. Thus, parliamentary debate's focus on reason is an inherent feature of the activity but the focus on reason is different in parliamentary debate than it is in cross-examination debate. The unique features of parliamentary debate's focus on reason leads rather directly to a focus on public audiences.

#### *Focus on Public Debate*

Each of the two previously mentioned foci lead directly to the public as an element in parliamentary debate. Because parliamentary debaters are expected to be clear in the structure of their reasoning and because parliamentary debaters use information from the public forum, the format is one which is accessible to public audiences. Parliamentary debate at its best is an event that ought to be enjoyable and educational for public audiences seeking information, education, and even entertainment. Parliamentary-style debates ought, therefore, to be made available to groups of high school and college students, to clubs and service organizations, as well as to members of the public at large. Cross-examination debate, on the other hand, has tended to focus on technical argumentation structures and technical information. For similar reasons cross-examination debate has focused on technical rather than public audiences.

The benefits of parliamentary debate extend to these public audiences as well as to the debaters themselves. Attending these parliamentary debates educates audiences in ways that monologues do not. Audiences who attend these debates learn not only about both sides of the issue debated, but learn that most public issues actually do have two reasonable sides. They also learn that structured arguments play important roles in creating opinions and values. In this manner, debates actually participate in the creation of informed and intelligent audiences.

### **The Parliamentary Debate Format**

To describe a single parliamentary debate format would be futile. Parliamentary debate exists in a variety of formats across the world. In Australia two teams each composed of three persons compete in a format that yields a win for one team and a loss for the other. In much of the United Kingdom, four teams of two persons compete for ranking of one to four. In Canada and the U.S., two teams of two persons each compete in a win-loss format.

The format described here is the one most frequently used in intercollegiate debate tournaments in the United States. As stated earlier, the debate occurs between two, two-person teams over a motion before the house. The Government team favors the motion and is obliged to give two constructive speeches and one rebuttal speech in support of the motion. The Opposition team gives two constructive speeches and one rebuttal speech against the motion. A few specifics of these speeches are in Table One (note 7).

| Speech                                  | Time      | Contents  |
|---|-----------|---|
| Prime Minister Constructive (PMC)       | 7 Minutes | Defines the motion and presents the case for the Government   |
| Leader of Opposition Constructive (LOC) | 8 Minutes | Accepts or rejects the Government's definition of the motion; refutes the Government's case, begins the Opposition's case against the motion, or both |
| Member of Government Constructive (MGC) | 8 Minutes | Reestablishes and expands the Government's case in light of the Opposition's arguments  |
| Member of Opposition Constructive (MOC) | 8 Minutes | Continues refuting the Government's case and/or constructing the Opposition's case against the motion   |
| Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR)     | 4 Minutes | Summarizes the main issues opposing the motion  |
| Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR)           | 5 Minutes | Summarizes the main issues supporting the motion  |

#### *Constructive Speeches*

The constructive period of the debate consists of four speeches, two from each side. The objective in all constructive speeches is to construct arguments either



proposing or opposing the motion. Speeches after the Prime Minister Constructive also may contain refutation of opposing arguments.

The first speech, called the Prime Minister Constructive, establishes the issues and direction for the debate. Following an introduction, the Prime Minister defines the motion as he or she believes it should be debated, then presents the case for the motion. The case for the motion includes a series of interrelated arguments which, taken together, present compelling reasons to support the motion.

The second speech is called the Leader of Opposition Constructive. During this speech, the leader of the Opposition either accepts or rejects the definition of the motion as offered by the Prime Minister. If the Leader of the Opposition accepts the definitions (either explicitly or implicitly), the debate is set and the Opposition is then bound to accept the definitions for the remainder of the debate. Having accepted or rejected the definition of terms, the speaker then begins the Opposition team's arguments against the motion. These arguments can involve constructive arguments against the motion, direct attacks on the arguments offered by the Prime Minister, or a combination of the two.

The Member of the Government Constructive follows with a defense of the Government's case. If the Government's definition of the motion was rejected, the Member of the Government needs to defend the definition. If not, the Member of Government proceeds directly to defend the Government's case against the attacks that were raised by the Leader of the Opposition. The Member of Government may present new examples or evidence in support of the Government's case, but always attempts to keep the debate focused on the strongest points raised by the Government.

The final constructive speech is the Member of Opposition Constructive. In this speech, the Member of the Opposition continues the main lines of argument raised in the Leader of Opposition's speech by defending those arguments against responses made by the Member of the Government. This speech is also the last opportunity for the Opposition to raise new arguments, and frequently the Member of the Opposition will use this speech to raise one or more new arguments against the motion.

### *Rebuttal Speeches*

Following the constructive speeches are two rebuttals. These speeches are intended to give each team the opportunity to compare and contrast the major arguments of each side with an emphasis on showing why their own arguments are the best. The point of these speeches is to wrap up the debate according to the arguments that have already been offered. Thus, new arguments are not allowed in rebuttals (note 8).

One seeming anomaly in the debate concerns the order of rebuttal speeches. Whereas the Government gave the first constructive speech, the Opposition gives

the first rebuttal. This means, of course, that the Opposition will give two speeches in a row (Member of Opposition Constructive and Leader of Opposition Rebuttal) and that the Government will begin and end the debate.

The Leader of Opposition Rebuttal is a bit difficult to conceptualize since it immediately follows a speech by the Member of the Opposition. One might think that if the Member of the Opposition has given a good constructive speech, anything that the Leader of Opposition might say would be redundant. In these cases, the Leader of the Opposition should try to provide a persuasive summary of the Opposition's argument. In other cases the Leader of the Opposition will use the rebuttal to give greater emphasis to an argument that was raised only slightly in one of the earlier speeches by the Opposition.

In almost every case, the Leader of Opposition should consider this rebuttal an opportunity to summarize, in as persuasive a manner as possible, the strongest arguments raised by the Opposition against the motion. This speech should be organized around those arguments that give the Opposition the greatest chance to convince the audience to oppose the motion.

The final speech in the debate is the Prime Minister Rebuttal. All speeches are important, but this speech takes on added importance because the Opposition has just had two speeches in a row. Most good debates should, at this time, be leaning toward the Opposition. A good rebuttal is needed to turn the debate back toward the Government's position.

The Prime Minister Rebuttal should accomplish at least two things. First, it should refute the strongest arguments offered by the Opposition. Selectivity is important. In general, judges and audiences will not expect the Prime Minister to refute every word uttered by an Opposition speaker, but they will expect the most convincing Opposition arguments to be dealt with in a substantial manner. Second, the Prime Minister should summarize the arguments that are the strongest for the Government. Judges and audiences will not expect the Government to win every argument in the debate, but they should expect the Government to win arguments sufficient to prove the proposition. Showing how this goal has been accomplished ought to be a primary goal of the Prime Minister Rebuttal.

#### *Interactive Elements in Parliamentary Debate*

The description we have offered thus far would indicate that parliamentary debate is a series of dueling monologues with very little interaction. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Parliamentary debate is an extremely active and interactive enterprise. The speeches are occasionally interrupted with "heckles" from the audience and by points of information from the opposing team. The interactive elements that demand specific attention are points of information, points of order and points of personal privilege.

Points of information provide information for direct interchange between debaters. After the first minute but before the last minute of any constructive speech, a speaker from the opposing team may rise and request a point of information. Speakers may request a point of information by a variety of means: by standing and saying "point of information please" or "on that point," by rising and placing a hand atop the head, by rising and extending a hand, or simply by standing. Any of these means communicate to the speaker that their opponent is requesting a point of information.

Because the time for a point of information is taken from the speaker's time, whether or not to accept the point of information is at the discretion of the speaker holding the floor. As a matter of courtesy, a speaker ought to accept two or three points of information dispersed throughout the speech but the speaker has the right to deny any point. The speaker can accept the point by saying something like "I yield the floor for a point of information" or "Your point" or the speaker can deny the point by saying "no thank you" or simply by waving to the person to take their seat.

If the point of information is accepted, the opposing team member has a short amount of time (a maximum of 15 seconds) to make the point. The point can consist of a direct question or a quick statement intended to refute some point the speaker is making. Whether a question or a statement, the point of information should be clear, crisp, and persuasive. Immediately following point, the speaker should respond directly to the question or statement. Delaying the response may be seen as a sign of weakness by the judges or the audience.

Points of information are important to parliamentary debate because they show debaters' skills at quickly responding to arguments. Debates literally can be won or lost on these exchanges. Points of information are much more important to the outcome of debates than the other interactional elements--points of order and points of personal privilege.

Points of order may occur at anytime during the debate when a debater believes that his or her opponent has violated some rule of the debate (note 9). To rise to a point of order, a debater must address the Speaker of the House with a statement such as "I rise to a point of order" or simply "point of order." Once recognized by the Speaker of the House, the debater must state, but may not argue for, the point of order. For instance, the person raising the point of order might say "I rise to a point of order. The Prime Minister is introducing a new argument in a rebuttal." At the discretion of the Speaker of the House, the accused may briefly respond to the point of order. The Speaker of the House will then rule immediately on the point of order in one of three ways: point well taken, point not well taken, or point taken under consideration. The time used to state and address a point of order will not be deducted from the speaking time of the debater with the floor. A point of order is a serious charge and should not be raised for minor violations. Debaters may be penalized for raising spurious points of order.

Points of personal privilege occur when a debater believes that an opponent has personally insulted one of the debaters, has made an offensive or tasteless comment, or has grievously misconstrued another's words or arguments. To initiate the point of personal privilege, the complaining debater raises and says "point of personal privilege" to the Speaker of the House. The complaining debater explains the basis of the point of personal privilege, then the Speaker of the House rules on whether or not the comments were acceptable. The time used to state and address a point of personal privilege will not be deducted from the speaking time of the debater with the floor.

Like a point of order, a point of personal privilege is a serious charge and should not be raised for minor transgressions. Debaters may be penalized for raising spurious points of personal privilege.

Although points of personal privilege and points of order are rare occurrences, points of information are commonplace. In addition to adding interest and excitement to parliamentary debate, they prepare debaters for the kinds of spontaneous arguments they will encounter in everyday experience.

### **Constructing the Case for the Motion**

Motions in parliamentary debate can roughly be divided into two categories: literal motions where the debate is about the precise substance of the motion and metaphorical motions where the motion is a metaphor for a substantive issue. Debaters need to be able to construct a case for both types of motions. Constructing a case involves both defining the motion and creating the arguments that support it.

#### *Defining the Motion*

Defining the motion means something different for literal motions than for metaphorical ones. In the case of literal motions, defining the motion involves more and less than defining the terms of the motion. A debater need not define every term in a literal motion in order to explain its meaning; the debater need only define the most important and abstract terms. The terms that need defining vary with the clarity of the resolution. When debating the topic, "This House supports a progressive tax," the Government might choose not to define terms at all or only to define "progressive tax." The Government certainly need not define "This House" or "supports" since those terms ought to be clear to all participants and listeners. Other topics may contain terms which may be less clear and need to be defined. In all cases, the terms of the motion should become clear in the presentation of the Prime Minister Constructive.

Defining the individual terms of a literal motion may not be sufficient to defining the motion in its entirety. Defining "progressive tax" as one in which the tax rate increases as a person's income increases may not be sufficient to define the motion mentioned above. One way of further defining a literal motion is to present a more specific proposal. The Prime Minister might, for instance, complete the definition of the motion by presenting a proposal which calls for zero tax on incomes below ten

thousand dollars, five percent on incomes over twenty thousand dollars, and seventy percent on income over one hundred thousand dollars.

Depending on the nature of a literal motion, one might define it by example. Take, for instance, the motion "This House believes that professional athletes are inappropriate role models for America's youth." The Prime Minister might choose to define this motion to say that professional boxers send improper messages to young people. By so doing, the Prime Minister is focusing the debate on one class of professional athletes. Of course, the Opposition may object to the limitation of "professional athletes" to "professional boxers." Nevertheless, the Government has the right and responsibility initially to define and clarify the motion. Defining by example is one of several ways they may initiate this responsibility.

Defining a motion phrased in metaphorical language differs from defining a literal motion. Whereas with the literal motions, the terms usually are defined either by standard definitions or by example, a metaphorical motion is generally defined by analogy. To define a metaphorical motion, the Government will ordinarily choose to link the motion to a more specific issue. In so doing, the Government is creating an analogy which says the idea expressed in the motion is analogous to this specific issue. For instance, the motion "This House should be as quiet as a mouse" might be linked to issues such as the being silent about the private sex lives of political officials or the need for Congress to maintain silence about its disagreement with the President's foreign policy actions.

Defining a metaphorical motion by linking it to a more concrete issue does not relieve the Government of the burden of defending the motion. The question becomes, having defended the concrete issue, has the Government also defended the motion? In other words, by proving that This House should be silent about our disagreement with the President's foreign policy, has the Government proven that "This House should be as quiet as a mouse?" The surest way to meet this criteria is to create a clear link between being "as quiet as a mouse" and being silent about our disagreements over foreign policy. The link should show that the key element or issue in the metaphor is transferred to the concrete issue. In our metaphor about the quiet mouse, the key element might be said to be a mouse being quiet to protect itself from a cat. The question becomes whether or not that key element is also present in the issues that the Government team wants to debate (maintaining silence about the private sex lives of political officials; secrecy in foreign policy, etc.). Defining the motion is a necessary but insufficient part of building a case for the proposition. Debaters must also construct arguments that support the motion.

### *Constructing Arguments for the Proposition*

Constructing arguments for the proposition is a process that varies depending on the type of proposition being debated. We have already discussed the division of propositions into the categories of literal and metaphorical. Within each of those divisions, one can say propositions are either of fact, value, or policy. A few words

about each of these kinds of propositions necessarily precede a discussion of argument construction.

*Propositions of fact* are of two types: those that assert a factual claim and those that assert a statement of relationship. Propositions asserting a factual truth might include motions about history or science such as "This House believes that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of President Kennedy" or "Be it resolved that intelligent life exists on places other than the Earth." A second kind of proposition of fact asserts a relationship based on causality or similarity between two objects. For instance, the motion "This House believes that capital punishment deters murder" asserts a causal relationship between capital punishment and the rate of murder. The motion "This House believes Clinton's beginning to look a lot like Nixon" asserts a relationship of similarity between Bill Clinton and Richard Nixon.

*Propositions of value*, like propositions of fact, can be divided into two categories: those that assert the connection between an object and a value and those that assert a comparison between two objects with respect to some value. Motions that assert a connection between an object and a value include statements like "Be it resolved that affirmative action is praiseworthy" or "This House believes that Bill Clinton is an effective President." These two motions claim that an object is valuable but do not claim that the object is more or less valuable than another object. The second category of value propositions does just that--compares two objects with respect to some value. Building on the earlier examples, motions of this category might include "Be it resolved that affirmative action is superior to the unfettered right to hire" or "This House believes that Bill Clinton is a more effective President than Ronald Reagan." These latter examples go beyond the simple evaluation of an object to an evaluative comparison between two objects.

*Propositions of policy*, unlike propositions of value, make an explicit call for action. For instance, "This House supports capital punishment for all persons convicted of first-degree murder" evaluates capital punishment and suggests an action based on that evaluation. Similarly, the motion "Be it resolved that Bill Clinton should be impeached" evaluates Clinton's presidency and calls for action.

The types of propositions are summarized in the following table:

| <b>Table Two: Types of Propositions</b> |  |
|---|--|
| Propositions of Fact                    | Propositions which assert a factual claim                                |
|   | Propositions which assert a relationship between two objects or concepts |
| Proposition of Value                    | Propositions which evaluate a single object                              |
|   | Propositions which compare two objects with respect to some value        |
| Proposition of Policy                   | Propositions which suggest some action based on an evaluation            |

In parliamentary debate, the kind of proposition should, in part, guide the method of constructing a case. In audience-centered debate, the debater should consider the logical and persuasive requirements dictated by the type of proposition. Rather than focusing on certain prescribed organizational patterns (value and criteria, comparative advantage, need and plan, etc.), parliamentary debaters should begin with the concepts necessary for presentation of a logical case and organize the case in a manner appropriate for the audience and the situation (note 11).

The concepts necessary for construction of a logical case vary according to the kinds of propositions being debated. However, all of the kinds of propositions discussed here can be argued by using three types of arguments in relation to one another. The three kinds of arguments are based on three conceptual elements: description, relationship, and evaluation.

The types of arguments needed to prove different kinds of propositions are summarized in Table Three. Analysis of sample propositions of fact, value, and policy will illustrate how these three conceptual elements can be used in presentation of a case for the proposition.

|                        |  |  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Propositions of Fact   | Propositions which assert a factual claim                                | Requires descriptive argument                              |
|                        | Propositions which assert a relationship between two objects or concepts | Requires descriptive and relational arguments              |
| Propositions of Value  | Propositions which evaluate a single object                              | Requires descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments |
|                        | Propositions which compare two objects with respect to some value        | Requires descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments |
| Propositions of Policy | Propositions which suggest some action based on an evaluation            | Requires descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments |

### *Constructing a Case for a Proposition of Fact*

Propositions of fact are of two kinds: those that assert a factual claim and those that assert a relationship. The former requires only a descriptive argument while the latter requires both descriptive and relational arguments. An example of a proposition which asserts a factual claim is "This House believes that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President John F. Kennedy" (note 12). The kinds of arguments needed to prove this proposition are descriptive: Oswald was known to have purchased a 6mm Italian rifle; the bullet that killed Kennedy was fired from that rifle; Oswald was seen carrying a package the size of the rifle into the Texas School Book Depository on the morning of the assassination; the trajectory of the bullet that killed Kennedy points directly to Oswald's nest on the sixth floor of the depository. Descriptive arguments frequently are sufficient to prove a proposition of historical or scientific fact.

A proposition of fact that asserts a relationship, however, requires a relational as well as a descriptive argument. When constructing a case for this kind of motion, a debater ordinarily describes some object or concept and then relates that object or concept to another. The relationship is usually one of causation or of similarity. Take for example, the motion "This House believes that capital punishment deters murder" (note 13). This motion implies a causal relationship between capital punishment and murder. To construct a case for such a motion, a debater might begin by describing some feature of capital punishment: for instance, that it is a very severe punishment. Then the debater would relate that feature (the severity of punishment) to the other concept (murder). The relational argument might be something like the more severe the punishment, the more likely a criminal will reconsider committing the act of murder. Thus, the case for the motion is constructed by building two arguments: a descriptive one (capital punishment is a very severe punishment) and a relational one (severe punishments decrease the likelihood of murder).

A different example of a proposition that asserts a relationship between two objects or concepts is "This House believes that Clinton is beginning to look a lot like Nixon." Like the capital punishment motion, this proposition asserts a relationship between two objects (Clinton and Nixon). Unlike the other motion, the asserted relationship in this proposition is one of similarity rather than one of cause. Still, a debater needs to make only two kinds of arguments: descriptive and relational. The case might begin by describing a feature of Clinton (his lack of ethics in campaigning) and then relating that feature to Nixon by showing similarity in the ethics of the two persons. In all of these examples, a debater need go no further than descriptive and relational arguments to construct a case for a proposition of fact. Other kinds of propositions require additional kinds of arguments.

### *Constructing a Case for Proposition of Value*

When called upon to construct a case for a value proposition, debaters need to employ a new kind of argument--an evaluative argument. The case for a proposition of value still uses the descriptive and relational arguments; it simply adds an



argument of evaluation. In some of the previous examples, a case was built by describing an object and relating that object to some effect. Constructing a case for a proposition of value requires doing just that plus evaluating the effect. So, when building such a case, debaters need to describe a feature of an object or concept, relate that feature to an effect, then evaluate the effect.

For example, consider a motion designed to evaluate an object or concept: "Be it resolved that affirmative action is negative." This motion requires the Government to describe a feature of affirmative action, link that feature to some effect, and evaluate that effect as "negative." When building a case for this motion, the Government should include a clear description of the key element or elements to be evaluated by the motion, in this case, affirmative action. Describing in this example--and in many others--goes beyond defining. While one might define affirmative action as policies designed to create diversity the workplace, this definition does not describe those policies. In order to adequately describe those policies, the Government needs to portray the major characteristic of affirmative action policies. The Government might say, for instance, that affirmative action is characterized by a demand for quotas in the hiring process.

Having described this essential feature of affirmative action, the Government then needs to relate this feature to something "negative." They might choose to say, for instance, that quotas cause employers to pass over more qualified workers for less qualified minorities thus reducing the quality of the work force. Or they might choose to demonstrate that quotas lead to the perception of tokenism among minority workers and others. In this way, the Government is relating the essential feature of quotas to the evaluative term in the motion-- "negative."

The only thing remaining is the evaluative argument. Since they have linked quotas to a reduced quality of the workforce and to tokenism, the Government then needs to evaluate those effects. They need to show how these effects are truly negative. They might argue that a quality workforce is essential to the production of quality goods and services and that tokenism is destructive to relationships among workers as well as to the self-confidence of minority workers.

Thus, the case for a proposition of value is made by describing, relating, and evaluating. The case has described an essential feature of affirmative action, related that feature to an effect, and has evaluated that effect as negative.

### *Constructing a Case for a Proposition of Policy*

In reality, a proposition of policy is simply a proposition of value that makes an explicit call for action (note 14). Take, for example, the policy proposition "This House would end the embargo of Cuba." As with the earlier value proposition, this motion requires that debaters construct descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments.

The debaters might begin by describing the Cuban embargo. Specifically, they might note that the embargo was created in the 1960s in an attempt to bring down the Castro regime. The embargo prohibits any U.S. company from exporting products to Cuba and it prohibits import of any Cuban products to the U.S. After describing the key elements of the motion the Government is in a stronger position to prove a proposition which ultimately involves the evaluation of those elements. The next logical aspect of constructing a case for the Government is to demonstrate a relationship between the described elements and some other condition.

In this example, the Government might relate these features to effects of the embargo the policy has had. The Government might note that the embargo not only has failed to bring down Castro; they might say that in fact, Castro has become a much stronger and a much more popular leader over the years. The restrictions on exports, the Government might argue, have reduced the prosperity of Cuban businesses by not allowing them to compete in a successful market. The Government might also relate the import restrictions to a reduced availability of goods to the Cuban people. These arguments are designed to demonstrate a relationship between the embargo and Cuba's economic health both in terms of business prosperity and goods available to Cuba's people. The implication is that lifting the embargo would improve Cuba's economic health both in terms of its businesses and its citizens. Again, these arguments are designed to create a relationship between a key element in the motion (Cuban embargo) and another condition (Cuba's economic health).

Having described the key element in the motion and related that element to another condition, the final logical requirement is to evaluate the condition. In this case, the condition to be evaluated is the economic health of Cuba. The Government might do this by showing that the current state of the economy in Cuba creates an unusually high incidence of poverty and that improving the Cuban economy would help the Cuban poor.

In summary, to construct a case for the proposition, one needs to carefully define the motion and construct arguments for it. Constructing arguments that logically and persuasively support the motion requires that debaters are able to identify the kind of proposition (fact, value, policy) and are able to construct the kinds of descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments required by the motion.

### **Constructing the Case to Oppose the Motion**

Just as the primary task of the Government is to construct a case to support the motion before the house, the primary job of the Opposition is to refute or disprove that case. Refutation of the Government case, construction of an Opposition case, or a combination of the two, are the basic strategies available to the Opposition team. As with case construction, refutation is not to be learned as a step-by-step process. Instead, debaters should begin by mastering a series of concepts with which they learn a variety of means to attack different cases. In this section, discussion centers on refutation as well as designs for building a case for the opposition.

### *Direct Refutation*

The direct refutation of a case involves rejection of the arguments that were used to build it. To do this, the Opposition shows how the descriptive, relational, and evaluative dimensions of the Government's case are logically or substantively flawed.

*Descriptive arguments* can be refuted by showing that the Government's description of a feature is flawed or by showing that the Government has failed to describe other essential features of the object or concept. Recall in the example of the affirmative action topic, the Government described the essential feature of affirmative action as a demand for hiring quotas. The Opposition might object that quotas are required only in cases where a company has been shown to discriminate in the past. They might also argue that not only has the Government inaccurately portrayed affirmative action as demanding quotas, but the Government also failed to mention other essential features, such as requiring that jobs be advertised in places that reach minority audiences and requiring that minorities be adequately represented in hiring pools (note 15). By attacking the Government's description of these policies, the Opposition has placed themselves in a better place to relate these policies to effects that will support the Opposition's side of the motion.

*Relational arguments* are particularly subject to logical attack. One example of a logical attack involves a debater charging that a relational argument is based on inadequate causal reasoning. As we have already said, creating a relationship between a condition and an effect is frequently necessary in constructing a logically valid case for the motion. To refute that case, an Opposition debater might clearly define and challenge the relationship by applying a concept called the absence test. The absence test probes the validity of a causal relationship by asking the question: "Absent the supposed cause, does the effect remain?" If the effect does not remain, we have reason to suspect that the supposed cause was not the real cause.

Using the Cuban embargo motion as an example, suppose the Government argued that the embargo has increased poverty in Cuba. The Opposition might ask, "Absent the embargo, would Cuban poverty disappear?" Poverty existed in Cuba long before the embargo. Cuba, like most other nations in that geographic area, was a poor nation long before President Kennedy decided to halt trade with Cuba. Even today, other nations in Latin America are as poor as Cuba. So, the Government's relating the embargo to poverty is suspect. By challenging the cause and effect relationship based on the absence test, the Opposition is using a simple tool of logic to refute an important part of a case. In addition to challenging the Government's relational argument, the Opposition might present relational arguments of their own.

*Evaluative arguments* can be debated by showing that the values the Government has linked to the features of the policy are not as important as portrayed by the Government or by showing that these values are not values at all. Take, for example, a Government team defending the motion "This House believes that affirmative action is praiseworthy." The Government's defense of this motion might include the

arguments that affirmative action leads to diversity and that diversity is valuable, for example, in educational institutions. The Opposition might respond that diversity is not a universal value for education by pointing to the value of all women's colleges, of traditionally African-American colleges, and to other examples of valuable college experiences which violated the standard call of diversity.

Thus, refutation of the Government's case can involve attacks on their descriptive, relation or evaluative arguments, or a combination of all three. Refutation is, of course, only one option. Another involves building a case for the opposition.

### *Building an Case for the Opposition*

Building a case against the motion is one of many choices open to the Opposition. It is not a necessary choice although frequently it is a good one, especially when combined with an effective refutation of the Government's position.

Building an opposing case begins with conceptualizing the argumentative ground available to the Opposition. As the statement of the motion defines the ground that the Government must defend, the direct contradiction of the motion defines the ground available to the Opposition. One earlier example was "This House would lift the embargo of Cuba." The direct contradiction of that statement, "This House would not lift the embargo of Cuba," defines the ground for the Opposition. This example is rather straightforward. The Opposition simply would construct a series of disadvantages to lifting the embargo. In some instances, conceptualizing the Opposition ground may help debaters develop creative arguments otherwise not evident to them.

If, for example, debaters were asked to articulate positions they find difficult to defend, they could conceptualize the Opposition's ground by thinking of positions inconsistent with the Government ground. Conceptualizing Opposition ground in this manner is one way to ease the problem. Take, for example, the motion "This House supports gay marriages." Suppose debaters draw the Opposition on this motion yet do not feel you can ethically argue that homosexuals should not have rights that other persons have. They might start by conceptualizing their ground as "This House does not support gay marriages." Looking for ground consistent with the Opposition but inconsistent with the Government, fairly creative debaters can move to the notion that by refusing to support marriage of any kind. By arguing against state support of marriage in general, they could simultaneously defend the Opposition ground and oppose the Government's motion. The Opposition might construct a case that argues that marriage ought to be a social and religious institution, not a legal one. Marriage, they might argue, should be supported by churches and families but not by governmental institutions. Adopting the Opposition position would solve the discrimination that the Government would most likely defend as a part of their case and would allow the Opposition to avoid making the traditional arguments against gay marriage that they may not feel comfortable making.

Conceptualizing the Opposition ground in this manner is a good way to discover a starting point for constructing a case against the motion. Having arrived at that point, the case is built in a manner reminiscent of building a case for the Government--describe, relate, evaluate.

*Descriptive arguments* are just as important for the Opposition as for the Government. Building a case for the Opposition, like building a case for the Government, involves describing a feature of a concept or an object. Obviously, the Opposition may choose to describe different features than the Government. As in the affirmative action example, the Government may choose to focus on quotas as the essential characteristics of affirmative action while the Opposition may decide to discuss the feature of advertising and expanded hiring pools. The choices that the Opposition team makes regarding description are always made with an eye toward their relational arguments.

*Relational arguments* for the Opposition may begin with the features described by the Opposition or those described by the Government. In the affirmative action example, the Opposition might not accept the Government's description but instead relate advertising and expanded hiring pools to the idea of diversity. Using their own descriptive features allows the Opposition to create evaluative arguments which oppose the motion. In the capital punishment example, the Opposition might choose to accept the Government's idea that the essential feature of capital punishment is severity. In this case, the Opposition might then argue that certainty of punishment--not severity--is the cause of deterrence. In both cases, the Opposition is using argumentative techniques that are similar to those used by the Government. They are relating an essential feature to some effect which they will later be prepared to evaluate.

*Evaluative arguments* for the Opposition also take two forms. The Opposition may evaluate effects which they have described. In the affirmative action example, the Opposition would evaluate the effects of affirmative action in positive terms. They might argue that diversity would create workplaces which were more responsive to society and which would be composed in manners that more closely mirrored society.

Alternatively, the Opposition may accept the effects advanced by the Government team and evaluate them in a different manner. For instance, the Opposition team might agree that affirmative action produced tokenism, but they might disagree with the evaluation of tokenism. They might argue, for example, that a certain degree of tokenism is essential to raise the consciousness of the majority as well as to prohibit those few in the majority who would discriminate from doing so. So, developing a case for the Opposition involves choosing from among three options: directly refuting of the Government's case, constructing an Opposition case, or both. In all choices, the ability to construct and refute descriptive, relational, and evaluative arguments is the key to good case construction for both the Opposition and Government.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is not intended to be a complete description of concepts related to parliamentary debate. A single chapter can only begin to introduce students and teachers of parliamentary debate to a few of the important concepts. Students and teachers interested in pursuing those concepts more fully should investigate other works on argumentation, debate, informal and formal logic, and persuasion. Even these limited descriptions are only foundational. Creativity, spontaneity, and awareness of issues in the surrounding world are critical to excellence in parliamentary debate. Debaters need to take concepts they find valuable from this chapter and from other relevant works and practice until those concepts are second nature to them. Only after mastering the concepts so well that the debater need not consciously think about them will the debater be able to pursue debate at more of a creative and spontaneous level.

Creativity and spontaneity can, however, be stifled if one takes as prescriptive, the concepts in this chapter or in other works about argumentation and debate. The concepts provided in this chapter are not meant to be prescriptive, but as possible routes for learning about parliamentary debate. In fact, prescription runs counter to the philosophy that underlies this work. To grow into a healthy and vibrant activity, parliamentary debate needs to be available as a means of creative and diverse expression of beliefs and values. Chairman Mao's metaphor of the garden is appropriate. Parliamentary debate needs to "let many flowers bloom and contend."

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Of course, I realized that British universities participated in debate. In fact, I had been host to one team from England and another from Ireland. I did not realize, however, that tournament debating existed anywhere other than the United States.

<sup>2</sup> In some instances, especially in public debates, the motion is announced hours, days, or even weeks in advance. Even in these instances, the debates are extemporaneous; speeches are given with minimal notes and are based as much on spontaneous as prepared argumentation.

<sup>3</sup> Depending on one's point of view this is either a positive or negative characteristic of parliamentary debate. Persons who prefer cross-examination debate believe this reduction of volume of information makes parliamentary debate less substantive. Persons who prefer parliamentary debate believe substance lies in the quality of both information and argumentation rather than the quantity of either.

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is consistent with the NPDA Championship Tournament's rules regarding "specific information." These rules are included in Appendix A following this chapter. The rules of the APDA with regard to "specific information" vary from those of the NPDA.

<sup>5</sup> Let me clarify that parliamentary debaters are not required to cite sources for all information they use--only for that information that their audiences might consider "specialized information." Furthermore, since they are forbidden to actually take the published information to the debate for use in constructing their arguments, they cannot reasonably be expected to cite all of the details they might be expected to produce in writing a thesis or research paper or, for that matter, in debating the cross-examination format.

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, reason means the process of making inferences between evidence (data) and a claim.

<sup>7</sup> I want to emphasize once again that the outline presented here is but one example of how speeches may be constructed. As debaters gain experience and expertise, they will want to experiment with creative approaches to organizing their speeches.

<sup>8</sup> The exception to the rule prohibiting new arguments in a rebuttal applies to the Prime Minister Rebuttal answering an argument presented for the first time in the Member of Opposition Constructive. The reason for the exception is the Prime Minister's Rebuttal is the first opportunity for the Government to answer this argument.

<sup>9</sup> Frequently a tournament will provide participants and judges with a set of tournament rules. The rules for the 1997 NPDA Championship tournament are provided in Appendix A.

<sup>10</sup> Personally, I do not find the categories of fact, value, and policy to be theoretically sound distinctions. I am using them here because introducing my own category system might prove confusing without a full discussion of each of them and how they are similar and different from the more traditional fact, value, and policy categories. Since such a discussion would be well beyond the purposes of this chapter, I will use the traditional categories for this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Other forms of debate have strong conventions which direct the method for organizing the affirmative case. For instance, cross-examination debaters are expected to present a plan and advantages for a policy proposition or are expected to pursue a value and criteria pattern of organization for a non-policy proposition. Since parliamentary debate is an audience-centered format, debaters should not adhere to the jargon of academic debate. To speak of values and criteria, of PMN (plan-meet-need arguments), of DAs (disadvantages), or of inherency, is to use jargon that is not appropriate to audience-centered debate.

<sup>12</sup> Because of the amount of specific information that would be required, this example is one most students would have great difficulty constructing a good case for or against. In addition, the entire category of propositions of historical and scientific fact require so much specific knowledge that their use in parliamentary

debate is limited to debates before special audiences in situations where both teams have advance knowledge of the topic for the purposes of specific preparation.

<sup>13</sup> Many if not most relational propositions have implied evaluative elements. For instance, the term "murder" carries an implied negative evaluation. Still, given the language of the motion, the focus is on the relational rather than the evaluative elements.

<sup>14</sup> All proportions of value have implications for action, but the explicit call for action is the feature that distinguishes propositions of policy from propositions of value.

<sup>15</sup> One motive of the Opposition in presenting additional features is to generate other effects that will be supportive of their opposition side of the argument. Presenting additional features without relating them to other effects does not assist the Opposition in making their case.