

Lincoln-Douglas Debate: Inherency Revisited

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The rich diversity of the forensic community, complimented by the wide range of individual events, creates broad boundaries of situational expectations. Grounded in particular theoretical and pedagogical conventions, the community delineates certain acceptable and unacceptable appropriations of those conventions. Whether the use of the black book in interpretation events, bookends in a limited preparation speech, or standard transitional movements in public address, regular expectations situate the individual performance.

The NFA's Lincoln-Douglas debate is no exception. Grounded in the stock issues paradigm, L-D debate entails similar pedagogical and theoretical conventions. The rules of engagement associated with this paradigm attempt to create an educational environment for the competitors, judges, and audience members.

STOCK ISSUES

Based on the Roman law court's utilization of certain stock questions when trying a criminal case, the stock issues paradigm evolved into the current form used in academic debate.¹ Although various authors present these issues differently, the preponderance of writers and theorists require the affirmative to satisfy four stock issues in the prima facie case.²

1. Harm: The affirmative must demonstrate a compelling need.
2. Inherency: The affirmative must demonstrate that the status quo cannot solve the problem.
3. Solvency: The affirmative must demonstrate that its plan can solve the need.
4. Advantage: The affirmative must demonstrate its plan will accrue benefits that outweigh any disadvantage(s) caused by the implementation of the affirmative plan.

The stock issues paradigm provides a rigid set of issues on which to debate. In promoting debate on these central issues, the paradigm presents "a sort of checklist for both debaters and judges,"³ as these issues indicate how the affirmative and the negative must argue in order to win the round.⁴ The affirmative must win all of the stock issues in order to change the negative presumption, while the negative needs only to win one of the stock issues to maintain the presumption against change.⁵

One of the critical components of the stock issues paradigm is inherency. We believe a theoretical understanding of inherency by the increasingly diversified community of competitors and judges in NFA L-D debate is quintessential to the activity's pedagogical function. Although a surfeit of articles has been published on the theoretical implications of various forms of inherency, to the authors' knowledge, no literature exists evaluating inherency specifically within NFA's Lincoln-Douglas debate and the stock issues paradigm. Because L-D debate began and continues to cling to pedagogical principles distinct from NDT and CEDA debate, a contextual evaluation of inherency is warranted. Offering both a survey of existing literature and a theoretical examination of various forms of inherency arguments, this paper attempts to ground the community's evaluation of inherency within the stock issues paradigm generally and NFA L-D debate specifically.

The stock issues paradigm posits that particular issues are inherent in the nature of policy propositions. Harpine asserts "Thus, the human beings seeking to reach a policy decision do not, according to this widely held opinion, contribute their own viewpoints, ideals, desires, or needs to the debate except in relationship to inescapable, objective issues."⁶ In presenting the pedagogy of the stock issues paradigm, Harpine reveals the importance of placing primary emphasis on certain objective standards. By providing several critical issues that must be met by an affirmative in a debate round, the stock issues paradigm sets the rules of engagement within that debate. Those rules provide the foreground for an environment that teaches the skills of effective argumentation rather than argumentation that rests primarily on preconceived beliefs. Stock issues are inseparable from the historical context and the statement of the resolution, and they represent the

logical obligations of the advocate of change.⁷ Stock issues help define the "rules of engagement" for the debaters' encounter and they set the parameters for various argumentative strategies, such as counterplans, minor repairs, and disadvantages.

Because we consider debate to be primarily a pedagogical activity, the rules of engagement have important implications. By forcing debaters to work within certain parameters, the stock issues paradigm situates debaters in a mutually agreed upon argumentative realm. Within that framework, debaters cultivate better reasoning skills, learn more about the strategic engagement of issues, and focus more attention on developing and refuting arguments rather than relying on "cards" to make their points. In fact the NFA L-D community was born as a reaction to the fast, cursory "spread" style debate rewarded in NDT, and more recently, in CEDA debate. Last year's new rule regarding speed was another step in protecting the activity from tendencies to sacrifice quality of argument for the sake of superficial depth.

NFA L-D debate remains the only form of national debate that mandates a particular paradigm to adjudicate a round. Although at least one small cross-section of NDT debate schools, the American Debate Association (ADA), mandates certain rules for engagement (e.g., topicality is a voting issue), no organization features one particular paradigm for educational purposes. In both CEDA and NDT debates, one commonly hears that topicality, inherency, and other stock issues are at best secondary and at worst irrelevant. Teaching debate through the lens of the stock issues paradigm, NFA L-D highlights a particular argumentative process. From its point of educational codification, L-D debate prizes the pedagogical value derived from rigorous argumentative inquiry. Various stock issues, such as topicality, solvency, inherency, are as important, if not more important, than the subject matter being debated.

NFA's mandate of the stock issues paradigm in L-D teaches a valuable argumentative process. Inherency is an integral part of that process that forces debaters to look at issues of causality. Establishing the link between the ills of the status quo and the cause(s) of those problems, inherency requires the debater to demonstrate a logical connection between societal failings and the affirmative plan. Students are forced to assess what is wrong, when

and where the problem emerged, how it should be changed, and who or what is responsible for it. Inherency provides the justification for action by demarcating the "guilt" of the status quo vis-a-vis the problem area that the affirmative defines.

Debaters who fail to complete such a well-rounded indictment of the status quo's policy often present piecemeal solutions. This inhibits a debater's ability to learn substantially from the status quo's shortcomings and it hinders the necessary argumentative thought process to correct those failings. One of our roles as educators is to encourage clear and complete analysis, and the stock issues paradigm is one important way that intercollegiate debate helps us to teach these goals.

THE KINDS OF INHERENCY

Historically, inherency has been divided into two kinds, structural and attitudinal barriers.⁸ A structural barrier is the absence of the mechanism needed to implement or create the desired policy.⁹ Typical structural barriers include laws, charters, or Supreme Court cases that oppose or preclude the affirmative's plan. Norton notes that structural inherency requires remedying permanent flaws rather than changing the magnitude of current measures.¹⁰ Calls for increased/decreased funding, enforcement, labor, etc. in the same general direction that the status quo is moving are not inherent under the stock issues paradigm.¹¹

Attitudinal inherency is the existence of values or beliefs that prevent the status quo from implementing the affirmative's plan.¹² For instance, a popular attitudinal barrier argument is that Congress is fundamentally opposed to the affirmative's plan (e.g., Congress has always voted down bills to eliminate Medicare). Without the affirmative fiat power, the existing attitudes preclude ameliorating the societal faults and the affirmative plan.

Whether inherency is presented as structural or attitudinal, it plays an important role, for inherency determines the opportunity cost of a particular position.¹³ Some argue that the burden of demonstrating inherency to such a rigorous extent has no place in the so-called real world. Advocates of this position argue that in society, inherency works only to prevent duplicate, and therefore

unnecessary actions. As a result, inherency should be de-emphasized in academic debate to parallel its role in society.¹⁴ This position denies one key reality. In the real world, policymakers understand that resources are limited and every action carries an opportunity cost, usually in the form of another action(s) that cannot be taken with those same resources. In theory, a reason why negative debaters present disadvantages to the affirmative plan is linked to opportunity cost: What must we "give up" to adopt the affirmative, and would those harms outweigh the benefits of resolutive adoption? In a world of shrinking resources and increasing demands, these decisions are real and good inherency arguments should train debaters to deal with these key issues.

Over the years, advocates have advanced a third form of inherency, which is called existential inherency. Existential inherency argues that the status quo is flawed in some significant way. At the same time, the advocate of change is unable, and even finds it unnecessary, to establish clearly the root cause of the problem. The affirmative asserts that because the problem exists, it must therefore be an inherent part of the status quo. Philosopher Bertrand Russell's analysis of the term "existential" aids understanding of this concept. He explains that the term "exists" logically means that there are objects in the world to which a given description applies; consequently, the act of defining something and demonstrating its presence is enough to prove its existence.¹⁵ The affirmative debater utilizing this philosophy argues that because a problem exists, a barrier to solving the problem must also exist, although he or she cannot precisely identify the barrier. The affirmative thus begs the question by arguing that because a problem exists, an attitudinal or structural barrier must exist, even though the affirmative is unable to identify either. Proponents of existential inherency argue that this inability to locate the dysfunction in the status quo should not prevent an attempt to alleviate the ills identified by the affirmative.¹⁶

The failure of existential inherency to identify this causality bypasses a critical evaluation of the cost-benefit analysis demanded in the adoption of any policy change. The continued existence of the problem demonstrates some obstacle to change. The mere existence of this barrier reveals some reason, logical or illogical, that is

preventing the affirmative's plan from being implemented. Without understanding these reasons, the negative cannot fully examine the potential harm the affirmative's plan might accrue.

The failure to identify the causality also presents a second problem of workability or solvency. Without establishing why change will not occur in the status quo, the affirmative cannot prove that its plan will bypass or overcome the unidentified inherent barrier(s) to change. For instance, if an affirmative argued anytime between the era of the Supreme Court cases of *Plessey vs. Ferguson* and *Brown vs. Board of Education* for legislative protection for African Americans, he or she could have presented a compelling case for change. However, a failure to identify that the Supreme Court had ruled "separate but equal" in *Plessey* would pose a noteworthy problem to the adoption of the affirmative plan, for any law that contrasted with the Supreme Court's holding would likely be struck down by the Court. Thus, an unidentified barrier might stand in the way of the implementation of the plan.

Indeed, the vast majority of scholars note that inherency is a stock issue and that this burden can be met only by demonstrating a structural or attitudinal barrier. Sheckels notes "Theorists generally agree that the status quo's failure to meet the goal must be inherent. Something-a law, a loophole, a Supreme Court decision-must be blocking the status quo from meeting the goal."¹⁷ The affirmative has the burden to demonstrate that the current system is structurally or attitudinally incapable of solving its problems. The inability to fulfill this burden within the stock issues paradigm fails to justify the resolution.¹⁸

To justify the debate resolution is the primary goal of affirmative debaters. In order to overcome the presumption against a change in policy, the affirmative, in discharging its burden of proof, must indict the status quo, find it lacking in some significant way, and propose a form of the resolution as an alternative action to solve the problem. Again, the focus of debate should be on the resolution, for the critic cannot make meaningful cost-benefit analysis of an affirmative proposal if he or she cannot determine whether adoption of the resolution is the key factor in producing a specific effect. If an affirmative fails to articulate causality for the problem or need then a critic cannot fully assess the impact of the resolution

on the problem. Moreover, resolutions that dictate a particular agent for action are further complicated by existential inherency arguments because without determining culpability of a current actor, the success or failure of the proposed agent of action cannot be adequately assessed.

Equally important, negative debaters who accept an affirmative's existential inherency position will find their argumentative ground severely limited. The negative can defend a status quo from resolutorial change by offering a minor repairs or a counterplan that is designed to test the advantages of the resolution against non-resolutorial alternatives. When the affirmative presents a structural or attitudinal inherency, the negative can fully defend the status quo by examining issues of opportunity cost, alternative causation, and other potential mechanisms that exist within the current system to solve the problem. However, once the negative agrees that the mere existence of a problem justifies change, its hands are tied. When presented with existential inherency, the negative can merely argue about the extent of the harm, the ability of the plan to solve the damage, or the topicality of the affirmative's proposal, for the negative's ability to assess accurately the impact of a particular resolution has been curtailed. By failing to identify the source of the *status quo's* failure, the affirmative slants the playing field in its favor, thus avoiding the issue of causality while violating the rules of engagement. Both infringements are pedagogically and theoretically significant. By circumventing the stock issues paradigm's reliance on identifying a clear connection between the harm and the resolutorial agent, debaters deprive themselves of the benefits associated with argumentative theory and decision making. For similar reasons, authors argue that existential inherency it is not an acceptable form of inherency in the stock issues paradigm, for by its very definition, existential inherency circumvents the affirmative's burden to establish clearly an inherent barrier, which then shifts the responsibility to the negative.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

"Existential inherency exists because existential inherency exists" is a kind of circular reasoning that the NFA community of

debaters and judges should reject. As this paper has argued, the mere existence of a thing does not necessarily warrant change, especially when such an idea of inherency runs counter to decades of acceptance by theorists, coaches, and debaters in propositions of policy. With more and more individuals competing in L-D debate every year since L-D's codification within NFA, the need for theoretical discussions continues to increase. Attempting to outline some of the pedagogical benefits advanced by inherency's role within L-D, this paper offers a grounding point for future theoretical discussions and examinations of inherency. In its fifth year of national competition, Lincoln-Douglas debate continues to grow, offering students, coaches, and judges a different educational experience complete with a wide range of conventions that are theoretically and pedagogically rooted.

ENDNOTES

1. Dale Herbeck, *Paradigms of Debate*. (Kansas City: National Federation of State High School Association, 1988) 5-6.
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3. John Schunk, "A Farewell to 'Structural Change': The Cure for Pseudo-Inherency," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 14 (1978): 147; John Morello, "Defending the Present System's Capacity for Incremental Changes," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 19 (1982): 115-121; Carl Flaningam, "Inherency and Incremental Change: A Response to Morello," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 20 (1984): 321-6.
4. Arthur N. Kruger, *Modern Debate: Its Logic and Strategy*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960) 40-1; Ziegelmüller and Dause 20.

5. Herbeck 6.
6. William Harpine, "The Theoretical Base of Stock Issues," *The Forensic* 70 (1985): 6.
7. George Ziegelmüller & Charles Dause, *Argumentation: Inquiry and Advocacy*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974) 32-3.
8. Carolyn Keefe, Thomas B. Harte, and Laurence E. Norton, *Introduction to Debate*. (New York: Macmillan, 1982); Clark D. Kimball, and David McConkey, *Elements of Tournament Debate*. (Portland: J. Weston Walsh, 1974); Maridell Fryar, David A. Thomas, and Lynn Goodnight, *Basic Debate*, 2nd ed. (Lincolnwood: National Textbook Co., 1986); Michael Pfau, David A. Thomas, and Walter Ulrich, *Debate and Argument: A Systems Approach to Advocacy*. (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1987); Gerald H. Sanders, *Introduction to Contemporary Academic Debate*, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1983); Freeley; Enison *et al*; Kruger; Sheckels.
9. Freeley 168.
10. Norton 226-233.
11. Morello.
12. Freeley 168-9.
13. Thomas F. Mader, "The Inherent Need to Analyze Stasis," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 4(1967): 13-20.
14. Freeley 169-170.
15. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1946 and New York: Simon and Shuster), pp. 859-60.
16. Freeley 169-170.

17. Sheckels 70.

18. Fryar *et al.* 54. See also Herbeck 6; Keefe *et al.* 233; Kimball *et al.*; Kruger, 45-7; Pfau, *et al.* 156.

19. Freeley 169-170; Sanders; Ziegelmueller *et al.* 34.