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Kritiking as Argumentative Praxis

Joseph P. Zompetti and Brian Lain

Introduction

Controversies in the realm of academic debate are often assessed with the standards used for other social science confrontations. The notion of paradigms, introduced by Thomas Kuhn (1970) to describe scientific revolutions, provides a starting point for analyzing the current conflict over kritiking.¹ Despite this, previous discussions concerning the so-called “kritik” have focused mainly on whether it should be considered a legitimate argument form in contemporary policy debate (Berube, 1996; Katsulas, 1996/1997; Morris, 1996/1997). In this way, these discussions have become embroiled in a back-and-forth squabbling. Overcoming the tendency to steadfastly proclaim the legitimacy/illegitimacy of kritiks as an argument form is necessary if we are to extend argument theory in relation to the kritik.

In an effort to explore and extend argument theory, we offer three main positions in this essay. First, we argue that there is an emerging paradigm,² which we call the “questioning-assumptions paradigm” that is evolving out of a conflict with the current policy-making paradigm. After describing the current controversy between these paradigms in debate, the major arguments lodged against kritiking (as a way of viewing argument rather than as an argument form) will be explained as a way of analyzing the paradigmatic differences, especially with the concept of fiat. Second, we suggest that there is room for dialogue among these two paradigms that lies within the concept of fiat. Policy-making is concerned with what the judge does when adjudicating a “policy.” The questioning-assumptions paradigm is concerned with how a judge endorses a “process,” which we call “fiat kritiking.” We argue that a bridge of compromise can be forged between these two concepts of fiat. Finally, we offer this conception of kritiking as a means of argumentative praxis, whereby argument theory is coupled with a unique experience of debate “action.” In this way, we suggest that kritiking is an exciting area for both argument theory and contemporary debate practice that, at the very least, deserves an investigation which transcends the already stale “legitimate/illegitimate” dispute that has characterized previous kritik discussions.

Paradigmatic Conflict

Thomas Kuhn (1970), in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, introduces the idea of systems of thought operating in paradigms. Along these lines, we may view a paradigm as a worldview or conceptual model “shared by members of a scholarly community that defines how inquiry within the community should be conducted” (Smith, 1988, p. 299). More specifically, Kuhn explicates the idea of a paradigm in two ways:

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On the one hand, it stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community. On the other, it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science. (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175)

Paradigms, therefore, are characterized by their different ways of seeing and “knowing” the world. This feature removes the “truth” variable of one paradigm from another; in other words, paradigms simply see the world differently. Kuhn explains that it is inaccurate to describe different paradigms as unscientific just because several of their tenets are called into question by the preceding paradigm, since “What differentiated these various schools was not one or another failure of method — they were all ‘scientific’ — but what we shall come to call their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science in it” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 4).

Paradigms are often applied to systems of debate theory (Pfau, Thomas & Ulrich, 1987). Paradigms are used to examine how the entire worldview of debate participants and judges is affected in different ways. Usually, two or more paradigms are compared to illustrate the conflicts between the differing worldviews. In fact, as one paradigm emerges, it is often thought that the existing, predominant paradigm becomes replaced. Within the debate context, Pfau and his colleagues (1987) have expressed that “[d]ebate is generated by shifts in paradigms. During this period of transition between the era dominated by the ‘normal’ paradigm, and the new era when the alternative paradigm replaces it, many controversies and debates are conducted over the whole nature of the field and the specific methods used to study and advance the field” (pp. 6-7).

The policy-making paradigm has been described as the prevailing paradigm in contemporary debate history. Generally, this paradigm prescribes the roles of debaters and judges by using a making-of-policy model, such as the U.S. Congress. Ziegelmüller, Harris and Bloomingdale (1995) explain:

A . . . model of debate is derived from an analogy to the policy making process typified by congressional decision making. The subject matter of the debate is typically concerned with the development of public policy. Consequently, theorists have suggested modeling the argument practices found in congressional debates. (pp. 18-19)

Without going into all of the formal tenets of the policy-making paradigm, we should have a general feeling of what this view of debating is about. As a deductive model of debate, it seeks to “force nature [debate] into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 5).

Given the predominance of the policy-making paradigm, alternative or competing paradigms have been relatively few in number in the past few years.

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One such recent challenge has been the hypothesis-testing paradigm which views the debate round as a laboratory that “tests” different (and not necessarily mutually-exclusive) methods of change, as if they were “hypothesis” statements (Hollihan, 1983; Patterson & Zarefsky, 1983; Zarefsky & Henderson, 1983). Yet, the prevailing support for the policy-making paradigm has resulted in a general dismissal of the hypothesis-testing paradigm as a viable or accepted worldview. In the wake of this type of paradigmatic flux, we believe this is the first time that the argument style of “kritiking” has been presented as a separate paradigm. Indeed, we feel that this paradigmatic flux may mean that policy-making as a paradigm is particularly vulnerable to challenge, or that “kritiking” as a paradigm may be premature. Nevertheless, the responses from the margins of the debate community concerning the viability of the kritik as an appropriate argument form has gained increasing acceptance. Thus, for our purposes here, we suggest that engaging in kritik may represent a developing worldview that might be called the “questioning-assumptions” paradigm.

Difficulty exists in describing this amorphous paradigm. Even as this description will no doubt reveal, new suppositions and opinions are made about this paradigm at an increasing rate. It would be impossible to produce a set of rules or characterize the identities of all who support the questioning-assumptions paradigm. Not only does the style of this paradigm subvert an explicit definition, as we shall see later, but it is also impossible to describe the differing views of each individual in the debate community who supports the kritik as an argumentative form. Nonetheless, this phenomenon is similar to what Kuhn describes as a “challenging” paradigm. While discussing the scientists’ response to the revolutionary notions of Newton, Lavosier, Maxwell, or Einstein, Kuhn states:

They can, that is, agree on their *identification* of a paradigm without agreeing on, or even attempting to produce, a full *interpretation* or *rationalization* of it. Lack of a standard interpretation of an agreed reduction to rules will not prevent a paradigm from guiding research. . . . Indeed, the existence of a paradigm need not even imply that any full set of rules exist. (1970, p. 44)

Although Kuhn does not do much to describe the “maturing” process of a challenging paradigm, he clearly expresses that even the formation of a paradigm may be classified as a worldview:

To that end it may help to point out that the transition need not (I now think should not) be associated with the first acquisition of a paradigm. The members of all scientific communities, including the schools of the “pre-paradigm” period, share the sorts of elements which I have collectively labelled [sic] a “paradigm.” (1970, p. 179)

Thus, our conception of questioning assumptions might also be labeled a “paradigm.” While we agree with Kuhn in describing the nature of a paradigm, we part with his belief that paradigms are mutually exclusive, or that when one paradigm emerges it necessarily displaces the existing paradigm. We believe that paradigms can co-exist and even, at times, share common threads within their respective worldviews. With the so-called judging “paradigms” or “philosophies” that exist in academic debate, we know that some judges have changed their paradigms, even in the middle of a debate round, because their personal beliefs intervened in the adjudicating process. Debate participants themselves also undergo fundamental “worldview” changes that may not be inconsistent with their prior ways of thinking. Our contention is that these paradigms always already intersect. It is our failure to negotiate this intersection that has created the paradigmatic tension.

With this in mind, we maintain that the questioning-assumptions paradigm is comprised of three crucial tenets. These tenets indicate how the questioning-assumptions paradigm is both significant and important for resolving paradigmatic conflict. First, advocates of the questioning-assumptions paradigm hold that debate arguments contain “taken-for-granted” (Hazem, 1989; Hopper, 1981; Schutz, 1967). The concept of taken-for-granted, according to Hopper (1981), refers to “[u]ncoded, ‘between-the-lines’ information” (p. 196) that “are missing premises of messages” and are “frequently understood [sic] as if spoken” (p. 207). The questioning-assumptions paradigm holds that when advocates make claims, a part of these claims is unstated. Whenever an argument is made, “implicit assumptions” or hidden parts of the argument persist. For example, to say that Egypt should receive more U.S. military training is to say implicitly that Egypt is a legitimate nation-state. Different perceptions inside the paradigm may explain these assumptions as other argument forms, such as an Aristotelian enthymeme, a Toulmin unstated warrant, types of linguistic analogs, etc. Nevertheless, there is agreement that a part of contemporary debate argument contains unstated assumptions.

The second tenet of the questioning-assumptions paradigm is that these hidden assumptions are open for debate. Some debaters may say that advocates are responsible for the unstated portions of their claims; others may simply say that is the hidden assumptions that are the precursors to the present argument. If they are called into question, the present argument is also called into question. The allowance of the questioning of these assumptions is what primarily distinguishes this paradigm from other debate paradigms.

Finally, the questioning-assumptions paradigm upholds a particular way of advocacy. Advocacy requires taking a position on a side of controversy. Advocacy, then, is acting out what the advocate believes. We suggest that thinking of advocacy in this way is a method of praxis. The choices made in debate rounds which, in-turn, affect the choices we or on-lookers make in our lives and within the questioning-assumptions paradigm is a way not only to engage in critical thinking, but also to engage in an action of advocacy. This action of advocacy is the coupling of debate theory/beliefs with purposeful action in and outside the debate round. In short, advocacy is a way of engaging in praxis. Because critical

thinking and advocacy are “traditionally” elements of the policy-making paradigm, we suggest that praxis is yet another way that paradigmatic conflict can be overcome.

The descriptions provided here are primarily definitions of what the terms policy-making and questioning-assumptions mean in this context. Surely the most complete descriptions of these paradigms will come as one evolves in opposition to the other, or when we realize that the worldviews can effectively co-exist. Since the questioning-assumptions paradigm is still emerging, there can be no definitive statement of its views for all debate situations. However, the paradigm is sculpted by the areas in conflict (with policy-making) over the issues of fiat and, consequently, debatability. Despite this conflict, we believe that we need to rethink the relationship between these paradigms. If we begin to see their relationship through the concept of fiat, we may find that the paradigms can co-exist.

Paradigmatic Resolution Through Fiat

Describing debate paradigms in this way demonstrates major controversies in kritiking among the advocates and judges. Both the policy-making and the questioning-assumptions paradigms have different conceptions of advocacy. Primarily, the question concerning advocacy is, what is fiat? This difference in opinion is multiplied when we see that proponents of each paradigm argue about the fundamental purpose of the debate round. We will try to use the language of each paradigm to describe the problems found in two major contentions: 1) no alternative/no uniqueness vs. kritiking as an alternative, and 2) doing nothing vs. the thought/action dichotomy.

The idea that a “policy” must be advocated is a crucial element within the policy-making paradigm. At the end of the debate either a proposed policy (the affirmative plan or a negative counterplan) or the policy of the status quo should be embraced. The benefits and drawbacks to each proposal is weighed carefully before the final determination is made. In short, the policy-making paradigm upholds that the judge needs a “policy” to vote *for*. In this way, the claim that kritiks offer “no alternative” has been a major complaint of the policy-making paradigm. The argument goes something like this:

The negative (or affirmative) questions the affirmative (or negative), but they don’t provide *us* with anything to question. They simply poke out problems with the our proposal, but they don’t defend anything themselves. If we are to reject the system (or whatever), we need something to adopt. The negative (or affirmative) can’t just kritik; they must also advocate something.

Recently, uniqueness has been tacked onto this argument:

The status quo is also guilty of the problems the negative describes. Even if the plan weren’t done, there would still be sexism, racism, classism, etc.

The problems inherent in the world system aren’t the fault of the affirmative. Therefore, the problem is non-unique to the affirmative plan.

The combination of these two answers has been the most common criticism lodged against kritiking. In a recent defense of the new American Debate Association rule that all kritiks be “unique,” Stefan Bauschard “takes a walk out on the plank” to suggest that “one thing that all critiques [sic] have in common is that they are all disadvantages which are not unique to the affirmative plan” (1995, p. 3).³ Thus, the “no alternative” argument mutates into an argument that is familiar in the policy-making style of argument.

In their often cited work criticizing what they call “Critiques,” Shors and Mancuso contribute to the uniqueness attack:

The strategic benefit of running a Critique lies in its set of rules, namely its rejection of conventional argument burdens. For example, the burden of “uniqueness,” which requires both the affirmative and negative to demonstrate that advantages and disadvantages are uniquely caused by the plan, is wholly irrelevant to the Critique as its rules currently operate. Herein lies one of the biggest defects of the Critique, because its insistence on adhering to the rigid rule of rejection is artificial. (1993, p. A-16)⁴

According to this perspective, since there is no alternative and the kritik is a non-unique disadvantage, there is no reason to reject the affirmative. “Doing nothing” is also a common criticism placed against kritik advocates. This late-breaking monster is usually seen in rebuttals. Although it comes into play in most kritiking debates, it is rarely considered as a distinct line-by-line attack. Yet, this argument speaks volumes about how the policy-making paradigm describes its view of fiat. The answer can be characterized this way:

Even if the negative is right, they aren’t going to accomplish anything. The plan advantages are real. If you do not vote affirmative, millions will die. While you will be sitting around “rethinking,” millions will die.

This characterization zooms-in on the thought that kritiking is separate from action. It also places a direct comparison between the plan advantages and the advantage/benefit of kritiking.

There have been many replies fired against the “no alternative/uniqueness” queries that are offered by kritiking opponents. At the heart of the issue is what one considers fiatable action/thinking. The questioning-assumptions paradigm suggests that kritiking may (is allowed to) be the “alternative.”

Rather than just accept policy options as considerations for voting, the judge can consider endorsing a process of kritiking. The over-adherence to the “cult of uniqueness” leaves advocates who seek radical overhauls of any given system without a rhetorical leg to stand on. The reply in theory has been to ac-

cept the process as fiat-able. Take the example of Edward Said's (1978) orientalism argument during the recent NDT Middle East topic. Negatives advocated a system of rethinking particular to a questioning of history, culture, military, social systems, etc., that seeks to expose how knowledge (as Truth) has been used coercively against oppressed Middle Eastern peoples in U.S. policy. What would a judge be voting for in this instance? He or she would be voting for kritiking, rethinking, questioning. The judge is voting to place this interrogative, dynamic process into motion.

We might imagine attempting to break down all the components of a debate into columns of what one would be voting for and how they would be voting for it. An analogy can be drawn with traveling. *Vehicles* are used to get to places; *destinations* are what is sought after. Both are critical to traveling.

Destination	Vehicle
Detroit	Our Chevette
Los Angeles	Delta Airlines
The Lake	The Third Path in the Forest

This analogy can be broadened with debate in mind. The What column below represents desirable ends that are sought after in the debate context. The How column describes the mechanism used to achieve those ends. For example:

What	How ⁵
Advantage	Plan
Disadvantage	Status Quo
Disadvantage	Counterplan
Net Benefit	Permutation
Advantage	Plan
Stop nuclear war	Harvard's plan
Disadvantage	Plan mechanism
Clinton popularity	Keep status quo
Disadvantage	Counterplan
Federalism	States do the plan

This categorization separates value specifications and things that are fiat-able. Up to this point, there is no controversy with the policy-making paradigm. However, when kritiks (noun) are included in the what/destination column, then the problems with the "cult of uniqueness" start to emerge. What does the column look like from this perspective?

What	How
Kritik	Status quo?
Kritik	Cool negative team?
Kritik	Our Chevette

We can see that as an argument type (a noun), the kritik creates a stale and even unproductive debate, especially with respect to our understanding of policy-making. However, it is here that the advocacy of kritiking (verb) inserts a new option into the mix:

Value	Kritiking
Avoid orientalism	Rethinking
Prevent gendered problems	Use gender lenses
Destroy government hierarchy	Question statism

It is the notion that fiat applies to the process of kritiking that primarily defines what we have been calling the questioning-assumptions paradigm. The affirmative suggests a plan to travel to the advantages, the negative suggests rethinking as a way to achieve the value (or other element) that they suggest is paramount. Kritiking in this way functions as a sort of counterplan.⁶ In some senses, kritiking may claim the affirmative advantage, just as a counterplan may claim to "solve" the advantage. We might also view this as an ends/means distinction. We may agree with the ends of the plan (i.e., the advantage), but not the mechanism (i.e., the plan).⁷

The questioning-assumptions paradigm also has a major reply to the "doing nothing" criticism. The questioning-assumptions paradigm views thinking as fiat-able. As such, the other paradigm is accused of adhering to a thought vs. action dichotomy. In other words, policy-making may ask, "What are you doing?" We may respond, "Just thinking." Then the retort, "Well, then, you are doing nothing!"

There is a long line of philosophy that questions the ability to distinguish thought from action (e.g., Hegel, 1931; Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Sartre, 1976). Not only does thought influence action and action influence thought, but it is also difficult to distinguish, especially in debate, where the thinking ends and where the action begins.

Fiat is the best example of where thinking and acting blur in debate. Using the tenets of fiat based on the policy-making tradition, we may ask ourselves the following: Does the plan actually happen? Does the Congress actually pass the plan? Are we just doing nothing? This is not intended as an illegitimacy argument about fiat. The ability to suspend disbelief over whether or not the plan would occur is essential if we are to have productive, educational and fun debates. However, kritiking isn't "doing nothing" in debate either. The process of debating might be likened to the process of (re)thinking. There is some action involved — speaking, researching, lifting boxes, etc. — but it is primarily the (critical) thinking that we encourage and reward in debate. When asked what is endorsed by kritiking, the negative should reply, "We are actively exploring, questioning, rethinking, kritiking the problem. We are not endorsing the status quo. We seek the rejection of both the affirmative plan and the status quo. Vote to adopt rethinking as a process of change!"

Although the suggestion of kritiking as an alternative was intended as a compromise from the questioning-assumptions paradigm, it has yet to be accepted. Speaker and Gavel, Vol 42 (2005) www.dsr-tka.org/

cepted fully among policy makers. Three different interpretations of how signing the ballot as action present themselves for consideration.⁸ Under each of them, the option of fiat kritiking⁹ exists. Fiat kritiking “uses” fiat as a mechanism to adopt a process of (re)thinking. Perhaps fiat kritiking can best be explained by way of example.

The first option for fiat is that the judge plays the role of “debate person,” or simply a person who operates within the debate activity. The judge is seen as a coach or bus driver or parent who sees the activity for its educational value. To fiat kritiking is easy to see in this case. Voting affirmative could occur because the plan is a “good idea” or because the affirmative did the “better job of debating.” Likewise, voting negative can also be viewed as an endorsement for kritiking — a rejection of the plan as a “bad idea,” or the negative did the better job of debating. The endorsement in this case may be intellectual or punishment-oriented, as in cases of rejecting sexist or racist language. Nevertheless, the judge would be voting for kritiking.

A second example views the judge as an actual policy maker. The judge has the ability to force Congress to do the plan. Whether this ability is metaphorical or something actually believed is irrelevant. All arguments are assessed in this manner. The judge views the advantage to the plan as greater than the disadvantages, or vice versa. There is a large difference between weighing the (dis)advantages of the plan as a reason for voting and “they did a better job of debating.”

A third model of fiat places the judge not as an overseer of policy, but rather as a participant. For some reason the judge is the policy maker who has the deciding vote on the question of the plan/counterplan/status quo. The scene of the debate is the floor of Congress and the judge has to give a speech for or against the plan, counterplan, or status quo. That speech will determine the outcome. We might envision some of the constraints suggested as impositions of kritiking under this vision of judging: “this is the wrong forum; Congress wouldn’t discuss these issues of philosophy,” or “we are constrained to do policy here!”

Under the latter two views, the judge has several options to fiat (it clearly is a verb in this sense). The plan may be done, a counterplan, or staying the course may be suggested. All of these fiated actions are executed by a governing body. Why not then have the judge endorse the kritiking option on the governing body? We could have the judge force Congress to rethink. The judge could fiat that the U.S. Government question threat construction as a reason for conducting foreign policy. The deciding speech given on the question of health care reform could be a well-constructed discussion of the problems of Western medicine, concluded by endorsing not the present system nor the policy on the floor, but rather a third option of beginning a quest of rethinking to uncover the problems of medicine and how Western medicine is flawed. Fiat the kritiking by the government on the problem outlined by the debate team. Fiat the kritiking!

A response to this view may be that the option is already present in the strategy of counterplanning. A two-fold rejoinder is offered here. First, the criticism that a counterplan is needed begs the question that there is some distinction

between fiat kritiking and counterplanning. Another way of stating this alternative may be “counter-thinking.”¹⁰ The though/action dichotomy is disputed in this form of fiat. Is there a difference between saying, “plank one, we suggest the Congress rethink,” and saying, “the Congress should rethink?” If there is, we must reside in a “cult of planks” since having a plank (for the sake of having a plank) is the only real difference.

Second, several modes of kritiking call policy-making into question. The idea that a plan should be done, that we can ever find a solution, that a “course of action” ought to be taken might be the thesis of the kritiking process. For example, several strands of feminism hold the view that the problem/solution format is a patriarchal tool (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Benhabib, 1987; Butler, 1990, 1992, 1995; Ganguly, 1992) Announcing that we have a solution not only forecloses future discussion, but it also chills the discussion of the problems for which there are no available solutions.

Fiat kritiking is not suggested as solution, but rather as a wholesale way of questioning/thinking. It is an exploration of the problem that may produce not a solution, but a better understanding of the problem which, for policy-making, should be appealing. In other words, a particular policy may be racist, classist, sexist, etc., but forcing the institution to rethink these problems is not an endorsement for the institution or for a policy. It is, rather, an endorsement for questioning.

Kritiking qua Praxis

Our position is that the debate round is more than just a “game.” It is, rather, a forum for advocacy. Even if the debate team does not (in “reality”) believe their position, they nevertheless must take a position in the debate context. The debate round becomes, if nothing else, a training ground for how to advocate a position. Integral to this concept is the ability to think critically, which is obtained by, among other things, intense research experience, anticipation of opposing arguments, skills in cross-examination, mastery of reasoning by analysis and synthesis, and the ability to take a position of advocacy on opposite sides of a proposition. In other words, critical thinking is the ability to know how and when to ask questions. We view this combination of advocacy with the ability to think critically as a coupling of theory with action (advocacy). Simply put, kritiking occurs as a form of praxis, or at least helps to frame praxis, in an argumentative format.

The ability to think critically should not be limited to a situation where X is chosen for discussion, researched, and then debated. Instead, critical thinking in debate can be (and is) expanded to ask questions about X: what is it, how does it function, is it valuable, does it contribute to the good of society? Arguments in the form of kritik ask such questions, among others. To this end, the critical thinking skills in debate are polished to include factors otherwise ignored. In fact, if we are going to emphasize the critical thinking skills that debate fosters as a selling point to recruits, parents and administrators, then we should inquire about how we can improve such skills. Ignoring critical factors and questions

about the nature of the topic, such as X, does not bid well for an activity that stresses its ability to think critically.

Additionally, while most contemporary debates are absent of spectators, except typically for final rounds which are attended by fellow debaters, the debate is still a public event. Nothing precludes or forbids observations of NDT debates. Also, many debates are videotaped or transcribed for classes, public officials and parents throughout the country. Thus, academic debate is not decoupled from the non-debate world. As such, academic debate is a forum for arguments meant to advance the skills and education of its participants but also to influence others who do not debate. Oral advocacy, then, becomes a serious enterprise in which “real” thoughts, stereotypes, beliefs, and policies are affected. Furthermore, the debate participants themselves, after years of debating, become conditioned to their style of debating and ways of thinking. This educational process and experience undoubtedly affects the way debaters think and act once they graduate and enter society. Thus, as we have been arguing, kritiking can help expand and intensify the quality of oral advocacy in contemporary academic debate. It promotes a range of possibilities that can serve effective oral advocacy. Additionally, because debate is a forum with multiple audiences and with the potential to influence different social groups, kritiking can have “real” consequences other than those typically encountered in a debate round.

In essence, then, by advocating that their positions are better, the participants make value judgments. They take a position about an issue and make arguments about that issue’s worthiness, especially as it is compared to competing issues. The debate round becomes a forum whereby the merits of issues are articulated.

The debate round also allows feedback from the audience and judge(s). After the debaters conclude their positions of advocacy, the effect of the round can be seen in post-round critiques. Judges can explain why they were or were not persuaded from the policy arguments presented in the debate. Of course, judges do not actually implement an affirmative plan. However, judges may be (can be) persuaded — based upon the debating — to take personal action, such as changed ways of thinking, writing letters to NGOs or government leaders, and the adoption of certain positions when they talk to friends or teach classes. Additionally, judge comments after the round may influence the debaters in a similar fashion. Of course, arguments presented in the debate have unlimited possibility in influencing other audience members as well.

The debate round, therefore, can serve to persuade people about policy implications that transcend the hypothetical issues of debate, such as fiat and topicality. Substantive issues that affect the participants in an everyday fashion can be (are) discussed. Debaters have often used these types of arguments to persuade judges, such as “Judge, you have children, and I doubt that you relish the thought of your kids growing up in a nuclear winter.” Such arguments bring the often abstract nature of policy positions down-to-earth and function as a particular type of persuasive technique. Kritiking supplements this process by encouraging participants to adhere to critical thinking once the debate round is over. In other words, a kritiking can encourage the judge not only to vote a certain way

because a hypothetical policy may result in nuclear winter, but also, for example, to take personal action against nuclear power or nuclear weapons.

Debate’s nature of persuasion and advocacy creates an atmosphere where debaters talk and judges listen. If compelled, judges may reciprocate with their own thoughts and opinions after the last speech. In any case, the debate round provides a forum, not only for intellectual competition, but also social activism. It offers an opportunity for “real” people with “real” problems to persuade others about “real-world” solutions.

In this way, the debate round can become a site for political struggle. Political concerns that are germane to the policy being debated can be waged into the debate round. Actual persuasion and personal transformation can occur if participants remain open to how viewing debate arguments (i.e., kritiking) relates to their non-debate lives. Kritiking, therefore, can be a form of social activism.

Kritiking opens a space for social activism in another way. Kritiking requires additional ways of thinking and arguing, an openness for alternative perspectives, and new methods of research. Just as “traditional” debate skills help debaters in other areas of life both during and after their debate careers, skills in kritiking also help participants in other areas. For example, the expanded ways of thinking that kritiking instills helps people become better critical thinkers and more sensitive to political concerns than do other debate skills. Kritiking helps train participants to recognize certain ways of thinking that typically entrench power relationships. As such, people who engage in kritiking become more likely to engage in social activism. At the very least, the critical skills that are intrinsic to kritiking encourage people to be active socially and politically because such concerns are given primacy by the questioning-assumptions paradigm.

Conclusion

Constructed scenarios and far-fetched nuclear war scenarios sometimes appear to have no grounding in reality, but are instead productions of the most clever and most researched debate squads. While we maintain that these “traditional” ways of arguing are valuable and should be encouraged, another way of seeing argument — kritiking — helps bring debate back to “reality.” The participants in the round can take positions, criticize, and attempt to persuade their audience for reasons other than intellectual stimulation or skills development. Instead, participants who feel strongly about the values underlying policy questions can take a critical position that encourages personal reflection and action outside of the debate round. Through kritiking, participants are more likely to increase their involvement in society than they are with “traditional” debating. The reason is simple. Kritiking fosters a spirit of responsibility and a call to action. Each person is important and should embrace their civic responsibility. When calling into question the values underlying types of policies, this spirit of activism can emerge. Thus, kritiking — as a way of viewing argument — can function as a median for praxis. Furthermore, kritiking is representative of what we have been calling the questioning-assumptions paradigm. Since kritiking al-

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lows room for fiat and for a proposal to be advocated, we believe a reconciliation between the policy-making and questioning-assumptions paradigms is possible. It is our hope that future debate forums and debate rounds will continue in this benevolent pursuit.

Notes

- ¹ We are using the verb “kritiking,” not the noun “kritik,” for two main reasons. First, the idea of THE kritik suggests there is just one possible kritik. However, we feel a “kritik” represents an argument style, not a monolithic argument form. Second, the verb usage implies a process, not a static image. Rather than suggesting an argument that has a known description, such as a disadvantage, kritiking is dynamic and evolutionary.
- ² To reflect our perspective of kritiking as a process — or a way of thinking, questioning or approaching a problem — we have chosen to use the word “paradigm” to describe it. We feel other descriptive words, such as field or philosophy, do not adequately illustrate the current tension that is occurring in the debate community concerning kritiking.
- ³ Bauschard’s negative criticism toward the argument style of kritiks pervades his article. As he states on the question of what the focus of the debate should be: “[o]pening up this theoretical can of worms is a waste of time that could be spent discussing unsettled questions” (1995, p. 4). We feel this is proof of the current paradigmatic conflict over taken-for-granted in debate.
- ⁴ One might wonder what argument strategy is open to the negative. Shors and Mancuso state, “The Critique [sic] can and should be used as an instrument to challenge questionable thinking, be it ethnocentric, or whatever. It can be useful in casting perspective on issues, but it should not be considered independent of comparison; it cannot be and remain meaningful. The Critique can be used as a disadvantage, solvency turn, a PMN, etc. — essentially anything but a kritik” (1993, p. A-17). This seems to harken back to Kuhn’s description of how old paradigms attempt to modify and take new anomalies into account — a sort of argumentative cooptation. The nuance of adopting kritiking is rejected, yet the system is said to always already represent such arguments. This is not to say that types of arguments such as disadvantages, solvency turns, PMNs, etc., are illegitimate. Rather, we feel these argument types can also coexist with kritiking, or at the very least must also meet the burden of defending the assumptions that lie underneath them.
- ⁵ This particular analogy has its origins with Bill Shanahan.
- ⁶ We take these words from Chris Lundberg of the University of Redlands, from the Semifinal round at Baylor University, 1996, where he was endorsing an argument from Spanos/Heidegger.
- ⁷ Lundberg again.
- ⁸ It is quite possible that there are more than three options. However, we feel these accurately represent the different paradigms under scrutiny.
- ⁹ We find it ironic that such an argument is now discussed since the genesis of kritiking sprung from what was first called a “kritik of fiat.” Now, with the

usage of the verb and the movement inside of affirmative constructions of fiat, we have a “fiat of kritiks.”

- ¹⁰ Please note the usage of a verb in this statement. Counter-thinking may be described above, but the option of a counter-thought (noun) has not been discussed in this article, and it is a totally different beast altogether. The counter-thought may be another negative argument/argument strategy available to debaters under the questioning-assumptions paradigm. As far as we know, the only execution of a “counter-thought” has been by Chris LaVigne and Brian Wassom (Wayne State University) against Dave Arnett and Jason Renzelman’s (University of Louisville) kritik-like affirmative case during the Octafinals at Northwestern University, 1995.

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