

# DEBATE: IS THERE ROOM FOR *KAIROS*?

by Tony Rosenberger

The most characteristic aspect of debate is logic. Logic is characteristic because, as debate is practiced, debate has very little to do with persuasion. Debaters, as the game represents them, are endlessly communicative about debate. However, the communication is of little consequence to persuasion. Full blooded persuasive engagement, as a mutual art, is taboo. Debate of logic is preferred. In rounds, the debaters and judges form a sad and meager relationship unable to follow through with the persuasive process. Possibly, teachers and debaters are doing a disservice to debate because persuasion has been ignored in debate strategies. Important education aims are tied to persuasion. A new judging paradigm can create a debate situation that is complimentary to debate's educational aims. The paradigm employs an overarching rhetorical concept, *kairos*.

*Kairos* has two layers of meaning that are important to the persuasive process. The first and more general meaning is epistemological, a philosophical investigation into the question of "How do we know that we know?" As the Sophist used *kairos*, it meant that ethics are situational. Take justice for example. Is the unjust one thing and the just another or is the unjust and just the same. I am unjustified lying to a friend but just in lying to an enemy? To lie is the same, but the situation has changed. Thus the charge that the lie was unjust or just is based on the situation. According to Bizzell (1990) *kairos* is the "sophistic doctrine...pointing to the contingent relationship between truth and circumstances" (p.23). In other words, circumstances create one's understanding of the world. Within this epistemic meaning, the concept of *kairos* suggest that there are no *a priori* truths, that truth is based on circumstances.

In addition to the epistemic notion, the concept of *kairos* has meaning within the study of rhetoric. One's circumstances are still the focus. However, the focus shifts to using the circumstances in one's rhetorical strategy. Bizzell (1990) noted that the term is closely associated to Isocrates. He bridges the

epistemic with the rhetorical. "...all general principles must fail because they screen out the particulars of a given situation, which must be taken into account in all truly good moral and rhetorical decisions" (p.28). In short, inflexible presentations fail because they do not adjust for circumstances. If a pitcher, as a general principle, only pitches fastballs, s/he will be ineffective. S/he must adjust for different batters, and have a variety of pitches in order to succeed. Just as a pitcher must adjust, debaters need to adjust for different judges and have a variety of proofs. Put another way, employing *kairos* means perceiving the circumstances in order to use rhetorical judgment. As a paradigm, it implies that the debater, seeking the means of persuasion, should analyze the situation, then adjust. Debaters usually do prepare for a debate. They employ analysis. The logic of their case is worked out ahead of time which is necessary and good. They have a strategy. However, that strategy is narrowly focused upon case, not possible audiences. The *kairos* paradigm does not exclude the use of traditional paradigms. It is inclusive of all because it is a rhetorical stance. The *kairos* paradigm adds more to the debate than logical argumentation. Aristotle said, "Rhetoric is a combination of analytical knowledge and knowledge of character...that on the one hand it is like dialectic, on the other like sophistic discourses" (Kennedy, 1991, p.53). Aristotle further said, "...Rhetoric is concerned with making a judgment. It is necessary not only to look at the argument, that is maybe demonstrative and persuasive but also [for the speaker] to construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person and to prepare the judge" (Kennedy, 1991 p. 120). Aristotle's persuasion is more than logic. The concept of *kairos* suggest the employment of what Aristotle calls an artistic proof. What the *kairos* paradigm brings to the debate is the use of that art, an art of adjusting one's appeal to logic, to emotions, to character. Unfortunately *kairos* doesn't reduce to a set of rules. Kennedy (1963) notes, "The subject is, of course, one that by na-

ture cannot be reduced to rules" (p.67). What, then, guides *kairos*? The *kairos* paradigm is adjustment to the circumstances. The adjustment necessitates communication between the judge and the debaters. Indeed, the information needs to be about more than which paradigm to use, for that restricts the debate to only logic. The dialogue between debater and judges could encompass appropriate argumentation, a topic common to a few debaters. However the dialogue can include the judges attitude toward the topic, toward speaking styles, toward important values.

One might argue that debate is logic not rhetoric. One might argue that debate is not persuasion. However, even the form of debate, the affirmative verses the negative, implies a persuasive agenda. After examining Kennedy's translation of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, the case structure for debate is directly out of Aristotle. What Aristotle calls deliberative speaking is policy debate (Kennedy, 1991). There is nothing wrong with seeing debate as a rhetorical act. Aristotle defined rhetoric as, "...an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (Kennedy, 1991, p.36). The focus is on the available means. Before one can use the available means one should understand the whole rhetorical situation. Indeed, a modern definition outlines what this rhetorical situation entails. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) described rhetoric as a human activity, a purposive action using symbols to communicate. One engages in rhetorical action by making a conscious decision to communicate which is guided by choices about the strategy one will employ. Rhetoric has a purpose; the acts are not accidental. When one does something in order to communicate one is engaging in rhetoric. When one takes a rhetorical perspective one seeks to understand and analyze the process of the communication rather than rely on the strict content of the communication. One can see that the contemporary builds upon the foundation of the ancient definition. Both emphasize process over content.

Paradigms used without audi-

ence analysis are like tricks on a wrestling mat. All watch, but they don't understand. When a lay judge comes to a round, s/he is baffled by the exercise of argumentation. If debaters would use the concept of *kairos* in the round and discover the nature of their judge, both the debater and judge would benefit. I have judged over fifty rounds this year, and in those rounds only a few times did the debaters ask even for a judging paradigm. There is a problem in debate. Few debaters persuade. Few judges understand the debate.

This argument for more communication between debaters and judges is not new. Rich Rodrick in "Beyond Objectivity; the Evolution of Debate Judging Paradigms, Alternatives to Judge Objectivity and the Dialogue Paradigm" (1987), proposed a paradigm similar to the *kairos* paradigm, the "dialogue paradigm." He notes an evolution in paradigms:

Examining the degree of objectivity of each judging paradigm in turn reveals an evolution. There is evidence of an effort to maximize the objectivity of the judge in the evolution from the stock issue paradigm to the policy maker paradigm to the hypothesis tester paradigm to the tabula rasa paradigm. In more recent paradigms, specifically the functional, critic of argument, and narrative paradigm, there is evidence of a turn away from objectivity *per se*. Alternatives to pure objectivity are sought (p.381). Rodrick shows an evolution in debate paradigms away from objectivity toward an acknowledgment that objectivity is illusory. This evolution is toward the *kairos* paradigm, both on the rhetorical level and the epistemic. Rodrick points out that two judges, judging the same round, will not agree on the outcome. The judge is not "outside" of the debate. S/he is involved in the process. The judges bring their own yardsticks in the form of biases, emotions, personal criteria. An acknowledgment of the subjective nature of judging can be seen in the use of the narrative paradigm, which is a direct attempt to bring emotional proofs into debate. Why not use emotional appeals? After all, judges bring biases and emotions to rounds. Do biases and emotions make good judging criteria? Alone, no. However, such appeals should be included in debate strategy. A good judge can

be subjective. Walter Ulrich (1983) noted, "The judge cannot avoid making subjective decisions. What distinguishes a good judge from a poor judge is the skills used to make decisions and the ability to communicate reasons behind their decisions to the other individuals" (p. 947). The good judge communicates. There should be a great deal of communication in rounds between debaters and judges. If the term subjective carries too many negative connotation, Rodrick (1987) made a distinction about subjectivity that makes it more palatable as part of any paradigm:

[the] alternative to objective observation is not subjective observation but perspectival observation. Perspectival observation recognizes that all observation is done from a position. It also recognizes the an infinite number of positions from which observations may be done are possible. Observers do not attempt to free themselves from positions, perspectival observation recognized multiple views of the same phenomenon, 'multiple foci that may be brought to bear, and multiple realities that are constructed of the same phenomenon' (p. 383).

Rodrick's "Dialogue Paradigm" takes into consideration that judges and debaters together produce the context of a debate. He suggests that debaters and judges converse before rounds to create the situation for the debate. The *kairos* paradigm is the overarching notion which entails this conversation between debater and judge. It means looking at the debate as situational, that each debate is different, that the rhetor must adapt to changing circumstances. There should be a serious discussion about the circumstances of the round.

Debaters will want to fight to keep debate within the illusory objective paradigms. Debaters will argue that debate is the art of demonstrating relationships. Yet Cronkhite has suggested:

Attempts to define 'sound' evidence have also fallen short of universal success. Most such definitions ultimately depend upon the judgment of some individual who is or is not convinced by the evidence and/or reasoning at hand. Even if that individual who serves as judge is the mythical 'reasonable man' who appears so frequently in the literature of argumentation (al-

though seldom in real life), his judgments are unlikely to be accepted as *vox dei* by anyone other than a few disciples' (1969, p. 187).

Seeking sound evidence as the key to objectivity, the "reasonable man," may have been the ultimate paradigm at one time. However, reasonable men and women have emotions, and objectivity has lost it's philosophical force.

Bringing the competitor and judge into the rhetorical framework of the debate round has advantages. Opening the lines of communication can bring these advantages. Rodrick (1987) suggested seven advantages that can be created by greater communication between debaters and judge:

1. Provides a context in which debate theory can be refined for educational purposes.

2. Function as a laboratory for argumentation [humanizes arguments].

3. Refine argumentation skills in an ongoing dialogue with the judges.

4. Judges could discuss before rounds the educational goals of debate.

5. Debaters would be able to better adapt to the judges.

6. Adaptation educates in its own right [development of art].

7. Narration, story telling, becomes a factor; for lay judges would become a part of this dialogue. (p. 385)

Advantage one allows for the exchange of views on debate theory which creates a greater community dialogue. Advantage two brings argumentation out of the text book into a setting with biases, passions, ethics that allow for more creativity in case building and argumentation. Advantage three brings feedback into the round. How many debaters look up to see the reactions of a judge? If debaters would look up from their scripts, they would see a dialogue of body language. This dialogue should be overt. Advantage four puts debate where it should be, as educational. Advantage five will add up to more enjoyable debates for debaters and judges. In addition, adaptation should create wins. Advantage six takes debate to a higher cognitive and creative level. Advantage seven brings a strategy to debaters who have a lay judge. The narrative paradigm emphasizes pathos but not at the expense of ethos and

logos. These advantages have a common element. They humanize an activity filled with conscious decisions about rhetorical strategies.

The bottom line for debaters is will the *kairos* paradigm persuade? Cronkhite (1969) explained several psychological theories that account for the effect of attitude or behavior change. He stated that Charles Osgood and Percy Tannenbaum's congruity hypothesis can account for one's change of attitude or behavior. Basically the audience's attitudes can be employed to create an associative or dissociative bond between one object and another to create favorable or an unfavorable response to some proposition. "Without an adjustment to the audience [*kairos*] intended persuasion seem to be ineffective" (p. 51). Another persuasion theory that takes into account audience adaptation is that of Cognitive Dissonance. Debate's format of problem/satisfaction follows this persuasive theory. Basically persuasion takes place when one has a feeling of dissatisfaction. This feeling is uncomfortable. The desire to overcome dissatisfaction motivates the person to act or believe. (Cronkhite, 1969, p. 54). The plan of policy debate should fill the void created by the significant issues of the case. If the debaters don't talk to their judges, how can they create this feeling of dissatisfaction? They are probably guessing. Furthermore, the *kairos* paradigm is advantageous for the educator, for the paradigm is a pragmatic strategy based on the idea the persuasion takes place between people, just as it does in civic discourse. Creating people who can participate in the civic discourse is probably the highest educational aim of competitive debate. At the National Forensic League tournament held in Tulsa, 1986, Lee (1987) interviewed coaches to discern pedagogical philosophy. The philosophy emphasized by the majority of coaches, 48.5% was educational pragmatism. Following this philosophy was educational idealism 42.4%. *Kairos* fits into the educational philosophy of the pragmatist, for "The pragmatist wishes to provide students with the ability to adjust to a changing society." (Lee, 1987, p. 353). On the other hand, education idealism emphasizes not "the means to accomplish practical tasks of everyday living, but on expan-

sion of the mind and definition of character" (Lee, 1987, p. 353). The notion of *kairos* is not excluded in this philosophy, for *kairos* opens the mind to other perspectives, and it places the debater in an ethical position. H/her conduct, character, is now a part of the round. Both of these points of view take place within a greater picture. We are creating people who will be able to participate in our community's and nation's civic discourse.

The most important consideration for the debate teacher is that there may be a connection between using a rhetorical perspective, the *kairos* paradigm, and the level and complexity of thought and argument development. Susan Kline (1988) concluded that higher construct differentiation (audience adaptation) and higher conceptual level thinking equate to more argument generation. Kline's research suggested that differentiated understandings of persons produces:

1. More strategies in influence attempts.
2. Use of more strategies in taking listener's perspective.
3. Use of appeals which focus on the personal perspectives and face the wants of the listener.
4. Reason about message choice in ways that reflect a special understanding of the listener.
5. Show greater adaptability in shifting appeals to fit the listener's characteristics.
6. Show greater adaptability in refuting objections.

Kline's work has profound implications for teachers of debate, since debate teachers want to create students who can think and generate arguments. If one views Kline's work through Frank Williams' model of thinking processes, judge adaptation stimulates several types of thinking. Clendening (1980) while writing about gifted curriculum explains Williams cognitive model. Cognitive behavior is divided into four areas: fluent thinking, generation of a quantity of arguments; flexible thinking, generation of a variety of arguments; original thinking, novel arguments; and elaborative thinking, expanding upon arguments. Kline's observations seem to suggest many levels of thought processes. As teachers we should be creating activities that foster many types of thinking processes. Debate as it is performed most of the time uses

fluent and elaborative thinking, sometimes flexible thinking. Few times does debate entail original thinking. The examination of strategy and thinking processes could be a fruitful area for further research.

In conclusion, Cicero said, "...If truth were efficient enough in delivery of itself, we should certainly have no need for the aid of art" (Cicero, p. 256). Aristotle's art is the use of all of one's thinking processes for the purpose of using all the available means of persuasion. Hopefully, this paper has stimulated thought about the role of the debater, the role of the debate judge, the role of debate, and the role of the teacher. Further study of debate programs, of teaching aims, and of program goals is needed.

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