

Moderator's Remarks – Lead In

In the fall of 2007 Ed Burdell was kind enough to put my name forward for membership in the Club. Shortly thereafter Fred McGavran, perhaps suspicious of some item on my application, called and invited me to lunch and conversation. At some point during that lunch, I asked Fred about the Club's history. During his remarks he mentioned that, in the early days, the club had debates as well as presentations; but that the Club dropped debates around the time of the Civil War or shortly thereafter, suggesting that, perhaps, they had become a little too vociferous and distressing to the general comity.

That got my attention and I jocularly suggested it might be fun to have them again sometime. I felt that way because I attended an undergraduate college that required four years of public speaking during which, after learning the basics of speaking and speech writing, advancement was marked by moving into debating and finally, play reading. I found the debate form both entertaining and educational. Then, not so long ago, I encountered the same form while attending Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Thomas Aquinas in his great work, the Summa Theologica, borrows a form from the Muslim philosopher Averroes, called the Utrum.

The Utrum takes the form of posing a question in the terms "Whether it is the case that" He then followed the question with two sections; the first called the Videtur and the next called the Sed Contra. In the first he forced himself to argue, to the very best of his ability, the affirmation of the proposal. Then in the Sed Contra he argued, once again to the best of his ability, the opposition to the proposal. Obviously this method requires a lot of intellectual integrity to not downplay one side or the other; but, when finished, he completed the third part, called the Responsio or Ergo, where he discussed whether the arguments of the Videtur or of the Sed Contra carried the argument and affirmed or denied the proposal

In any case the idea reviving debate at the Club stayed in the back of my mind until about a year ago when I suggested to the Board of Management that I would like to attempt revitalizing the tradition if I were assigned a budget for my next talk. They agreed and here we are.

To prepare, for this evening, I did considerable digging in our archives, with a lot of help from Dale Flick and Jim Myers, to better understand our history of debate before proceeding. Interestingly, in the original 1849 Constitution of the club, I found these very words: "We, the undersigned, with a view to promote the wider culture of our intellectual, moral, and social powers; and believing that a union of mind in the pursuit of these high aims will secure greater strength and success, do hereby form ourselves into an association with these objects, vis. – to discuss the leading questions of the age;"

Further research quickly revealed that debates happened nearly every week and were, indeed, concerned with the major social, political, and religious issues of mid-19th Century America. If I may test your memory of American history for a moment, note the timeliness of these topics:

Around the Mexican American war over Texas fought in 1846 – 1848:

"Is the extension of territory dangerous to the durability of our government?"

“Is “intervention” a suitable action to prevent intervention?”

“Was the Mexican war just upon the part of the United States?”

Or at the time Massachusetts, in 1852, passed the first law making schooling compulsory:

“Is the moral and religious education of the people a legitimate end of civil government?”

Or, in the thirty years surrounding 1850 when nearly one half the population of Ireland, and an

equal number of Germans, emigrated to the United States, all predominantly Roman Catholic:

“Are our free institutions in danger from Catholicism?”

And finally, as the Civil War loomed in the late 1850’s:

“Are there causes at present existing from which we have reason to fear a diminution of the Federal Union?”

The record of debates at the Club disappears in the years just before the club shut down for several years in the early 1860’s. The minutes, after the Club restored itself to full activities, record the resumption of paper presentations but not of debates.

That said, we will have a debate this evening. We (Mr. Dehner, Mr. McGavran, and myself) at first thought we might simply pick up where our ancestors left off, i.e. the “intervention to prevent intervention” question in the context of Russia/ Ukraine and ISIS/ Syria/Iraq.

Or perhaps, with this highly popular Pope, “Are our free institutions (again) in danger from Catholicism?”

Or much more ambitiously a la Ferguson and New York City: “Whether it is the case that the grand jury system has become incapable of adjudicating conflicts between law enforcement and the citizenry?”

And then a somewhat more esoteric, but quite timely, possibility fell in our laps. About two months ago, an ex- Wall Street Journal reporter and author, Ann Hagedorn, released a book entitled “The Invisible Soldiers” and gave a talk about it at the Mercantile Library. What we wish to debate this evening is an outgrowth of that book; perhaps the major question arising from the rapid emergence in the last few decades of Private Military and Security Company’s on the international scene. These companies today are conservatively estimated to receive \$300 billion in US Government funding through the Department of Defense alone. They also receive funding from the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and the Central Intelligence Agency and the Agency for International Development on our side and countless billions from other nations. The most obvious example of their curious use today may be the United States Embassy in Iraq, where, as you know, our President, as he promised, is bringing the troops home. Except that the Department of State’s Embassy will employ nearly 7,000 men under arms for protection and intelligence activities in Iraq alone – but none of the 7,000 are US Marines who normally defended

embassies in the past. The 7,000 will consist of some US citizens, some US military veterans, and mostly recruits with military experience from other conflict zones around the world such as Pakistan, or Colombia. And remember the hullabaloo around Benghazi? The persons defending the facility were Libyans working for a subcontractor of one of these companies --- not even the company's own employees.

The question before the house, the putative Utrum, then will be:

“Whether it is the case that the use of Private Military and Security Forces by the Executive branch of our government is a threat to democracy?”

This Utrum will be followed by the Videtur: “It seems that – where the affirmative is argued by Joe Dehner. As soon as he finishes, the Sed Contra: “On the other hand - will be argued by Fred McGavran. Finally I will present the Responsio or Ergo which is the conclusion or the answer. I will provide the answer. Following that we will step away from the Utrum form and have a vote from the assembly regarding these arguments which will (naturally) affirm my conclusion.

But first a bit of research – we want to know what you think now, before the arguments have been presented --- let's see if Joe or Fred can change any minds. Let me pose the question again: “Whether it is the case that the use of Private Military and Security Forces by the Executive branch of our government is a threat to democracy?”

If you think right now they are a threat, please raise your hand.

If not, please raise your hand.

(23 agreed PMSC's were a threat to democracy; 17 disagreed, and thus 19 of the 59 persons present were undecided.)

Let us proceed:

Joe