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# Response to my commentator

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# Response to my Commentator

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I think Cathal Woods' useful comments deserve some clarification. I divide all verbal activities into either mono-logues or dia-logues.<sup>1</sup> *Dia-logues* comprise all interactive uses of language (to be precise: *actual* or *explicit* dialogues; *internal* or *implicit* dialogues are monological renderings of actual interactions). Based on the number of speakers, dia-logues – or simply *interactions* – are a genus that can be, quite straightforwardly, divided into the species of: *di-logues*, *tri-logues*, *tetra-logues*, etc. *Poly-logues* are dia-logues which are not di-logues. All this, in a slightly different way, is made clear on the first page of my paper.

Therefore, I don't and can't claim or imply that "Many' is implicitly defined as three or more, by contrast with dialogue." First, to repeat, I don't do it implicitly, but rather explicitly. Second, I consistently use a term di-logue, not a dia-logue, to contrast with a poly-logue. I understand that a confusion may arise for a casual reader for at least two reasons: 1) the tiny difference in Greek terms (dia-logue: *through* discourse; di-logue: discourse *between two*); 2) the practice, very deeply entrenched in both ordinary and academic parlance, of limiting a dia-logue to a di-logue.<sup>2</sup> I aim precisely to problematize this practice in argumentation theory. Further, Woods remarks that:

In section 3, then, Lewiński offers no evidence from authority, and otherwise makes no theoretical case, for a polylectic; the proof will be in the pudding, that is, by demonstration of the existence of polylectically understood fallacies.

By contrast, I think this section is precisely a theoretical case for a polylectical account of fallacies. I follow a path of those who, since Aristotle, have argued that a normative theory of argumentation can define both reasonable and fallacious arguments as moves in a verbal activity, a dialogue. (References are in the paper – whether they can be considered "evidence from authority" I don't know. Looking at how argumentation theory has developed, I would say many have taken them seriously.) The strongest case was made by Hamblin – fallacies can be treated in an

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<sup>1</sup> I only take numbers into account without considering numerous value-laden concerns. E.g., Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 37) distinguish between (heuristic) *dialogues=discussions* and (eristic) *debates*.

<sup>2</sup> See a quote from Sylvan used in my paper (p. 9) and, for a further elaboration of these, the work of Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) referenced there.

academically satisfactory way only if there is one (unified, consistent, comprehensive, elegant, etc.) theory of argumentation that explains the fallaciousness of arguments (in the normative sense). Naturally, so many arguments seem fallacious to us – hence textbook taxonomies are thick. But there is typically no consistent theory behind detecting fallacies. Some are inferential mistakes, some epistemic, some ethical, some conversational, some rhetorical, etc. To avoid this commonsense eclecticism, Hamblin developed formal models of dialogue. Pragma-Dialecticians, Walton & Krabbe, etc., have followed suit. All these models may seem contrived in their elaborate ways of justifying fallacy judgments. For of course we *know* ad hominem, false dilemma, the straw man, and so many more, *are* fallacies.

I also *know* in some way that false dilemma is wrong (it's 'false'!) and that the straw man is too (it's 'straw'!). Woods seems to offer some incipient explanation of this; a false dilemma might be an *epistemic* lapse: we are myopic in considering only two, say, truth-candidates while there are more. (We agree that it is neither a logical nor a dialectical error.) However: 1) I'm not quite sure if the set of epistemic lapses is co-extensive with the set of what argumentation theory recognizes as fallacies; 2) as Woods stresses, such explanations call for some serious theoretical grounding. Following Hamblin – and others – I have tried to provide this grounding via the concept of polylogues. It's also clear Woods departs from a logical treatment:

A false dilemma essentially involves use of a false disjunction, and concludes from the falsity of one option that the remaining option is correct.

On a standard logical reading, a *false disjunction* forms a tautology with a conjunction of false conjuncts:  $\neg (p \vee q) \equiv \neg p \wedge \neg q$ . Hence, there is no way (other than a blatant illogicism) of concluding “from the falsity of one option that the remaining option is correct” because in a *false* disjunction both options are wrong by definition. Perhaps Woods follows here Tomić to mean an “incomplete disjunction”:  $\neg (p \vee q) \equiv p \vee q (\vee n\dots)$ . In this case, the valid form of disjunctive syllogism mentioned by Woods would indeed not work. Yet, as I have argued, this is not a logical sense of a false disjunction or false dilemma. Shall we be suspicious about *incompleteness* of any given premise in our logical operations? (Funny examples are easy to generate.) Instead, Woods again hints at epistemic criteria:

[...] I don't think that false choice [=false n-lemma, incl. di-lemma] requires even a dialogical analysis! It does, of course, require something more than a logical analysis, since it is a valid form. Argument evaluation includes evaluation of the premises, in addition to the logic.

Yes, it does. But it is precisely this part of evaluation that does not belong to the competence of argumentation theory (unless we want it to be a super-theory of all correct knowledge). I can spot some fallacies in a nuclear physicist's paper, but I can hardly check the robustness/completeness of her specialized claims *qua* premises. Following this, false dilemma/false choice would fall outside the scope of argumentation theory. I wouldn't welcome this.