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Monologue, dialogue or polylogue: Which model for public deliberation?

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ABSTRACT: Modelling argumentation as a dialogue brings distinct advantages over monological approaches to analysing actual argumentation. Yet, models of dialogue are typically built of di-logical exchanges between two parties (pro and con). By contrast, many public arguments and deliberations are in fact poly-logues involving many parties. I argue that salient features of polylogues (the possibility for collective (counter-)argument, departures from a simple *ababab* sequential organisation of exchanges, etc.) are theoretically significant for analysing and evaluating public argumentation.

KEYWORDS: deliberation, dialectics, polylogue, pragma-dialectics, public argument, strategic manoeuvring

1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a European country at the height of the global financial crisis. Its economy is not really getting any better, and the public budget deficit is soaring. The country is even said to be on the verge of bankruptcy. Therefore, the minority, centre-left government is trying to push through a tough austerity budget in the parliament. The government faces a number of smaller opposition parties—some to the left, and some to the right. At least some of them have to be convinced and vote for the budget, or at least abstain from voting against it. Simplifying things, the situation looks more or less like this:

Government—centre-left party
This is the best, balanced budget

Leftist parties
*We need less cuts for public workers,
more tax-increases (esp. for the rich)*

Centre-right party
*We need more cuts in the
public sector, less tax- increases*

Fig. 1. Simplified argumentative situation

In such a situation, not uncommon in European policy debates, the government has to fight on two fronts, since it is challenged from two opposing directions. Leftists and rightists criticise the government, but also each other, on the basis of their own, not fully compatible ideological and economical starting points. This puts the government in the following predicament: How to consistently answer the leftists' challenge that the budget

is bad, for it cuts too much of public wages, and, at the same time, the rightists' challenge that the budget is bad, for it cuts too little of public wages? The choice of the government may be to simply address one opponent. Let us assume that the votes of one centre-right party are enough to have the budget accepted. So the ruling party takes up the challenge and defends its position on this front. Imagine that it is strong arguments, and not political concessions and behind-the-scenes deals, that convince the right-wing opposition to abstain during the voting. The government can pride itself on a reasonable and successful argumentative strategy. Yet, there is a little hitch. The leftists' objections have not been addressed. From the perspective of the government vs. leftists debate, government's arguments are evasive and irrelevant. That is to say, they are fallacious. Moreover, they are also rhetorically ineffective: the leftists vote against the budget. In this situation, an argumentation analyst faces the following paradox: the same arguments in a public debate are both reasonable and fallacious at the same time. How can this be?

Well, one may say that this kind of situation is a purely imaginary, constructed exemption. Yet, public deliberation of the kind illustrated above is no alien to argumentation studies. Collective deliberation can be crudely defined as a multi-party decision-making procedure that necessarily involves public argumentation. (Despite significantly differing views, this much is common in all accounts of collective deliberation from Aristotle to recent proponents of deliberative democracy. See Yack 2006.) Deliberation thus combines two crucial elements: the process of argumentation and many parties. For some, these two elements even lie at the very heart of the study of logic and argumentation: "Logic arose originally out of reflection on many-agent practices of disputation", and thus was founded on a "broader agenda of rational agency and intelligent interaction" (van Benthem 2009: vii; see also Krabbe 2006). In spite of such historical roots of argumentation studies, there seems to remain an important difficulty in adequately analysing and evaluating multi-party argumentative practices. The difficulty is this: How to reconstruct and evaluate the multi-party practices in terms of the models of sound argumentation developed in normative disciplines (logic, dialectics)? More precisely, shall we split the many-agent practices into a collection of monological acts of reasoning, and evaluate them one by one? Or rather approach them in terms of dialectical encounters in which two parties argue "on both sides of the issue"? Or, yet differently, shall we altogether abandon such reductions and perhaps look into the whole complex fabric of multi-party argumentative interactions? In the following, I endeavour to briefly analyse each of these options.

2. MONOLOGUE (A COLLECTION OF MONOLOGUES)

Many logicians may be inclined to analyse argumentation as a form of monologue. They would thus approach multi-party public debates as collections of individual acts of reasoning. An act of reasoning consists of a set of arguments and arguments are defined as sets of claims supporting another claim through an identifiable inference rule. Proponents of this perspective acknowledge, of course, that so defined arguments may be, and often explicitly are, part of interaction, but the substance of arguing is the way every single discussant justifies her own position. Whether acts of reasoning belong to the context of monological, confirmatory justification or to the context of rebutting objections in a critical dialogue is an attribute, possibly an accidental one. On a radical interpretation, the contingencies of interaction—the very presence and contributions of other arguers—

become, to borrow an expression from Grice (1975: 42), “undesirable excrescences,” that unnecessarily obfuscate the theoretical and analytic picture which should, first and foremost, clearly focus on the primary object of argumentation studies, that is, the monological structure of inferences.¹

This depiction looks like a crude simplification, or perhaps even a caricature, of a well-known tradition in logic, stemming from Aristotle’s account of demonstration. However, the line of research based on the principles sketched above is still very lively or perhaps even dominant. Monological logicians who make inroads into argumentation theory argue, for example, that argumentative moves that are commonly considered fallacious on dialectical grounds—*petitio principii* or fallacy of many questions (see Hamblin 1970)—can be *fully* elucidated “on entirely logistical principles” in a way “closely resembling the Standard Treatment” (Botting 2011: 23). Such a position implies that any extension of the scope of argument analysis beyond monological acts of reasoning is basically redundant and thus does not pass the test of Occam’s razor.

Consistent and powerful as it is, such a position involves strong reductionism. That is because much of what we routinely find important in argumentative exchanges is excluded from examination.² In particular, a monological stance makes it utterly difficult to test the comparative strength of various positions regarding the same issue. Various positions may be supported by valid chains of inferences, and thus the crucial test would depend on the strength of the basic premises assumed by each of the party. But this is not exactly a logician’s concern. It would be, if factors such as responsiveness to other parties’ objections regarding these premises, as well the position at large, were within the scope of inquiry. Yet they are not, at least in a monologically constructed logical system. “Acceptable premises” are often defined as those that, in a nut-shell, face no overriding reasons to the contrary (Freeman 2005). By including “reasons to the contrary” in the definition of acceptable premises, however, we introduce the second party—a critic—to the process of reasoning. Following Aristotle (*Topics*), we can thus say that whenever the premises become disputable, we abandon the monological activity of proof-making, or demonstration, and enter the realm of dialectics.

3. DILOGUE (A COLLECTION OF DILOGUES)

The inherently monological tenets of much of logical inquiry are fiercely contested by the proponents of dialectical approaches. For dialecticians, again indebted to Aristotle, argumentation is a particular form of communicative exchange, in which what matters are not only justifications but also, or even primarily, criticisms of the other party. On such a view, conditions for reconstruction and assessment of argumentation are essentially dialogical: It is in the dialogically reconstructed competitive weighing of pros and cons where the value of arguments is, and indeed should be, established. Therefore, a step “from axiom to dialogue” is advocated (Barth & Krabbe 1982).

Proponents of a dialogical stance speak of a “straightjacket of logic,” and interpret the seemingly monological core of reasoning as either a form of a dialogue game

¹ Johnson (2000) uses the term “illative core” to refer to this monological core of inferences.

² In O’Keefe’s (1977) terms, monological logicians are only interested in arguments₁, or even only in a particular subset of such arguments, and not in arguments₂.

with God himself (Lorenzen & Lorenz 1978: 1; as cited in Walton & Krabbe 1995: 3) or, after Plato, as an internal discussion of the soul with herself (see *Theaetetus*, 189e-190a; *The Sophist*, 263e-264b). Monological chains of inferences are thus no more than manifestations, or end results, of “interiorized dialogic argument” (Kuhn 1991: 13). In this way, monologue is defined through dialogue, not the other way round (dialogue is in the *definiens* of monologue).

To many argumentation scholars, bringing such arguments for an inherently dialogic character of argumentation is like trying to break into a door that is wide open. Dialectics is by definition a dialogic enterprise: “In the dialectical approach to argumentation it is assumed that in arguments there are always two roles in play, even when just one person is putting forward an argument so that the role of the Opponent remains implicit (monologues)” (Krabbe 2006: 196). The central notion of dialectical inquiry is thus the notion of a ‘dialogue.’ However, whereas the Greek meaning of ‘dialogue’ is not limited to two-party exchanges, argumentation theory seems to favour such a two-party approach to dialogue. *Dia-logue* thus becomes reduced to *di-logue*, a conversation between two. A short look at the definitions of dialogue in informal logic and argumentation theory clearly indicates this tendency (*italics added*):

A dialogue is an extended verbal exchange between *two people (in its simplest form)*, in which the parties take turns responding to what the other said in one or more of the preceding turns. (Blair 1998: 325)

The concept of a dialogue [...] is that of a conventionalized, purposive joint activity between *two parties (in the simplest case)*, where the parties act as speech partners. It is meant by this that the *two parties* exchange verbal messages or so-called speech acts that take the form of moves in a game-like sequence of exchanges. (Walton 1998: 29)

The root meaning of dialectical is dialogue—a *logos* (which I take to mean “reasoned discourse”) that is between *two (or more) people*. (Johnson 2000: 161)

What is noticeable in such definitions is that the possibility of having more than two discussants is mentioned somewhat timidly and more often than not parenthetically. Worse yet, the parenthetical distraction is sometimes dropped altogether: “As was clear in our discussion of the process, arguing involves two participants; or if you prefer, it has two poles and the process takes place between those poles” (Johnson 2000: 157).

The question is—does this reduction of argumentative interactions to basically dyadic exchanges bring about any important limitations/problems to the analysis and evaluation of argumentation? Is such a reduction of many to two similar in any sense to the reduction of two to one? That is to say, is dialectics guilty of a similar abstraction from the practice of argumentation that it so strongly criticises monological logic for?

Well, not exactly. The limitation of the scope of dialectical inquiry to two parties can be explained by the way dialectical issues are formulated. For example, Krabbe reconstructs the first step in the Aristotelian system of argumentative discussions, in which the very roots of dialectical study lie, in the following way: “Discussion starts with a problem that can be expressed by a question of the form: Is it the case that..., or is it not?” (2006: 186). That means that a dialectical issue is raised by a yes/no or polar question. Such a question only allows for two kinds of relevant responses (leaving aside the “I don’t know” answer). Therefore, any controversial issue allows for two sides to form: those who say yes and those who say no. As a result, in each dialectical encounter

“[t]here are two roles: the Questioner (Q) and the Answerer (A)” (Krabbe 2006: 186). These two dialectical roles are alternatively called the proponent and opponent, the protagonist and antagonist, or, by analogy to the game of chess, White and Black (Walton & Krabbe 1995: 133-154).

These roles are certainly realistic enough, as they form the basis of much actual argumentative discourse, most obviously in legal proceedings, often considered a prototype of argumentative exchange. A legal question that opens a criminal trial, e.g. “Is Socrates guilty of corrupting youth?”, clearly calls for a defence and prosecution to clash in a battle of arguments. However, also many issues raised in deliberative assembly take the form of a polar question: “Shall we go to war with Sparta?” may be one example of such a question. Again, to test whose position holds, and thus decide if Spartans are to be worried or not, two parties engage in an argumentative exchange.

As we know, dialectical scholars developed various normative models of two-party discussions to regulate such exchanges (Barth & Krabbe 1982; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, 2004; Hamblin 1970; Walton 1984; Walton & Krabbe 1995). Some, however, claim that such models do not quite capture everything that is relevant to argumentation. Blair, for instance, in his paper “The limits of the dialogue model of argument,” challenges the view that “that dialogue is a necessary condition of argument, that arguments always occur in a context of dialogue” (1998: 326). Blair argues that in long argumentative texts, such as philosophical treaties or scholarly monographs, argumentation is predominantly built of “solo arguments” in which an arguer “is not forced by questions or challenges from the other side to address additional issues that the critic deems important” (1998: 333). Such arguments are thus decidedly different from “duet arguments” characteristic of “‘fully-engaged’ argument-dialogues,” that is, actual argumentative interactions in which “what is supplied by each participant at each turn is a direct response to what was stated or asked in the previous turn” (Blair 1998: 329). Since Socratic dialogues, Walton’s dialogue types, or the pragma-dialectical critical discussion are all models of fully-engaged dialogues, their study, so Blair concludes, “will not suffice to reveal all the salient properties of solo argumentation, nor all the norms appropriate to them” (1998: 338).

One may be tempted to swiftly disagree with such a stance that seems to resuscitate the monological take on the nature of argumentation. However, two elements of Blair’s argument make his position worthy of serious consideration. First, Blair hedges his position in an important way. In fact, he distinguishes between two senses of a dialogue. One is an abstract and minimal sense, in which a dialogue amounts to envisaging a possible opposition; this includes internal dialogues and the anticipation of objections in a longer monological stretch of discourse. What crucially remains in such a view is that, in a Platonic fashion, dialogue is in the *definiens* of thinking cum reasoning. Second is a dialogue in the proper sense, understood as an interaction between two (or more) people who are mutually engaged by taking turns and thus co-producing argumentation. Blair challenges the latter, but not the former view. That is to say, he is not against a dialogical (or rather a “dialectical”) view of argumentation, but rather against a strong dialogical view.

The second salient element of Blair’s argument is the overall rationale for his criticisms. Namely, he wishes to account for the complications argument scholars may face once they depart from the simple *abab* (question-answer; argument-objection) form of dialogue:

I have attempted to characterize argument-dialogues according to increasing levels of the complexity of the argument ingredient at each turn of a dialogue. I contend that at a certain stage in the increasing complexity of the argument turns, there is a qualitative change in the nature of the dialogue. (Blair 1998: 327)

I find Blair's point well-taken. Yet, myself, I focus on the "qualitative change in the nature of the dialogue" brought about by a move in exactly the opposite direction. Rather than looking into the increasing complexity of individual turns in a dialogue between two parties, I look into the increasing complexity in the interactional structure of the dialogue between more than two parties.³ That is because the two-party approach generates its own problems in analysing and evaluating multi-party argumentative exchanges in a way that is both pragmatically sensitive and dialectically relevant.

Argumentation scholars have noticed some of such difficulties and proposed corresponding amendments to the basic one-on-one scheme. One possibility is to reconstruct the variety of positions under discussion as a dispute between two basic collective parties (see Prakken 2009: 286). Thus the duality of dialectics is preserved, but some practical, rhetorical considerations are added. One of them is the phenomenon of argumentative coalitions: arguers in group situations tend to team up around an issue and thus co-produce arguments as a collective protagonist, or "tag-team" (Brashers & Meyers 1989; Canary, Brossmann, & Seibold 1987). Reverseely, discussants can also form a collective antagonist and jointly object to various elements of their opponent's position (Lewiński, 2010). Both complexity and persuasiveness of collectively produced arguments tends to be higher than individual ones. However, while justified in many cases, such reconstructions may also result in a loss of nuance whenever a dispute involves a complicated web of mutually incompatible positions and arguments. In effect, a possible simplification of the disagreement space towards a dichotomization, or even false dilemma (either... or...), is possible. Another rhetorically important option is to reconstruct the variety of positions under discussion as a dispute between two basic collective parties that additionally take into consideration the more or less passive audience of the exchange.⁴ There is thus a situation of an argumentative overlay. One discussion party explicitly argues with the other party, but implicitly, and perhaps even primarily, manoeuvres to reach out to the audience that may be skeptical about her position (see van Eemeren, 2010). Much of political debate in the public sphere has a similar structure, in which what really counts are potential voters that need to be addressed. This is another important extension of the dualistic model to account for some real life, rhetorical elements. Still, it presupposes a hierarchy of addressees (primary and secondary), that sometimes may be difficult to tell. Crucially, however, in many cases the neutrality or passivity of the third party does not hold. The third party is not necessarily a collection of onlookers that are merely supposed to have their own dissenting opinions, but otherwise remain silent and thus play a largely implicit role in an argumentative dialogue. Rather, a third party may actively contribute to a discussion actually extending it beyond two-party argumentative exchanges. This complication brings us to the third option.

³ Using O'Keefe's terminology again: while Blair calls for extending dialectical analysis of arguments₁ (see also Blair 2010), my goal is to further the analysis of arguments₂. See also the distinction between "illative core" and "dialectical tier" (Johnson 2000).

⁴ Prakken, in his formalization of a persuasion dialogue, proposes that "[t]he remaining participants, if any, are the third parties with respect to *t*, assumed to be neutral towards *t*" (2009: 286).

4. POLYLOGUE

A polylogue is a form of verbal interaction, or dialogue, that involves “or more” participants. The simplest form of a polylogue is a tri-logue: a dialogue between three parties. The notion has been introduced by pragmatic discourse and conversation analysts (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004). Since more than a dyadic exchange is not thoroughly theorised in argumentation studies, an incentive to do such work may come exactly from the pragmatic investigation of polylogues. Already classics of interaction analysis, such as Goffman, have identified the methodological limitations in the study of spoken dialogues:

Traditional analysis of saying and what gets said seems tacitly committed to the following paradigm: Two and only two individuals are engaged together in it. [...] The two-person arrangement [...] being the one that informs the underlying imagery we have about face-to-face interaction. (Goffman 1981: 129)

To substantiate the claims that a dyadic model of interaction is not adequate to all cases of dialogues, analysts of polylogue identified a number of qualities of polylogues that extend beyond the dyadic model: the much increased complexity of exchanges; the problem in determining the completeness of exchanges and the related issue of distributed responsibility for talking (which of the addressed parties is to answer a difficult question?); the perils of inconsistency in multiple-recipient design; various forms of co-production of discourse that may lead to strategic coalition-building; difficulties in gauging and establishing the common ground among all the participants, and so on (Bruxelles & Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997, 2004). At least some of these qualities are potentially relevant to argumentation analysis. An interesting example may be the reconstruction of a polylogue in terms of the basic dialectical exchange of turns between two parties:

As for the alternating pattern, the famous ababab formula only works for dialogues, whereas for trilogues the alternation does not respect any kind of fixed rules: we are dealing with an infinite number of possibilities, the abcabcabc model being very exceptional [...]” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1997: 5)

The challenge for an analyst may thus be to extract from a multi-party discussion the *abab* order on which the much-used “dialectical profiles” are based (see van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans 2007).

Taking such concerns into account, interaction analysts go as far as bemoaning the “straightjacket of first and second persons” resulting from the “bias towards the study of dyadic interaction” (Levinson 1988: 222-223). Such a bias may lead to an important inadequacy in understanding verbal exchanges, since “in any society, dyadic exchanges tend, in fact, to be in the minority” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004: 2). If pure, prototypical one-on-one interactions are indeed a rarity, then the models of interaction built of adjacency pairs do not meet the basic requirement of empirical adequacy. And the chief goal of interaction analysts is to faithfully represent the structure or order underlying actual discursive exchanges. Therefore, the models they propose are descriptive models, whose shape is directly dependent on the shape of actual interactions. As a result, a misfit between the actual qualities of interactions that are relevant from a given research perspective (for instance, sequential organization), and their representation in the model may seriously undermine the

usefulness of the model. Hence the need of studying polylogues is relevant and indeed crucial to understanding the complex structure of much of our interactions.

In contrast, argumentation theorists primarily aim at stipulating normative models of reasonable argumentative exchanges. The basic function of such models is not to picture reality, but rather to propose certain ideal conditions under which reasonable argumentation can be exercised in an uninhibited fashion. In this way, such models provide tools for distinguishing the good from the bad in argumentation. Because of that they are not, and should not, be directly affected by the complexities of argumentative reality. The question remains though if such models can be *indirectly* affected. That is to say, can some complexities of argumentative exchanges trickle all the way down to the normative models so as to affect the normative standards? How about some moves that are reasonable in a one-on-one exchange becoming unreasonable in a many-to-many exchange, and the other way round?

Such points have been noticed, for instance, by Bonevac in his assessment of the pragma-dialectical model:

[...] many discussions [...] involve more than two participants with different and mutually incompatible standpoints. Why does this matter? Success in such a discussion may be more than success against each opponent. Someone seeking to defend a position against a variety of opponents at once, for example, must meet a number of constraints that cannot be understood as conjunctions of constraints applied to each dispute taken individually. (Bonevac 2003: 454-455)

As an example of such discussions he mentions deliberations in American politics: president Clinton, Bonevac argues, often had to argue simultaneously against reservations of his own Democratic party members and objections of the Republicans. In this way, Clinton did not just argue on one of the two sides of the issue, but rather “maneuvered by triangulation” in that “he was implicitly or explicitly criticizing two different opponents and seeking to appeal to groups of voters positioned between them on the political spectrum” (Bonevac 2003: 453). Without taking such factors into account, Bonevac claims, one cannot fully understand Clinton’s argumentative strategies.

Such reservations regarding dialectical models of argumentation would not really hold if not two important assumptions that Bonevac is not at all explicit about. The first is that dialectics is based on an inadequate model of interaction. In his criticisms Bonevac, a formal deductive logician himself, seems to be saying that purely abstract logical models of solo inferences are fine, for they remain within the realm of formal science and thus do not have any aspiration at getting close to reality. However, once one wants to construct normative models of argumentation that include the interactive aspect of it, this has to be done on the basis of a certain basic model of interaction. And the model based on two and only two speakers cum arguers is not adequate. But why would pragma-, or any other, dialecticians care about this if, as shown above, they deal with polar issues?

A second crucial assumption addresses exactly this question. The problem of multi-party discussions arises only if one allows taking as a point of departure for argumentative discussions not only a polar yes/no question, but also an open Wh-question: “Which neighbour shall we ally with?” or “Who shall we vote for?” or “What cuts shall we introduce to our budget?” Such questions are by definition open-ended and thus usually afford more than two relevant responses.

It is interesting to notice that the Wh-questions may actually be seen as the trademark of an initial situation for decision-making: an open problem that allows for a

number of alternatives that are to be tested in an argumentative process (McBurney, Hitchcock, & Parsons 2007: 97-99; Walton & Krabbe 1995: 73-75). Such a departure point for deliberation allows for systematically including more than two parties to the debate, because there may be more than just two sides to an issue raised by a Wh-question. In answering a question such as “Which austerity measures to introduce?” some may be in favour of raising rich people’s taxes, other of cutting poor people’s benefits, or reducing employment in public sector, stimulating the economy with public money, or perhaps raising corporate tax, and so on. In this way we obtain a rather bulky set of positions, some of them contradictory, some contrary, and some compatible (so that they can be combined in distinct ways). And this is usually the situation in which public deliberators argue for their positions and against the positions of others.

Such multiplicity of positions is taken into account in some models of decision-making (see McBurney, Hitchcock, & Parsons 2007; Rehg, McBurney, & Parsons 2004). Yet, in such models advocates of various positions are *deliberative* parties that resort not only to arguments, but also proposals, counter-proposals, voting, majority deals, etc. As soon as deliberative exchanges turn to argumentation, understood as a critical testing of the merits of the proposals in a dialectical exchange, the interaction comes down to two parties (see Prakken 2000, 2009). Hence multi-agent is limited to two-agent again. Prakken (2009: 287) suggests that argumentation, in contrast to deliberation, is a conflictual zero-sum game, in which there is but one winner and one loser. On such a view, no more than two *dialectical* parties can exist. But can’t there be more?

It depends exactly on the answer to the question if argumentative exchanges can be occasioned by a Wh-question. If Krabbe (2006) is correct in his analysis, it did not seem possible in the classical Aristotelian system. Yet, some present approaches seem to allow such a possibility. This is evident when different kinds of confrontations or disputes are examined. Pragma-dialectics, for instance, includes among the types of disputes a “qualitatively multiple dispute.” Such a dispute arises when the second speaker “takes up an alternative standpoint [...] [that], viewed dialectically, implies a standpoint that is opposite to [the first speaker’s standpoint]” (van Eemeren et al. 2007: 26 f.). An opposite standpoint may be both contradictory and contrary to the other position (ibid.: 57-62). Moreover, a qualitatively mixed dispute may clearly arise in response to a Wh-question which may open a discussion of various alternatives. Van Eemeren et al. analyse many examples of such disputes, including this:

Where can we still see a glimmer of hope in that terrible genocide in Kosovo? That hope does not lie in a victory for NATO or a victory for the Kosovo Liberation Army, UCK. And certainly not in a victory for Milosevic. (quoted in van Eemeren et al. 2007: 61)

Although van Eemeren et al. reconstruct this dispute in terms of a dyadic exchange, it is also plausible to see it as a clash of at least three contrary positions advocated by different parties: that NATO will bring peace to Kosovo, that UCK will do it, or that Milosevic will. The author of the newspaper commentary is adamantly against Milosevic, and quite doubtful about two other options: NATO and UCK. Perhaps he argues for some kind of a fourth solution, but this is not clear in the quoted fragment. What is clear, though, is that we deal here with a conflict of contrary opinions in a qualitatively multiple dispute.

Still, dialectical accounts seem to fall short of investigating the intricacies of the discussion between two contrary positions. By definition, such positions cannot be both

correct, yet they can be both wrong. And this is exactly because there is a third (or fourth, etc.) position that *is* correct. The problem remains how to introduce this third or fourth position into a dialectical analysis. The most common solution seems to be splitting a multi-party dispute into elementary disputes between two parties. Van Rees, in her response to Bonevac's reservations, identifies this point as the main challenge: "The question then is [...] whether multi-party discussions can be fruitfully viewed as a number of dualistic exchanges" (van Rees 2003: 461). Her answer is yes, and this is exactly what I would like to carefully look at towards the end of this paper.

There have certainly been successful attempts to analytically break a multi-party discussion into a collection of di-logues. Feteris, for instance, analysed court proceedings that involve at least three parties (prosecution, defence, and the judge) as two simultaneous critical discussions: between prosecution and the judge, and defence and the judge (1999: Ch. 11). Yet, criminal trials are a very special institutional activity that exactly allows or even enforces such a division. Moreover, issues in criminal law are delineated by the yes/no question regarding the guilt of the accused. Van Rees, however, seems to make a more general claim:

[In pragma-dialectics] It is fully well recognized that in practice, an arguer may address various opponents with an argument. In fact, the very conception of complex argumentation in pragma-dialectics takes into account the fact that an argument may seek to convince several different opponents at the same time (Snoeck Henkemans 1992). [...]. (van Rees 2003: 461)

The crucial point of this position lies in the definition of "several different opponents." There seem to be two possibilities: Either these multiple antagonists belong to the same dyadic critical discussion, and then the protagonist is facing one collective antagonist. So in fact there is no multiplicity of discussions, and thus no need to split anything. Or, each antagonist belongs to a different discussion and possibly employs different starting points. But then we can hardly talk of the protagonist defending himself with one complex argumentation that requires, for example, consistency or relevance. In pragma-dialectics, similarly to other dialectical approaches, even if the standpoint defended is the same, one does not have to be consistent across two different critical discussions with different antagonists employing different starting points (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2003). Yet, since many political discussions take place in one public sphere, a charge of inconsistency may be justified, at least from the perspective of the participants. Analogically, the problem of relevance arises. Two antagonists may disagree with me for contradictory reasons. Yet, they attack the very same argument of mine. Now, my defence is relevant to the challenge of one of them, but irrelevant to the other's. Hence, depending on which dyad we analyse as part of one critical discussion, the same move is once good and once bad. Again, I do not have to be relevant across discussions, but we have one public discussion here.

I will illustrate these problems by presenting a simplified dialectical exchange in a manner crudely corresponding to the analysis of dialectical profiles. Let us return to the budget debate. In the following, A is a centre-left government, B is a leftist opposition, C a centre-right opposition. In the argumentation stage, B's and C's critical reactions target either the propositional content or the justificatory potential of A's argumentation. The tri-logue goes as follows:

MONOLOGUE, DILOGUE, POLYLOGUE

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| (1) | A. <i>This is a good budget, because it introduces austerity measures</i> | |
| (2) | B. <i>Why would a good budget be characterised by austerity?</i> | C. <i>Does it really introduce austerity?</i> |
| (3) | A. <i>In these hard times, it has to be</i> | A. <i>Yes, there are cuts in public sector and tax-increases</i> |
| (4) | B. <i>OK, but why this kind of austerity?</i> | C. <i>Not enough job cuts</i> |
| (5) | A. <i>It is the best balance between job cuts + tax-increases</i> | |
| (6) | B & C. <i>Is it really the best balance?</i> | |
| (7) | A. <i>We consulted all experts—this is best we can do</i> | |
| (8) | B. <i>No, our experts: Too many cuts, too few increases</i> | C. <i>No, our experts: Too many increases, too few cuts</i> |
| (9) | A. <i>No, just small cuts, and a big enough VAT rise</i>
[or]
(no separate response here) | A. <i>No, 5% salary cuts for all public workers, just a bit more VAT tax</i> |
| (10) | B. <i>We won—“NO” vote</i> | C. <i>OK you won—“ABSTAIN” vote</i> |

Fig. 2. Simplified dialectical exchange

In this example of public deliberation we have two concurrent discussions: between A and B, and between A and C (let us leave the B vs. C debate aside). Initially, B and C examine different elements of A’s argumentation. But turns 5 to 7 are directly relevant to both discussions, and thus the debate merges into one (A is facing one collective antagonist). In 8, however, both opponents attack one and the same argument of A with contradictory counterarguments. To successfully shield from this attack on both fronts in turn 9, A risks inconsistency, and thus the prospect of losing both discussions. Therefore, instead, A strategically chooses to respond only to C; practically speaking, convincing this opponent alone allows A to have the budget approved in the parliament (while B’s support would not suffice). From the perspective of A vs. C discussion, A’s turn 9 is a relevant and also successful response, as C decides to abstain from voting against the budget. But we have an empty slot in A vs. B debate. As analysts, we can treat such an empty slot either as a lack of response, in which case we deal with evasion of burden of proof, and thus a fallacy; or we take the response given C as part of this discussion too. But then B immediately wins the discussion *ex concessis* by saying “you said it yourself!” In any case, the problem arises of how to evaluate A’s argument in turn 9: as reasonable and successful, unreasonable but successful, reasonable but unsuccessful or even unreasonable and unsuccessful? It all seems to depend on which dialectical dyad we take under scrutiny.

Moreover, the splitting into dyads may open the problem of establishing the final outcome of the discussion. In this example, leftists defeated the government, but the government defeated right-wingers, a bigger and strategically more important opponent. However, imagine that in a direct parliamentary exchange between the two opposition parties, the speakers for the right-wing party defeat the leftists. So $B > A > C$ but... $C > B$! Whose arguments are then strongest and whose position should prevail according to the rules of critical testing? Such a problem of establishing outcome is known from sport tournaments, including chess: in a direct encounter a White player may win over Black, Black defeats Yellow, and Yellow defeats White. Even though we know perfectly well who the better player in each game is, we do not know who the best player of the three is.

It remains to be seen how many of these troubles of reconstruction and evaluation can be solved by further advances in a detailed, context-sensitive analysis of argumentative dialogues. In particular the study of strategic manoeuvring in various communicative activity types belonging to the genre of deliberation may prove useful in answering the questions posed above. Pragma-dialectical attentiveness to the various kinds of audiences (multiple and mixed, primary and secondary; see van Eemeren 2010) seems to facilitate this task. One of the crucial complications in such a study of deliberation would be the somewhat paradoxical notion of strategic manoeuvring “between” discussions: I argue against B in a rhetorically sloppy, or perhaps even fallacious way, in order to establish a strategically good position against C. Such manoeuvring may possibly be both reasonable and fallacious, and has a persuasive success as its ultimate goal, so it seems to fall within the basic definition. Yet, it requires the stretching of the notion beyond rhetorical efficiency in dealing with dialectical sub-tasks in one and the same critical discussion.

Such complications of multi-party deliberation may lead to fallacies that are not necessarily committed by a sloppy or sly arguer, but rather by an arguer strategically defending herself in a context quite different from a bi-polar discussion between one proponent and one opponent. And I mean this difference in a way contrary to Walton’s (1998) idea of relative reasonableness being judged differently in different dialogue types. While Walton’s aim is to present different two-party dialogues as having divergent goals, and thus also rules, for me the goal of reasonable argumentation is always the same, yet the path to reach it is different exactly because there are more than two parties. What does such a different path involve? By analogy to games, and indeed any rule-governed behaviour, this difference can be described on the level of rules (how to play the game) and the level of strategies (how to play it well). Starting from the latter: the rather strange idea of strategic manoeuvring between a number of dyadic discussions, can be replaced by a concept of a global strategy in one discussion with many parties. Such a global strategy may involve coalition-building, including shifts of alliances, various kinds of strategic feints, such as simulated attacks and retreats, good cop/bad cop strategies, and so on. All these are relevant points not only by sheer analogy to a multi-party military conflict or some games, but simply because they are genuine problems of everyday public argumentation. Taking into account the polylogical aspect of it can perhaps lead to a more fine-grained account of argumentative strategies in collective deliberation.

In terms of the very rules of the game, an argumentative polylogue should depart from di-logical models of dialectical exchanges in as few points as possible. The basic rules would certainly remain the same, if only because we deal with argumentation, rather than some other activity such as bargaining. Some amendments can possibly concern

different sequential requirements (who is to respond to a challenge, whose criticisms are to be first dealt with), the common starting points (do they have to be established among all, or some of the parties), relevance and consistency of arguments directed to a diverse group of opponents, and, notably, different winning and losing rules (is the winner the one who conquers one of the opponents, or all of them?). If such work indeed proves useful, the polylogical game of argumentation should be very similar to, yet different from a dyadic dialectics. A stimulating analogy may come from a game of chess: there are quite a few models of “chess for three,” in which next to the White and Black, Yellow (or Red) player is situated in the same board.

5. CONCLUSION

The intricacies of multi-party discussions seem to pose intriguing challenges for argumentation theory as much as for the practice of argumentation in the public sphere. The promise of seriously considering argumentative polylogues is to abandon what seems to be a false dilemma: either we have argumentation or a game of chess between two parties, or we are doing something else (deliberating, playing snooker) among many parties. And dodging the dilemma can possibly enhance our understanding and evaluation of multi-party public deliberation.

The peril is to lose the sharpness of analysis. In his terribly succinct but influential paper “Where is argument?”, Brockriede suggested that for an argument to kick off discussants need to have “a choice among two or more competing claims”:

[...] people who argue have some choice but not too much. If they have too little choice, if a belief is entailed by formal logic or required by their status as true believers, they need not argue; but if they have too much choice, if they have to deal with choice overload, then argument may not be very productive. (Brockriede 1975: 181)

This depiction of an initial situation for an argument has been much criticised for vagueness and unclear status (see O’Keefe 1977: 123-125). Yet, on a charitable interpretation Brockriede seems to convey the following message: Neither a monological reasoning for one option, nor a debate over an infinite set of options can lead to a productive, perhaps even reasonable argumentative enterprise. The question remains where to draw the line between one and too many. So far the line has been drawn around two dialectical parties. The task now is to inspect the possibility of adequately reconstructing, or perhaps even modelling, a productive and reasonable argument that involves more than two parties pursuing more than two competing claims.

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Commentary on “MONOLOGUE, DILOGUE OR POLYLOGUE: WHICH MODEL FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION?”

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1. INTRODUCTION

I think the issue that Lewiński addresses in his paper, namely the analysis of the argumentation that occurs in collective deliberations, is well worth attention, and he produces reflections about it that illuminate as well as raise important issues. However, I will focus mainly on points I question or disagree with, which is a very small subset of the points he makes, with a view to advancing the dialectic.

The thought experiment that Lewiński uses initially to motivate the paper ends with the outcome of a government supposedly arguing reasonably to one party and fallaciously to another. “The same arguments in a public debate are both reasonable and fallacious at the same time.” I have worries about this particular example. The argument is fallacious to the left-wing party because, going along with the Pragma-Dialectical theory of fallacy, one or more discussion rule is violated from its point of view, and it is reasonable and not fallacious because none of the discussion rules is violated from the point of view of the right-wing party. However, this assumes that the governing party is engaged in argumentation with both parties at once. It seems as plausible to describe the situation as one in which the governing party has chosen to ignore the left-wing party and engage in argumentation exclusively with the right-wing party. On that interpretation, the left-wing party is left out of the argumentation and is just an onlooker. And in that case there is no apparent paradox of reasonableness combined with fallacy. That said, I think Lewiński’s real quarry is not an explanation of how the same arguments can be both reasonable and fallacious at the same time, but rather how best to model what he in due course defines as “collective deliberation.” If that is so, then he can discard this example without loss to his argument.

2. COLLECTIVE DELIBERATION

Lewiński defines ‘collective deliberation’ as “a multi-party decision-making procedure that necessarily involves public argumentation.”

Notice that usually the word ‘deliberation’ refers to an event: deliberation occurs over time, with a beginning and an end. A *procedure* is a set of organizing norms in accordance with which an event may take place. So it is odd to define deliberation as a procedure. Notice, too, that by making public argumentation a *necessary* ingredient in collective deliberation, Lewiński makes the argumentation–deliberation connection true by definitional fiat. It seems at least conceivable, however, that multi-party decision-making

might occur without any argumentation, so I suggest that this possibility should be left open for empirical determination. In brief, the definition of *collective deliberation* seems to need some tweaking.

Along with Lewiński's definition, there are other, different senses of the term 'deliberation.' For another sense, and arguably the classical one, is "reasoning about what to do," and such reasoning doesn't necessarily involve argumentation in Lewiński's sense, let alone public argumentation. The difference between such deliberation and such argumentation is important. Such deliberation occurs in the absence of, and in advance of, a decision. The decision is not known before the deliberation begins or while the deliberation occurs (even if it is a candidate noted at the outset); the decision is the outcome of the deliberation. Argumentation, according to the Pragma-Dialectical perspective within which Lewiński is working, is the attempt to resolve a difference of opinion by persuading the other party to give up its standpoint in favour of yours, or to give up its doubts about your standpoint. The standpoint of each party is known at the outset of the argumentation if it is well-ordered. In this sense of 'deliberation' just sketched, a deliberating agent need not use or engage in such argumentation at all. So if argumentation is necessarily involved in collective deliberation, that must be deliberation in another sense and of a different kind.

Consider what might be the minimal conditions for public argumentation within collective deliberation. First, the decision or choice is not decided in advance. (When the decision is "a foregone conclusion," we say the deliberation is a sham, bogus, a pretense, a mockery of genuine deliberation.) Second, there is some decision-procedure, such as some kind of vote (requiring either a consensus, a majority of some degree, or a plurality in favour of the decision) that, followed at the end of the deliberation, normally results in a decision. Third, there are qualifications for membership in the public or the collective, with membership entailing a right either to participate in a discussion about what the decision should be or to vote on proposals, or both. Fourth, there are opportunities for members with participatory rights to propose alternatives, to advance reasons in favour of and against proposed alternatives, and to critique the reasons advanced by other members. Fifth, while it is permissible for any member to advocate for a particular decision, it is equally permissible (not ruled out by inconsistency rules) for any member to advance arguments on both sides of any proposed decision. That is, a member may engage in the discussion by considering alternatives, whether or not he or she has made up his or her mind in advance in favour of or against any one of them. Considering arguments both in favour of and against any alternative is a way of testing its merits. Notice that the expression by the same party of arguments on both sides of a choice alternative is different from persuasive argumentation, for there is no attempt to persuade; the aim is rather merely to expose the pros and cons of the alternative for the purpose of furthering the deliberation.

To be sure, public deliberation can occur in contexts in which there are factions—that is, parties which or who are committed in advance to support a given decision. This is the situation in the legislatures of most political entities like countries, states or provinces, cities, and many other kinds of decision-making bodies. Sometimes there is room for amendments to proposals, and so room for persuasive argumentation in support of modifications as long as they are, at the least, consistent with the policy commitment of the sponsoring party. However, much of the decision-making discussion among such factions consists of negotiation argumentation or bargaining, aimed at gaining support for

trades and concessions rather than at winning support for the virtues of one favoured decision. Or, to the extent that persuasive argumentation does occur, the intended audience—the target interlocutor—is some or all of the general public, whose support for the measure in question is sought. So public deliberation in which the participants are committed in advance to some decision or another is different from public deliberation in which at least some parties are using the discussion to help them to make up their minds about which options are available and, of those, about which one seems best.

3. MONOLOGUE

Lewiński's strategy in considering how best to model the argumentation of collective deliberation is to go through what he proposes are the available candidates, which he takes to be a monological (or logical) perspective, a dilogical (or dialectical) perspective and a polylogical perspective.

I think contrasting the so-called logical and the dialectical perspectives makes a category mistake. Logic and dialectic are not competitors, and what's denoted by the term 'argument' as used by logicians (a reason-claim complex) is different from what's denoted by the term 'argumentation' as used by argumentation theorists (a communicative interaction).

"Many logicians," says Lewiński, "may be inclined to analyse argumentation as a form of monologue." But argumentation is by definition the exchange of arguments to some end, and I don't know of anyone who would think of an exchange of arguments as a monologue. Sometimes an arguer makes an extended case (even a book-length case) without interaction with an interlocutor. Such a book, like a speech to a non-interactive audience, actually *is* a monologue. But even so, the arguer, be he or she a writer or a speaker, has some audience in mind (even if, simply, anyone), and is almost certain tacitly or explicitly to acknowledge objections or challenges to his or her views or arguments, known or anticipated, and to respond to them. So the monologue is almost certain to be dialectical.

Johnson's notion of an illative core is taken to typify the non-dialectical logical view.¹ The illative core of an argument is the "this, therefore that" move. But any argument has an illative core in this sense. This is not due to a "monological" approach or interpretation or model; it is due to the nature of argument. If there is no "therefore" move, explicit or implicit, there is no argument and so no argumentation. So interest in what kinds of "this, therefore that" moves are legitimate and what kind are not (which is one topic of logic) is of potential interest to the argumentation theorist who regards argumentation as dialectical.

What is right-minded about Lewiński's case against logicians and the phantom "monological" perspective is that some philosophers used to think that the study of the inferential link in arguments is all there is to the study of arguments and some to hold that training in formal deductive logic is sufficient to understand the logic of arguments. The problem, though, lies not in trying to analyze or model argumentation as non-dialectical; it lies in ignoring argumentation.

¹ Johnson borrowed the term from Blair (1995).

4. DILOGUE

Turning to the dilogical perspective, Lewiński attacks definitions of the word ‘dialogue’ by Blair, Walton and Johnson for failing to accommodate the fact that argumentation can involve more than two parties. He says, “What is noticeable in such definitions is that the possibility of having more than two discussants is mentioned somewhat timidly and more often than not parenthetically,”² and he calls this a “reduction of argumentative interactions to basically dyadic exchanges.” But a definition of the *word* ‘dialogue’ does not reduce argumentative *interactions* to two-party exchanges; moreover, the accusation assumes that every dialogue is an *argumentative* interaction, which is simply false, for not all dialogues are argumentative in nature.

Lewiński quotes Blair on the limits of the dialogue model of argument with qualified approval. I would like to note a passage that he did not quote:

It will never happen, but it would be nice if the term ‘dialectical’ were reserved for the properties of all arguments related to their involving doubts or disagreements with at least two sides, and the term ‘dialogical’ were reserved for those belonging exclusively to turn-taking verbal exchanges. (1998: 338)

This is a view I continue to hold. It is one thing to model all argumentation as if it consisted of dialogues (which I think is false), and quite another to hold that all argumentation is dialectical (which I think is true). Dialogue (typically) involves two parties, and it gets cumbersome if the numbers increase very much beyond two; dialectic can involve any number of parties, although always some pair of three possible points of view: pro-*p*, contra-*p* and undecided (with the “contra-*p*” viewpoint understood to be either just the contradictory of *p* or else some contrary of *p*).

5. POLYLOGUE

Turning to the polylogical perspective, in my opinion it would help to have historical, rather than invented, examples. For instance, absent actual examples to the contrary, the outside observer gets the impression that what happens in the political arena is that parties negotiate. They seek some compromise position. They do so by trading concessions. In the case of minority governments (which entail three or more parties), the government must give up enough to one or more of the other parties to win its or their support, on pain of being defeated. The government doesn’t appear to persuade by arguments. It wins support by (promised) actions and policies that are concessions to the other party’s (or parties’) platforms. Agreement is reached if (and only if) each side perceives that it has more to gain by compromising than not or by forcing an election. The governing party can negotiate with the two or more other parties separately, and act on the best deal it can make, or it can negotiate with two or more other parties together.

In Canada, the recent minority federal government often won the support of at least two of the three opposition parties by including in each Bill enough of the components that each party preferred so that, although each party liked and disliked different

² By the way, after defining ‘dialogue’ as “a conversation carried on between two or more persons,” the *Oxford English Dictionary* adds the *parenthetical comment*, “(The tendency is to confine it to two persons, perhaps through associating *dia-* with *di-*;....).”

components of the Bill, each got enough of what it liked, so that, given a strong disinclination to defeat the government and force an election, the government got those parties' support on that Bill. One could model this situation as the government arguing separately with each of the two parties whose approval it calculated it could get and ignoring the third party. In each case the government argued that the party preferred the parts of the Bill it liked plus not forcing an election, to preventing the parts it disliked plus forcing an election. We get a diagram like Lewiński's:

Government Bill is X (Key measures are ABCD)

	Oppn Party1	Government	Oppn Party2
1		+X	
2	?X		?X
3		ABCD, so +X	
4	~CD		~AC
5		(+AB+no election) > ~CD+election	(+BD+no election) > ~AC+election
6	+X		+X

Fig. 1. Example of a Dialogue

However, almost certainly the government entered into discussions with the two opposition parties first, and asked questions like, “Here’s what we are proposing (BCEF). Will you support it?” And the parties said things like, “We can only support it if you add A” or “We can only support it if you take out E.” And the government then responded with comments like, “We’ll give you part of A and water E down, how about that?” And so on back and forth until provisions ABCD constituted the bill. That is, arguments of the sort modeled above almost certainly would be the *result* of negotiations, not arguments that persuaded the parties *de novo*.

Contexts where one may expect polylogical argumentation to occur might include the following: the annual meeting of a law-firm’s partners in which it is decided how to distribute the firm’s profits for the year; a democratically-run university department meeting to discuss curriculum reform; a majority-ruled university academic senate with authority over curriculum and other academic matters such as promotion and tenure regulations; a family trying to make a collective decision about something, say, how to spend a vacation together.

In the law firm and university situations there will be much argument. Individuals will state and defend their preferences, seeking to persuade some or all members of the group to agree. If the matter is in the end decided by a vote, as is often the case, people’s preferences will be shaped in part by how well they are persuaded by the arguments advanced, including the critiques made against those arguments and the rejoinders to them, as well as, no doubt, by a sharp eye to their own interests. Arguments may thus be addressed to all the members of the group, or to the members of some subset of the

group. The argument might be addressed to some individual or sub-group the speaker deems influential. The speaker may treat whichever audience he or she is addressing as a collective person, possessing all the commitments and other attitudes that are distributed through that group which he or she deems pertinent to the argument. Alternatively, the speaker can address different arguments to different sub-groups, so long as these arguments are consistent. Inconsistent arguments to different sub-groups would be signs of bad faith. Arguments can turn out to have unexpected salience, or to meet unexpected resistance. Addressed to the group as a whole, they might resonate only with a subset, and even be greeted with hostility by another subset—depending on how well the speaker reads the audience and frames the argument. (Some of the lines of argument are likely to be strategic, aimed at winning enough votes to form a majority, rather than aimed at building a consensus.)

But another kind of decision-making process is agreement by consensus. This was the method reportedly used by some North American aboriginal tribes and it might be the model for family deliberation. Each person has a right to speak to the issue and a decision is made only when everyone is prepared to accept it and be bound by it. A speaker might use arguments addressed to individuals, to sub-groups or to the entire audience, even though the entire audience are always the auditors of the argumentation. The purpose of addressing an individual or sub-group might be to try to win over a particularly influential party, or it might be to discredit or refute a particularly influential party in the eyes of the larger group. Again, consistency is a constraint.

Who it is that the speaker addresses, and which arguments are used, will partly be a function of the decision-making procedure. If the matter is decided by majority vote, the strategy might be different from what it would be if the matter were decided by consensus. Also, speakers can vary in how well they know their audience. Thus speakers sometimes push on open doors, or vainly try to open doors fastened shut.

Also, an intervention during one or another of such deliberative discussions can hang together as a unit, even though it contains several lines of argument, and even though it has arguments aimed at different constituencies among the members of the audience. For instance, a proposal might be defended on grounds that give something to each interested party and also call for sacrifices of interests by all, and so be admired by all for its even-handed distribution of benefits and burdens. This property would not be apparent if each individual line of argument were analyzed separately. There would have to be a sort of mega-profile envisaged, if the argumentation were to be analyzed as a dialogue profile.

Nothing Lewiński says is inconsistent with these suggestions, I think, but it does seem to me that his theorizing, even its normative aspects, will become more plausible and useful if it is based on and grounded in case studies.

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