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# Winning and Losing for Arguers

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# Winning and Losing for Arguers

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**ABSTRACT:** What roles do “winning” and “losing” have to play in argumentative discussions? We say that someone has “won” a discussion or debate, but also an emphasis on “winning” is often rejected. The question is: can these concepts be so interpreted that justice is done to these antagonistic views? Starting from Aristotelian ideas, the paper purports to establish that the views mentioned above can indeed be reconciled.

**KEYWORDS:** Aristotle, cooperative argumentation, creative argument, formal dialectic, Overarching Principle, pragma-dialectics, senses of winning, Topics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When discussing argumentation, the terms ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ quite often make their appearance. This holds both for argumentative practice (real life debates and argumentative discussions) and for theory (normative models of argumentative discussions). In practice—as no one will be surprised to hear—these predicates are not always used in the same way, it being a moot question which role they ought to play. For instance, suppose you read a headline announcing that Obama won a certain election debate. You may then wonder what, exactly, is meant by ‘winning’ and whether this attribution is justified. As to theory: in some normative models there is a larger or smaller role for winning and losing, but there are also theoretical discussions in which this role is dismissed, at least for the best kinds of argumentation. The question is: can the concepts of winning and losing be given a precise content in a way such that justice is done to these antagonistic views about their role in argumentation?

To gain a clear understanding of this matter we shall first have a closer look at the ordinary sense of the terms ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ and especially at their sense in connection with debate and discussion (Section 2). Next we shall consider some points of view about ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ that occur within the theory of argumentation. These points of view may be either dismissive (Section 3) or rather more positive (Section 4) as in the cases of ancient dialectic as presented by Aristotle (1976) in *Topics* 8 (Section 4.1), of formal dialectic (Section 4.2), and of pragma-dialectics (Section 4.3). At the end the results will be summarized (Section 5).

## 2. THE CONCEPTS OF WINNING AND LOSING

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1989) lists three principal senses (or groups of senses) for 'win' as a verb:

- 1 [...] be victorious in (a battle, contest, race, etc); do best [...]
- 2 [...] obtain or achieve sth as the result of a bet, competition, race, etc [...]
- 3 (a) [...] obtain or reach (sth), esp. as a result of hard work or perseverance [...] (b) [...] cause (sb) to obtain or achieve sth [...]

At present, we are mainly concerned with sense 1 (to be victorious). But we should keep in mind that 'winning' can also refer to obtaining some benefits (senses 2 and 3). We shall refer to the first sense as the victory sense of 'winning,' and to the other two as the benefit sense. A glance at the entry for 'lose' gives us, besides a number of other senses, the opposites of these senses of 'winning':

- 6 (a) [...] be defeated; fail to win (a contest, a lawsuit, an argument, etc) [...] [relates to the victory sense of 'winning'] (b) [...] have sth taken away (by sth/sb) < [relates to the benefit sense]

So we may focus on 'winning,' in particular on 'winning' in the victory sense. In definition 1 winning is defined in terms of 'victorious.' Further investigation using the dictionary does not seem to yield much: victorious is defined as 'having gained a victory; triumphant'; here, gaining is defined as winning (in sense 2, the benefit sense), which is again defined in terms of achieving, whereas a victory is defined as a 'success in a war, contest, game, etc'; a success is defined as an 'achievement of an desired end ...'; an achievement is defined as an 'action of achieving'; so it all turns on the definition of 'achieving,' but achieving brings us back again to gaining. Inevitably, we are getting into circles. Yet, consulting the dictionary is useful, for one thing because the investigation of the different senses of 'winning' shows us that the victory sense of 'winning' involves the benefit sense. Altogether, the following characteristics of the victory sense can be gleaned from the dictionary:

1. Winning occurs in a context of struggle (*S*), or at least competition.
2. Hence, there must be an adversary ('other party') (*A*).
3. Winning refers to the result or outcome of the struggle.
4. The outcome is positive for the winner (*W*) and negative for the adversary.
5. There is something at stake: a benefit (*B*) obtained by the winner.

In general, a situation of winning can be described by substituting appropriate terms for the variables in the sentence form:

*W* defeats *A* in *S* and thus obtains *B*.

Here *W* stands for the winner (or the winning party), *A* for the adversary, *S* for a struggle of some kind, whereas *B* stands for what is at stake in the struggle (the benefit). Examples are obtained by substituting various competitive activities for

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S, which activities often go with special terms for denoting the adversary or the benefit (Table 1).

Struggle	Adversary	Benefit
war	enemy	territory/raw materials/empire
lawsuit	prosecution/defence	acquittal/conviction
match	rival	medal/championship
game of chance	antagonist	the pool
bet	bookie	the stakes
lottery	competitor	prize
debate	opponent	acknowledged superiority
discussion	interlocutor/opponent	being judged right

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*Table 1: Activities involving winning and losing*

Now, one may wonder whether reference to ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ in the cases of debates and discussions is as customary as in the other cases of competitive activities. Could such reference in the cases of debates and discussions not rather rest on a forced comparison with a match or even a war? For debates, however, one may point out that it is not really unusual to speak of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’; but, then, if one refers to a debate, what does one mean by these terms?

After a Dutch election debate on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, between Jan Peter Balkenende (Prime Minister and leader of the Christian Democratic Party) and Wouter Bos (leader of the oppositional Social Democratic Party), one broadcasting company brought the news on the internet with the headline: “Bos beats Balkenende in debate” (NOS Nieuws 2006).<sup>1</sup> Another broadcasting company displayed the headline: “Viewers: Bos beats Balkenende in debate” (RTLnieuws 2006). In both cases one should read more in order to grasp the meaning of ‘beating,’ which does correspond to the victory sense of ‘winning.’ In the first case, we get the most detailed explanation:

According to 50 percent of the viewers, Mr Bos, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, is the winner of the telecast debate on RTL4, 46 percent thought that his rival, Mr Balkenende (Christian Democratic Party), better came into his own. This is shown by a poll carried out by TNS/Nipo canvassing 1342 people.

Bos got a 7.2 and Balkenende a 6.9.<sup>2</sup> Among people that before the debate were intending to vote for the Socialist Party, now 19 percent declares to go for the Social Democratic Party.

The other company adds that the sample interviewed in the poll was a representative one and that ‘exactly 50 percent of the viewers think that Mr. Bos was the better one in selling his arguments.’

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<sup>1</sup> Dutch texts from the internet have all been translated by the present author.

<sup>2</sup> These marks are given on a scale with 1 as a the worst and 10 as the best score, where every mark below 5.5 equals an F, 6 equals a C minus, and every mark above 8 stands for a kind of A. So, roughly, Bos had a B minus and Balkenende a C plus .

The definition of ‘winning’ applied in such polls seems to imply that you are the winner of a debate as soon as more canvassed people declare you to be the winner than there are canvassed people for any of the other debaters. But this threatens to boil down to the stipulation that you are the winner as soon as people think you are the winner, and hence as soon as people think that people think you are the winner, and hence as soon as people think that people think that people think you are the winner, and so on. To escape from this regress, we must assume that the canvassed people understand ‘winning’ in a sense different than that adopted by the canvassers. The latter may think and declare that someone has won if he has the greatest number on his side. But the people canvassed may be supposed to wield different criteria. The question is what the viewers’ criteria amount to.

Notably, it does not seem to be a matter of whether the viewers think that Mr Bos, with respect to certain issues, put forward the best arguments, or maybe even must be judged right. Obviously, the concern here is not primarily to evaluate the discussions, which are implicit in the debate, between either debater and the viewers. Rather, what is at issue is the rhetorical evaluation of each debater’s performance, though this may involve also the quality of the arguments.

But, granted that winning a debate is a matter of rhetorical evaluation, even so we do not yet dispose of a definite concept of ‘winning a debate.’ After all, different companies and juries may evaluate the same debate, each of them using somewhat different criteria and thus reaching diverging conclusions. Thus, FOK!frontpage (2006, “Bos wins debate narrowly”) notes that the Balkenende–Bos debate was also judged by a jury in the studio. This jury “had declared Balkenende the winner because he, globally, made a more confident impression. Bos seemed to be stressed, but according to Henkjan Smits—a body language expert—he had *‘his moments.’* But then, Bos frequently interrupted the leader of the Christian Democratic Party and would be a *‘control freak.’*”

We must conclude that in ordinary language there is no unambiguous notion of winning a debate. Rather, such a verdict will always be relative to a specific group of evaluators. In this ‘winning a debate’ differs from winning a lawsuit or a match.

How about winning a discussion? The expression ‘winning the discussion’ is rather less common than ‘winning the debate.’ Users of language differ about whether the concepts of winning and losing apply to discussions. This is shown by the following discussion (“discushion<sup>3</sup> and linguistic blunders”) on forum.fok.nl (2005):

*Appelboom* (11/24, 2005, 9:15 pm): Hi,

It must be familiar, a substantial discussion. Heavily winning [...] and all at once you say for instance “onliest” or “as” instead of “than.”

I once read an article that expounded some research that someone who in discussion corrects<sup>3</sup> the other on a technical point of language has lost the discussion by definition. [...]

*thabit* (11/24, 2005, 9:20 pm): That doesn’t seem to make sense. Rather one who commits linguistic blunders shows himself to be incapable of formulating his arguments well and therefore has lost the discussion by definition.

*Gajus* (11/26, 2005, 4:02 am): Winning or losing a discussion? As if there is any meaningful analogy with a contest.

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<sup>3</sup> Linguistic blunders in the Dutch are translated into similar blunders.

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Surely, two people are opposed to each other, both exchange arguments, but to claim that the arguments of one are “better” than those of the other and that, therefore, the first has defeated the other [...] ? Would there be a criterion to quantify arguments?

A *good* discussion results in an improvement of knowledge for all concerned. In that sense, there are just ‘winners.’

*Automatic Rock* (11/26, 2005, 9:07 am): That’s for sure. But if you can convince the other, than you may for my part say to have won the discussion.

This example exhibits three views on argumentative discussion: Both Appelboom and thabit see discussion as a competitive activity to which the concepts of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ do apply (even though they disagree about the role of linguistic blunders); Gajus holds that these concepts do not apply and sees discussion as an activity in which both participants exchange arguments and cooperate to improve their knowledge; Automatic Rock adopts a middle course.

### 3. WINNING AND LOSING: CONTRA

The point of view exemplified by Gajus, who is opposed to a role for winning and losing in argumentative discussions, is sometimes presented as urging that good discussions yield a win-win situation. Upon hearing the term win-win situation some people, however, raise their eyebrows. That may be because the term conflicts with the core of the victory sense of winning, according to which winning by one implies losing by the other. Clearly, the word ‘win’ should in this case be understood to have the benefit sense: both parties obtain or achieve some advantage. But then the opposition between a win-win situation and a win-loss situation vanishes because in the latter term the word ‘win’ does have the victory sense. Consequently, a situation can very well be both a win-win situation and a win-loss situation.

In argumentation theory and informal logic, similar points of view as those put forward by Gajus and his interlocutors are expressed by distinguishing various kinds of arguing with a predilection for one of them. Thus Michael Gilbert, in his *How to Win an Argument*, distinguishes ‘creative argument’ from ‘attached argument’ with a clear preference for the former:

An argument is *creative* when the arguers are willing to explore a position in order to determine its value, when you and your partner are willing to alter or reconsider a position if strong arguments are brought against it. An *attached argument* is just the opposite: You and your partner have a strong commitment to a position, an emotional or psychological stake in seeing one conclusion triumph. [...] In a creative argument both parties are more interested in finding the truth or solving the problem than in being right. (Gilbert 1995, p. 12)

According to Gilbert “No one really loses a creative argument” (1995, p. 24); at first sight, a surprising statement in a book entitled *How to Win an Argument*: how is one to win an argumentative discussion if no one ever loses? Or can only *attached arguments* be won? Light may be cast on the matter if we take into account the different senses of ‘winning’ (and the corresponding ‘losing’). Gilbert writes:

In a creative argument, neither position is a clear victor. Yet the investigation, the examination of the issues and problems, provides insights and information about the position. In a creative encounter you always come out ahead—one very important kind of winning. (Gilbert 1995, p. 24)

It seems that, actually one could win a *creative argument* (in the victory sense) making the other lose—be it not as a “clear victor”—, but more important is that both parties win in the sense that they obtain a benefit from the discussion. In the benefit sense of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ there are no losers in a *creative argument*. *How to Win an Argument* is a practically-oriented book; in his later more theoretical work *Coalescent Argumentation*, Gilbert writes:

Classically and usually, the aim of an argument has been to bring an opposer around to the point of view the proponent is defending. When the opponent abandons his point of view and accepts the proponent’s claim into his commitment set, then the argument has been won by the proponent. This kind of winning does not occur frequently. More often outcomes include a negotiated agreement, a compromise, or a realization that further dispute is futile. In pragma-dialectic terms, sometimes opposers “settle,” as opposed to “resolve,” a dispute. (Gilbert 1997, p. 103)

Gilbert does not deny that the notion of winning makes sense when applied to argumentative discussion, but refrains from giving it prominence. His position resembles in this respect that of Automatic Rock in the example given above.

An even more forceful rejection of the idea that winning and losing deserve a prominent position in the theory of argumentation can be found in *Cooperative Argumentation* by Josina Makau and Debian Marty, who champion *cooperative argumentation* against *competitive argumentation*:

The approach to disagreement developed in this book is *a process of reasoned interaction intended to help participants and audiences make the best assessments or the best decisions in any given situation*. (Makau and Marty 2001, p. 87)

Makau and Marty assess the role of winning negatively:

[...] ideological commitments to competitiveness, individualism, and winning also compromise cooperative argumentation and interdependent decision making. We have had little difficulty seeing how, when participants are motivated primarily by the desire to win or to further only their own immediate self interests, realization of a deliberative community is nearly impossible. (Makau and Marty 2001, p. 101).

In the next section, we shall see that among dialecticians there is a more positive attitude towards winning and losing.

#### 4. WINNING AND LOSING: PRO

In this section we shall investigate the role of winning and losing in some kinds of dialectic. After having discussed Aristotle, we shall move on to discuss contemporary formal dialectic, and finally pragma-dialectics from this angle.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The subject of this section will be treated somewhat more extensively in Krabbe (2009?).

4.1 Aristotle in *Topics* 8

In the eighth book of the *Topics* Aristotle discusses dialectical procedure. The book is somewhat puzzling, as the text seems continually to shift between cooperation-oriented and competition-oriented conceptions of discussion. A great difficulty for the contemporary reader is that Aristotle discusses a practice of discussion that he supposes to be familiar to his audience, whereas in our times we do not meet with discussions of that kind in daily life. Though Aristotle nowhere gives us a list of rules of discussion, the essentials of the procedure have been reconstructed. There are two roles: that of the Questioner and that of the Answerer. The Questioner proposes a problem for discussion (e.g., “Is virtue teachable, or not?”); the Answerer selects a thesis (an answer to the problem). The contradictory of his thesis is sometimes called “the Questioner’s thesis”; it is the conclusion the Questioner is to deduce. In order to do so, the Questioner asks the Answerer to grant certain premises. It is not upon the Answerer to argue for his thesis; only the Questioner is to defend his thesis by argument. In case the Questioner succeeds to do so, the Answerer has been refuted. Let this (oversimplified<sup>5</sup>) sketch of the procedure suffice.

On the face of it, competition seems prominent in this kind of discussion. The role of winning and losing is notable in this context. When the Answerer is refuted, one may say that he has lost and that the Questioner has won; when the Questioner does not succeed to accomplish a refutation, it will be the other way round. This impression gets confirmation from Aristotle’s discussion of concealment (*krupsis*), i.e. tactics for “concealing the conclusion” that can be deployed to keep the Answerer ignorant about the way the Questioner intends to go about reaching his conclusion. Such tactics would be inappropriate if cooperation were the whole story. However, according to Aristotle, though techniques for concealing the conclusion serve contentious (eristic, competitive) goals, all the same these should be used because in argumentative discussion one is always addressing the other. (*Topics* 8.1, 155b26-28). Examples of such tactics are: asking alternately for premises belonging to different parts of the argument to be constructed in order to avoid that premises one wants to link will at an early stage reveal their conclusion; raising, once in a while, objections against oneself to quench suspicion; prolonging one’s argument and inserting irrelevant points.

Notwithstanding these contentious features, Aristotle’s first concern remains a cooperation-oriented kind of discussion that serves the goals of exercise, of examining one’s interlocutor (peirastic), and of inquiry (*Topics* 8.5, 159a25-28). Cooperation is pursued to such an extent that the Answerer is even required to contribute to the construction of a good argument, and thus to his own refutation, if such refutation by good argument is feasible. A good argument, according to Aristotle, starts from premises that are more acceptable and more familiar than its conclusion. Marta Włodarczyk (2000, p. 156) has dubbed this principle the *Overarching Principle* (OP). A good Questioner should, therefore, ask the Answerer to grant premises that are more acceptable and more

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<sup>5</sup> The sketch leaves out induction, analogies, preliminary deductions, and objections.



familiar that the conclusion he is to deduce from them. But, according to the rules in *Topics* 8.5, not only the Questioner, but also the Answerer, is to guard the quality of the argument in this respect: if the Questioner were to ask for a premise that does not fulfill the requirements of the OP, the Answerer should not concede it. On the other hand, the Answerer should concede premises that fulfill these requirements. According to Aristotle, Questioner and Answerer have a common task (*koinon ergon*).

This is not to say that cooperation between the two parties is always perfect. The Answerer can display obstructive ('peevish') behaviour and refuse to concede necessary premises (*Topics* 8.11, 161a17-24). The Questioner, too, may misbehave by questioning his interlocutor in a contentious manner (*Topics* 8.11, 161a37-161b5). In such cases, there should be a way to resist one's opponent by an equally contentious reaction, so that ultimately competitiveness and winning and losing appear to be indispensable ingredients of this type of discussion.

Besides this type of dialectic (dialectic discussions in the narrow sense), which is primarily cooperation-oriented but includes contentious elements, Aristotle recognizes two other types of dialectic: the contentious (eristic) discussion, which really is all about winning and losing, and the didactic (demonstrative) discussion, in which winning and losing may have no role to play. In dialectic discussions in the narrow sense, contentious means are supposedly deployed, ultimately, to further the execution of the common task. This holds as well for winning and losing themselves.<sup>6</sup> As Włodarczyk writes:

It seems [...] that the desire to win, as long as it is subordinated to the desire to accomplish the common task, would not hinder good dialectic. Moreover, assuming the dialecticians pursue the common task, the desire to win could be seen as a stimulus for pursuing it better than the opponent and hence for achieving the best argument for a given conclusion. (Włodarczyk 2000, p. 170, note 41)

#### 4.2. Formal dialectic

The term "formal dialectic" was introduced by Charles Hamblin (1970), but the first formal dialectic systems were authored by Paul Lorenzen (starting, in 1958, with the lecture *Logik und Agon*, published in 1960). These systems belong to formal logic, but start from a dialectical situation, instead of being presented in a semantic or inferential framework. There are two roles: that of the Proponent and that of the Opponent, which roles roughly correspond with those of Questioner and Answerer, respectively, in ancient dialectic. The Proponent has a thesis to defend; the Opponent attacks this thesis (she challenges the Proponent), but has herself no thesis to defend. Usually, however, the Opponent puts forward a number of concessions—either at the start of the discussion or in reply to questioning by the Proponent; these may be used by the Proponent to defend his thesis. Dialogical logic systems (dialogue games) are defined by stipulating rules that precisely determine the options for either participant. On the basis of such systems, one may provide dialectical definitions for the concept of validity in terms of winning strategies, hence ultimately in terms of winning and losing. Since these dialogue games are based on a situation with two parties, a difference of opinion, and rules of discussion

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<sup>6</sup> Thus winning and losing can be seen as contributing to the "positive power of controversy" (Govier 1999, Ch. 14).

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that should, ideally, lead to a resolution, Lorenzen thus contributed to bridging the gap between logic and theory of argumentation.

It may be clear that winning and losing are essential for dialogue logic; but without giving these games a contentious character. In fact, both participants do also have the common task to resolve their difference of opinion and are for that reason bound to the rules of the game. The same holds for the further argumentation-theoretic elaboration and justification of the rules of dialogue logic attempted, about thirty years ago, by Else Barth and the present author (Barth and Krabbe 1982, Ch. 3 and 4). That there should be opportunities for winning and losing was evident to us:

Why should the debaters enter into a discussion at all? There must be some possible—spiritual, if not material—immediate results, desired by the debater in question. The following rules answer this question:

- FD W1 If, in a certain chain of arguments [= a chronological sequence of moves, related among themselves, starting with an attack on the Proponent's thesis, without any retractions or replacements of moves by other moves], one party has
- (1) lost its rights in that chain of arguments or
  - (2) exhausted its rights in that chain of arguments, then this party shall express that the other party has *won* (with respect to) that chain of arguments by *rational* means.
- FD W2 If and only if one party has won a certain chain of arguments by rational means, then this party *may* express that the other party has “lost (with respect to) that chain of arguments” provided it adds: “My adversary in this discussion has used *rational* arguments and so was rational with respect to *every* stage [= move] of the discussion (in this chain of arguments).” (Barth and Krabbe 1982, p. 71)

These are rules pertaining to the direct consequences of formally winning or losing a chain of arguments (there are corresponding rules for winning or losing the discussion as a whole; a discussion will usually comprise a number of chains of arguments). One may not be impressed by the benefits of winning or the harms of losing: if you win the other is to admit that you have won, and you may yourself declare that you have won (recognizing that your interlocutor's behaviour in discussion has been rational); if you lose you must admit to have lost and your opponent is entitled to declare to have won (recognizing that your behaviour in discussion has been rational). Yet these benefits and harms are not insignificant for those who value reasonable discussion. Therefore, these rules (or variants of these rules) can make the use of the instrument of reasonable discussion for resolving differences of opinion more attractive for potential discussants, who, if no such victories were in sight, perhaps would refrain from discussing these differences altogether.

Not all formal dialectic systems feature winning and losing, In Hamblin (1970) these notions are absent. Consequently, Hamblin systems are not suitable as a basis for definitions of validity by means of the concept of winning strategy. That is a pity for logic, but does not impair the utility of Hamblin systems for the study of certain aspects of argumentation.

### 4.3. *Pragma-dialectics*

Nowadays we have two versions of pragma-dialectics: the original standard version (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 1992, 2004) and the more recent extended or integrated

version (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 1999, 2002).<sup>7</sup> Let us first have a look at the standard version. In critical discussion, which is the normative model of pragma-dialectics, the primary goal is to achieve a resolution of the difference of opinion. A resolution is not achieved by getting a simple agreement of opinions, let alone by striking a deal, or agreeing to disagree on certain points:

A difference of opinion is only resolved if a joint conclusion is reached on the acceptability of the standpoints at issue on the basis of a regulated and unimpaired exchange of arguments and criticism. (van Eemeren en Grootendorst 2004, p. 58)

Just as in formal dialectic, there are two parties or roles: Protagonist and Antagonist. These have each their specific task—the Protagonist as defender of a standpoint, the Antagonist as a critic—, but also a common task: the resolution of the difference of opinion. Just as little as this is the case for Aristotle’s dialectic, does this focus on a common task exclude that there is also a role to play for competition and for winning and losing. It may be the case that pragma-dialecticians do not speak of winning and losing, but they do speak of a difference having “been resolved in favor of the protagonist” (when the outcome is that the standpoint is acceptable and the Antagonist has to withdraw his doubt) or “in favor of the antagonist” (when the outcome is that the standpoint of the Protagonist must be withdrawn) (van Eemeren en Grootendorst 2004, p. 61-62). Actually, the notion of a resolution of a difference of opinion in someone’s favor amounts to the same as what formal dialecticians mean by winning a discussion. In both cases, what is involved is a benefit awarded according to the rules, without excluding that someone who has to withdraw his standpoint or his doubt (because he loses) may in some way or other also obtain a benefit.

The extended version even more stresses the notion that a resolution of a difference of opinion can be in someone’s favour. In fact, this version of the theory explicitly takes into account the consequences of the fact that each participant desires to have a resolution in his favour, that is to say: to win the discussion. It is this desire, in combination with the willingness to abide—in principle—by the rules of discussion, that leads to strategic manoeuvring. Winning and losing are therefore central notions of the extended theory

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tried to get some hold on the use and the significance of the notions of winning and losing, both in argumentative practice and in the theory of argumentation. It was found that it is important to distinguish two senses of ‘winning’ (and of its opposite ‘losing’): the victory sense and the benefit sense. Using this distinction, it turned out to be possible to defuse the apparent incompatibility between a win-win situation and a win-loss situation.

As to the *practice* of argumentation, the use of ‘winning’ when referring to debates was found to be rather slippery. To fathom the meaning of ‘winning’ one has to observe carefully on what survey or jury report the use of the term was based, and how

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<sup>7</sup> The newer version integrates rhetorical viewpoints into pragma-dialectics. Its central notion is that of strategic maneuvering to realize both dialectical and rhetorical goals.

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this survey or report came into being. The usage of the term ‘winning’ in connection with discussions may be unobjectionable (see Automatic Rock), but one should realize that often people are indisposed to accept such usage, so that it might be advisable to look for other terms.

As to the *theory* of argumentation, I would say that the use of ‘winning’ is unproblematic. The term is not so martial that it implies the “Argument is war”-metaphor (Cohen 1995); rather, one would think of a contest or a game. That only one of the parties can win in the victory sense of ‘winning’ does, also where theory is concerned, not exclude that both parties may win in the benefit sense. The term can, therefore, equally be applied to those types of discussion that are cooperation-oriented.<sup>8</sup> A necessary condition would be that, for each use, it be precisely stipulated what ‘winning’ amounts to.

An advantage of having opportunities for winning (as well as other contentious aspects) in normative models of discussion would be that this enhances the attractiveness of using discussion instead of other kinds of struggle. If one omits every reference to struggle or competition from the model, then someone who wants to defend some point of view will not easily be enticed to use that model as a guideline for discussion.

Another advantage was mentioned above in the quotation from Włodarczyk:

[...] assuming the dialecticians pursue the common task, the desire to win could be seen as a stimulus for pursuing it better than the opponent and hence for achieving the best argument for a given conclusion. (Włodarczyk 2000, p. 170, Noot 41)

[Link to commentary](#)

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<sup>8</sup> This conclusion has been reformulated in the “Reply to my Commentator.”

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