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1. ON SECTIONS 2 AND 3

Lewiński ends by talking about wielding Occam's razor one step beyond the second level, so that we have only logic, dialectic and polylectic, and not an infinite series covering dialogue, trilogue, etc. But the razor can be wielded one level sooner, I think, at least on the basis of this paper.

In section 2, Lewiński defines a polylogue as a discourse between many people. "Many" is implicitly defined as three or more, by contrast with dialogue. The speakers involved are assumed to hold their own standpoint. (Note that if only two standpoints are available, the standpoints of three or more speakers — in a polylogue — must collapse to these two. Since Lewiński will later focus on standpoints rather than speakers, he might want to say that a polylogue is a discourse with three or more standpoints, rather than three or more speakers.)

Are there any polylectical fallacies, that is, fallacies which "are discovered and better described" (§5) in a polylectic?

In §3.3, Lewiński quotes Sylvan and uses this quote to claim that a polylectic — an account of the argumentation of polylogue — is wider than and encompasses dialectic — an account of the argumentation of dialogue.

But the quote offered does not quite say this; rather it says that Sylvan prefers the word 'polylogue' to 'dialogue' for discourse between any plural number of speakers and asserts that a polylogue system contains all logics. A dialogue is a polylogue, in this sense.

And indeed, the only claim Lewiński takes away from this section is that different *procedural* rules are needed for polylogues.

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

2. FALSE DILEMMA

The first fallacy considered is false dilemma.

In §4.1.1 Lewiński gives his 'three candidates' example and he claims that the first two candidates (taken as a pair, without reference to the third candidate)

"seem to be ensnared in a false dilemma", because they share the belief that if one is right, the other is wrong.

Note that this is not the defining belief of a false dilemma. A false dilemma essentially involves use of a false disjunction, and concludes from the falsity of one option that the remaining option is correct. The belief that "if I am right, you are wrong" is in fact entirely correct, under the assumption that the positions are exclusive. And this is so whether there are two possible options or twenty. If "It is raining." is true, then "It is sunny." and "It is snowing." are both false. It is exhaustivity of the two options that is the worrying assumption.

How, then, might false dilemma require a distinctly polylectical (in the sense of 'the logic of three or more speakers') diagnosis?

Arguments employing an 'incomplete' (§4.1.2) disjunction are valid, and thus logic cannot diagnose them. Instances of false dilemma are fallacious because they artificially restrict the options available; they would be corrected by expansion into the additional standpoints, such as the third candidate's position. Van Eemeren & Grootendorst's diagnosis is cited as glossing over other options.

Lewiński in §4.1.3 convicts the dialogical diagnosis of working *necessarily* with only two standpoints; the two speakers is a dialogue maintain at most two standpoints, even when there are multiple standpoints possible. This is the key claim of the paper.

Lewiński doesn't use the word "necessarily", but I think it is implied by the phrase "amounts to more than a duality" and more importantly by the structure of his argument: if there is to be a difference between dialogic and polylectic, dialogic will have to be incomplete or insufficient in some way, and this is the feature of dialectic that he points to in his paper.

Lewiński goes on to assert that while a dialogue concerns a yes/no question, a polylogue by contrast occurs in response to an open-ended question and that polylectic (and only polylectic) can give a full account of false dilemma.

It is not clear that when two speakers argue they (either of them) must hold the belief "if you are wrong, I am right". They *might*, or one of them might, but this is not a necessary feature of a two-person argument, even in decision-making.

(In many elections an assumption of exhaustivity is often correct, or at least, a convenient way of speaking. Even if there are more than two candidates (and there are always the options of not voting, or spoiling one's vote, or writing in a candidate), many of these candidates are ignored for practical purposes. But even so, candidates might argue positively, for the superiority of their own candidacy, just as much as or more than they argue negatively, against the other candidate(s).)

I think Lewiński conflates van Eemeren & Grootendorst's 'first rule' (that speakers may not prevent each other from advancing a standpoint or from calling a standpoint into question) with their claim that argument begins when someone casts doubt on a standpoint (and also the notation of +/p and -/p). All that is meant here is that a speaker will advance a standpoint and, for an argument to take place, another speaker must doubt *it, i.e. proposition p.* He might doubt it by holding an incompatible proposition, *q*, and there might be a discussion about the reasons for and against *q*.

The "yes/no" question is thus, "Do you accept this standpoint?"; the proponent does accept it and the antagonist does not. There is thus one sense in which Lewiński's claim that dialectical reasoning necessarily concerns a two-sided question is true: either "Standpoint-1 is proven/worthy of belief." or it is not.

But this is not the sense of "standpoint" or of "dialectic" relevant to false dilemma, which concerns substantive standpoints and not epistemic standpoints about other standpoints.

I agree with Lewiński that polylogue involving three or more standpoints occurs in response to an open-ended question. Lewiński is incorrect, however, if he says that dialogue occurs in response to yes-or-no issues; it too can occur in response to an open-ended question. Each speaker adopts a standpoint, even when more than two are available.

In an argument, each speaker takes up a single position; that is, the number of speakers equals the number of standpoints. (*I* think that expressions of 'not proven' imply a counter-standpoint; but if this is controversial to the reader, we can say instead that "the number of speakers is not greater than the number of standpoints".)

This is a structural feature of argument — I will consider this in more detail in a moment; it is not, as Lewiński seems to claim, because dialectical argument has a yes-or-no structure (contradictories) while polylogues involve open questions with multiple standpoints (contraries).

A false dilemma occurs when arguers fail to canvass all of the possible standpoints relevant to a topic. This is true *however many speakers (or standpoints) there are.* Indeed, speakers in a polylogue (any one of them or all of them collectively) can be just as guilty of false dilemma as speakers in a dialogue or monologue.

And note that, despite its name, false *di*lemma is not necessarily a reduction to two positions. Some textbooks note that it can be a reduction to three or more positions, so long as these are fewer positions than are available. For this reason, the name "false trilemma" is sometimes used, though only as the first in an infinite series of false *n*-lemmas. Alternatively, it is sometimes given the general name of "false choice".

The point being: we don't learn anything more about false choice by thinking at the level of dialogue or polylogue. Thinking in polylectical terms does not advance our understanding of false dilemma. Arguing by elimination, whether done in a monologue, a dialogue or a polylogue, risks being fallacious in the same way: arguers might move from the falsity of a smaller subset of standpoints to the truth of a remaining standpoint, all the while ignoring yet further possibilities.

I include "monologue" just above because I don't think that false choice requires even a dialogical analysis! It does, of course, require something more than a logical analysis, since it is a valid form. Argument evaluation includes evaluation of the premises, in addition to the logic.

Lewiński (or someone else) might challenge the assumption of "one speaker, one standpoint" by saying that a speaker can (and should, to avoid false dilemma) advance and consider multiple standpoints simultaneously.

A response to this is that advancing (that is, holding) standpoints and considering standpoints are quite different. Argument from elimination ought properly to canvass all of the available alternatives even as the speaker holds and argues for only one of them. Presenting multiple standpoints for consideration is not to argue for these standpoints; all of the considered alternatives will be rejected, leaving the preferred standpoint. To argue, a speaker must attempt to convince others of a standpoint. It is part of the definition of "argument" and "argue" that each speaker advance (at most) one position. If one person is talking to another person while trying to work out which of two or more incompatible standpoints he should adopt, he is not arguing.

(This would not be to insist that *in the course of an argument* each person has only one standpoint. Rather, the claim would be that each speaker can hold only one standpoint *at a time*, for in the course of a discussion, a speaker might change his standpoint, perhaps in response to objections from the other speakers. (These moments might instead be taken to constitute a new argument, even though the discourse is continuous.))

There's no reason, then, to think that there is any form of false choice unique to polylogues or that taking a polylectical perspective reveals anything more about the nature of the fallacy.

3. COLLATERAL STRAW MAN

Let us turn briefly to Collateral Straw Man.

Lewiński's claim seems to boil down do: in dialogue, the aggrieved party would say "I didn't say that – you're putting words in my mouth" whereas in a polylogue, the aggrieved party would say "I didn't say that – you're putting the words *of another person* in my mouth".

Lewiński says that in dialectical analyses, there is no "another other" (§4.2) and notes that the speaker might have accurately quoted the third-party and not "a random some [sic; "someone"?]"; it's just that the second party is not the third party.

I am not sure that this is a difference that requires a polylectic. In a two-person straw man, the position attributed might be an actual position of some other party, who is not present. Indeed, in a dialogue, speaker-1 might know a source whose position is the same as the one he is being attributed, and could thus say "I think you're confusing me with X …".

4. CONCLUSION

What's common in both of Lewiński's reading of the two fallacies is that the polylogue might concretize the fallacy. In the case of false choice, the third speaker's position makes explicit what an additional standpoint might be; in the case of straw man, the position attributed might belong to the third speaker (but it doesn't necessarily do so, in which case there is no advantage at all). But this (possible) concretization doesn't change or deepen our understanding of either fallacy.