

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Wittgenstein's Influence On Hamblin's Concept Of 'Dialectical'



## 1. Introduction [i]

While working on the question of what influence Wittgenstein had on the development of informal logic, I faced the question of whether Wittgenstein had any influence on Hamblin. I checked the references to Wittgenstein in *Fallacies*, and found that there were four, two to the *Tractatus* and two to works of the later Wittgenstein, one identified by Hamblin as the *Preliminary Studies*, known to us as the *Blue Book* and the *Brown Book*, the other to the *Philosophical Investigations*. I was particularly struck by the reference on p. 285:

If we want to lay bare the foundations of Dialectic, we should give the dialectical rules themselves a chance to determine what is a statement, what is a question. This general idea is familiar enough from Wittgenstein.

The footnote states that "The best examples of dialectical analysis are in the 'Brown Book': Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations.'*"

This text strongly supports the idea that Hamblin was influenced by his reading of Wittgenstein. That came as something of a surprise to me, and I found myself puzzling over the above reference to 'examples of dialectical analysis.' I also found myself puzzling over Hamblin's notion of 'dialectical', for it seemed to me that the use of 'dialectical' here was quite different from the way it had been used in Chapter 7. [ii] I hope to out these puzzles to rest in this paper.

In the sections that follow, I proceed to examine Hamblin's use of the term 'dialectical' in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of *Fallacies*. [iii] In each case, I start by setting up the context in which his use of the term arises. I then state what I take to be the meaning of 'dialectical' in that context. I then take up any issues that occurred to me about that use. In Section 5, I gather together the assorted meanings together and ask: What is the relationship among them? Can we fashion a coherent account of Hamblin's use of 'dialectical' in these three chapters?

Then, in Section 6, I discuss, rather more briefly, the matter of Wittgenstein's influence on Hamblin. Section 7 is my conclusion.

## 2. The meaning of 'dialectical' in Chapter 7

*The context.* Chapter 7 is about the concept of argument. Hamblin starts by making some comments about the concept of argument that seem primarily directed at logicians. At p.232, Hamblin sets aside the question of what an argument is, and instead pursues the questions of how we evaluate argument: by what criteria, he asks, should we evaluate an argument? He begins by examining alethic criteria - criteria based on truth - the sort of criteria that occur in Formal Logic. He argues that they will not work and then turns to a discussion of epistemic criteria - criteria based on knowledge - with which he also finds problems. That is the context in which we first encounter 'dialectical' in Chapter 7.

*The meaning.* The term 'dialectical' is introduced in Chapter 7 on page 241, at a point where Hamblin has already discussed both alethic and epistemic criteria. The ramp into the passage is found at the bottom of page 240 where he says: In practice, we often proceed on less than knowledge. Namely on more or less strong belief or acceptance. An argument that proceeds from *accepted* premises on the basis of an *accepted* inference process may or may not be a good one in the full alethic sense but is certainly a good one in some other sense which is much more germane to the practical application of logical principles. (240-41)

Hamblin provides a name for this other sense of goodness that an argument may have - he calls it 'dialectical'. Why? The answer occurs on page 241, where Hamblin deals with an objection he anticipates will be raised by "puristic logicians" who will accuse him of selling out, of lowering his sights by being satisfied with arguments that persuade as distinct from arguments which are valid (but may not persuade). In response, Hamblin says that we must distinguish different purposes an argument may have. One of these is to convince[iv]; here Hamblin's point is that we have to get the person whom we want to convince to accept the premises; otherwise even if the argument is valid, we will not succeed. So we must aim at securing acceptance of the premises if we seek to convince. Logicians can hardly complain that an argument is not an argument because it proceeds *ex concessio* (meaning, by gaining acceptance of the other) or that such arguments have no rational criteria of worth. We are, he says, in fact talking about the class of arguments Aristotle called "dialectical" (241) which he glosses

as “that class of argument that work on the basis of acceptance.” Hamblin admits that the dialectical merits of an argument may differ from its merits judged alethically, “but we would still do well to set down a set of criteria for them”(241). Hamblin calls these dialectical criteria; they are based on acceptance rather than truth or knowledge. [v]

*Issues.* There are at least two questions concerning his use of ‘dialectical’. First, exactly what is meant by acceptance? And how does it relate to belief, acceptability etc. This issue has been much discussed by others and myself, and I do not propose to take it up here.

A second issue is its relationship to the Aristotelian account. One standard account of Aristotle’s concept of ‘dialectical’ as it applies to reasoning/argument is that it is the kind of reasoning that proceeds on the basis of premises that are widely believed (generally accepted) or endorsed by the learned (*Topics*, 100a 30, b 21). If Hamblin now uses that term to refer to a premise that is accepted by one’s interlocutor [which may be neither widely believed, nor endorsed by the learned], it does seem like at least a significant extension, if not an outright change, from its Aristotelian meaning. And Hamblin seems to be taking just such a path, for he states. “Aristotle is not satisfied to leave it at this, but his actual definition of dialectical arguments is less than satisfactory” (60). And now he quotes the above definition from *Topics* and writes: “This marks them off from didactic arguments, and, as defined above, contentious arguments but does not give any clue to their supposed exceptional merit” (60). Now Hamblin says: “In fact, Aristotle is in transition from a pure Platonic view to a more measured one that treats Dialectic as mere technique unessential to the pursuit of truth” (60). It seems fairly clear that Hamblin’s view of Dialectic is closer to Plato’s view (as understood by Hamblin) than to Aristotle’s (as understood by Hamblin); thus his apparent departure from the strict Aristotelian sense seems intentional.

In Chapter 7, then, the term ‘dialectical’ refers to a type of criterion for the evaluation of argument, which Hamblin distinguishes from alethic criteria (based on truth) or epistemic criteria (based on knowledge). There are four criteria in his set of dialectical criteria, the first of which is: “(D1) The premises must be accepted.” The other criteria all invoke this notion of acceptance.

### 3. *The meaning of ‘dialectical’ in Chapter 8*

The story about ‘dialectical’ in Chapter 8 is relatively straightforward.

*The context:* In Chapter 8, Hamblin seeks to develop what he calls “a dialectical system” which, he says is “no more nor less than a regulated dialogue or family of dialogues. We suppose that we have a number of participants - in the simplest case just two - to debate, discussion or conversation and that they speak in turn in accordance with a set of rules or conventions”(255). In Hamblin’s view, Formal Dialectic is the study of such systems, the pursuit of which he now briefly justifies:

There is a case to be argued, even in modern times, on behalf of studies like Dialectic and Rhetoric against a Logic which is pursued in disregard of the context of its use. Logic is an abstraction of features of flesh and blood reasoning; and it is entirely natural that a formal theory of fallacies should be seen as simply abstracting features of fallacies .... (69)

*The meaning:* In Chapter 8, then, ‘dialectical’ is used chiefly as the adjectival form of the term ‘dialectic’ where here ‘Dialectic’ refers to Hamblin’s system of Formal Dialectic. Thus here it means: ‘pertaining to a system of Formal Dialectic.’

*Issues:* First, one wonders why Hamblin here chose ‘dialectical’ and rather than ‘dialogical’. Dialogue logics had been in existence for some time when he wrote *Fallacies*.**[vi]** I believe there is a good answer to this question that will emerge later. Second, what is the relationship between the meaning of ‘dialectical’ here and its meaning in Chapter 7? Clearly here it has a different sense than had in the previous chapter where it referred to a type of criterion for evaluating arguments. I return to this question in Section 5, turning next to the meaning of ‘dialectical’ in Chapter 9.

#### *4. The meaning of ‘dialectical’ in Chapter 9*

*The context:* Having set forth his system of Formal Dialectic in Chapter 8, Hamblin turns in Chapter 9 to the issue of the authority for these dialectical rules that he has been discussing in Chapter 8. He begins: “Where do dialectical rules derive their authority, and who enforces them?” He writes:

If we want to lay bare the foundations of Dialectic, we should give the dialectical rules themselves a chance to determine what is a statement, what is a question and so on. This general idea is familiar enough from Wittgenstein [the footnote refers to *Preliminary Studies...*] I do not think, however, that it has ever been worked out in any detail. The programme is too large a one to be undertaken but certain features of it are of fundamental importance for us. (p. 285)

Just what is meant here by 'the programme' is not clear, but I will later refer to the views of two scholars (David Hitchcock and J.D. Mackenzie) who have offered their views about it.

In any event, the context here is that of providing justification for the rules of the system of Formal Dialectic. That justification will be dialectical.

*The meaning:* The meaning of the term 'dialectical' in this context is made clear when Hamblin goes on to say: "The thesis that I shall adopt is that all properties of linguistic entities are dialectical in the sense of being determinable from the broad pattern of their use" (285). Here we have the basis for Hamblin's understanding of 'dialectical' in Chapter 9. He takes 'dialectical' to mean the broad pattern of use of linguistic entities which, he holds, is to be appealed to determine their properties.

*Issues:* What are we to make of this text? Here is how J.D. Mackenzie (a student of Hamblin's) construes it:

I would approach the passage on p. 285 of *Fallacies* in this way. As logicians, we have an understanding of terms like "statement" built up from familiarity with axiomatic and natural deduction systems, and we use that understanding in describing dialogue. But strictly speaking, we should study dialogue on its own terms, and only later come to that very specialist sort of dialogue in which axiomatic systems are developed. And we should develop an understanding of the word "statement" from dialogue, and then modify its meaning for use in axiomatic systems, rather than the other way round. [Private correspondence with the author, used with permission.]

According to Mackenzie, Hamblin is arguing against the view that there is a pre-established meaning of what a statement is:

Wittgenstein (in the *Brown Book*) was also interested in dealing with dialogue by beginning with what people say (how expressions are used), rather than by beginning with some pre-established semantics (their "meaning"). In Formal Dialectic, we will study dialogue and how expressions are used, and from that we will develop an account of 'statement.' [Private correspondence with the author, used with permission.]

This exposition seems to me to be accurate. Hamblin wants us to generate our idea of what a statement is by looking at how that expression is used, and says that to do this is to proceed in a dialectical way. Confirming texts appear later on in the chapter:

Both accounts (Quine, and Grice and Strawson) are 'dialectical', in that they refer their respective explications of analyticity or incorrigibility to patterns of verbal behavior. (290)

Meanings of words are...always relative to a language-user or a group G of language users. ... There is a reverse side to this doctrine...: Since the language behavior of some person or group may be unsystematic or incoherent, it is not necessarily the case that questions of meaning are resolvable... It is only in so far as regular pattern of use can be determined that it is possible to make suitable judgements about meaning. (291)

By 'dialectical' in this chapter, then, Hamblin means a way of proceeding to assign meaning to fundamental terms in the system of Formal Dialectic. This is to be done by examining how they are used, "the broad pattern of their use." This is the connection with Wittgenstein. **[vii]**

### *5. Summary and Synthesis: Hamblin's conception of 'dialectical'*

Let me summarize the findings thus far. In Chapter 7, the term 'dialectical' refers to a type of criterion for the evaluation of argument. It is a criterion of premise adequacy based on acceptance rather than knowledge (epistemic) or truth (alethic). In Chapter 8, the term 'dialectical' has a different meaning. It is now used as the adjectival form of 'Dialectic' by which Hamblin means "the study of regulated dialogue or family of dialogue." In Chapter 9, the term is assigned yet another meaning. The term is here used to denote a method by which the rules for Formal Dialectic are to be justified. These rules are said to be determinable by the broad pattern of their use, and here Hamblin has invoked what he takes to be Wittgenstein's views. So 'dialectical' as it is used in Chapter 9 refers us to neither acceptance, nor to a study called Dialectic, but rather to a method or procedure for adopting rules that govern meaning of terms that are found in Formal Dialectic - that basis being the broad pattern of use.

There appears to be a marked difference between these three meanings. Is Hamblin equivocating? Or, is there an acceptable account that brings them into some proper relationship?

I believe there is a way in which these disparate uses can be brought together and unified. The key is to focus on Hamblin's concept of Dialectic. When we understand exactly what he has in mind by Dialectic and how he understands the

project he calls Formal Dialectic, we will clearly understand 'dialectical' as it is used in Chapter 8. From there it is easy enough to explain 'dialectical' as used in Chapter 9. That leaves 'dialectical' as used in Chapter 7, but I think that it can readily be seen to be a part of this family.

I noted above that Hamblin's concept of Dialectic appears to be closer to Plato's concept than to Aristotle's (or, I should say, closer to how Hamblin understands Plato's and Aristotle's concepts). I believe we should view Hamblin as attempting to revive Dialectic, as an inquiry distinct from Logic (he is well aware of the conflation that took place [viii]) and indeed as more important than Formal Logic for the study of argument. We have already met that concept in Chapter 8 where Dialectic is conceived of as the study of regulated dialogue, or family of dialogues. So Hamblin's concept of dialectical is dialogical. Yet he does not go the route of Dialogue Logic. Why not? It may have something to do with how Hamblin thinks of Formal Logic. He writes:

There is a case to be argued even in modern times on behalf of studies like Dialectic and Rhetoric against a Logic which is pursued in disregard of the context of its use. Logic is an abstraction of features of flesh and blood reasoning; and it is entirely natural that a formal theory of fallacies should be seen as simply abstracting features of fallacies. (69)

Hamblin wants his study to be a study of argument as situated, as engaged in by participants in the practice, thereby avoiding the on-looker status, the "God's-eye view of things" (242) that he associates with Formal Logic. This may be the opportune moment to point out that Hamblin is not opposed to Formal Logic, but is opposed to the view that it should be employed as the exclusive tool in analyzing and evaluating arguments. Indeed, one of his aims in *Fallacies* is to show that something like what he calls Formal Dialectic is a much better tool for handling the fallacies.

Now in Chapter 9: If we ask how the rules for Formal Dialectic are to be justified, the only answer can be that these rules are to be justified by reference to the practices of those engaged in the dialogue, and that refers us inevitably to the use made by the interlocutors: the broad pattern of use referred to above.

That leaves the use in Chapter 7 where it refers to a type of criterion for premise adequacy. For Hamblin, that criterion is "acceptance by the party the argument is aimed at" (242). When we understand that the context Hamblin has imagined is

two people engaged in a dialogue, then what determines whether a statement is functioning properly is whether it is accepted by the other party, accepted by one's interlocutor. Thus it makes sense to see acceptance as a 'dialectical' (in the broad sense) criterion for the evaluation of argument.

My conclusion is that Hamblin is neither inconsistent nor equivocating in the way he makes of use 'dialectical' in these chapters. There is a coherent relationship among the different meanings.

### *6. Wittgenstein's Influence on Hamblin*

While Hamblin thought of himself as Wittgensteinian (there is both internal and external evidence for this), the two explicit references to the views of the later Wittgenstein in *Fallacies* that I have discussed provide some basis for thinking that he may have been overestimating that influence. For it seems that in one case (p. 242, referring to what has come to be known as the "pain and private language argument"), he seems to me to have misread Wittgenstein. He writes: In the limiting case in which one person constructs an argument for his own edification - though we might follow Wittgenstein in finding something peculiar about this case - his own acceptance of premises and inference is all that can matter *to him*.

In the footnote, Hamblin refers to the "well-known private language argument in *Philosophical Investigations*, #258, which can be adapted here." Since Hamblin wrote, the so-called "private language argument" has been much discussed. #258 is one of the elements of that argument but that argument itself is generally thought to commence at #243 continuing on up to #321. [Kripke (1982) thinks it starts earlier, at #198.] The following points occur to me. First, #258 is not about argument at all. It is about whether or not a person can keep track of a supposedly private sensation, 'S'. The drift of this thought experiment is to allow the reasoner to discover the enormous problems associated with this task. The inference that Wittgenstein himself draws is that there can be no criterion of correctness here. Second, I do not see anything in the #258, or in the so-called private-language argument, or in his general position that would rule out for Wittgenstein that a person might construct an argument for his own edification, in order to see where a certain line of thinking leads - which could take place in any number of language-games: speculating, for example.

In the other case (the passage on p. 285 connecting 'dialectical' with the

Wittgensteinian idea of meaning as use), Hamblin has taken Wittgenstein in a direction he might not have followed. I think that when we look to the issues Hamblin is addressing and how he is addressing them and ask: Is Hamblin operating here in a Wittgensteinian manner? It is far from clear that he is. Indeed Hamblin here offers a positive doctrine or theory (Formal Dialectic), whereas Wittgenstein seems not to be engaged in any such effort and indeed is often seen as encouraging us to avoid such efforts in philosophy. However, the most important glaring indicator is that Wittgenstein called his type of investigation “a grammatical one” (PI, #90), whereas Hamblin thinks of the work as dialectical. There is a significant difference between Wittgenstein’s concept of *grammatical* and Hamblin’s conception of *dialectical*, but that is a subject for another occasion.

In no way are these comments meant to detract from Hamblin’s ideas which have been so enormously important in the development of Informal Logic and Argumentation Theory. It is just to say that his own understanding of what Wittgenstein meant may not have been altogether warranted.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to set forth as clearly as I can Hamblin’s conception of “dialectical” particularly as it occurs in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of *Fallacies*. I think I have been able to provide an account of its meaning in those three chapters and a way of understanding them as flowing from a coherent conception of Dialectic which, I believe, lies at the very core of what he is up to in *Fallacies*. Hamblin thought that at least one of these uses (that in Chapter 9) was inspired by the sort of analysis Wittgenstein engaged in in the *Brown Book*, though I have expressed doubts about whether that is so.

## NOTES

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**[ii]** For my discussion of this chapter, see my (2000), pp. 182-189.

**[iii]** For my take on the complex story surrounding the term ‘dialectical’, see my OSSA 2009 paper: “Revisiting the Logical/Dialectical/Rhetorical Triumvirate.”

**[iv]** Hamblin seems to use ‘convince’ and ‘persuade’ interchangeably.

**[v]** On p. 245, Hamblin sets forth five criteria (D1-D5) he calls “dialectical, ones formulated without the use of the words ‘true’ and ‘valid.’ ” The literature has tended to focus on D1: “The premises must be accepted.”

**[vi]** See *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*, Chapter 9, 246-274 for a history.

**[vii]** David Hitchcock has offered the following account of what Hamblin was up to: “The idea that all properties of linguistic entities are determinable from the broad pattern of their use (Hamblin, bottom of p. 285) is clearly Wittgensteinian, but with a dialectical/dialogical twist. It is not a matter of depth grammar, but of defining what it is to be a statement, to be a question, to have the same meaning at one occurrence as at another, and so forth, in terms of how words and strings of words are used in dialogues, in particular, what are the standard (expected, required) sequences of locutions in a conversation. It’s a radical agenda, not yet fully appreciated. It is comparable in its reformism to the attempt of Sellars and Brandom to replace representational semantics with inferential semantics. Hamblin wants to replace both of them with dialogical semantics.” Hitchcock suggests that the thesis above is the cornerstone of what he calls Hamblin’s dialogical semantics. That seems to me a credible interpretation of the passage that would explain the programme to which Hamblin made reference, though clearly a departure from what Wittgenstein himself did. [Private correspondence, used with permission.]

**[viii]** On p. 92, Hamblin notes that ‘dialectic’ has come to mean ‘logic’; it has dropped its old meaning and simply become the standard word for ‘logic’ It seems clear that he does not approve of this development.

7 If one were inclined to press the case for Hamblin as Wittgensteinian, one could say that the term ‘dialectical’ is a family-resemblance concept. See *PI* (# 67).

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