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'WE NEED TO ASK OURSELVES': WE, AS A MARKER OF (INTER)SUBJECTIVITY IN ACADEMIC DEBATE

Abstract. This paper combines Langacker's notion of intersubjectivity with research into the discursive purposes of the first-person plural to analyse the 2008 debate between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox *Has Science Buried God?* The analysis identifies several differences and similarities between the debaters. Both speakers navigate the objectivity – (inter)subjectivity continuum in similar ways. Both speakers also use *we* to create their unique discursive identities. Dawkins primarily uses *we* to refer to himself as a member of an atemporal or cross-generational scientific community. This use was often exclusive as part of his argument seemed to be that he was a scientist in a way that Lennox was not. In contrast, Lennox's uses are primarily inclusive, placing himself, Dawkins, and all scientists as part of the human race and using the human predicament as his main argument. Although only one debate is examined here, this paper may serve as a model for conducting a larger-scale project. With the recent increased polarisation of society, this analysis of *we* and intersubjectivity within a debate over an often volatile topic could provide insight for improving dialogue. Thus, this study is also relevant to fields beyond linguistics.

Keywords: first-person plural, debate, (inter)subjectivity, cognitive linguistics.

1. Introduction

The debate format is one of the contexts in which *we*[1] plays a variety of roles – from organising discourse to establishing common ground with the audience to establishing and controlling us/them boundaries. As such, it is conducive to linguistic analysis of the pronoun's many functions, including, but not limited to, expressions of (inter)subjectivity.

To study the ways debaters employ *we*, the 2008 debate between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox *Has Science Buried God?* has been chosen.[2] This particular debate was selected for several reasons. First, both professors have experience debating and have met each other in this context before.

As a result, they have developed a relationship and are not merely designated representatives of their opposing viewpoints. Second, in exit interviews, the audience observed that Dawkins and Lennox seemed to listen to each other and exhibit mutual respect. Such engagement is rare in the debate format and suggests heightened awareness of their interlocutor's vantage point, i.e., intersubjectivity. Finally, the participants can both claim a shared identity as established scholars (Dawkins in zoology and Lennox in mathematics and philosophy), as Oxford professors, as popular authors and as proponents of the theory of evolution. Hence, this debate does not fit any of the traditional dichotomies: it is neither 'creationism vs. evolution' nor 'theologian vs. scientist'. Rather, the two scientists focus on whether the theory of evolution precludes the existence of God.

This study is also interesting in terms of contemporary culture. As society becomes more polarised, it is important to look at how scholars with such vastly different worldviews engage in respectful debate. Thus, this paper with its limited scope could be seen as a test case or pilot study for a larger research project.

As such, these results are not only of academic interest but could also aid in improving communication across a diverse cross-section of society.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Objectivity and intersubjectivity

Definitions of subjectivity and objectivity across disciplines abound and, according to Verhagen (2010, pp. 4–5), can more or less be summarized as falling into one of two basic categories:

(a) A distinction between the viewer (subject) and the object under investigation

(b) A distinction between information that is personal (subjective) and publicly available (objective).

He adds that Langacker (1999, 2006, 2008), by treating subjectivity and objectivity as elements of construal, provides a framework for dealing with both definitions (a) and (b). This echoes Benveniste's (1971, p. 224) understanding of subjectivity as "the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as "subject". Langacker (2008, p. 78) explains:

> In their tacit role as subjects of conception, the speaker and hearer are always part of the conceptual substrate supporting an expression's meaning. If that is their only role, they are always implicit and construed with maximal subjec-

> tivity. To varying degrees, however, they can themselves function as objects of conception. [...] The extreme is to put them onstage as the focus of attention: with the first- and second-person pronouns (I, you, we, and their variants), the speaker and hearer are profiled, explicitly mentioned, and objectively construed.

In other words, *subjectivity* and *objectivity* refer to the degree to which the speaker/hearer, or other elements of the Ground, are put 'on stage', or made objective, through explicit mention. This can be best understood by looking at a diagram of a conceptual arrangement similar to that in Figure 1.
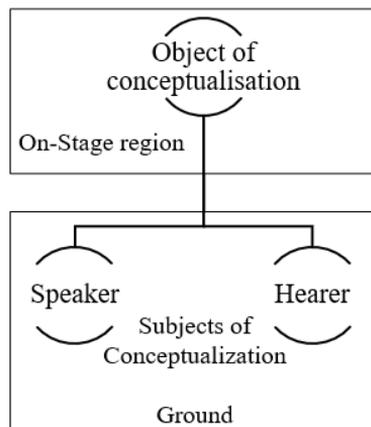

Figure 1. A conceptual arrangement

In this study, the ground includes the debate context, Dawkins, Lennox, the moderator, the physical and virtual audience and their interactions. The onstage region comprises the objects, events, people, etc. being discussed.

2.2. Intersubjectivity and the debate genre

Discussion about the continuum between objectivity and subjectivity leads directly to the topic of intersubjectivity.

> Intersubjectivity comes into play when the S/W [Speaker/Writer] either indicates that perceptual evidence is available to a larger speech community or when the S/W engages the addressee in negotiating the availability and/or interpretation of given evidence. (Whitt, 2011, p. 359)

As the debate genre presupposes both activities, it provides the perfect context for studying this phenomenon. According to Whitt (2011, p. 350),

the two dominant approaches to intersubjectivity are sentence-based (Langacker, 1999, 2006, 2007; see also Verhagen, 2006) and semantics-pragmatics (Traugott, 1995, 2010; see also Nuyts, 2001). Langacker (2007, p. 182) describes intersubjectivity as "the mutual apprehension of other minds," and notes that this is made most explicit through the use of personal pronouns. Verhagen concurs and views intersubjectivity as an activity that takes place within the Ground. Conversely, De Cock (2016, p. 362) would argue after Traugott (2003) that intersubjectivity implies the expression of attention to the attitudes and beliefs of the hearer. This paper focuses on the former while keeping in mind the latter.

Langacker's approach corresponds to Stahl (2016, p. 360), who, with reference to Schutz (1932), explains how the ideal "we-relationship" and shared meaning is created through conversation:

> When two people are engaged face-to-face, they participate together in an ongoing series of acts of meaning-establishment and meaning-interpretation. [...] The shared intersubjective world is constituted by this experience in the face-to-face situation.

In other words, intersubjectivity is the ideal goal of a debate. This does not necessitate complete agreement between the interlocutors by the end of their interaction but rather a common understanding of the questions underlying the controversy and an ability to see the other perspective, even if they ultimately reject it (Nathan, Eilam, & Kim, 2007). Admittedly, this idealistic goal is rarely achieved. As Sears, Freedman, and O'Connor (1964) note, debates tend to solidify audience members' existing beliefs rather than convince them to adopt a new perspective. Nevertheless, the debate is structured, and the participants participate *as if* such a change of mind on the part of their interlocutor(s)/audience were probable.

2.3. Placing utterances on the objectivity – (inter)subjectivity (OIS) continuum

According to Verhagen (2006, 2008, 2010), certain grammatical structures tend to operate on particular dimensions of the conceptual arrangement. He places morphological negation in the onstage region (as a relationship between objects), and treats sentential negation and counterfactuals primarily as intersubjective acts (2010, 98, 105). Complementation clauses are understood as functioning at the level of the subject and its relationship to the onstage region (2010, pp. 98–105). Whitt (2014, pp. 56–57) adds that "[p]arenthetical constructions [...] always convey a sense of intersubjective evidentiality".

In her analysis of the first person singular in the same Lennox-Dawkins debate, Barczewska (2018, pp. 20–23) applies the analyses conducted by Verhagen (2010) and proposes a continuum with four distinct points:

– On stage – the speaker puts himself in the onstage region;
– S/H to stage – the speaker makes a connection between himself and the onstage region;
– Ground to stage – the speaker "negotiate[s] the relationship between elements of the ground and past or future discourse frames";
– Intersubjective – the speaker's attention is exclusively focused on the interlocutor.

The current project differs in that it does not tag negatives and counterfactuals as intersubjective by default. This is because the speakers are often referring to a (fictive) ground, and this is consistent with the way in which Langacker (2008, p. 272) addresses counterfactuals. It also coincides with Verhagen's (2006, p. 324) observations "that the conceptual distinction does not always coincide with a distinction between linguistic symbols: one linguistic sign may very well conventionally perform functions in both dimensions, while the relative weight of each may also gradually change over time". Perhaps as important, if not more important than linguistic symbols, in determining the influence of a pronoun is its cotext (Harwood, 2007, p. 30).

2.4. The problem of *we*

Although Langacker (2007, p. 179) claims that the intended referent of *we* is normally quite apparent, "semantic instability and internal contradiction" are "inherent properties of the first-person plural" (Jakobson, 1973, p. 454). Indeed, the first-person plural has been discussed in terms of vagueness (cf. Marcus, 2008), and scholars who have attempted to categorize its intended referents frequently encounter difficulties (e.g., De Cock, 2016; Harwood, 2005; Petersoo, 2004; Scheibman, 2004; Wales, 1996). As Helmbrecht (2002, p. 33) states, "[t]he first-person non-singular category is, from a referential point of view, the most complex category of all person categories". This is especially true for the English language, in which there is no distinction between inclusive/exclusive or dual/plural uses. "Although this lack of semantic distinction is frustrating for the analyst, researchers claim it can be exploited by writers" (Harwood, 2005, p. 345, with reference to Wales, 1996 and Pennycook, 1994; see also Scheibman, 2004).

2.4.1. Referents for *we*

The possible referents for *we* have been well-documented (e.g., Fortanet, 2004; Helmbrecht, 2002, 2015; Scheibman, 2004). They are usually

discussed in terms of dual vs. plural (referring to two, usually speaker and hearer, or more referents, respectively) and inclusive (including the hearer) vs. exclusive (excluding the hearer). However, this simplicity is deceptive as there is a wider variety of uses.

First, *we* can be used to refer to *they*, i.e., to a group that the speaker is not a member of but feels connected to. This occurs not only, e.g., when fans talk about their favourite sports team: *We won/lost last night's game* but also in political and military discourses. A well-known example comes from Churchill's response after the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940:

(1) We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds.

Although neither Churchill nor his audience fought, Churchill used *we* to simultaneously claim that the soldiers represent the British people and to invite the citizens to see themselves as soldiers. This use of *we* also presupposes an us/them delineation: the listeners either support the speaker's team, country, army, etc., or they do not. Those who do not may feel forced to adopt the speaker's perspective, or, alternatively, they may feel marginalised.

Second, *we* can be used to refer to *you*. This is often referred to as the "nursery we" and has been associated with power imbalance. Examples include *Have we taken our medicine?*; when the speaker clearly means *Have you taken your medicine?* De Cock (2016), however, questions whether power imbalance is always a factor. She cites examples in Spanish and Italian corpora in which this use of *we* is used, e.g., between waiters and diners, to mark solidarity, empathy and familiarity. At the same time, she notes that the use of the first-person plural to imply *you* is rare.

Third, the use of *we* to refer to *you plural* can be found in academic discourse. This includes utterances such as *last lesson we learnt*, when the professor knew the information before the last lesson. It is his/her students who are the referents (cf., Fortanet, 2004).

Finally, two uses of *we* mean *I*: the majestic *we* and the academic/editorial *we*. The majestic *we*, or majestic plural/pluralis majestatis, occurs in cases when leaders, often royalty, refer to themselves in the plural. This can be seen as a way of asserting status and social superiority. Alternatively, the academic or editorial *we* is often found in scholarly writings or press articles and is often viewed as an expression of modesty. This *we* frequently shifts between a *we=I* to an inclusive plural. Harwood (2005, pp. 346–348) suggests that inconsistent pronoun use may be unintentional or it may suggest that the writer is "exploiting the exclusive/inclusive ambiguity for their own ends". This ambiguity can be intentional and aid the speaker/writer in

achieving rhetorical aims. For example, the inclusive *we* spreads any culpability for any lack of knowledge across the entire discourse community. It also may make the reader feel involved (cf. De Cock, 2016; Harwood, 2005, 2007).

2.4.2. Discursive roles

Linguistic analyses of *we* to date have drawn attention to the role the inclusive and exclusive *we* play in identity formation (Bucholtz, 2005), persuasion (Harwood, 2005), and discourse management (Fortanet, 2004). Taking into consideration their mentioned similarities and differences, Dawkins and Lennox have reason to use both the inclusive and exclusive *we* to do all three.

The contrast and ambiguity surrounding the inclusive and exclusive *we* is largely connected to identity and signalling group membership. As Pennycook (1994, p. 175) observes, "'We' is always simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, a pronoun of solidarity and of rejection, of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, it defines a 'we', and on the other it defines a 'you' or a 'they'". Studies of both American political discourse (Proctor & Su, 2011) and written academic English (Harwood, 2007) reveal that pronominal choice reveals who the speaker identifies with and helps speakers establish their identity vis-à-vis other possible group members.

These observations are relevant to this study as one of the focal points in the debate over biological evolution in general (Barczewska, 2017), and this debate in particular (Górska, 2016), is whether or not conflicting viewpoints on evolutionary biology belong inside or outside the domain of science. Thus, establishing their own position as firmly situated inside science, vis-à-vis their interlocutor, is crucial for both Lennox and Dawkins.

In this study, the role of *we* is looked at in (a) organizing the discourse, (b) making ontological claims about who *we* are, (c) creating common ground with the interlocutor, (d) creating an exclusive community for one of the debaters.

In terms of intersubjectivity, both Harwood (2005) and Whitt (2011) argue that the first-person plural is a way for the speaker/writer to signal "engagement" with the audience and past or emerging shared knowledge. Thus, any use of the inclusive *we* presupposes some level of intersubjectivity. However, it is not always the main focus of the utterance. For example, an utterance such as *we've discussed this before*, directs the interlocutor's attention to previous discourse frames. Alternatively, *we used to play ball in that field* places the speaker and his/her interlocutor onstage. In terms of the exclusive *we*, its place on the continuum is necessarily limited to the onstage region or the between region.

In analysing *we*, a number of referents and purposes are possible, as well as roles on the OIS continuum. Although sometimes it is possible to smoothly link referent, purpose, and OIS dimensions, this is not always the case as the results demonstrate.

3. Methodology

Three questions are addressed in this study:
– What are the most common referents for *we*?
– What roles or purposes do utterances with *we* play in the debate?
– What elements of the conceptual arrangement are profiled via the various utterances with *we* and does that differ between debaters?

Analysis of the data was conducted as follows. The transcription of the debate available on YouTube was edited by the author and annotated according to the speaker. Personal pronouns were identified and tagged according to three factors: the referents, the role, and the location of the utterance in the conceptual arrangement.[3] The referents are presented in Table 1. Column three identifies these referents as inclusive or exclusive, with the exception being <s>, which differs depending on context and is not always easy to discern.

Table 1

<div align="center">

Referents

</div>

Label	Referent	Inclusive/Exclusive
All	Most/All People	Inclusive
LD	Lennox and Dawkins	Inclusive
Eur	Europeans	Inclusive
S	Scientists	Contextual
Sc	Science community – they	Exclusive
DSCM	Dawkins and Simon Conway Morris[4]	Exclusive
we_I	Majestic plural or academic *we*	Exclusive

Although identification of the exclusive and inclusive *we* could have been linked to the referents, creating exclusive space or establishing common ground are treated as purposes for this analysis. This distinction was

particularly relevant in the case of <s>, where the choice between an exclusive and inclusive use was often strategic. These and the other discursive roles identified are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

<div align="center">

Discursive roles

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Label	Discursive roles
od	Organise the discourse
rs	Report Speech
q	Ask a question
exp	Give an explanation
ont	Make ontological claims about who we are as people
cg	Establish common ground with the interlocutor (inclusive)
excl	Create an exclusive group

In terms of the location of the utterance on the construal configuration, the four points on the continuum identified by Barczewska (2018) were applied. However, as explained in Section 2.3, counterfactuals were not automatically designated as intersubjective.

Table 3

<div align="center">

Location in the conceptual arrangement

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Label	Location in the conceptual arrangement
os	interlocutors placed on-stage as objects within the debaters' arguments
dis	elements of the ground connected to past/future discourse frames
btwn	debaters connected to the onstage region (e.g., verbs of knowing, thinking)
is	relationship between the debaters focused on (intersubjective)

The tagged file was uploaded to WordSmith Tools 6, and the concord function was used to identify all uses of *we/we'/our/ours/ourselves/us* according to the speaker. This information was downloaded to Excel, where the tags were copied to a spreadsheet and confirmed or amended. This format facilitated quantitative analysis and statistical calculations. The analysis described in Section 4.1 was conducted using two different statistical tools. For simple proportions, the Z Score Calculator for 2 Population Proportions

on the Social Science Statistics website (2024) was used to obtain a two-tailed p-value. Binomial tests and chi-squared tests (correlation tables) were conducted using Jamovi (R Core Team, 2021; The jamovi project, 2022). Graphs showing the results of the latter were also created in Jamovi. Although the sample size is small, statistical information is provided because the speakers differ in the number of words they use, and thus raw numbers could be misleading. It also helps identify which similarities and differences are worth looking at in the qualitative analysis.

4. Results

This section is divided into quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative section analyses the tags and identifies statistically significant differences between the debaters, while also drawing attention to their similarities. The qualitative section analyses fragments from the debate according to the debater's placement of *we* on the OIS continuum.

4.1. Overview of the use of *we* and tag analysis

The first sub-section begins with an overview of the use of the first-person plural by the debaters. The following two subsections demonstrate how Dawkins and Lennox each use *we* to construe their discursive identity and to construct their arguments. The final subsection looks at the two debaters together in terms of their similarity in navigating the OIS continuum and their differences in using the inclusive and exclusive *we*.

4.1.1. Presence of *we* in the debate

As demonstrated in Table 4, the frequency of Lennox's use of *we* is comparable to academic lectures (cf. Fortanet, 2004). Dawkins's use of *we* is much more frequent, and the difference is statistically significant, $z = 3.229$, $p = .001$.

Barczewska (2018) observes the opposite tendency for the first-person singular. Lennox's use of *I* is significantly more frequent than Dawkins's use ($p < .001$). She claims that this enables Lennox to use himself and his experience as part of his argument. Hyland (2007) demonstrates that, in academic writing, biologists avoid *I* in preference for *we*, whereas philosophers prefer *I* and very rarely use *we*. Harwood (2005) observes similar results between the hard and soft sciences. The current study may correlate Harwood and Hyland's conclusions; particularly if Dawkins has chosen the first-person plural to refer to himself as in the majestic or academic *we*.

Table 4

Occurrences of the first-person plural according to speaker[5]

Dawkins (4728 total words)			Lennox (5328 total words)		
Pronoun	Occurrences	Per 1,000 words	Pronoun	Occurrences	Per 1,000 words
WE	84	17.77	WE	53	9.95
OUR	6	1.27	OUR	7	1.31
OURSELVES	0	0.00	OURSELVES	2	0.38
US	11	2.33	US	9	1.69
LET'S	4	0.85	LET'S	2	0.38
Total	105	22.22	Total	73	13.71
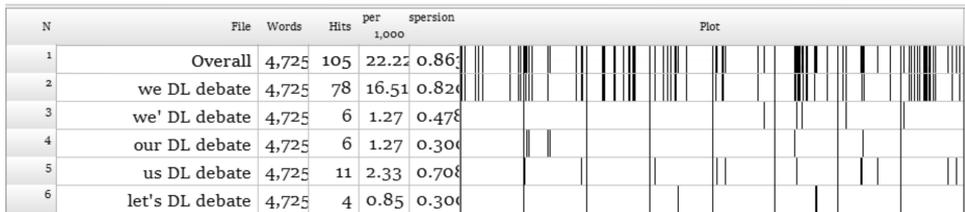
Figure 2. Dispersion plot of Dawkins's use of the first-person plural

Another thing to consider is dispersion; that is, when in the debate the participants use *we* (Figure 2 and Figure 3).
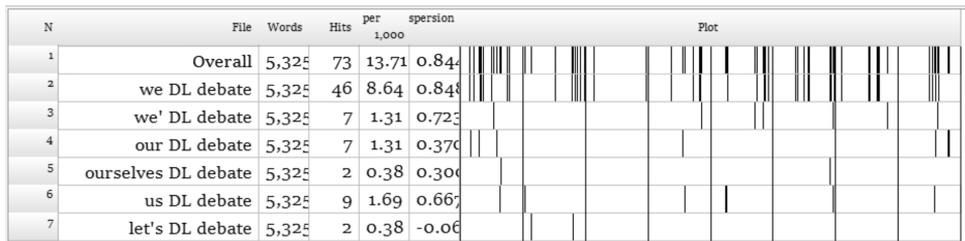
Figure 3. Dispersion plot of Lennox's use of the first-person plural

If we look at the plots for both debaters, Lennox has longer sections where he does not use the first-person plural, whereas Dawkins's use is more consistent.

The following two sections present the ways in which *we* is used by Dawkins and Lennox, respectively. Although the analysis is divided according to the debater, differences and similarities are mentioned throughout with a summary at the end.

4.1.2. Tag analysis: Dawkins

Dawkins most frequently uses *we* in a way that could be glossed *we scientists* Figure 4). In fact, uses of *we* tagged <DSCM> and <sc> could be seen as subsets of this category and therefore have been included with *we*<s> in latter analyses. Combined, these tags comprise nearly half of Dawkins's uses of the first-person plural (45%). When compared to Lennox's referents, this use is statistically significant, $z = 3.257$, $p = .001$.
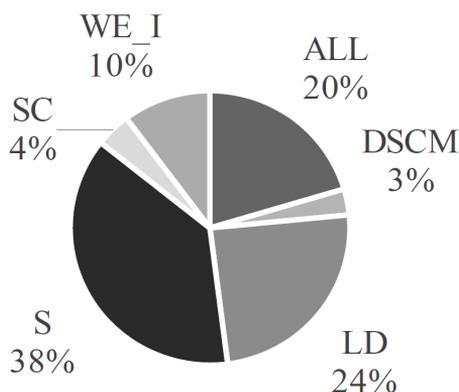
Figure 4. Dawkins's *we* referents

Figure 4 shows the correlations between purpose and referent. Despite the academic qualifications of both debaters, Dawkins is often ambiguous as to whether or not he is including Lennox in his group of scientists. He often uses <s> in cases where he is countering Lennox's arguments or expressing something he knows that Lennox, despite also being a scientist, will disagree with (2). These uses of *we* are marked <excl>.

(2) D: It's not designed, er *we*<s_excl_btwn> know that now, *we* understand how it happened, erm, but it looks very designed.

Dawkins's use of *we* to refer to an exclusive relationship with other scientists comprises 68% of his use of *we*<s>. The majority (80%) of *we* <s_excl> were also classified as placing the referents on stage as an example of an acceptable scientific perspective. The remainder occupied the <btwn> dimension. Dawkins only appears to intentionally include Lennox in his group of scientists three times in the debate.
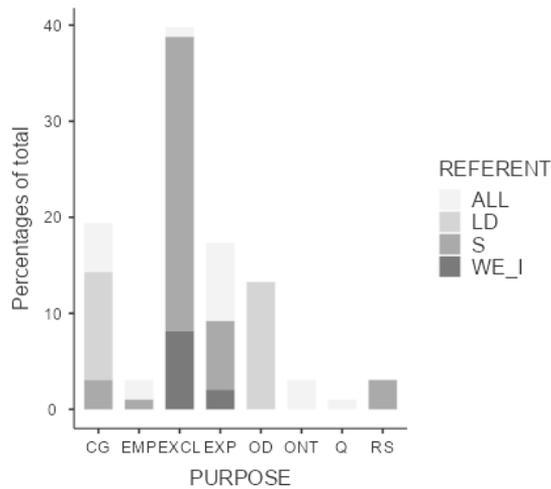
Figure 5. Dawkins's use of referent and purpose

Although the exclusive use of *we* seems to dominate in Dawkins's language, it is not the only role *we* plays. His use of *we*<cg> is slightly higher than proportionally expected ($p = .046$); however, this tag more frequently co-occurs with referents <LD> and <all> rather than <s>. The mutually exclusive co-occurrence of tags <LD> and <od> is expected in the debate format.

The referents <all> and <LD> each comprise just under a quarter of Dawkins's use of *we*. However, decisions regarding some of the <all> tags were not straightforward. For example, there was one instance in which the referent was actually the planet Earth (3).

(3) D: but *we*<all_exp_os> are one of billions of planets on a huge scale and a cosmic god who bothers about this kind of human scale is not the kind of god that is[6]

Although (3) can be assumed to be a metonymic referent to the people living on the planet, the choice to create distance through metonymy furthers one of Dawkins's arguments for God's non-existence: people on earth are too insignificant for any superior power to concern Himself with.

There is also a stretch of text in which Dawkins's use of *we* could have been tagged <all>, <we_I>, but was chosen instead as the text suggests a majestic or academic *we*. The text fragment is presented and discussed in Section 4.2.3. This use is not found in Lennox's discourse.

From the tag analysis, it appears as if Dawkins's debate strategy in terms of the first personal plural is to use *we* to identify himself with a group

of scientists, whom he puts onstage as experts. This group of scientists is often exclusive, and this exclusivity also forms part of his argument. The use of the majestic *we* could also be considered as part of that strategy.

4.1.3. Tag analysis: Lennox

Lennox primarily uses a dual inclusive *we* to refer to himself and Dawkins, with references to all humankind being second. The difference when compared to Dawkins's use of *we*<LD> is statistically significant, $z = 2.377$, $p = .017$. However, the role this referent plays is similar for both debaters: just under half are used to create common ground and the remainder to organise the discourse.
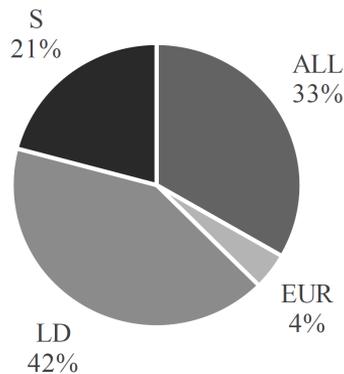
Figure 6. Lennox's *we* referents

Lennox's *we*<Eur> was added to *we*<all> in further analyses. The difference between Dawkins's and Lennox's use of *we*<all> is marginally statistically significant $z = 2.462$, $p = .014$. Moreover, as Figure 7 demonstrates, Lennox's discursive application of *we*<all> differs from his interlocutor's. Specifically, the referent frequently co-occurs with *we*<ont> as the two uses in (4).

(4) L: that *we*<all_ont_os> have personality, that's an anthropomorphism. But *we*<all_ont_os> are persons, God is a person

These excerpts contain a significant aspect of Lennox's debate strategy: focusing on who we are as humans. This includes the complexity of our DNA as well as our spiritual needs and potential. He argues that this is key to understanding the (im)probability that life came to be through random processes.

Lennox's use of *we*<s>, while less frequent than Dawkins's, differs significantly from his interlocutor's. Of his fifteen uses, eight are marked <cg>;

that is, they are used to include Lennox and Dawkins within the same scientific community. When compared to Dawkins's use of *we<s>*, the difference is statistically significant, $z = 3.995$, $p < .001$. Lennox's use of $<cg>$ is also greater than Dawkins' $z = 2.067$, $p = .038$.
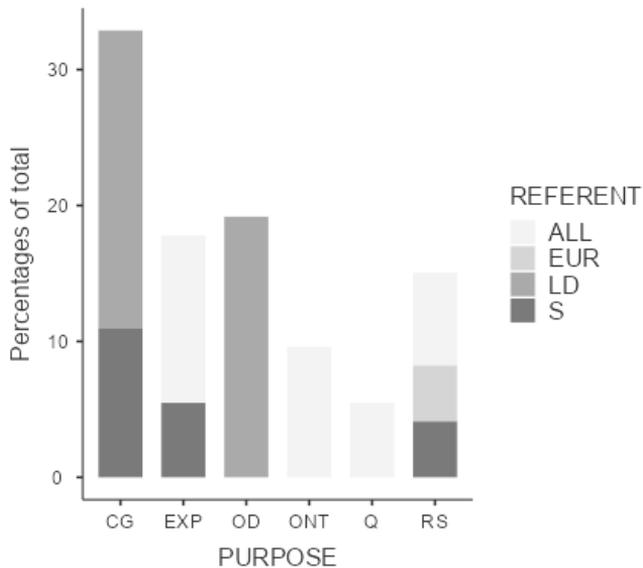

Figure 7. Lennox's use of referent and purpose

The tag analysis suggests that Lennox uses *we* to underscore that he and Dawkins are both part of the scientific community and part of the larger community of humankind. This is further evidenced by the frequent use of *we<cg>*, signifying that Lennox's argument is based on similarities between himself and Dawkins rather than their differences.

4.1.4. Comparison and summary

Chi-squared tests of independence show a significant relationship between speaker and referent X^2 $(4, 170) = 23.8$, $p < .001$ and speaker and purpose X^2 $(7, 170) = 48.5$, $p < .001$ but not for speaker and OIS X^2 $(5, 170) = 4.22$, $p = .519$. Although both debaters engage on the intersubjective level in similar proportions, there are important differences when referents and purposes are taken into account. These are discussed in Section 4.2.

When it comes to inclusive and exclusive uses, Lennox and Dawkins differ significantly. All but one of Lennox's uses of *we* are inclusive. On the other hand, Dawkins's uses are split forty-six to forty (inclusive-exclusive), with twelve instances ambiguous.

In summary, tag analysis reveals that the use of the OIS continuum is similar for both debaters; however, the debaters differ in referents and the purposes for which they use the first-person plural.

4.2. Navigation of the objective-(inter)subjective continuum

As mentioned above, there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which the debaters use the dimensions on the OIS continuum. Nevertheless, there is a difference in who *we* refers to and the purpose for which *we* is used in these dimensions. This section is subdivided into the four points on the OIS continuum and discusses the interlocutors' use of each in the debate. It concludes with the debaters' navigation of this continuum in their closing remarks.

4.2.1. Discourse organisation

Uses of *we* tagged <dis> are located in the ground to stage dimension and organise the discourse. A possible depiction is presented in Figure 8. Here, A represents previous discourse frames, B the current discussion, and C future discussion.
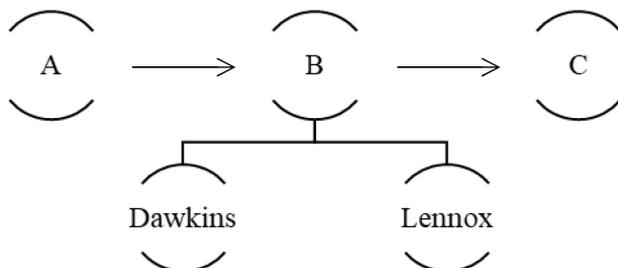

Figure 8. A conceptual arrangement of the dimension of discourse organisation

Different temporal points in the debate are profiled depending on the needs of the speaker. Excerpts such as (5) profile A, whereas (6) profiles C.

(5) D: Well *we*<LD_od_dis> have talked a little bit about morality.

(6) D: but I think it is a serious discussion of that *we*<LD_od_dis> could have

Both Lennox and Dawkins use a similar number of these expressions (15 and 13, respectively); however, the part of the discourse they tend to profile differs. Dawkins prefers present or future debate elements over past (4, 8, and 2 uses, respectively). Lennox favours the past over the present or the future (8, 2, and 5 uses, respectively). Excerpts (7) and (8) present a unique case with the phrase *let's leave aside*. This phrase presupposes an

element or topic that is cumbersome or troublesome in the past and present and, therefore, removed from the on-stage region of the debate. Each debater uses this phrase once.

(7) D: Now when you look at history and let's, let's<LD_od_dis> leave aside, maybe I alluded the possibility that some historians think that Jesus never existed. I take that back.

(8) If this mechanism that you talk about which doesn't apply for the origin of life at all but *let's*<LD_od_dis> *leave that aside*, if it is so phenomenally clever then it itself is giving evidence that there's a mind behind it.

Lennox also uses the expressions *step back, go back* and *brings us back* (2x) to pause the conversation and revisit a previous topic (9).

(9) L: well *let's*<LD_od_dis> go back to the level of the origins of the universe and the origin of life

These expressions profile movement between the discourse spaces as well as A and are unique to Lennox.
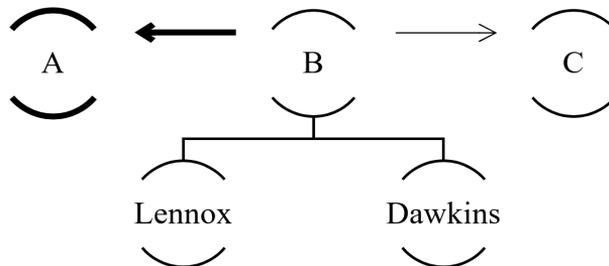

Figure 9. A conceptual arrangement of go back

The use of *we* in these discourse markers implies camaraderie and suggests that the debaters view their discussion as a journey or quest.

4.2.2. Between the onstage and offstage regions

When Lennox uses the dimension linking the onstage and offstage regions, it is exclusively to create common ground with Dawkins. As such, his referents are either <LD> or <s>. This strategy establishes the shared knowledge he uses to introduce an argument or to ask a question as in (10).

(10) L: As a scientist erm *we* <LD_cg_btwn> both believe in the rational intelligibility of the universe. I believe the universe is rationally intelligible because there's a creator God behind it. Now, how do you account for the rational intelligibility of the universe?
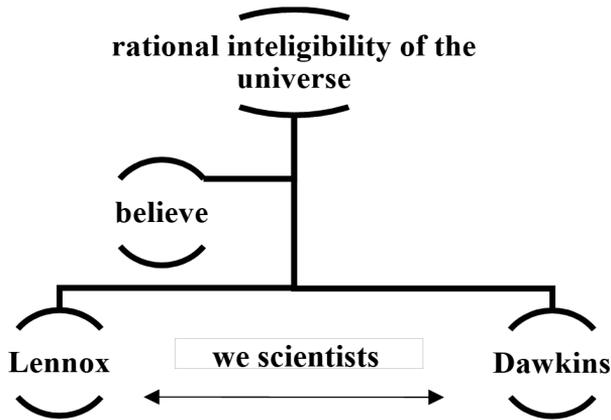
Figure 10. *A conceptual arrangement of* as scientists we believe

All but two of Dawkins's uses co-occur with <s>: three of these create common ground with Lennox, six suggest exclusivity and the remainder leave it unclear as to whether or not Dawkins is including Lennox in his in-group. Excerpt (11) is an example of this exclusive use.

(11) D: It's not designed, er *we*<s_excl_btwn> know that now, *we*<s_excl_btwn> understand how it happened, erm, but it looks very designed.

(12) D: Now the cosmos hasn't yet had its Darwin; *we*<s_exp_btwn> don't yet know how the laws of physics came into existence, how the physical constants came into existence, and so *we*<all_exp_btwn> can still say is it a freak accident or was it designed.
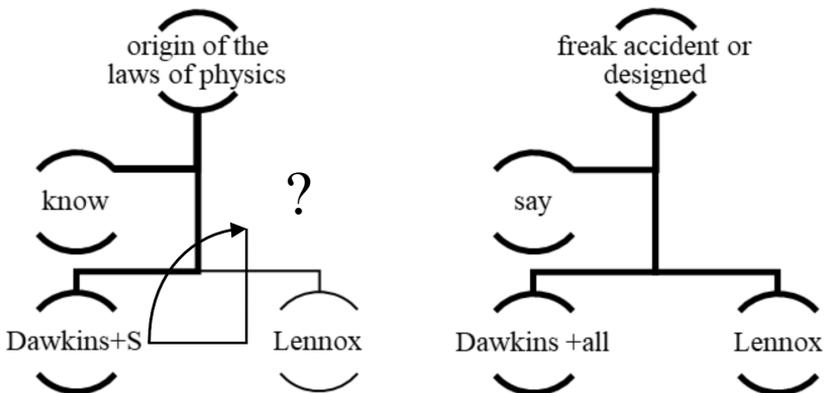

Figure 11. A conceptual arrangement of the laws of physics

In (12), Dawkins is continuing his train of thought regarding what science does and does not know, and it is unclear if Lennox is part of this group or not. With the hyperbolic *freak accident* and permission to admit natural laws were designed suggests that Dawkins's *we* refers here to people outside his scientific circle as well. A possible conceptual structure for (12) follows in Figure 11.

In this way, Dawkins makes use of the ambiguous nature of the first-person plural to cast doubt on Lennox's inclusion in the scientific community.

4.2.3. The on-stage region

As observed in the quantitative section, there is a difference in the debaters' referents for *we*, and this is most prominent in who they put onstage to construct their arguments. As mentioned, Dawkins's discourse shows a preference for an exclusive *we <s>*. This is exemplified in (13).

(13) D: [...] The analogy with biology might discourage *us*<LD_cg_is> from being too confident that it's designed because *we*<sc_excl_os> had *our*<sc_excl_os> fingers burned before the nineteenth century with the thing that- that biology which looks so much more obviously designed that *we – we*<sc_excl_os> got *our*<sc_excl_os> fingers burned there.
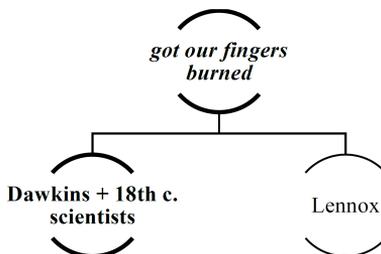

Figure 12. *A conceptual arrangement of* got our fingers burned

Dawkins's referents of the first-person plural shift from present-day to nineteenth-century scientists. The last four uses (excluding the stutter) were labelled <sc> and resemble the *we=they* use discussed in Section 2.4.1. Dawkins was not alive when scientists had to reconsider biology in the aftermath of Darwin's publication, but he identifies himself as a colleague of those who did. Dawkins places himself on stage with this larger group of scientists, a move that lets him speak from authority as a member of an exclusive, cross-generational community. This use of *we* serves as an implicit question to Lennox: *Do you, as a scientist, view yourself to be part of this group of scientists who got their fingers burned?*

As mentioned in section 4.1.2, there is also a fragment in the debate where Dawkins appears to be using the royal *we* to place himself onstage.

(14) D: I think there's something wonderful about uh... standing up and facing up to a universe where *we*<we_I_exp_os> are increasing *our*<we_I_exp_os> understanding, *we*<we_I_exp_os> throw away childhood obsessions, *we*<we_I_exp_os> throw away the sort of imaginary friend that comforts *us*<we_I_exp_os> when *we*'re<we_I_exp_os> children and *we*<we_I_exp_os> feel the need for some kind of parent figure to turn to. I think when *we*<we_I_exp_os> grow up, when *we*<we_I_emp_os> grow up, *we*<we_I_exp_os> need to cast that aside and stand-up tall in the universe and it's cold and *we*'re<all_exp_os> not going to last fore... *we*'re<all_exp_os> all going to die and *we*<we_I_exp_os> face up to that and I think that's a nobler way of getting through life than to pin your hopes on childhood delusions.

This fragment could be partially diagrammed as depicted in Figure 13. Dawkins places a series of *growing-up* events onstage for Lennox and the audience to contemplate.
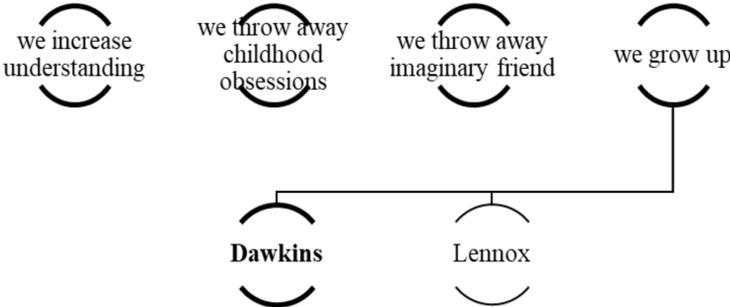

Figure 13. A conceptual arrangement of we grow up

In this fragment, Dawkins seems to be extrapolating from his personal experience of leaving religion. Thus, it could be argued that the use of *we* in (14) is an exclusive *we*, or, perhaps, a majestic *we* or *I*. For this reason, the majority of uses of *we* in this excerpt were marked <we_I>. The value judgment *noble* and the phrase *grow up* suggest that this is a perspective that Dawkins would like audience members to adopt (Anna Drogosz, personal conversation). This enables Dawkins to use *we* to put himself onstage as an example of a scientist who exhibits both bravery and maturity.

Whereas Dawkins uses an exclusive *we* to place himself and other scientists on stage, Lennox frequently employs the inclusive *we* to place all humans, Dawkins included, on stage. He uses *we* in this way to present our ontological status as human beings, particularly in terms of our need for God.

(15) the fundamental problem that I don't think atheism even eh even er begins to deal with, and that is the problem of *our*<all_ont_os> alienation with God.

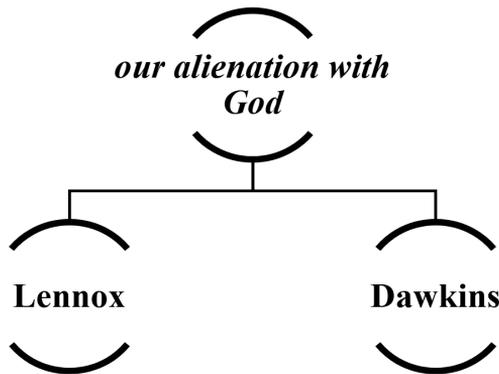This placement of *we* and our human predicament onstage can be depicted as in Figure 14.

Figure 14. A conceptual arrangement of our alienation with God

However, Lennox does not limit the human predicament to spiritual needs; he also asks Dawkins and the audience to consider their cognitive abilities (16).

(16) L: [...] it seems to me that atheism is saying that the thoughts in *our*<all_rs_os> minds are in the end of the only the results of a mindless unguided process. Now if that is the case it seems to me that it's very difficult to see how they could tell *us*<all_rs_os> anything that is true about *ourselves*<all_ont_os> [...] And John Gray, who's also an atheist I understand, made the point not long ago, that er the problem with Darwinism if you take it in its ultra-form, it really undermines the er notion, that *we*<all_rs_os> can give any credence to what *we*<all_rs_os> think. So, it seems to me that your atheism undermines the very rationality that I assume and you assume when *we*<LD_cg_os> go to study the universe.

In this fragment, Lennox and Dawkins are both observers and objects under investigation. As Lennox moves from *we*<s> to *we*<all> in (16), he expands the group of people *we* refers to. His final use of *we* to refer specifically to himself and Dawkins is strategic, reminding Dawkins that although in the present moment they are both unique participants in a scientific debate, they are also part of the scientific community and members of humankind. It is the human predicament that grounds and drives most of Lennox's argument.
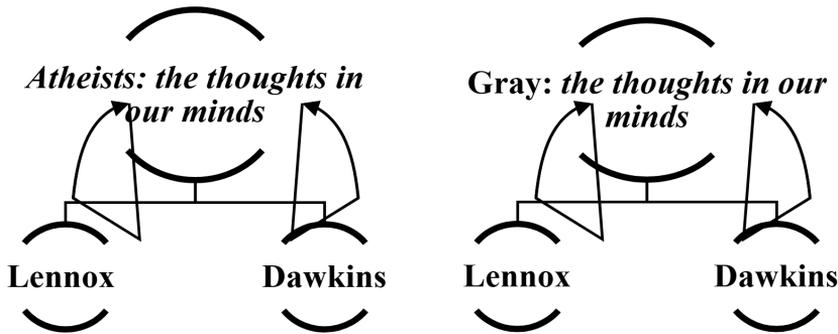
Figure 15. A conceptual arrangement of the thoughts in our minds

4.2.4. Intersubjective coordination

Despite their differences of opinion, the debaters often engage in dialogue in the intersubjective dimension. At times, this is a rhetorical question as in (17), but more frequently there are examples of coordination as in (18) where they both understand and accept a problem fundamental to their debate, thus exhibiting intersubjectivity.

(17) L: So, *we*<LD_cg_is> have to ask *ourselves*<LD_cg_is>, are *we*<LD_cg_btwn> prepared to believe in historical testimony [of Jesus] or not?

(18) L: [...] the notion of things in principle going from simple to complex, and they must go that way, that seems to me to be your belief, your faith
D: Wha- Things must go to the simple to complex?
L: yes
D: no! If- if things go from simple to complex *we- we*<LD_cg_IS> need an explanation.
L: Yeah, *we*<LD_cg_is> do indeed

After this moment of intersubjective coordination, the interlocutors again diverge, unable to agree on whether or not the level of sophistication in the language of DNA presupposes a mind. And then once again they achieve intersubjective coordination regarding the nature of the problem – how things started – and diverge on their solution.

This is a pattern that repeats itself throughout the debate – convergence and divergence. Even after Dawkins's monologue in (14), in which Dawkins indirectly suggests Lennox's belief in God is a childhood delusion, the two are able to again admit that while their perspectives differ, they can agree that the evidence for either position is still lacking (19).

(19) L: But that all rests on the assum..assumption that there's no God of your childhood delusions
[...]
D: *We*<LD_cg_is> need the evidence.
L: *We*<LD_cg_is> need the evidence. And what I'm suggesting to you is that *we*<LD_cg_btwn> do have do have that evidence.

I would like to suggest that it is this repeated return to an agreement regarding the unknown and the humility that it reflects on the part of the debaters that enables them to have such a polite exchange.

4.2.5. The OIS continuum and the debaters' closing remarks

Both debaters apply similar strategies in their closing remarks: they begin with comments at the intersubjective level and then draw their interlocutor and audience's attention onstage to make their point.

(20) L: [...] The other big area which *we*<LD_od_dis> didn't discuss in great detail tonight is that if science if science has buried God, it seems to me there's something else that lies before *us*<all_cg_is> and that is, where are *we*<all_q_is> going to get *our*<all_q_is> morality from? [...]

(21) L: But Jurgen Habermas, who is not a Christian of course, recently said that the foundations of *our*<Eur_cg_os> legal system and *our*<Eur_cg_os> education and *our*<Eur_cg_os> morality in Europe are based on Christianity, everything else is post-modern chatter.

Lennox tries to connect with Dawkins at the intersubjective level (20) by raising the question of morality. Then uses an inclusive *we* to place himself and Dawkins onstage as Europeans in need of a moral foundation, thereby emphasising the predicament of humankind from a moral and social perspective (21). The latter is also an attempt to connect with Dawkins by referencing a scientist who shares his worldview.

Dawkins also begins with an attempt at intersubjective coordination and the only example in which he uses *we*<s> that includes Lennox (22). The majority of the remaining uses of *we* were labelled <s_excl_os> (23).

(22) D: *We*<all_cg_os> live in an intelligible universe and that's one of the things that *we*<s_cg_is> need to explain and you think it needs a god in order to explain it [...]

(23) It's it's one of the glories of science that *we*<s_excl_os> know what *we*<s_excl_os> don't know, and *we*<s_excl_os> work on what *we*<s_excl_os> don't know, trying to shrink what *we*<s_excl_os> don't know. It's hard work, *we*<s_excl_os> don't cop out by saying oh *we*<s_excl_os> have come to a difficult problem, magic must have done it, or God must have done it, no *we*<s_excl_os> don't say that, *we*<s_excl_os> say right that's a problem to be solved. It may not be solved this century, it may be solved in the following century or the one after that, but *we*<s_excl_os> don't just lie down and give up.

Thus, Dawkins reiterates points that he has made throughout the debate: he understands and agrees with Lennox's concern that they need to explain the intelligibility of the universe (22), and he believes that present and future science, with whom he identifies himself through the pronoun *we*, will find that explanation (22). Dawkins's use of *we*<s> again extends beyond his generation. In excerpt (13), *we* identified Dawkins with scientists of the late nineteenth century; here, *we* connects Dawkins with scientists of the future. Thus, his pronoun use shows that Dawkins views himself as part of an atemporal community of scientists. In the debate, these scientists are placed onstage as experts and comprise the force of his argument.

5. Discussion and conclusion

As evidenced by the analyses above, Dawkins uses *we* more often than Lennox. When looked at in connection with Barczewska (2018), the results align with Hyland's (2007) and Harwood's (2005) analysis: those working in the hard sciences tend to use *we* to replace *I*. Nevertheless, both speakers use *we* to create a discursive identity. This discursive identity was most visible in their navigation of the between and onstage regions.

Dawkins tends to use *we* to group certain scientists throughout the generations into one unified group and to identify himself as a member of that cross-generational group. In so doing, he both claims group membership and suggests that metaphysical naturalism is representative of this group.

Not only does this ignore the philosophical differences between the scientists, but also demarcates the boundaries of what constitutes 'a scientist', thereby questioning Lennox's claim to the title. Thus, for the most part, Dawkins's use of *we*<s> can be seen as an example of the exclusive *we*. When Dawkins uses this *we*, he places himself and those he acknowledges as scientists on stage as experts and examples to be followed. Lennox and members of the audience have a choice as to whether or not they want to join this exclusive group.

Lennox's use of the first-person plural exemplifies an inclusive *we*. First of all, he grounds his argument within the human predicament. It is this general *we*<all> that creates the core of his argument. Hence, Dawkins and the audience are already on-stage – the choice that remains is whether or not they want to accept Lennox's explanation of their ontological status, both physical and spiritual. When he uses *we*<s>, most, if not all, of these instances could also be marked as *we*<LD>. Hence, Lennox discursively construes himself and Dawkins as both belonging to not only the same group of scientists but also, and more importantly, members of humankind.

Despite these differences, the two debaters show evidence of intersubjective coordination and their ability to repeatedly seek out and accept moments of mutual agreement. Although this occurred at the level of problem identification rather than solution, simply being able to see the same problem is an exercise in intersubjectivity and a prerequisite to real dialogue.

6. The need for further research

This study demonstrated differences and similarities in the use of *we* by Lennox and Dawkins in the debate *Has Science Buried God?* (2008). It showed how both speakers used *we* in construing their discursive identity – visible in their scope of referents and discursive purposes. It also showed that, despite their different perspectives on life's origins, the two debaters navigated the objectivity – (inter)subjectivity continuum in similar ways, enabling them to have a debate in which the audience felt that the interlocutors really listened to each other. This is a skill that is missing in much contemporary debate.

One of the limitations of this study was its scope. With only one debate, it is not possible to make any claims regarding the overall styles of Lennox and Dawkins, or Christian and atheist debaters. However, it does suggest areas for research and raises questions for further exploration:

- To what extent are these differences in debate styles:
  a. Topic-specific?
  b. Participant-specific?
  c. Viewpoint-specific?
- Are there signs of one discourse partner 'adopting' the style of the other? When/why does that occur?
- How do the debaters' use of *we* and the (inter)subjectivity-objectivity continuum contribute to the level of intersubjectivity?

Answers would require a large-scale research project comprised of a group of scholars from a variety of contexts. Taking into consideration the increasing polarisation of contemporary society, such a study would not only be of academic interest but could also aid in improving communication across a variety of spectrums.

N O T E S

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, *we* is used by the author to refer to all forms of the first-person plural.

[2] The debate was organized at the Oxford Museum of Natural History by the Fixed Point Foundation and can be viewed along with exit interviews on YouTube (2008).

[3] Originally, there was one set of tags, but reviewers encouraged broadening the scope. Special thanks to Aleksandra Górska for her assistance with the preliminary transcript and tagging.

[4] Simon Conway Morris is a scientist whose view on evolution is similar to Dawkins, and he is mentioned in the debate as someone whose views Dawkins identifies with.

[5] Of Dawkins's uses of *we*, seven were stutters or false starts. One of Lennox's utterances with *we* was cut off and could not be analyzed. These uses are counted in Table 4, but not used in further analyses.

[6] The tags as presented in this paper differ slightly from the corpus: (1) they have been simplified to only include information relevant to the discussion; (2) they have been changed to lower case and moved after *we* to facilitate reading.

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