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Response to my commentator

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Response to my Commentator

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I am grateful to Steven Patterson for his insightful comments, and I am glad we agree on the positive role that decision-theoretic approaches could play in argumentation theory. However, we do have points of disagreement, so now I will focus on three of his criticisms.

(1) Informal logic had historical reasons for moving away from formal theories in general, including rational choice theory, and these reasons were valid at the time.

I agree, and my whole work on argumentation expresses deep sympathy for the informal logic enterprise. In a sense, Patterson here is saying that it was strategically rational for informal logic not to commune with rational choice theory, at that particular time, regardless of the potential theoretical merits of that communion. How could I possibly disagree with that, since I claim that strategic considerations can, and sometimes should overrule other normative concerns? However, those historical reasons no longer apply, and it is to present-day informal logicians that I appeal for participating in this project.

(2) My taxonomy of argumentative decisions is highly familiar to any argumentation scholar, since all those aspects have been discussed in the literature.

Indeed, the taxonomy was meant to be familiar. But what I claim is novel, as partially missing in the extant literature, is a decision-theoretic approach to those aspects of an argument. Not only to yield interesting empirical results, but also to offer powerful modeling tools. These tools are not meant to replace current theories of argument, but rather to complement them. And the fact that these decision-theoretic models are to be applied to familiar concepts is not a problem.

(3) I fail to establish a “moral equivalence between strategic considerations and considerations of reasonableness and argumentative fair dealing that derive from the usual sense of rationality in play in argumentation theory”.

Yes, I do not provide reasons for such equivalence, instead I take it for granted and discuss under what conditions one of these normative concerns is justified in taking priority over others. And yes, I look forward to providing reasons for that

equivalence in the first place. However, why should the burden of proof be automatically or exclusively on me, rather than on those who do *not* consider strategic rationality on a par with other normative concerns? What reasons do they have to offer, other than “it’s obvious” or “we always thought so”? If accepting strategic rationality as a valid normative concern for argumentation is question-begging, the same applies to its rejection.

I suspect that the uneasiness of many argumentation scholars towards strategic rationality is based on a slippery slope, which starts from “strategic”, moves to “self-interested”, then goes to “selfish” and ends up with “immoral”. The key mistake is in the confusion between self-interest and selfishness. As my “political” example was meant to suggest, strategic rationality can lead to perfectly unselfish outcomes, even when it conflicts with other normative criteria. That’s because strategic rationality is completely *neutral* with respect to the morality, or lack thereof, of the preferences in question.