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Reply to my Commentator - Freeman

James B. Freeman

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Reply to my Commentator

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I want to thank Professor Blair for his comments. My response to his minor objections will come when I revise this material for publication. Concerning his broader issues, Professor Blair questions “whether this is a paper on philosophical ethics rather than on argumentation theory” (p. 1). It is both and I believe this is necessary properly to address the question of connection adequacy for deontic arguments, given an epistemological approach to argumentation. I have proposed that a basic premise in an argument is acceptable just when the source vouching for that statement creates a currently undefeated presumption for it. That is an epistemological criterion. Likewise, whether the premises of an argument are so connected to its conclusion as to transfer their acceptability to it depends on the warrant of the argument being properly backed and not rebutted. Specifying when these conditions hold for deontic arguments is a matter of moral epistemology. An ethical intuitionist such as Ross in effect will hold that most, if not all, of the warrants are self-backed. We do not dispute that here. But if interlocutors apparently have conflicting intuitions, they may possibly appeal to higher-level principles, which may back one warrant and rebut the others. When are warrants and higher level principles justified? These matters of philosophical ethics bear directly on connection adequacy.

Rawls *Theory of Justice* deals at length with higher level principles and their justification. But both Kant’s categorical imperative and Mill’s principle of utility are higher level principles. So I accept Professor Blair’s point that my discussion of Rawls should simply illustrate how such principles might function in moral argumentation and how one might try to justify them, rather than endorse Rawls’ position. Finally, I agree completely with Professor Blair that appealing to higher level principles is not the only way to remove dissensus over considered moral judgments. Showing that an act possesses a further morally relevant property which one’s interlocutor has overlooked and which changes the balance of morally relevant properties is a basic level way through argumentation to challenge the interlocutor’s considered judgment. Appeal to higher level principles is another way. To address the lacuna of not discussing that way in my 2007 OSSA paper I prepared this contribution for 2009.

[Link to commentary](#)

[Link to paper](#)

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