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Reply to commentary on Constructing a Periodic Table of Arguments

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Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Argumentation, Objectivity and Bias: Proceedings of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation Conference, Vol. 11, University of Windsor, May 18-21, 2016

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Citation for published version (APA):

Wagemans, J. H. M. (2016). Reply to commentary on Constructing a Periodic Table of Arguments. In L. Benacquista, & P. Bondy (Eds.), *Argumentation, Objectivity and Bias: Proceedings of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation Conference, Vol. 11, University of Windsor, May 18-21, 2016* OSSA.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA11/papersandcommentaries/163/>

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Reply to Commentary on Constructing a *Periodic Table of Arguments*

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1. Introduction

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Yun Xie for his commentary on my paper. In the commentary, Xie challenges important aspects of the theoretical framework of the table by providing a number of examples that illustrate specific problems. In this short reply, I will provide alternative reconstructions of these examples and indicate whether – and if so, how – I think these problems can be solved.

2. Response to criticisms

2.1. The distinction between subject arguments and predicate arguments

The first challenge raised by Xie pertains to the distinction between subject arguments and predicate arguments. According to him, the grammatical understanding of a categorical proposition consisting of a subject and a predicate that underlies this distinction “might have just oversimplified the structure of categorical proposition, and therefore veiled some complexity in our ways of arguing for a standpoint.” Xie is especially worried that by using the grammatical understanding of categorical propositions, some commonly distinguished ways of arguing might be overlooked. Also, he states that if we would take a logical understanding of categorical propositions, i.e. an understanding that includes the distinctions between affirmative and negative propositions as well as between universal and particular ones, then “the distinction between subject and predicate argument would appear to be unwarranted.”

To illustrate these points, he asks how two specific examples that employ this logical understanding of categorical propositions can be accommodated in my proposal. As a response to this challenge, I will try to show how these examples can be reconstructed in terms of the theoretical framework of the *Periodic Table of Arguments*.

The first example, a syllogistic argument, can be reconstructed by taking the major premise (All men are mortal) to support the justificatory force of the minor premise (Socrates is a man):

Example 1

- 1 Socrates is mortal
- 1.1 Socrates is a man
- 1.1' If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal
- 1.1'.1 All men are mortal

Taking this reconstruction as a starting point, the main argument (1.1) can be identified as a first-order predicate argument instantiating the combination FF, i.e. as an ‘argument from sign’. Given that the argumentation consists of two levels, it is even possible to identify which sub-type of the ‘argument from sign’ is used in this case. The presence of the quantifier ‘all’ on the second level of the argumentation (1.1’.1) supporting the standpoint (1) indicates that the relation between the two predicates is such that ‘being a man’ is a sure sign of ‘being mortal’, thereby making the example an illustration of Aristotle’s concept of *tekmêrion*.

The second example, a linked argument, is similar to the first in that it can also be reconstructed as consisting of two levels:

Example 2

- 1 Capital punishment is desirable
- 1.1 It is a deterrent to crime
- 1.1’ If capital punishment is deterrent to crime, then it is desirable
 - 1.1’.1 Being deterrent to crime is a good thing (i.e. it renders capital punishment desirable)

Employing the distinctions that constitute the theoretical framework of the *Periodic Table of Arguments*, this argument can be identified as a first-order predicate argument instantiating the combination VF, i.e. an ‘argument from criterion’.

The next three, more abstract examples mentioned by Xie address different types of problems. I think that the first one, ‘Some S are P, because all S are P,’ could be interpreted as an abstract formulation of a first-order subject argument instantiating the combination FF, i.e. an ‘argument from similarity’. For in this case, one could argue that ‘some S’ is the subject of the standpoint and ‘all S’ is the subject of the argument, the genus-species relation between the two subjects rendering the standpoint more acceptable. The other two, ‘Some S are P, because all P are S’ and ‘No S is P, because no P is S’ are more difficult to reconstruct. Maybe they should be seen as instantiations of substitution rules or implication rules rather than as abstract formulations of arguments. But they surely pose a challenge: I will try to find some concrete examples and think about it.

The last example that is related to the first criticism is ‘Abortion should be prohibited, because taking the life of an innocent person is totally wrong.’ Problematizing this case, Xie points out that, since the standpoint and argument do not have a common element, this example cannot be reconstructed in terms of the theoretical framework of the *Periodic Table of Arguments*. Now it is true that the proposed framework only allows for subject arguments, which have a common predicate, and predicate arguments, which have a common subject. But I think that this example can be accommodated in the table, for if we substitute ‘abortion’ for ‘taking the life of an innocent person’, the argument can be identified as a first-order predicate argument instantiating the combination PV, i.e. an ‘argument from evaluation’. The statement that ‘abortion’ implies, means or results in ‘taking the life of an innocent person’ can be reconstructed as an argument in support of that argument, which can be identified as a first-order predicate argument instantiating the combination VF, i.e. an ‘argument from criterion’. The complete reconstruction would then include both types of argument, the latter one supporting the former:

Example 3

- 1 Abortion should be prohibited
- 1.1 Abortion is totally wrong
- 1.1' If abortion is totally wrong, then it should be prohibited
 - 1.1.1 Abortion implies, means or results in taking the life of an innocent person

2.2. The identification of the combination of types of propositions

I will now turn to addressing the second criticism, which pertains to the identification of the combination of types of proposition in an argument. Xie suspects that “it is quite possible that some argument schemes could instantiate more than one combination of type of proposition” and mentions pragmatic argumentation as an example. As to this example, I think that the solution lies in reconstructing the proposition of value (V) as an argument in support of the justificatory force of the proposition of fact (F):

Example 4

- 1 Act A should not be carried out (P)
- 1.1 Act A leads to result R (F)
- 1.1' If act A leads to result R, then act A should not be carried out
 - 1.1'.1 Result R is terrible (V)

Reconstructing the statement expressing the evaluation of the result as an argument (1.1'.1) supporting the link (1.1') between the main argument (1.1) and the standpoint (1) reflects the idea that it is only this evaluation that tells us why act A should or should not be carried out under the assumption that it leads to result R. If result R is positively evaluated, the statement expressing the evaluation functions as a reason for carrying out act A, while if result R is negatively evaluated – like in the example just mentioned – it functions as a reason for refraining from carrying it out. So I think that there is only one type of argument in the *Periodic Table of Arguments* that should be called ‘pragmatic argument’ and that this type of argument should be conceived as a first-order predicate argument instantiating the combination PF.

A final issue concerns the place in the table of the ‘argument from authority’. According to Xie, this argumentation scheme could instantiate more than one combination of propositions (VF and PF) and therefore “cannot be located in the *Periodic Table of Arguments* at a unique place.” I agree that if this would indeed be the case, it would create a problem. But I think that the second example – the one instantiating the combination PF – reflects an underlying mechanism that is different from that of the argument from authority conceived as a second-order argument.

3. Conclusion

I would like to thank Xie once again for pointing out these problems, all of which pose a challenge to the design of the theoretical framework of the *Periodic Table of Arguments*. As I hope to have indicated in this reply, some of the problems can be solved by giving alternative

reconstructions of the examples. Other problems, especially those regarding the logical understanding of categorical propositions and the location of the argument types at a unique place in the table, definitely need more consideration than could be given on this occasion.