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Reply to my Commentator - Rudanko

Juhani Rudanko
University of Tampere

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Reply to my Commentator

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I thank Dr. Jansen for her comments, and I appreciate it that she finds the term “counter-constructive” helpful. As used in this study, the term designates a rhetorical move that runs counter to the proper purpose or purposes of a dialogue.

However, there are some major areas where I want to respond critically to Dr. Jansen’s comments.

First, Dr. Jansen questions my quest for intention, observing that it is “different from the one practiced in pragmatics.” In response I would maintain that for overt intentions, a speaker’s words are often sufficient, but for covert intentions, the investigator needs to look more closely at the totality of the speaker’s behaviour record. The present study is not about how overt intentions give rise to conversational implicatures; instead, it is on covert intentions, central to *ad socordiam*.

Dr. Jansen in fact agrees that James Jackson did have a hidden agenda. However, she believes that a “hidden agenda is not counter-constructive,” and that “Jackson’s secret agenda isn’t one [a fallacy, JR].” Dr. Jansen’s opinion accords with the view that

it is not the internal reasoning processes and inner convictions of those involved in resolving a difference of opinion that are of primary importance to argumentation theory (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, 54).

I maintain that in political discourse having a secret agenda is deceptive, misleading and counter-constructive. When a member of Congress proposes a course of action that will be binding on everyone, he/she should indicate what he/she intends to achieve with the proposal. To fail to do so is to fall short of a reasonable argumentative standard. A move to postpone the consideration of a measure made with the intention of blocking the measure is liable, as in the present case, to divert the discussion away from the substance of the measure proposed, preventing it from receiving a fair hearing.

It should also be emphasized that *ad socordiam* is worth investigating as a fallacy because speakers may be sensitive to its presence. Goodhue’s and Madison’s comments on Jackson’s speech show that, while they had probably never heard of fallacy theory, they were sensitive to the presence of *ad socordiam*.

For Dr. Jansen, *ad socordiam* is not a fallacy, and she instead claims that Goodhue and Madison are guilty of *ad hominem* in their remark about Jackson’s inner convictions. I

cannot share Dr. Jansen's view. The reason is that exposing a fallacy is a legitimate argumentative move.

Theoretical terms may be defined to suit the purposes of investigation, but the student of political rhetoric should not turn a blind eye to *ad socordiam* as a fallacy. To do so would be seriously to impoverish one's approach and to sideline the analysis of a noteworthy feature of political discourse.

[Link to commentary](#)

[Link to paper](#)

REFERENCE

Eemeren, F. H. van and Rob Grootendorst. 2004. *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The pragma-dialectical approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.