One measure of the success of a target article is the vitality of the commentary it generates. I could not be more pleased with the thoughtful and often penetrating discussion offered on the preceding pages from such a diverse range of perspectives. Each perspective enriches both the original article and our collective discussion, even as each tugs in its own unique direction. It is all the better that they should tug in such very different directions.

In the target article (Markus, 1998), I argued that Messick’s (1989) theory of test validity contains an unfinished synthesis. The evidential basis of test validity suggests that validity is independent of values whereas the consequential basis suggests what appears to be the opposite: that test validity is dependent on the values brought to the testing process. The above tension cannot be avoided by attempting to separate test interpretation from test use. Facts and values are closely linked in ways underlined by the role of constructionism and context in Messick’s (1989) theory. Although several possible solutions are considered, an approach based upon value justification appears to be the most promising. Rephrasing the assertion that validity is independent of values as the assertion that validity is independent of subjective statements resolves the tension between the two bases of test validity. At least, that was the basic argument.

Messick (1998) provided some helpful clarifications and a forceful new defense of the consequential basis of test validity. Reckase (1998) provided a valuable divergent perspective on validity from which we all can profit. I share his commitment to latent structure analysis in all its forms (Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968). Moss (1998) counterbalances Reckase’s fervent formalism with a probing consideration of the dialogic and interpretive dimensions of Messick’s theory. Despite my greater emphasis on the role in science
played by regulation and self-regulation, as in the Panopticon, I share her conversational view of validity arguments and welcome the regulatory effects produced by her friendly interrogation of my assumptions. Zimmerman (1998) provides a far reaching and provocative discussion with which I find general agreement.

I will attempt to leave intact the dynamic interplay between the comments by organizing my reply around specific issues. Preferring dialog to debate, let me begin by conceding each author his or her local truths without delay or reservation. Rather than choosing between truths, it is more interesting to explore the range of each author’s truths with a particular eye for the ways in which they overlap or complement one another. At the same time, let me emphasize that I do so from my own situated perspective and do not pretend to adjudicate between them. The truths I have to tell are also local truths.

Validity: Judgment, Concept, and Theory

Three intertwined issues are woven through the various comments. One involves validity itself: Is there a single unitary validity corresponding to a given test interpretation? The second involves the concept of validity: Is there one unified concept of validity? The third involves the unified validity theory: Are there unresolved issues in our current validity theory? There is something to be gained in disentangling these three issues.

Unitary validity. Both Messick (1998) and Moss (1998) reject the idea of a test interpretation having a single validity assessment, whereas Rackese (1998) seems adamant that there is a unitary validity. Faced with this apparent tug-of-war, it is worth asking if we are all tugging on the same rope.

Rackese prefaces his comments by stipulating a framework for discussing validity that is mindfully different from that adopted by Messick, Moss, and myself. He restricts constructs to continuous latent variables corresponding to a predefined dimension in a predefined hyperspace of predefined variability across predefined individuals. If we agree on the definition of the construct – thus determining a line in hyperspace – and we agree on a particular test – thus determining a second line – then there is a single determinate