



CAUSAL AND EPISTEMIC RELEVANCE IN APPEALS TO AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT. Appeals to authority have a long tradition in the history of argumentation theory. During the Middle Age they were considered legitimate and sound arguments, but after Locke's treatment in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* their legitimacy has come under question. Traditionally, arguments from authority were considered informal arguments, but since the important work of Charles Hamblin (Hamblin, 1970) many attempts to provide a form for them have been done. The most convincing of them is the presumptive form developed by Douglas Walton and John Woods (Woods and Watson, 1974) that aims at taking into account the relevant contextual aspects in assessing the provisional validity of an appeal to authority. The soundness of an appeal depends on its meeting the adequacy conditions set to scrutinize all the relevant questions. I want to claim that this approach is compatible with the analysis of arguments in terms of relevance advanced by David Hitchcock (Hitchcock, 1992). He claims that relevance is a triadic relation between two items and a context. The first item is relevant to the second one in a given context. Different types of relevance relation exist, namely causal relevance and epistemic relevance. "Something is [causally] relevant to an outcome in a given situation if it helps to cause that outcome in the situation" (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 253) whereas it is epistemically relevant when it helps to achieve an epistemic goal in a given situation. I claim that we can adapt this conception to Walton and Krabbe's theory of dialogue type (Walton and Krabbe, 1995) seeing the items of a relevance relation as the argument and its consequence and the context as the type of dialogue in which these arguments are advanced. According to this perspective, an argument from authority that meets the adequacy conditions has to be considered legitimate because it is an epistemically relevant relation. Therefore, my conclusion is that

an analysis of appeals to authority in terms of relevance can be a useful tool to establish fallaciousness or legitimacy of such a kind of argument even within the established paradigm of argumentation theory.

KEYWORDS. Appeal to authority, Adequacy conditions, Epistemic relevance, Causal relevance.



1 Introduction

The legitimacy of appeals to authority has traditionally been disputed all along the history of philosophy. As Douglas Walton claims (Walton, 1997, p. 33), in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages it was considered a sound and legitimate argument. A turning point in the debate was the treatment advanced by John Locke, the first who used the label of *argumentum ad verecundiam*. In his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke characterizes it in a quite different way in respect to how it is conceived today. In Locke's view, *the argumentum ad verecundiam* consists in an appeal to the reverential awe (*verecundia* in Latin) of the opponent no less than to the expertise of an authority. The authority is such that every criticism advanced by the opponent should be regarded as an act of pride or shamelessness. In Locke's view, such a kind of move is not always fallacious, but surely it is when used to silence the opponent by intimidating him or making him appear pride or presumptuous. Locke's treatment is one of the most relevant in the history of this argument and it dictated the guidelines for every following treatment (Walton, 1997, p. 33).

As it happens also for other kinds of arguments, even the appeal to authority is double-sided. We can obviously say that when such an appeal is used to silence the opponent and to intimidate him to make him abandon his thesis, it has to be considered fallacious. However, appealing to authority becomes necessary when we are considering arguments that require high degrees of expertise. If two politicians are discussing the opportunity of legalizing a drug in a TV talk, they have to appeal to the opinions of expert pharmacologists or physicians to decide if this substance is dangerous or not. Also in our everyday life, the opinion of experts is very relevant: every time we ask our doctor what is the best way to treat our cold or when we bring our car to the mechanic to have the engine repaired, we are relying on their expertise. Therefore, when an appeal to an expert's opinion is used as a move inside a critical dialogue there are many factors that have to be considered in order to evaluate its legitimacy.

In this paper, I would like to propose a particular view on this subject based on the notion of relevance proposed by David Hitchcock (1992) and see if it can give a contribution in establishing the legitimacy of an appeal. My aim is to show that an approach based on relevance can gain a different perspective on the subject, a perspective useful in evaluating the correctness of adopting appeals to authority as moves in a dialogue.

In the next sections of this paper I am going to examine various attempts to formalize the *argumentum ad verecundiam* by different authors. I will also focus on the conditions required to an authority to be considered such and to make an appeal to it appropriated. The second part of this paper will be dedicated to the issue of relevance.

By the word “relevance”, I mean a triadic relation between two items and a context (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 252). We have to distinguish between causal and epistemic relevance. According to Hitchcock, “something is [causally] relevant to an outcome in a given situation if it helps to cause that outcome in the situation” (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 253), while it can be considered epistemically relevant when it helps in achieving an epistemic goal. In the context of a critical dialogue, we can consider an argument the relevant item, in our case an appeal to authority, while the item to which it is relevant can be defined in two different ways. First, I propose to consider causal relevance as the persuasion of the opponent achieved by whom put forward the argument. Therefore, the outcome is the persuasion. Second, in the case of epistemic relevance, the second item of the triadic relation is an epistemic goal. In the second part of the paper I will apply this concepts to the analysis of a recent debate about the appeal to authority trying to see if the notion of relevance may be of some help in it.

2 Forms of the Argument

As I have stated in the introduction, different attempts have been made to formalize arguments from authority. For a long time, in the history of argumentation theory, the appeal to authority was considered an informal argument that did not fit any kind of formalization because of the many contextual factors involved.

However, since the important work of Charles Hamblin *Fallacies*, several attempts have been made. Firstly, I want to consider the deductive formalization proposed by Hamblin himself (Hamblin, 1970, p. 170):

Everything X says is true.

X says that p.

Therefore, p.

The form of the argument is deductively valid thanks to the universal quantifier in the first premise. However, this form places too strong constraints to the soundness of the appeal because it requires the existence of an omniscient authority. This formalization does not allow to shape appeals to authority in a plausible and realistic way. For this reason, Hamblin dismisses the hypothesis of finding a deductive form suitable for appeals to authority.

However, some other attempts to find a deductive form for appeals to authority have been done, in particular placing restrictions on the domain in which expert’s beliefs are assumed to be true. An instance of that can be found in Walton (1997, p. 93):

Everything E asserts on subject S is (or may be assumed to be) true.

E asserts that A is true.

Therefore, A is true.

This form allows to restrict the domain of expertise, giving a more plausible account of what should be taken as an expert. As Walton exemplifies (Walton, 1997, p. 93) when we look at a train schedule in a station, we assume information on it are true, though we cannot be sure that reality is not different and that the train supposed to leave at 12 is late. This deductive form is more plausible than the first one but it is still too unrealistic to be an effective description of appeals to authority.

Leaving aside the deductive form, we can turn to the inductive one, as suggested by Wesley Salmon (1963, p. 63). The inductive form is meant to solve problems arising from the deductive one by reducing the number of true beliefs an authority should hold in order to have a valid appeal.

The vast majority of statements made by E (A/N: expert source) concerning subject S are true.

A is a statement made by E concerning subject S.

Therefore, A is true.

This form rests on the reliability of the expert instead of his infallibility because the first premise does not state that every assessment made by E in a domain is true but only that the majority of them is. This gives us a more realistic account of the appeal to authority. It is an inductive form because the truth of the premises does not grant the truth of the conclusion but only that is likely to be true. It is also a statistical form because the truth of the first premises is based on the strength and the amount of the evidence we can bring in favour of the expert's reliability.

However this statistical aspect poses a problem: what to do when we are not able to judge the tracks record of an expert's assessment? It might not be available for many reasons: for instance, we are watching a TV programme in which a physician is claiming to have found a new treatment for cancer but we do not know him and so we are unable to decide if he is trustworthy or not. Another aspect, which I have no room to treat extensively but it is crucial in appeals to authority, is: how to establish if someone is an expert if we ourselves are not expert in the domain in question? The tracks record may be present, but it may be too difficult for us to understand it. More generally evaluating experts' reliability is a difficult task and basing it only on the number of true assessments made by an expert might be not enough.

To solve these problems, John Woods and Douglas Walton (Woods and Watson, 1974, p. 150) suggest that a presumptive form would be more helpful to understand the nature of appeal to authority argument.

E is a genuine expert in S.

E asserts that A

A is within S.

A is consistent with what other experts say.

A is consistent with available objective evidence (if any is known). Therefore, A can be accepted as a plausible presumption.

This form takes into account many contextual factors that play an important role in evaluating a statement from authority. According to Woods and Walton, not only the expertise of the authority is relevant, but also the consensus among other experts about what the authority in question says. The fifth premise focuses on the evidence about the issue at stake available to whom is called to judge the correctness of the appeal. The presumptive form gives the possibility to add new premises that may be relevant. According to this form, when new information is added to the premises, the conclusion may falter. For this reason, the conclusion is only presumptive.

The form proposed by Wood and Walton has the merit of taking into account many aspects that play a role when we are called to judge an appeal to expert opinion. On the negative side, it has to be noticed that for the same reason it requires much more knowledge in order to assess the soundness of an argument.

Inductive and presumptive forms share a common feature that distinguish them from deductive ones. Deductive formalizations place the burden of proof on the proponent and when the opponent challenges the validity of the premises or the relation between them and the conclusion it is up to the proponent to show the strength of the argument. In inductive and presumptive forms, instead, the conclusion provisionally reached can be challenged by the opponent only if he shows that some relevant factors have been neglected, for instance demonstrating that the world-known physic quoted was under the effect of drugs or alcohol when he expressed his opinion.

As we have seen, analysing appeals to authority disregarding contextual factors does not succeed in providing an effective perspective on the question. To meet this problem, authors like Walton, Anthony Blair and Ralph Johnson have tried to establish under which conditions an appeal to authority should be considered legitimate. These conditions will be the issue discussed in the next section.

3 Adequacy Conditions

Now let's turn to consider the adequacy conditions mentioned in the previous section. Walton individuates six main critical questions that can be addressed to someone who advances an appeal to authority. If these questions can be positively answered the appeal has to be considered provisionally legitimate. Now I briefly

report them and then I will examine them.

1. *Expertise question*: How credible is E as an expert source?
2. *Field question*: Is E an expert in the field that A is in?
3. *Opinion question*: What did E assert that implies A?
4. *Trustworthiness question*: Is E personally reliable as a source?
5. *Consistency question*: Is A consistent with what other experts assert?
6. *Backup evidence question*: Is A's assertion based on evidence? (Walton, 1997, p. 223)

A positive answer to the first question implies that the expert considered is a reliable source of knowledge. Some other subquestions can rise from the first one, in particular those that aim to verify the expert's professional or academic background. A typical negative answer to the first question is represented by the case of a testimonial who advertises a product, for which he has no competence, in virtue of his prestige or his glamour. This is a classic case in which an appeal to authority fails in meeting the adequacy conditions and in particular the condition of the expertise of the authority.

The second question aims to make clear if the expert quoted as authority is such in the considered domain. An authority can be such in a domain that is not the one considered in a particular appeal. This is an improper move in a critical dialogue due to a mistake on the side of the proponent but it can also be done on purpose to try to force the opponent to leave his point on the ground of the authority prestige. If in a critical dialogue about the health risks brought by smoke, I quote a renowned novelist who dismisses the worries saying that smoking helps his creative process and it is not dangerous for health, I am committing a fallacy because the authority is not such in the field at stake. When considering the field of expertise, we should pay attention also to the particular subfields that makes up the major one. Scientific disciplines are often constituted by various fields of specialization and being an expert in one of them does not imply to be such also in the others. Therefore, considering a theoretical physicist an expert of experimental physics could be a fallacy, even if, of course, he has more knowledge in experimental physics than a layman.

The third question aims to verify the correctness of experts' quotation. In order to have a legitimate appeal to authority, the expert's opinion has to be correctly interpreted and not distorted by the proponent. In particular, in the context of a written text, the proponent should provide all the necessary references to expert's opinion quoted to allow the opponents and the readers to track the first source of such opinion. An even more critical point is establishing the right interpretation of an opinion from authority. Even when a quotation presents all the necessary

references it might be the case that the proponent has manipulated it to support his own claim. This can be done in several ways, for instance by extracting it from its original context. Therefore, even an appropriate quotation can turn out to be misleading and pushing the authority opinion to support a claim that was not originally in the expert's mind. Another point of concern is represented by the deduction of experts' opinions from what they have clearly asserted. Experts' opinions are not always explicit and sometimes need to be deducted. However, this process can be risky and might lead to a misunderstanding of such opinion. There is no clear strategy to avoid all these obstacles because they can hardly be formalized, still we need to pay attention to all these aspects to avoid illegitimate appeal or real fallacies.

The trustworthiness question overlaps, to some extent, the first question. It is quite reasonable to relate the trustworthiness of an expert to his being actually such. However, the notion of trustworthiness is broader and pertains not only the expertise held by an authority but even different contextual aspects. We can take the case of a renowned scientist who stands for the utility of a particular drug in treating a disease, but it turns out he has received financial benefits from the company that produces the drug. This situation does not immediately disqualify the scientist from being considered an authority, however it should suggest the participants in the debate to consider carefully the scientist's opinion and his potential conflict of interests. This is a simple instance of a potential worry in the expert's trustworthiness, but many others are conceivable and this makes the attempt to provide an accurate treatment of this point very hard.

The fifth critical question attains the consistency of an expert's opinion with the ones held by other experts in the same field. The question of the consensus among experts is one of the major problem in evaluating appeals to authority as legitimate argument. Clearly, the appeal to the opinion of someone who is totally discredited by the experts of his supposed domain of authority has to be rejected as a fallacy, however problems arise in more blurred situations. When the question at stake is highly controversial it may be the case that different authorities, recognized as such by the community of experts, disagree. How should we act in this situation? Wood and Walton (Woods and Watson, 1974, p. 145) suggest that in case of disagreement a "consensus technique" is required to settle the dispute between experts. A consensus technique is a method or a procedure used to monitor what is the general acceptance of an opinion in a particular field. Walton argues that when such opinion is "representative of what is generally accepted in the field" (Walton, 1997, p. 221) the argument can be legitimate, for however, when it is non-representative, dismissing this opinion requires a justification by the opponent. In other word, dismissing an expert's opinion shifts the burden of proof from the proponent of the appeal to the opponent.

The last critical question concerns the evidence on which every appeal to authority should be grounded and, perhaps, is the most questionable. Due to its presumptive and non-deductive nature, appeals to authority should be based on some kind of evidence available in principle. However when we appeal to an expert is because we lack the evidence required. For a layman is hard to have access to scientific evidence and sometimes, even when this evidence is available, it is hard to correctly interpret it. Requiring the proponent of the appeal to have direct evidence seems to be a too strict constraint for the validity of such appeal, however the expert in question should be able to prove his assertions showing the required evidence and, in general, providing a justification for them.

After this introduction to the general structure of the appeal to authority and its features, I will introduce the core question of the paper: the notion of relevance and its application to the *argumentum ad verecundiam*.

4 Relevance

In his 1992 paper "Relevance", Hitchcock describes relevance as a triadic relation between an item, an outcome and a situation (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 252). Firstly, it is important to stress the fact that relevance is not a property. There can be no such a thing relevant in itself. Every item assumes its relevance in relation to a context and an outcome. This means that the same thing can be relevant or irrelevant depending on the context in which is positioned. We have to consider it as an important feature of relevance, in particular, following Walton and Krabbe's theory of dialogue types (Walton and Krabbe, 1995, p. 252), we can say that a shift in the kind of dialogue exerts an influence on the relevance of an argument. The same argument may be considered relevant inside a critical dialogue and irrelevant in a deliberation-seeking dialogue. For instance, if I am discussing the quality of a movie with a friend, I can appeal to a renowned film critic to support my opinion. However, if we are trying to decide what is the best movie to watch and the only cinema that screens that particular movie is too far, the appeal to the famous critic may be overwhelmed by more practical considerations. This depends on the fact that every kind of dialogue has its own goal. Here we assume that the goals of different dialogues are the outcomes that constitute one of the elements of the triadic relevance relation. For our purpose, we have to specify the correspondence between elements of a dialogue and elements of the relevance relation. The item that bears the relevance is the argument put forward in a particular stage of the discussion. To define better which the features of the outcome in a relevance relation are, we should avoid to mislead the goal of a dialogue with the individual ones sought by participants, as Walton clearly states (Walton, 2008, p. 8). The object of a critical dialogue is getting a stable resolution of an initial disagreement, however every participant aims to persuade the opponent to leave his initial position to embrace

the proponent's one.

Now I will introduce the two different kinds of relevance proposed by Hitchcock and then I will try to see them in the light of the distinction between dialogue goal and individual ones. Hitchcock distinguishes between causal and epistemic relevance. The first is present when an item (i.e. an argument) contributes to produce a practical consequence. The notion of "practical consequence" is broadly conceived, but we can shape it better referring to the contextual dimension that is constituent of every relevance relation.

If we turn to consider the dialogue goal of a critical discussion as the reaching of an agreement between the participants, we can say that an argument is causally relevant when it succeeds in establishing this agreement. This can be done in different ways. If the argument is sound, it may lead to the agreement because of its strength. The opponent may recognize the contribution of the argument and concede the point.

Such a kind of valid argument leads us to the second kind of relevance, the epistemic one. Broadly speaking, "an item of information x would be epistemically relevant to an epistemic goal y pursued by a set S of person in a situation z " (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 256). Within the dialogue context, a legitimate (i.e., not fallacious) argument is such that it contributes to explore and deepen the issue at stake; in this sense we can consider it as epistemically relevant because it increases our knowledge. Going further, we can say that an argument that is epistemically relevant in a given context has to generate one or more true beliefs. These beliefs may be the ones that settle the question or, in an intermediate stage, that helps in going further with the dialogue. We should be aware of the fact that, unlike causally relevant argument, epistemic relevance has to be noticed in order to be in place. Whereas an argument that holds causal relevance necessarily brings practical consequence, an epistemically relevant argument needs to be recognized as such. An epistemically relevant argument, if recognized, can also become causally relevant because it may lead to settle the dispute by mean of his strength (Hitchcock, 1992, p. 254). . Take the case of two people debating about airplanes chemtrails during a TV talk. One of them is arguing against the existence of such trails appealing to the opinion of an illustrious chemist, but the second, a committed conspiracy-theory supporter, may not recognize the legitimacy of the appeal claiming that the chemist is himself part of the conspiracy even whereas no evidence of that is available. Therefore, even if the appeal is sound it does not lead to settle the dispute.

I should make clear that the present distinction is correct only within a context, as the critical dialogue, in which the participants are supposed to hold a reflective stance toward the arguments and accept them only on the basis of an adequate scrutinizing. However, this does not grant, as in our example, that the participants do not reject a sound argument.

Now, I will turn to the individual goal (i.e., the participants' goal) in a critical

dialogue. Every participant aims to persuade the opponent to leave his own initial position and accept the proposed one. If this is done by means of a sound argument (an argument that is at least epistemically relevant) no problem arises and the exchange has to be regarded as correct. However, the persuasion of the opponent can be reached also by influencing him from a psychological point view with an argument that appears to be sound but actually is not. And that is a rather classical definition of fallacy. Therefore, a fallacy is an argument that succeeds in persuading the opponent but for the wrong reasons. It is seductive but it does not contribute to increase our knowledge or understanding of the question at stake in the critical dialogue. In other words, it is causally but not epistemically relevant.

In this paper, I would like to argue that an appeal to authority that is epistemically relevant should be regarded as a valid move in a critical dialogue, whereas one that is causally relevant should look as a possible fallacy. To clarify this point, I will examine different combinations of these two types of relevance.

An appeal to authority is epistemically relevant when it helps in achieving an epistemic goal. To do so, the appeal needs to meet the adequacy conditions seen in the previous section. In my view, saying that an appeal to authority is epistemically relevant amounts to saying that the appeal should be regarded as a sound argument. Once an appeal to authority is recognized as epistemically relevant, two different things may happen:

1. its relevance is noticed and therefore it becomes also causally relevant.
2. its relevance is not recognized and it does not become causally relevant.

In the first case, the practical consequence is the reaching of an agreement over the controversial question. The opponent may leave his initial position and embrace the one suggested by the proponent. In the second case, the opponent does not recognize the soundness of the appeal and the critical dialogue may move to a different stage. According to the pragma-dialectic perspective, the opponent may ask the proponent of the argument to defend his appeal to authority. This act takes place at the argumentation stage and it is called directive speech act because it consists in a licit command aiming at the clarification of an argument (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 64). After the requested clarification, the opponent may still not recognize the validity of argument and the dialogue could move toward a further clarification.

Here I am distinguishing between the objective validity of a move, and the subjective recognition of it. The first can be in place even when the second is not. When an appeal to authority has only causal relevance we meet a successful fallacy, an argument that is seductive and can push the opponent to leave his initial position even whereas it does not undermine that. That is the typical case of a fallacy, an appealing but not valid move in a dialogue. To detect an inappropriate appeal to

authority, we have to be aware of the different adequacy conditions and check if the appeal meets them.

5 An Approach to Contemporary Debates

Now that I have provided an account of appeals to authority in the light of the notions of causal and epistemic relevance, I would like to apply it to a recent debate arisen about the strength (or the weakness) of this kind of argument. I will refer to two different papers, one by Moti Mizrahi (2013) and the other by Marcus Seidel (2014).

In a nutshell, Mizrahi argues for the weakness of appeal to authority claiming that empirical findings on expertise show that a proposition expressed by an expert is not more likely to be true than one based on chance (Mizrahi, 2013, p. 58). Therefore, he concludes that appeals to authority are weak arguments. We can read Mizrahi's claim in the light of what I have previously said about relevance. An argument from authority, according to Mizrahi, lacks epistemic relevance because it does not help in achieving any epistemic goal. In particular, he claims that the appeal to expert opinion has to be considered an unreliable method because the evidence shows it does not make a proposition more likely to be true. Many objections can be raised against Mizrahi's argument (and Seidel does so) but more generally we can say that the question can be read in terms of epistemic relevance. Mizrahi argues that appeals to authority have none, while Seidel claims they have it.

Mizrahi takes the case of two electrochemists who claimed that they had found a way to produce a nuclear fusion at room temperature. The argument can be reconstructed in this way:

1. Electrochemists Fleischmann and Pons say that nuclear fusion can occur at room temperature.
2. Therefore, nuclear fusion can occur at room temperature (Mizrahi, 2013, p. 62)

In this case, a true premise leads to a false conclusion showing how appeals to authority (in this case the authority of the two electrochemists) may lack the epistemic relevance to achieve the goal of establishing which temperature is suitable for nuclear fusion. Mizrahi adopts a similar approach to other examples, concluding that appeals to authority do not provide strong support for the truth of a claim. As I have said before, epistemic relevance is related to the notion of truth: epistemically relevant appeals to authority should be able to gain us true beliefs and, according to Mizrahi, they do not.

If the question is that appeals to authority do not provide true beliefs, or at least not enough to be considered a reliable method, Seidel's challenge is proving they are epistemically relevant in developing good argument. First, he claims that according to Goldman's definition of authority "a person A is an authority in a subject S if and only if A knows more propositions in subject S [...] than almost anybody else"

(Seidel, 2014, p. 196). We can translate “A knows more proposition in subject S” with “A has more true beliefs related to subject S”. Therefore, Seidel claims that would be analytically false to say that “expert opinions are only slightly more accurate than chance”. Again, we can say that appeals to expert opinion are epistemically relevant because they allow us to have access to a large number of true beliefs held by authorities.

However, Seidel admits that Goldman’s definition of authority is questionable (Seidel, 2014, p. 198) so he turns to another argument. This argument is particularly interesting for my purpose because it allows me to use both kinds of relevance in the appeal to authority context. Seidel claims that there is a difference between being an expert and being taken as an expert. This distinction can be specified by examining the adequacy conditions and, in particular, the first critical question. An appeal to an actual authority differs from an appeal to an alleged authority. The first one should be able to grant us a wide range of true beliefs (see above) whereas the second might not. Rephrasing that, we can say that the first has epistemic relevance and second does not. In the second case, we have an illegitimate appeal to authority: someone who is not an expert in the domain at stake is taken to be an authority. This kind of appeal, which does not meet adequacy condition, can be qualified as a proper fallacy. In fact, an appeal to an authority that is not such in a specific domain can be causally relevant because it can push the opponent to change his mind or leave his initial position by mean of the prestige of the authority. Seidel claims that Mizrahi should argue against the second case, which is fallacious, not against the first one.

According to Seidel, the examples taken by Mizrahi are cases of misjudgement on authority: appeals are not to real authorities but only to taken as such ones. We can read the question in the light of relevance saying that Mizrahi is committed to criticize appeals to the authority that are not into an epistemically relevant relation but only into a casually relevant one, whereas a valid appeal to authority has to be into the first one. In other words, Mizrahi is not challenging a correct account of the appeal to authority, but a mere straw- man.

6 Conclusions

I wish to have shown how the notion of relevance can be fruitfully employed to assess the validity of an argument and, in particular, of an appeal to authority. My aim was to prove that relevance can be adopted as a useful tool in argumentation theory even inside the well-established paradigms of the discipline. In particular, I hope to have stressed enough the relationship between the adequacy conditions and the epistemic relevance of an appeal. In other words, adequacy conditions can be regarded as guidelines to assess the epistemic relevance of an argument and thus its correctness.

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