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**Editors introduction.**

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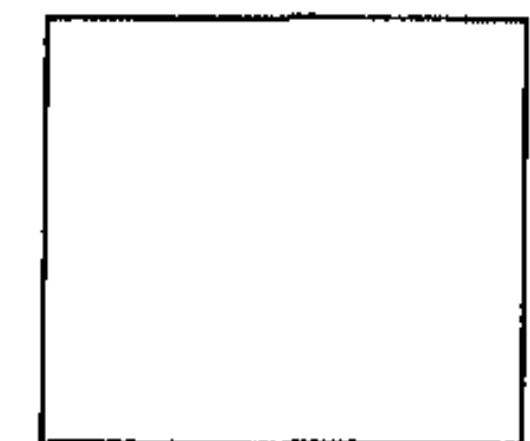
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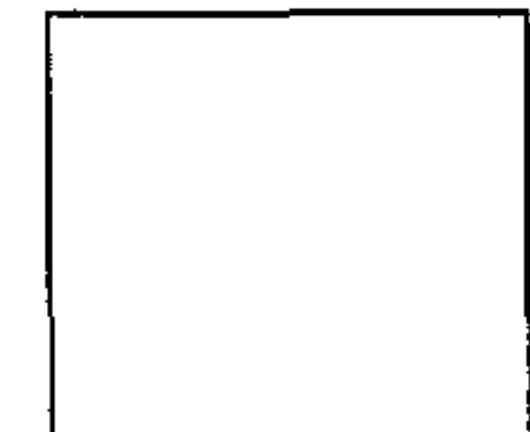
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## Editors' Introduction

The contributions in this issue are based upon papers presented at the conference on 'Relevance in Argumentation', held in June 1991 at McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario) in Canada. They represent work in progress and offer no final answers to the many problems posed by the study of relevance in argumentative discourse. Disappointing as this may seem, what else can one expect from articles about such a complicated issue? Fortunately, for many years a number of excellent scholars of argumentation – and other disciplines – not only have devoted their best efforts to this subject but have also made good progress. This is, for instance, clearly evident in the issue of *Argumentation* which focuses on 'Argumentation, Relevance and Discourse', edited by Jacques Moeschler (Vol. 3, No. 3, 1989) and, in our opinion, in the present issue as well, in which the central topic is the role of relevance in the analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourse.

Up to now the efforts to improve the study of argumentative relevance have not resulted in a single conceptual framework and a single theoretical approach. There are many different definitions of relevance, and distinctions continue to emerge. The articles in this issue are no exception to this tendency. In this respect, they reflect perfectly the pre-paradigmatical state of the art, which is likewise clear from the terminology used by the authors: they talk about 'premissary relevance', 'conclusion relevance', 'topic relevance', 'subject-matter relevance', 'logical relevance', 'pragmatic relevance', 'audience relevance', 'causal relevance', 'epistemic relevance', 'local relevance', 'global relevance', et cetera. While it is true that the terms used are sometimes just different names for the same thing, in other cases they do indeed refer to different concepts.

On the other hand, there is also a growing tendency towards agreement with respect to the definition of relevance as a context-dependent pragmatic notion, which finds its natural habitat in critical discussions aimed at resolving a difference of opinion. A recurrent topic in this issue is the relationship between the concept of relevance and the so-called fallacies of relevance, but here, too, opinions differ considerably with respect to the exact nature of this relationship.

In Part I of 'Relevance Reviewed', which serves as a general introduction to this issue, Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst define argumentative relevance as a functional, interactional relationship between certain elements in the discourse. They discuss the distinction between interpretive and evaluative relevance that can be traced in the literature, and introduce analytic relevance as an intermediary concept. They propose a taxonomy in which the concept of relevance is differentiated along the dimensions of object, domain and aspect.

Using the *argumentum ad hominem* as their example, they show in Part II that the problems of evaluative relevance that cannot satisfactorily be dealt with by



the logical standard treatment of fallacies can be more systematically approached within a pragma-dialectical framework. They argue that the fallacy of the *argumentum ad hominem* is not a fallacy of relevance and should be analyzed as a violation of one of the rules for critical discussion; thus pragma-dialectically speaking, it has negative evaluative relevance.

In 'Relevance and Digressions in Argumentative Discussion', Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson argue that analyses of relevance in argumentation must take into account the pragmatics of argumentation. They distinguish informational relevance (of propositions to the truth value of a conclusion) from pragmatic relevance (of argumentative acts to the task of resolving a disagreement). They discuss four examples drawn from court-ordered third party mediation sessions and claim that the digressions in the examples show that irrelevance is not simply a matter of information unrelated to conclusions, but also a matter of acts ill-adapted to the function of resolving disagreements. In their view, pragmatic irrelevance is generally a collaborative failure.

In 'Audiences, Relevance, and Cognitive Environments', Christopher Tindale discusses the concept of audience relevance. Proceeding from Sperber and Wilson's concept of cognitive environment, he argues that the evidence advanced in an argument should be relevant to the facts and assumptions that are manifest in the cognitive environment of the audience. According to Tindale, audience relevance underlies premise relevance and topic relevance. He concludes that the relevance of a premise can vary according to the audience, that irrelevant premises can be made relevant, that evidence can be relevant in various degrees, and that the notion of audience relevance is helpful in the identification and assessment of hidden premises.

In 'Apocalyptic Relevance', John Woods argues that a theory of relevance should not be apocalyptic: it should not maintain either that nothing is relevant to anything or that everything is relevant to everything. He discusses Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance and claims that, on logical grounds, their account violates this condition. Yet he thinks that more can be learnt about relevance from Sperber and Wilson than from relevance logic.

In 'Premissary Relevance', Anthony Blair argues that between the premises and the conclusion of an argument the relation of relevance is a pragmatic and semantic property, not a purely syntactic one. He explains premissary relevance in terms of the support which a premise lends to a conclusion and which, in turn, can be explained in terms of the inference warrant (in the Toulmin sense) authorizing an inference to a conclusion. In his opinion, the study of the Aristotelian doctrine of *topoi* or argument schemes may be a useful contribution to the task of identifying authoritative warrants.

In 'Relevance, Warrants, Backing, Inductive Support', James Freeman perceives relevance in terms of an inference habit, which may be expressed as Peirce's leading principles or as Toulmin's warrants. He defines relevance as a ternary relationship between two statements and a set of inference rules. From a normative point of view, he argues that the warrants must be properly backed and that different types of warrant must be backed in different ways. In order to

explicate proper backing for warrants corresponding to empirical generalizations, he discusses L.J. Cohen's notion of inductive support. He claims that the degree of support is relative to the canonical test for inductive support and may be modeled as relative to a certain point in a dialectical situation.

In 'Which of the Fallacies are Fallacies of Relevance?', Douglas Walton argues that fallacious emotional appeals such as the *argumentum ad misericordiam*, the *argumentum ad populum*, the *argumentum ad baculum*, and the *argumentum ad hominem* are clearly failures of relevance in argumentation. He defines argumentative relevance as a pragmatic notion, connected to the resolution of conflicts of opinion in critical discussion. He claims that not all emotional appeals in argumentation are fallacies; they may in some cases be reasonable. After having discussed three cases, he concludes that the evidence required to prove an argument fallacious because of irrelevance has to come from the context of dialogue.

In 'Relevance', David Hitchcock analyzes the general concept of relevance and the specific concept of epistemic relevance. He defines relevance as a triadic relationship between an item, an outcome or goal, and a situation, while epistemic relevance is defined as the capacity of a piece of information to help achieve an epistemic goal in a given situation. In his opinion, irrelevance is not a matter of degree, although relevance may be. His analysis leads to a conception of premise relevance which provides a basis for determining when the *argumentum ad verecundiam*, the *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, and the *argumentum ad hominem* (as described by John Locke) are indeed fallacies of relevance. He argues that an *argumentum ad verecundiam* is irrelevant if the authority cited lacks expertise when it comes to endorsing the conclusion, or the conclusion does not belong to a cognitive domain; otherwise the *ad verecundiam* is relevant.

Finally, in 'So What?' Erik Krabbe discusses several types of relevance criticism in dialogue, with special reference to the possibility of criticizing the opponent's contribution for being deficient in respect of conversational coherence. In the first section, he distinguishes between tenability criticism, connection criticism, and narrow-type relevance criticism in dialogues. In his opinion, only the latter types of criticism describe the charge of fallacy. In the second section, he argues that a full study of narrow-type relevance criticism requires the construction of complicated, many-layered, dialogue systems.

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