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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RELEVANCE CRITERION: FROM THE BEGINNING TO NOWADAYS

In the paper, I consider the argument evaluation issue within informal logic. I focus on the relevance criterion, which belongs to the RAS-criteria model of argument evaluation. The purpose of the article is to find out the transformation of the relevance criteria understanding from the time of the RAS-criteria model emergence to nowadays. To achieve this goal, I, firstly, analyzed the specifics of an argument as the evaluation subject. Secondly, I reviewed the key notions of evaluation, such as goodness and soundness. Thirdly, I provide a comparative analysis of the relevance notion understanding in the 1970s and in the 2000s. The results of this research let us conclude, that relevance became the deliberate feature of an argument in general, but not just the criterion of a good argument. The critics, such as relevance criterion vagueness, unanalyzed and dependency of sufficiency criterion, were replied. Thus, the present understanding of relevance is broader, than it was at the beginning of informal logic. The role of this criterion became to be more important for argument analysis.
Keywords: argumentation theory, informal logic, argument evaluation, RAS-criteria, relevance.

Introduction. Argumentation theory is a normative discipline, which gives clear and universal rules for making an argument. Argument evaluation is one of the most discussed issues in the recent informal logic researches. This attention is caused by theoretical and practical value of such investigations.

Firstly, the establishing of universal criteria for such a procedure may help to rise argument's researching to fundamentally higher level. It lets unify approaches' diversity in terms of the evaluation criteria understanding.

Secondly, the practical competence to evaluate arguments professionally lets, on the one hand, avoid misunderstanding and deception. On the other hand, it takes communication to the higher level of reasonableness. The conversation's compliance to normative requirements prevents unprofessional and ineffective resolving conflict of views.

It is necessary to admit, that my research stands on informal logic methodology. The topicality of argument evaluation relates with the simultaneous presence of different approaches to understanding the evaluation criteria.

There is no unified understanding of relevance, sufficiency and acceptability today in spite of more than 30-year history of criteria-based argument evaluation. Furthermore, uncertainty of the RAS-criteria model today seems to have become larger than it looked like in the 1980's. The understanding of criteria's essence seems not so clear today, as at the time of the RAS-criteria model rising. This is due to the fact that it was enough time to rethink all peculiarities of criteria-based model. The questions about criteria`s belonging to logics and about the possibility of its practical usage arise today.

There are many informal logicians, such as A. Blair, P. Bondy, T. Govier, R. Johnson, D. Hitchcock, C. Tindale, D. Walton etc., who researches argument evaluation nowadays. This issue is considered also by Ukrainian logicians, such as I. Khomenko.

The subject of this research is argument evaluation criteria and, in particular, the relevance criterion.

In this article I set several tasks. Firstly, I analyze the essence of argument evaluation criteria. Secondly, I reveal the peculiarities of the good/sound argument and argument/argumentation notions. Thirdly, I clarify contemporary interpretations of the relevance criterion.

1. The essence of evaluation criteria. The RAS-criteria model of argument evaluation has become commonly used within informal logic. It was formulated by R. Johnson and A. Blair in their fundamental work "Logical Self-Defense". It includes three criteria for argument evaluation, such as relevance, acceptability and sufficiency.

To start with, let us consider what the subject of argument evaluation is. For this purpose, let us notice a clear distinction between argument and argumentation within informal logic. For example, Goldman shows such a distinction in the next way:

"The term "argument" … the product, or perhaps content, of argumentation, usually, for a set of sentences, or a set of propositions that might be expressed by means of such sentences(…)"Argumentation", by contrast, will refer to the process or activity of producing or deploying such a complex object"[1].

Blair's position is similar:

"... a unit of argument, is a compound proposition consisting of a proposition together with a consideration that supports it, other things being equal"[2].

In my opinion, such approaches complement each other. Both of them show the distinction between argumentation and an argument as between the process of activity and its content. In the other words, argumentation is the part of conversation, on which an argument takes place. I agree, that an argument is that, which fills argumentation with substance.

Evaluation focuses on an argument as a specific type of reasoning, in which the premises give support to the conclusion. Particularly, the RAS-criteria model is intended to evaluate precisely argument's goodness. In the other words, it cannot be a "good argumentation", but only a "good argument". Despite the fact, that argument evaluation aims to evaluate arguments logically, relevance, acceptability and sufficiency are rather epistemological than logical concepts. However, to my mind, it is possible to allow such a situation taking into account pragmatic focus of the evaluation's subject. It is impossible to make such evaluation within classic logical methods, and argumentation theory is interdisciplinary researching field.

So, informal logic evaluates arguments. However, nobody can recognize and analyze an argument without the context of its usage, and without the communicative situation, on which it is involved[3].

In my opinion, it is necessary to clarify the question, what the notions of soundness and goodness mean in the argument evaluation. For this, it is needed to analyze their distinctions.

So, let us analyze the notion of soundness. It includes a necessarily satisfaction of two conditions: the true premises and the valid inference[4]. In the other words, an argument can be evaluated as sound if and only if it is valid and all its premises are true. The distinction between soundness and validity is, firstly, that soundness includes not just inference process, but also a truth/false characteristic; secondly, soundness is a feature of argument, validity is the feature of inference process.

An argument is considered to be good within classic logic if it is formally valid and has true premises. However, validity is a logical criterion per se about the fact that logical methods don't deal with premises and conclusion truth value[5].

Thus, the notion of validity applies to the reasonings with inferential premises-conclusion relation. As Johnson notes, "An argument is valid just when it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false"[6].

So, an argument's validity is the feature of deductive inference. To say more, an argument's strength is the characteristics of the inductive argument in contrast to validity as the feature of the deductive one. Therefore, in valid argument the conclusion follows deductively from the premises. However, the conclusion can be false in the case of the premises' falsity.

The classic interpretation of validity deals with the kind of argument, which seems artificial and looks like "If P, then Q". Therefore, it is unsuitable for a real argument analysis. The validity notion does not involve a pragmatic aspect of an argument. Furthermore, a valid inference does not mean a good argument. The inductively strong support often is enough for argument's goodness. In addition, there are situations in real communication, in which the true premises with valid inference can't provide the truth of the conclusion[7].

Nevertheless, validity notion is widely used within informal logic. The emphasis of this concept's understanding has moved. A real argument is not so simple, as merely deductive "If P, then Q" form.

[1] Goldman, A. (2003). An Epistemological Approach to Argumentation. *Informal Logic, 23, 1*, 51-63.

[2] Blair, J. A. (2004). Argument and Its Uses. *Informal Logic, 24, 2*, 137-151.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bondy, P. (2010). Truth and Argument Evaluation. *Informal Logic*, 30, 2, 142-158.

[5] Khomenko, I. (2013). Informal Logic: Between Logic and Epistemology. *Philosophy Study, 3, 11*, 1051-1060.

[6] Johnson, R. H. (2017). Wohlrapp on the Criterial Side of Validity: Some Comments. *Informal Logic*, *37, 3*, 223-229.

[7] Hamblin, Ch. L. (1970). *Fallacies*. London: Methuen young books, 326.

In the real communication people often make arguments, which involve some assumptions or estimates. Such kind of an argument cannot be evaluated as deductive, because it is impossible to attribute the truth or false value to the premises[1]. Concerning the question of validity in the case of argument evaluation, I should note, that there is counterpart of classic validity concept within informal logic. It can be called "informal" validity, which is involved to the RAS-criteria model. It's significantly, that acceptability replaces truth, good argument replaces sound one within informal logic.

That is why I would like to analyze the notion of goodness. Good/bad are the most used characteristics for argument analysis within informal logic. Good argument is that, which is capable to produce justified belief in the conclusion via justified belief in its premises[2].

To my mind, it means that the relation between the premises and the conclusion has to provide the transmission of justification from one argument's part to another. Such a connection makes an argument itself, and it can be deductive or inductive, and, furthermore, conductive or abductive type. In the other words, a good argument is that, which meets the RAS-criteria: its premises have to be acceptable for participants of the conversation, relevant to the conclusion, and they all together must be sufficient for supporting the conclusion.

To say more, many theorists suggest, that an argument can be evaluated as good, if it reaches its purpose. Therefore, an argument can be evaluated as good, if its purpose is agreement, even if premises are not true or don't entail the conclusion. However, the question about truth doesn't leave the argument evaluation. Some theorists tend to understand persuasion of the truth as the argument purpose[3]. In this issue I follow Blair's approach, in which he distinguishes the variety of argument's usage, and archiving the truth is only one of them[4].

As it is known, informal logic aims to evaluate and analyze a real argument. That is why it has to give its own specific type of premise-conclusion relation. Such a relation must be reasonable, but it is not necessary for it to be namely valid. Premise-conclusion supporting is such a relation within informal logic. An argument is good, if such a support provides a reasonable passage from the premises to the conclusion. Let's remind that the argument's premises have to be relevant, sufficient and acceptable to achieve this goal. However, such criteria are rather epistemological, than logical[5], while informal logic tends to be "logic of argument". So, logical discipline uses epistemological criteria in its key goal, such as argument evaluation.

On my view, it would be the end of the argumentation theory, if it would be just a part of logic. I believe, the theory of argument has to be an interdisciplinary research study. I suppose, it is not possible to analyze a real argument by only logical methods because of the subject peculiarities. Argument evaluation becomes too complicated, when we put real persons as the participants of conversation, on which an argument takes place. That's why appraisal involves also epistemological methods to analyze an argument. I would like to notice, that epistemology is understood in the broadest sense, as the theory of belief's and other normative propositions justification[6].

I must admit, that RAS-criteria can provide different levels of supporting. Consequently, an argument can be strong, in the case of strong supporting; weak if it has some support, but not enough to make an argument effective. An argument without some supporting is not considered to be an argument at all[7].

Let us consider, what does mean effectiveness within argument evaluation. I suppose, it is an argument possibility to achieve the speaker's goal. I must admit, that such a goal can varies in different speech acts. As Blair notes, argument's aim is not just persuasion[8].

What's about support and entail distinction?

In this issue I agree with A. Blair, who suggest, that entailment can link two propositions, which are not relevant to each other. In addition, non-deductive argument can have relevant premises, which support the conclusion.

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[1] Hitchcock, D. (2000). The Significance of Informal Logic for Philosophy. *Informal Logic, 20, 2*, 129-138.

[2] Goldman, A. (2003). An Epistemological Approach to Argumentation. *Informal Logic, 23, 1*, 51-63.

[3] Ibid, 53.

[4] Blair, J. A. (2004). Argument and Its Uses. *Informal Logic*, *24, 2*, 137-151.

[5] Govier, T. (1979). More on Deductive and Inductive Arguments. *Informal Logic, 2, 3*, 7-9; Woods, J. (2000). How philosophical is informal logic? *Informal Logic, 20, 2*, 139-167.

[6] Blair, J. A. (2004). Argument and Its Uses. *Informal Logic*, *24, 2*, 137-151.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

As I have spoken above, the premise-conclusion relation must not be necessarily deductive in the real argument. It means that inference is not an inherent condition of a good argument. The conclusion supporting by premises is enough to make a good argument.

Relevance is that, what provides the presence of such a link.

2. The recent interpretation of the relevance criterion. The notion of relevance seems to be clear for an ordinary person. To be relevant to some kind of situation is really important in everyday communication.

What does this notion mean within informal logic?

As Hitchcock notes, if the premises are to persuade rationally to accept the conclusion, they have to be related with the conclusion's acceptability, or, in the other words, they must be relevant[1].

Relevance within pragmatic approach of informal logic is understood as function, which keeps the conversation within productive boundaries[2].

If some part of discussion, proposed by the arguer, was evaluated as irrelevant, it just is excluded from the argumentation at all. Walton describes such a function as gatekeeping, because relevance helps to allow nothing, which doesn't relate to the dialogue purpose[3].

The similar is present Blair's approach[4]. Primarily, I would like to describe shortly the understanding of relevance in "Logical Self-Defense". It's necessary for analyzing the distinctions between the early and contemporary approach to the relevance concept.

Let's remind, Blair and Johnson understood relevance in 1970s as one of three criteria for argument evaluation. The authors distinguish three basic fallacies in argumentation. The main criteria of argument evaluation compare with fallacies. There is irrelevant reason, hasty conclusion, problematic premise among them[5].

The first one is particularly interesting to this research. Irrelevant reason occurs in the next case. The proponent puts forward a premise as a reason for the conclusion. This premise, which has to provide support for the conclusion with the other premises, doesn't satisfy the requirement of relevance. It is necessary to admit, the relevance criterion concerns a link between one premise and the conclusion. However, the evaluator must take into account all parts of an argument to have a complete understanding of argument's goodness[6].

I must admit, there are many types of relevance in different approaches within informal logic. Blair and Johnson distinguish local and global relevance. The first plays the role of evaluation criterion, while the last one is broader notion and deals with the premise relation to the conclusion topic. In the other words, the premise can be globally relevant, but locally irrelevant. In such a case the argument is considered to be failure[7].I would like to notice, that local relevance is the same, that Blair's premissary and Walton's probative relevance is[8]. So, what does mean for the premise to be relevant to the conclusion?

Blair defines it as "A proposition p1 is a relevant premise in a well-ordered argument by P to O for another proposition, q, if and only if: (a) p1 belongs to a constellation of propositions asserted by P (p1, p2, ..., pn), which P accepts and believes support q, and which P believes O will accept and will believe support q (q being a proposition P believes O does not accept), and P does this as an attempt to convince O of the acceptability of q; and (b) p1 lends support to the acceptability of q"[9].

So, Blair and Johnson understood relevance as one of the three basic criteria for argument evaluation. However, in the 2000s Blair notes, that all three criteria require adjustment. Particularly, relevance has to play

[1] Hitchcock, D. (2000). The Significance of Informal Logic for Philosophy. *Informal Logic*, *20, 2*, 129-138.

[2] Walton, D. (2004). *Relevance in Argumentation*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Publishers, 311.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Blair, J. A. (2004). Argument and Its Uses. *Informal Logic, 24, 2*, 137-151.

[5] Johnson, R. H., Blair, J. A. (1994). *Logical Self-Defense*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 312.

[6] Ibid, 67.

[7] Ibid, 69, 70.

[8] Blair, J. A. (2012). *Groundwork in the Theory of Argumentation*. Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 355; Walton, D. (2004). *Relevance in Argumentation*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Publishers, 311.

[9] Blair, J. A. (2012). *Groundwork in the Theory of Argumentation*. Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 355.

the role of an argument, not just a good argument, criterion. Such an understanding of relevance means, that irrelevant premises cannot be in an argument at all[1].

In fact, an argument is impossible without the relevant link between the premises and the conclusion. Because, as Blair marks:

"...the judgement about whether grounds are relevant is one the arguer ... makes in deciding what belongs in the argument, one the interpreter makes in deciding what to attribute to the argument, and one the assessor makes in deciding whether they are both right"[2].

Blair claims about criticism of the relevance criterion within informal logic for the last 30 years. Firstly, logicians note about the relevance dependence on the sufficiency criterion. In the other words, sufficiency presupposes relevance. Secondly, it's argued about the relevance ambiguity, or about the kind of relevance, which has to be the criterion. Thirdly, logicians point out the impossibility to analyze the relevance concept.

Blair responds to all three part of criticism. The first, he asks, what happens when one of the premises of an argument is irrelevant, and the hearer is invited to accept its conclusion on the basis of its premises"[3].

To my mind, such a view can be understood in the next way. The premises together can have enough probative force to support the conclusion. However, such an argument is still irrelevant in the case, if at least one premise is irrelevant. In fact, we can just exclude this premise from the argument. Nevertheless, the original argument, which the arguer has made, contains the fallacy. To say more, the question about the arguer's intention arises from such an assumption.

The second part of Blair's argumentation deals with the irrelevance notion. Although sufficiency entails relevance, however, insufficiency doesn't entail irrelevance. In the other words, all premises of an argument can be relevant to the conclusion, but all they together can be insufficient to give support to the conclusion[4].

The second, Blair agrees with some ambiguity of the relevance type's distinction. However, he claims, such vagueness does not prevent evaluating argument relevance. Local (or probative) relevance deals with argument goodness evaluation. While global (or, for example, dialogical or audience-relevance) is not a criterion of a good argument. So, only probative relevant propositions have to be counted as reasons for the conclusion. The third, the impossibility to make a philosophical analysis for the concept of relevance doesn't imply the impossibility to use this concept for argument evaluation[5].

That was about Blair's rethinking of the relevance criterion. I must admit, many recent logicians tend to understand relevance as rather pragmatic, than semantic concept. They continue to consider the relevance criterion controversial[6].

In particular, Hitchcock supposes doubtful of the requirement to each premise to be relevant to the conclusion as a necessary condition of argument goodness. He notes that adding the irrelevant premise to an argument will not make it bad. In the other words, an argument, which fulfills its function, is good in spite of some irrelevant reasons in it[7].

In my opinion, an argument with irrelevant premise can be evaluated as good only in the case, when it is enough the other premises to support the conclusion, and such the added premise doesn't mislead the hearer.

Conclusions. In summary, the concept of relevance is hardly reinterpreted in recent researches. I would like to say, that three main criticism reviewed above were replied. Relevance continues to be a normative requirement to an argument; furthermore, it becomes to be inseparable feature of an argument as a whole.

Today relevance is understood as related not just to premise-conclusion link, but to the dialogue and, furthermore, the audience. It is not possible to separate relevance from practice of its usage. This criterion cannot be analyzed on strictly theoretical ground. On my opinion, relevance tends to be a notion of applied epistemology. Its analysis goes beyond merely logics, involving epistemological notions. As the relevance

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[1] Blair, J. A. (2004). Argument and Its Uses. *Informal Logic*, *24, 2*, 137-151.

[2] Ibid, 146.

[3] Ibid, 61.

[4] Ibid, 137-151.

[5] Ibid, 137-151.

[6] Hitchcock, D. (2000). The Significance of Informal Logic for Philosophy. *Informal Logic*, 20, 2: 129-138; Walton, D. (2004). *Relevance in Argumentation*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 311; Woods, J. (2000). How philosophical is informal logic? *Informal Logic, 20, 2*, 139-167.

[7] Hitchcock, D. (2000). The Significance of Informal Logic for Philosophy. *Informal Logic*, *20, 2*, 129-138.

criterion deals with epistemological issues. However, its applied to an argument evaluation, which is logical procedure. To my mind, the recent understanding of argument's goodness lets to compare logical and epistemological parts to argument analysis within informal logic.

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