

The general justification for believing things on the basis of authority is the advantage one gains by believing those who have knowledge superior to one's own. To be sure, this advantage is diminished somewhat if one thereby believes things that are false. But if most of the things one believes on the basis of authority are true, one's overall advantage justifies one's believing on this basis.

The alternative would be to believe nothing unless one also saw it to be true on the basis of one's own experience and reason. But any such strict canon would preclude one's taking advantage of the experience and reason of others. It would restrict one's sharing in what others have learned and would limit one's effective action accordingly.

True, one is always justified in trusting one's own experience and reason when the results conflict with the statements of authorities. But one must first be nurtured by the statements of authorities before one can begin to challenge them.

Belief based on authority never constitutes proof. Yet in the absence of counterevidence and counterargument, the fact that something is held to be true by the authorities in the field constitutes a *prima facie* reason for believing it rather than its opposite. That it is ~~re~~asonable to believe it, however, means that it is sometimes reasonable to believe things that are false or unworthy of belief.

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