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**CONSPIRACIES AND LYES:  
SCEPTICISM  
AND  
THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF  
TESTIMONY**

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## ABSTRACT

In *Conspiracies and Lyes* I aim to provide an epistemological account of testimony as one of our faculties of knowledge. I compare testimony to perception and memory. Its similarity to both these faculties is recognised. A fundamental difference is stressed: it can be rational to not accept testimony even if testimony is fulfilling its proper epistemic function because it can be rational for a speaker to not express a belief; or, as I say, it can be rational for a speaker to *lye*.

This difference in epistemic function provides the basis for a sceptical argument against testimony. Scepticism is presented as a method rather than a problem: considering how to refute the sceptical argument is taken to be a means of evaluating theories as to how testimonial beliefs are warranted. I consider two strategies for refuting scepticism and, correlatively, two accounts of how testimonial beliefs are warranted. I show these accounts to be neutral across all theories of justification that entertain the project of investigating our faculties of knowledge.

A reductionist account explains the warrant supporting our testimonial beliefs in terms of our inductive ground for accepting testimony. An anti-reductionist account explains the warrant supporting our testimonial

beliefs in terms of our possessing an entitlement to accept testimony. I show how both positions can be intuitively motivated. In presenting reductionism I appeal to probability theory, empirical psychology and invoke David Hume. In presenting anti-reductionism I invoke John McDowell and Tyler Burge.

A refutation of scepticism is provided by a hybrid of reductionism and anti-reductionism. The hybrid is conceived as part social externalism and part individual internalism. In developing this account I provide a means of conceptualising the dynamic that exists between individual knowers and communities of knowledge.

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## **THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY: AN INTRODUCTION**

Testimonial beliefs are central to our lives; through understanding and accepting the utterances of others we form beliefs ranging from the commonplace, our belief in our birth-date or the identity of our parents, to the fanciful, among nineteenth century Norsemen ‘sild’ and ‘herring’ were used as terms for money and fish. Our knowledge of the world and the past, our knowledge of other minds and our own minds are each and all interwoven with testimonial knowledge.

My beliefs, for instance, that the highest peak of the Carpathian Mountains is 8788 feet and that the North Atlantic Drift is a major ocean current flowing from the Gulf of Mexico to North West Europe depend upon testimony. I have not scaled these mountains nor seen the entire passage of this ocean current. Many of my beliefs about the past equally depend on testimony. I believe that there have been two world wars in Europe this Century and that the Medici family gave three Popes to the Church, yet these events occurred before my birth. I do not remember their happening. Many of my beliefs about other minds also depend on testimony. If another were to tell me that they are not angry but indignant, I might believe them despite only seeing their displeasure. And my beliefs about my own mental states

could also depend on testimony. I might believe, for instance, that my intentions were generous but another could demonstrate to me, maybe by offering an alternative description of my actions, that they were solely self-interested.<sup>1</sup> Such examples could, obviously, be endlessly enumerated.

This is not to suggest that our epistemic dependence on testimony is limited to further enumeration.<sup>2</sup> It is to claim that testimony is a *faculty or source of knowledge*, where our faculties, or sources, of knowledge are those ways by which knowledge is acquired or retained.<sup>3</sup> As such to describe a belief as testimonial is to say something about its epistemic status; it is not simply to describe its causal genesis. Thus in seeking to explain how testimony is a source of knowledge and determine the epistemic status of testimonial beliefs, the epistemology of testimony is part of the larger project in the theory of knowledge of investigating our faculties of knowledge.

In this introduction to the epistemology of testimony I aim to outline

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<sup>1</sup> Burge similarly notes, “Of course, much of our self-knowledge ... depends on observation of our own behaviour and reliance on other’s perceptions of us.” Burge (1988), 649.

<sup>2</sup> Fricker (1995), 402, suggests that the acquisition of language could also be considered a special case of our epistemic dependence upon testimony. Coady (1992), 169-73, argues that testimony is implicated in the formation of many perceptual beliefs. The belief, for instance, that this “is an eighteenth-century mahogany architect’s desk”. Strawson similarly claims, “perception without the concepts and attendant information which derive from the spoken or written word is, if not blind, pitifully short-sighted.” Strawson (1994), 26.

<sup>3</sup> Thus the faculties of knowledge seem to include perception, memory, induction, introspection and rational intuition. Dancy (1985) and Pollock (1986) prefer the labels ‘forms’ and ‘areas’ of knowledge respectively. I prefer the terms ‘faculty’ and ‘source’ because both suggest the possibility of a causal description. Memory retains knowledge: it is a source of knowledge for a person at a time. Thus in labelling memory a ‘source’ an implicit relativisation to the present is assumed. A similar relativisation is assumed in the case of testimony.



the key issues such an epistemology confronts. I will proceed as follows. In §1.1, I will give brief consideration to testimony as a faculty of knowledge. Testimony, it shall be seen, compares interestingly to the faculties of perception and memory. In §1.2, I will introduce the central question of this thesis, that is, ‘How are testimonial beliefs justified?’ The similarities and differences between testimony and perception and memory suggest two broad responses to this question. In §1.3, I will consider the, often tacit, claim that the epistemology of testimony undercuts the chronic individualism of epistemology and, thereby, provides a resolution to sceptical difficulties. Finally in §1.4 I will conclude by surveying the issues thus revealed and state how they are approached by the chapters that follow.

## **1.1. Testimony as a faculty of knowledge**

Consider the claim that testimony is the source of much of our knowledge. This claim is equivocal. ‘Our’ could refer distributively to epistemic subjects *qua* individuals or it could refer collectively to epistemic subjects *qua* members of some community. Testimony is a source of knowledge for individuals, by means of testimony each of us has *acquired* knowledge, and for communities, by means of testimony our knowledge has been *retained*. Testimony can be seen to serve these two

quite different epistemological roles because one can take two different but compatible perspectives on testimony.

The difference in perspective is that between considering a single communicative link and considering a chain of communication. For example, suppose the following fiction is a quote from *The Times* 1973.<sup>4</sup>

The actress Elizabeth Taylor narrowly escaped death on the London Airport flyover earlier today. It was Mrs. Taylor's alertness, her chauffeur claimed, which saved them from a violent collision. Her shout of "Car!", in response to a car careering out of a side road towards them, prompted him to swerve and were it not for her shout, they would both certainly be dead. He never saw the car, a black Lincoln, but he reacted instinctively to her shout. The driver of the Lincoln died when his car jumped the rails of the flyover and plunged ...

The chauffeur was alerted to the presence of the oncoming car because of Mrs. Taylor's testimony: his response was as sure *as if* he had seen it himself. And we can *now* know what happened on that day because of testimony, first the chauffeur's then the journalist's, as surely *as if* we remembered the event ourselves: the chain of testimony from the chauffeur to us allowing the retention of his knowledge. Thus this difference of perspective allows testimony to be interestingly compared to both perception and memory.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The fiction is adapted from Ballard (1973).

<sup>5</sup> For the analogy between testimony and perception see Reid (1764) and McDowell (1980). For the analogy between testimony and memory see Burge (1993), Dummett (1993a) and Welbourne (1986).

### *1.1.1. Testimony as a way of retaining knowledge*

It may be that some knowledge of things past can only be retained through memory.<sup>6</sup> But much of our knowledge of the past has only been retained through testimony. I only know that there have been two world wars this century because of testimony, I remember neither, and none could remember the Medici family giving three popes to the church. Thus, testimony, like memory, is a *unique* way of retaining knowledge. It is unique in the sense that some past things we can know only through being dependent on testimony.

Knowledge can be retained by testimony because a speaker can transmit what he knows to an audience. If the audience acquires knowledge by means of a speaker's testimony, then this knowledge is retained through the memories of both. Thus it may be that at a later date the speaker may defer to what the audience recalls him saying and the knowledge which the speaker expressed at this earlier time need not be lost with the speaker's forgetting or death. Further, if the audience were to pass this knowledge on

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<sup>6</sup> Arguably, what has been learnt in remembering how to do something or remembering an experience of  $\phi$ -ing.

to another and him to another still, then an audience born long after the original speaker's death could acquire knowledge of things past that maybe none could recall. In this way testimony allows the retention of knowledge through time.

The analogy between testimony and memory, however, is strongest for what could be termed *fossilised* testimony. That is, testimony which has not passed through many hands but has been preserved in its original form, either as written or audio record, after the speaker's death. In our literate culture such fossilised testimony is the basis of most of our knowledge of our past. For instance, it seems that we are in a position to know that Socrates remained in prison a month after his death sentence, waiting till the sacred ship had returned from Delos, now, over two thousand years after these events took place because of Plato's testimony. From the social perspective it seems that the preservation of Plato's testimony has allowed the retention of this knowledge throughout the intervening years.

Nevertheless, even considering only one speaker-audience link, there is a significant difference between testimony and memory as ways of retaining knowledge.

Our memories can be both poor, and believed poor, with respect to both domains and times. But memory allows the retention of knowledge provided it is properly serving its rational function. Whereas testimony allows the retention of knowledge only insofar as speakers express what they know. The contrast is that, other things being equal, one cannot with rational intention take things to be other than one remembers they were: if

one remembers that  $p$ , then unless one possesses a reason to distrust one's memory it should be irrational to disbelieve that  $p$ .<sup>7</sup> But the same cannot be said for testimony.

Let me say that *a speaker is artless if he believes the proposition he intends to communicate and artful if he does not*. Lies and, at least ordinarily, jokes are artful utterances. And any utterance not made with informative intent could be artful. We speak for many reasons; we might intend to persuade, reassure, flatter, hurt, joke, pass the time, generate intimacy or create an impression.<sup>8</sup> Thus it is perfectly rational to speak artfully; *if* Elizabeth Taylor's purpose in uttering were to get her chauffeur to slow down and she believed that demonstrating nervousness, and maybe giving him a fright into the bargain, would accomplish just this, then her shout would be rational *irrespective* of whether there was any black Lincoln.

It can be rational to speak artfully. Thus it can be rational to not-accept the proposition another expresses. Other things being equal, it is irrational to disbelieve something one remembers but it is perfectly rational to disbelieve what one says and what others say.

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that memories are somehow indifferent to the present or future of the subject whose they are; misconceptions can come to light that irrevocably change one's memories but this is another matter.

<sup>8</sup> "The intention to be taken to mean what one wants to be taken to mean is, it seems to me, so clearly the only aim that is common to all verbal behaviour that it is hard to see how anyone can deny it." Davidson (1994), 11.

### *1.1.2. Testimony as a way of acquiring knowledge*

It may be that some of the things one knows, one needs to see for oneself to know.<sup>9</sup> But much that one knows, one knows only testimony. I shall never scale the world's mountain ranges, nor trawl the ocean currents. I could not witness events prior to my birth. But I can know about such things simply by consulting an encyclopaedia. And some of knowledge that I have of myself and others I could acquire only through testimony.<sup>10</sup> Thus testimony, like perception, is a *unique* way of acquiring knowledge; again unique in the sense that some things can be known only through being dependent on testimony.

The analogy between testimony and perception is strongest for those things that are often known by both means. I can, for instance, learn of the early morning weather either by asking you or by getting up and seeing for myself. And Mrs. Taylor's shout alerted her chauffeur to the oncoming car as surely as if he had seen it himself. For such things it is as if we can see through another's eyes; the utterances of others can seem to inform us about the world as easily as our own perception of it. In these cases testimony seems a way of acquiring knowledge which need not be inferior to

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<sup>9</sup> Again our knowing how and our perceptually knowing how the world is, rather than our knowing that it is a certain way, are, arguably, such things. According to Hume divine miracles would be another such thing.

<sup>10</sup> We speak about 'knowing people' alongside knowing their states of mind but it is only the latter propositional knowledge that is my concern.

perception; if you tell me that the bus coming is not the one we want, I shall believe you knowing that your eyesight is better.

Nonetheless these cases, central to the analogy, also illustrate a striking difference between perception and testimony.

Our eyesight may be poor, our hearing bad and so on. But in perceiving, the percipient would be simply aware of the world before him. When his perception is properly serving its rational function, he knows the world is as he experiences it to be. Receiving testimony does not similarly create any direct epistemic contact with how the world is. Whether it reveals to its recipient how the world is depends on whether the speaker knows what he expresses. On looking out the window, you might *think* that the day is cloudy, but on getting up and looking for myself I know that what you see is simply the early morning haze common to these parts. And one could suppose that the chauffeur did not respond to Mrs. Taylor's shout by swerving the car: he knows Mrs. Taylor is a nervous and jumpy passenger. Testimony reveals how the world is only insofar as its speaker is *competent*.

A speaker is competent with respect to an utterance, one might suppose, if his utterance expresses a justified belief. However this is not right: it implies a speaker would be incompetent if either the belief expressed was not justified or he did not believe what he expressed. But we would not want to say that a speaker who did not believe what he expressed, either possessing no intention to inform or the intention to deceive, was incompetent. A joker and a liar are not incompetent because

they joke and lie. Thus a better definition would be: a speaker is competent with respect to an utterance if his utterance is artless and expresses a justified belief.

However this definition is still inadequate. The underlying thought is that the speaker's expression of his belief should be sensitive to its truth. This is then captured by requiring that the belief expressed be justified. However given that we communicate for many purposes, the speaker's *expression* of his belief will also be sensitive to these purposes. This sensitivity will be manifest in *how* the speaker expresses his belief. Rendered inarticulate by reflex Elizabeth Taylor squawks "Car!"; later that day, when relaxed, one could imagine her saying as a matter of fact, "When I saw the car drive straight at us, I shouted and James responded in time." But in addition to informing her audience of what happened she might want to vilify the other driver, "When I saw that monster drive ...". Or she might want to inform her audience of what happened and dramatise it, "... and James responded just in time." Or she might want to praise herself, "... quick as lightning I shouted ...".<sup>11</sup>

There are many ways of describing an event. It seems plausible to say that a certain range of possible descriptions can all be used to express

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<sup>11</sup> In fact "most everyday utterances contain elements of metaphor, irony, understatement, indirectness, ritual or whatever, which make it wrong to describe them as communicating what it is they actually say." Cooper (1987), 99; he cites Sampson (1980), Ch. 4 in support. To attempt to state the truth and nothing but, it seems, is quite peculiar. Whilst "the writings of scientists and learned men do indeed attain a certain austerity" Taylor (1980), 267, "they do this by creating a special context, that of exchange between serious thinkers dedicated above all to the truth of their depictions." But this is allowed for if the epistemologically relevant level is the proposition expressed rather than the sentence uttered.



the same belief. But if the speaker utters for purposes other than, or in significant addition to, the purpose of informing his audience, then the justification for the belief *as it is presented* could be altered. An artless utterance could be considered as *mode of presenting* a belief; how Mrs. Taylor's audience thinks of the event will be, at least partially, determined by how she presents it.<sup>12</sup> Thus the justification relevant to defining competence should be the epistemic justification supporting *whatever* is presented; this is the proposition expressed. Thus competence may be adequately defined: *a speaker is competent with respect to an utterance if he is artless and expresses a justified proposition*. This definition allows for the limiting case of a speaker's utterance being artless but so florid that whatever justification supports his belief was lost in its expression. (One could imagine him pushed, "Do you really believe *that?*", "Well, OK. I exaggerate but ...".<sup>13</sup>)

This divergence with perception takes on greater significance if it is recognised that *any* intelligible utterance, where 'utterance' is understood in the broad Gricean sense, can provide its audience with the opportunity of acquiring knowledge.<sup>14</sup> We acquire knowledge from maps, timetables, road-signs, sign language and other gestures.<sup>15</sup> We acquire knowledge from overhearing conversations and illicitly reading diary entries just as we do from acts of telling where speakers inform their audiences of something

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<sup>12</sup> I intend to evoke Frege (1892). Compare Burge (1997), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Of course we can learn from another's florid exaggerations: we can acquire knowledge by inference.

<sup>14</sup> See Grice (1957), 216.

<sup>15</sup> I could, for instance, tell the time by stating it, showing my watch or drawing a clock face in the sand.

known. And speakers ‘tell’ what they know in many more ways than straightforwardly asserting it.<sup>16</sup> The significance, then, is that whilst any intelligible utterance could provide its audience with the opportunity of acquiring knowledge, it could be ‘testimony’, in few utterances are ‘testifiers’ concerned simply with knowledge. Mrs. Taylor’s purpose in ‘testifying’, in all probability, should be to convey the drama or spectacle of her near-crash rather than its details in any accuracy. Spoken for this purpose, her utterance would still be rational. There is no similar sense in which perception can serve the percipient’s purpose.

### *1.1.3. Similarities and Differences*

The essential similarities are that like perception testimony is a

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<sup>16</sup> In the face of this diversity testimonial knowledge can be identified, and, in particular, separated from knowledge acquired by inference, by its requiring acceptance of what the speaker is understood to express. Consider Sosa’s puzzles. “(a) T testifies that p, S perceives that T testifies that p, and S knows thereby that someone testifies that p. (b) T testifies that n times now has someone testified in place P, with no idea that hers is the nth such testimony or even that she is at place P. S witnesses the testimony and knows (i) that there had been n-1 earlier instances of testimony at place P, and (ii) that this testimony of T’s is at place P and unaccompanied by any other present testimony at P” Sosa (1994b), 217. With respect to (a) S’s knowledge is not testimonial but inferential: T does not testify that someone testifies that p. With respect to (b) the puzzle seems to be that the only reason the testimony is true is because it is made. The act of testifying seems peculiar because it is comparable to, what Austin (1962) termed, *performative* speech acts.

unique way of acquiring knowledge and like memory testimony is a unique way of retaining knowledge. The essential difference is that for testimony to serve these epistemic functions someone other than the epistemic subject, namely the speaker, must be competent and artless. That is, if testimony is to be a source of knowledge, then its speaker must be neither artful nor incompetent. This condition holds irrespective of the account given of testimonial knowledge, assuming only that knowledge requires the knower be in some non-accidental relation to the truth of what is known, because if a speaker is either artful or incompetent, then it would be an accident if he expressed a truth.

It may be thought that considerations of artfulness and incompetence are comparable to considerations of illusion in perception and memory. It is equally true, for instance, that if a subject is to acquire perceptual knowledge, he must not be hallucinating. However the suggestion that what we seem to perceive could be a hallucination is a suggestion driven by theory. But it is not theory that drives us to consider the possibility of speakers being artful and incompetent. These considerations arise with our experience of communicating.

Nonetheless, as epistemological considerations there is some parallel between the possibility of a speaker being incompetent and the possibility of one's perceptual or recollective faculties delivering an illusion. However the same cannot be said for artfulness and it is artfulness that is the more epistemically significant consideration. This is because a speaker decides whether to be artless or not in a way that he doesn't decide whether to be competent or not. And it is rational to be artful in a way that it

is not rational to be incompetent. That artlessness is epistemically fundamental may also be seen in the definition of the competence: a speaker can be competent with respect to an utterance only if he is artless.

Thus testimony is comparable to perception and memory because it is a unique source of knowledge. And it is fundamentally different to these faculties because testimonial knowledge is mediated by artlessness and this consideration has no counterpart in either perception or memory.

## **1.2. The Justification of Testimonial Beliefs**

This thesis aims to provide an epistemological account of testimony as a faculty of knowledge. Given that testimony is a source of knowledge, others must sometimes express truths. Suppose, then, that an audience could acquire testimonial knowledge *only if* his believing of a truth expressed by testimony is justified.<sup>17</sup> It should clearly be justified if the speaker expressed something mutually or already known. Or something that on reflection the audience already has sufficient reason to believe. But *the*

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<sup>17</sup> This supposition brackets the question of whether knowledge can be analysed as justified true belief. It is not supposed that a true belief is knowledge if justified. See Gettier (1963) and Williamson (1995).

*fundamental case* is one where the speaker expresses something that the audience does *not* have otherwise sufficient reason to believe.<sup>18</sup> The question is, what justifies *accepting* testimony rather than merely agreeing with it? In these fundamental cases, how is the audience's testimonial belief justified? There seem to be two broad responses to this question.

Insofar as the similarities between testimony and perception and memory are stressed, the thought might be that we have the epistemic right to trust testimony just as we have such a right to trust perception and memory. Testimonial beliefs would then be justified simply because they are testimonial. Conversely, insofar as the differences between testimony and perception and memory are stressed, the thought might be that we have an epistemic imperative to distrust testimony. By contrast to what is perceived or remembered, there is no direct connection between what others present-as-true and what is true. Testimonial beliefs would then be justified by whatever reasons an audience might possess for believing that what is expressed is true.

The former of these responses articulates an *anti-reductionist* epistemology of testimony, the latter a *reductionist* one.<sup>19</sup> I provide a rough

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<sup>18</sup> That is, fundamental with respect to the epistemology of testimony. If testimony expresses something that the audience, on reflection, has otherwise sufficient reason to believe, then the testimony is merely the *cause* of belief. Nonetheless the relation between *testimony as cause* and *testimony as justification* is complex.

<sup>19</sup> These terms come originally from Coady (1973). Anti-reductionism is by far the most common epistemological position. It could be attributed, for instance, to the following authors: Austin (1946), Bhattacharyya (1994), Burge (1993), Chakrabarti (1994), Coady (1992), Dummett (1993a), Hardwig (1985), Holton (1994), Jack (1994), Lehrer (1994), McDowell (1994a), Reid (1764), A. Ross (1986), J. Ross (1975), Strawson (1994), Webb (1993) and Welbourne (1986). By contrast reductionism could only be attributed, as far as I am aware, to Hume (1777) and, up to a point, Fricker (1987).

outline of these responses and their motivations in the next two sections respectively.

### *1.2.1. Anti-reductionism and its motivations*

Suppose a speaker utters ‘U’ and intelligibly expresses that  $p$ . Anti-reductionism could then be characterised as the claim that the fact that the speaker intelligibly expressed that  $p$  provides a reason to accept that  $p$ . Thus an audience, who understood the speaker’s utterance ‘U’, would be justified in believing that  $p$ , other things being equal. Testimony should then be a source of both knowledge and justification.

There is something quite intuitive about this anti-reductionist claim. What is the root of this intuition?

It cannot be the supposition that other people are fundamentally trustworthy. Whilst there may be some empirical support for this supposition, as an empirical claim it is far too contentious to motivate anti-reductionism. There could be equal empirical support for the converse supposition that other people are fundamentally untrustworthy. Experience might make one of these suppositions salient but this could reflect no more than one’s limited history of dealing with others. Nor could the root be the

conjunction of some authoritarian epistemic principle such as ‘one can be justified in believing a proposition if either oneself or another possesses reasons for belief’ with the claim that audiences frequently lack reasons to believe what speakers express. Irrespective of the truth of this principle this contestably assumes that audiences do lack reasons for accepting what speakers express.

Rather I take the motivation for anti-reductionism to be two-fold. First, testimony seems a source of knowledge not simply for adults but also for children. Both an adult and a child could learn that the highest peak of the Carpathian Mountains is 8788 feet by reading this in an encyclopaedia. However children do not seem capable of articulating reasons to believe or disbelieve speakers.<sup>20</sup> The unreflective acceptance of testimony, characteristic in children, still seems ingrained in much of our adult responses to testimony. When another tells us the time, the latest football result or gives us directions we, ordinarily, simply accept what is said. In watching the news, consulting encyclopaedias or following road signs we, rarely, even consider the possibility of being misinformed. The transmission of information, it seems, is an elementary function of communication; this unreflective attitude could certainly be explained were communication to have, maybe due to its evolutionary role, the transmission of information as its essential purpose. An awareness that communication can transmit information so easily, I suggest, constitutes the first intuitive motivation for

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<sup>20</sup> In this vein Wittgenstein states, “A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it.” And, “The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief”. Wittgenstein (1969), §143 and §160.

the anti-reductionism.

Second, to find an utterance intelligible is to understand it and to understand something is to see it as rational. But then, it seems that there must be some basic conceptual connections between understanding and reason, belief and truth such that we must suppose that the intelligibility of testimony provides a reason to believe what it expresses. This conception of an audience's understanding being a rational human activity, I suggest, constitutes the second intuitive motivation for anti-reductionism.

### *1.2.2. Reductionism and its motivations*

A speaker utters 'U' and intelligibly expresses that  $p$ . Reductionism could then be characterised as the claim that the mere fact that the speaker intelligibly expressed that  $p$  provides no reason to believe that  $p$ . An audience who understands the speaker's utterance 'U' is justified in believing that  $p$  only insofar as he possesses reasons to accept the speaker's testimony. Insofar as testimony is a source of knowledge audiences must possess reasons for accepting testimony.

There is also something intuitive about this reductionist claim. What is the root of this intuition?



It cannot be the supposition that other people are too incompetent in their belief to be trusted. I have no doubt that beliefs are held for other reasons than truth, for instance to ease moral sentiments or to uphold cherished but fallacious notions, but the supposition that *others* are by and large incompetent is inseparably close to a third person construal of global scepticism. Nor could the root be the conjunction of an individualist epistemic principle such as ‘one can only be justified in believing a proposition to the extent that reasons are possessed for belief’ with the claim that the speaker’s reasons are not *the audience’s* reasons. Irrespective of the truth of this principle this contestably assumes that intelligible testimony does not provide an audience with a reason to believe.

Rather, as with anti-reductionism, I take the motivation supporting reductionism to be two-fold. First our purposes in communication are many and varied: speakers need not have the intention of informing their audiences. Whilst believing what a speaker expresses would be an appropriate response *if* the speaker were communicating in order to inform, it would be an inappropriate response to many other communicative purposes. If, for instance, I seek to reassure you, there seems to be no need for me to express something I believe, my concern is to express something you should find reassuring to believe and believable. Thus, insofar as the mere intelligibility of an utterance does not indicate that the speaker is communicating in order to inform, believing what the speaker expresses seems appropriate only if, at least, reason is possessed to believe that the speaker is artless. An awareness that communication serves so many other

purposes than the transmission of information, I suggest, constitutes the first intuitive motivation for reductionism.

Second, a speaker cannot, without irrationality, believe something that he thinks is false. A speaker can, with perfect rationality, express something that he thinks is false. And speakers seem to have the absolute liberty to do just this, that is, there seems to be no rational imperative constraining speakers to be artless. But then it seems that it should be irrational for an audience to believe what a speaker expresses without possessing a reason for doing so. This conception of a speaker being at rational liberty not to express his beliefs, I suggest, constitutes the second intuitive motivation for reductionism.

### **1.3. Testimony and Individualism**

In the last two sections I have mapped out, what I take to be, the central issues within an epistemology of testimony. I should now like to consider, what I take to be, a certain configuration of prejudices within the literature on testimony.

The epistemology of testimony has suffered neglect.<sup>21</sup> The most commonly remarked explanation for this hiatus is the individualism of epistemology.<sup>22</sup> The ‘individualist’ is commonly identified with the ‘reductionist’ and reductionism is taken as the ‘received view’. This identification is then frequently, and often in the same breathe, connected to another: it is also individualism, the vain ‘reductionist’ desire to be ‘autonomous’, which is the cause scepticism. This, it is supposed, is the most futile of epistemological errors. Thus the reductionist is presented as a straw man whose defeat will undercut the individualism of epistemology and thereby provide a panacea for all epistemological ills.

In this vein, Code argues that whilst the trustworthiness of another’s testimony might be doubted,

Without other people, no one would *be* to doubt and be aware of her or his fallibility. A doubt that doubts the conditions of its own possibility verges on irrationality. So a simple move from a judicious recognition of fallibility to the nihilism of scepticism is too swift: it can be made only by ignoring the very forces that shaped it. Were autonomy-obsession displaced, and the pervasiveness of second-person relationships fully acknowledged, temptations to scepticism might not be so strong.<sup>23</sup>

And considering the traditional epistemological centrality of perception, but

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<sup>21</sup> Prior to the late eighties very little was written. Even now there have only been two books and one edited volume published, Coady (1992), Welbourne (1986) and Matilal and Chakrabarti (1994) respectively. Other key articles include, Hardwig (1985), Fricker (1987) and Burge (1993).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, “In the post-Renaissance Western world the dominance of an individualist ideology has had a lot to do with the feeling that testimony has little or no epistemic importance.” Coady (1992), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Code (1991), 139.

mining the same vein, Coady claims

a hankering after a primacy for *my* perceptions, or, more strictly, for the individual's own perceptions seems to lead inevitably to the sceptical conclusion that perception cannot be relied on. The fact that this egocentric assumption and the traditional sceptical challenge to perception go so naturally hand in hand should give us pause about the supposed attraction of the assumption. ... [However if we] see our starting point as encompassing *our* knowledge and not exclusively *my* knowledge. There will then be no problem of the epistemological priority of *my* perceptions over *our* perceptions.<sup>24, 25</sup>

I put aside the cause of testimony's neglect, and, for that matter, the detail of both Code and Coady's arguments. I hope I have shown that reductionism is intuitively motivated. I shall now contest that the epistemology of testimony, in any way, either resolves scepticism or stands naturally opposed to individualism. In order to do this I should like to consider two arguments. Both illustrate that even if our dependence on testimony is acknowledged, scepticism is still a concern and a concern with

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<sup>24</sup> Coady (1992), 149-51.

<sup>25</sup> And there is Rorty. "The idea of a "theory of knowledge" grew up", Rorty (1980) claims, "around this latter problem ['scepticism of the external world'] - the problem of knowing whether our inner representations were accurate. The idea of a discipline devoted to "the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge" - the textbook definition of "epistemology" - required a field of study called "the human mind", and that field of study was what Descartes had created. The Cartesian mind simultaneously made possible veil-of-ideas skepticism and a discipline devoted to circumventing such skepticism." 140. Thus "skepticism and the principle genre of modern philosophy [epistemology] have a symbiotic relationship. They live one another's death, and die one another's life." *Ibid.*, 113. Rorty, however, is keen to announce the death of both epistemology and scepticism because "justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice." *Ibid.*, 170. That is, it is a matter of "what society lets us say", *Ibid.*, 174.

the individual subject's reasons is still reputable.

### *1.3.1. Two Sceptical Arguments*

The first sceptical argument is owed to Putnam. This argument is not directed against testimony as a source of knowledge. However it is illustrative.

Suppose that an individualist account of testimony is false: an audience's reasons for accepting or rejecting testimony are fundamentally irrelevant to the justification of his testimonial beliefs. A testimonial belief is justified, suppose, *if and only if* the community would regard it as justified. Is this epistemology immune to scepticism?

Most form scientific beliefs on the basis of testimony and the community would certainly take the scientific beliefs of the day to be justified. But then,

what if we ['we' as in the community] accept a theory from the standpoint of which electrons are like *phlogiston*? ... This is, of course, a form of the old sceptical 'argument from error' - how do you know you aren't in error *now*? But it is the form in which the argument from error is a *serious* worry for many people today, and not just a 'philosophical doubt'. One

reason this is a serious worry is that eventually the following meta-induction becomes increasingly compelling: *just as no term used in the science of more than fifty ... years ago referred, so it will turn out that no term used now ... refers.*<sup>26</sup>

For the authoritarian epistemology characterised this meta-induction concerns not the references of scientific terms but the justification possessed for the individual audience's testimonial beliefs. The meta-induction is that: *just as no scientific belief based on testimony of more than fifty years ago is justified, so it will turn out that no scientific belief based on present day testimony is justified.* And I think Putnam is correct when he states that this is a *serious* worry for many people. That it is so would explain the alarmingly charitable contemporary attitude towards pseudo-science, magic etc.

This is not to say that an authoritarian epistemology of testimony would have no response to this argument. But if an individual audience's reasons were relevant to the justification of his testimonial beliefs, this meta-induction would then be *less* threatening. Even if the community were to accept a theory that sent electrons the way of *phlogiston*, this should not imply that an individual's belief in electrons is completely unjustified. This is because the individual audience will have had a reason for his belief in electrons, his reason for believing testimony concerning science, which plays a justificatory role and which is constant across the theory change.

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<sup>26</sup> Putnam (1978), 24-5.

This is not to say that an individualist account of testimony would be committed to the implausible claim that were there such a theory change the epistemic status of the audience's belief would be unaltered. After all, the audience's reason for thinking his testimonial belief to be true would have been objectively defeated. It is just to claim the meta-induction less threatening if an individual audience's reasons are given a justificatory role. And this is to illustrate how a recognition of our dependence on testimony implies neither any resolution to scepticism nor any opposition to individualism.

The second sceptical argument is owed to Susan Feldman. An acknowledgement of our epistemic dependence on testimony, Feldman claims, is compatible with scepticism. This is because it is possible to give a sceptical argument against testimony as a source of knowledge.

In Feldman's view such an argument "poses a similar challenge to knowledge claims ... [as] radical scepticism"; that is, it "can ground scepticism just as firmly as the solipsism of Descartes' *Meditations*."<sup>27</sup> This cannot be right. Radical scepticism concludes, at least, that none of our beliefs about the world are justified. However, even if we are not justified in believing that something is the case on the basis of another saying that it is, we should still be justified in believing that the other *said* that something is the case. But then we are justified in believing something about the world, contrary to radical scepticism. Perception must be assumed a source of knowledge before we are entitled to even consider other people saying

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<sup>27</sup> S. Feldman (1997), 81.

things. Nonetheless the target of Feldman's argument is the claim made by Code above that once our dependence on testimony is genuinely recognised, "temptations to scepticism might not be so strong". Thus Feldman's argument succeeds against its intended target if she provides a sceptical argument against testimony.

The sceptical argument Feldman provides is modelled on Stroud's reconstruction of Descartes' argument for dreaming.<sup>28</sup> This argument requires:

- (1) A sceptical possibility that is phenomenologically indistinguishable from what we take to be the case.
- (2) The epistemic impossibility of acquiring knowledge, by whatever the considered means, were this possibility the case.

I consider, in turn, these prerequisites and how Feldman's argument purports to satisfy them.

(1). Feldman's sceptical possibility is "a world designed by an Orwell influenced by Kafka, where one never can be sure whom to trust, where one's memories and perceptions are under constant social challenge and political scrutiny, where betrayal is commonplace and where conformity is the highest social value."<sup>29</sup> Further, whilst the possibilities employed in the generation of other sceptical arguments can be asserted to be *only* possibilities, "We have reason to believe that such worlds in fact

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<sup>28</sup> See Stroud (1984).

<sup>29</sup> This and all the following quotes are taken from S. Feldman (1997), 82-3.



exist and have existed (as in East Germany, perhaps)". Scepticism of testimony, I would agree, is believable in a way other scepticisms are not. However, writing in contemporary London I have many reasons to believe that I do not live in this "social nightmare world". I have certain freedoms, such as my liberty to visit other countries, which seem incompatible with the supposition that I live in such a "nightmare world". Feldman thus works with a weaker condition than phenomenological indistinguishability, a condition which begs the question as to why one should be sceptical, that is, "If we live in a social nightmare world, we would not be able to recognise it as such while in its grip." I see no reason to accept this. (If Eastern Europe is perhaps considered, for instance, then the extent to which Eastern Europeans recognised their political condition should not be disregarded.<sup>30</sup>) Thus I take Feldman's sceptical argument to fail condition (1).

(2). "Social forces", Feldman claims, "contaminate our sources of belief. Perception, testimony from ordinarily reliable others, memory, knowledge of other people, have been shown to be unreliable sources of true belief." This claim *must* be qualified; Feldman's illustration suggests to what degree. "Concerning testimony, 'urban legends' are entirely false accounts, related with perfect sincerity by otherwise reliable people, which become widely believed and recounted." Don't people just recount urban legends for their anecdotal value? Do they really believe them? Suppose they do, is this enough to throw testimony into disrepute? Would testimony fail to be a source of knowledge even in the "social nightmare world"

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Milosz (1953) and Vladislav (1986).

where “perverse social forces” operate? I do not think so. The encroachment of political institutions and ideologies into the life of a citizen, I would contest, can only have limited epistemic consequences. I see no reason why one should not have reasons to believe much testimony. Totalitarian regimes might still cultivate good scientific practice, if only to generate more sophisticated mechanisms of surveillance, yet this is extensively reliant upon testimony and requires an educated populace. And one would still have reason to believe even official organs with respect to many things; one could, for instance, be assured of having one’s request for directions to the local party headquarters answered truly. Thus I take Feldman’s sceptical argument to fail condition (2).

In arguing against Feldman I have no intention of defending the thesis stated by Code or Coady. I think Feldman is exactly right: a sceptical argument can be given against testimony as a source of knowledge. Further, an argument can be given, modelled on Descartes’ argument from dreaming, which satisfies the two stated conditions. I shall provide this argument at the start of chapter two. Now I turn to my programme for approaching the epistemology of testimony.

## **1.4. Conclusion: The Programme**

- (1) Testimony seems to perform different epistemic functions when viewed from different perspectives. From the perspective of the individual audience testimony is a way of acquiring knowledge yet from the perspective of the community, a way of retaining knowledge. Thus an account is needed of both individual and community perspectives on testimony which explains their integration.
- (2) Testimony like perception and memory is a faculty of knowledge: the source of much of our knowledge could only be testimony. Yet testimonial knowledge is mediated by considerations which have no counterpart in any other faculty and which explain why we tend to be more sceptical of testimony than any other faculty. Thus an account is needed of testimony as a source of knowledge which explains testimony as one of our faculties of knowledge and recognises our greater scepticism towards it.
- (3) The claims that the justification of testimonial beliefs is unique and that it reduces to an individual audience's reasons for accepting the testimony believed can both be intuitively motivated. Whilst these motivations are not mutually exclusive, at least insofar as they are intuitively expressed, the epistemological positions which draw on

them are. Thus an account is needed of how testimonial beliefs are justified which does justice to as many of our intuitions as possible.

These are, I propose, the three key issues which an adequate epistemology of testimony must address.

I do not think that finding a response to a sceptical argument against testimony is a key issue. Responding to scepticism of testimony is not an *issue* within the epistemology of testimony it is a *method* of doing this epistemology. By pursuing this method I hope to tackle the third issue; by finding out why it is not the case that testimonial beliefs are unjustified I hope to reveal how in fact they are justified. This method acts to arbitrate between the intuitions motivating answers to the question of how testimonial beliefs are justified.

Thus the central issue of this thesis is the third. I start in chapter two by articulating a sceptical argument for testimony. The rest of this chapter is then taken up with meta-epistemology outlining, in tandem, an epistemology of our faculties of knowledge and a justification for employing scepticism methodologically. Chapter three is devoted to developing a sophisticated characterisation of reductionism, that is a characterisation which recognises the complexity of our reasons for either accepting or rejecting testimony. Chapter four evaluates whether reductionism so conceived is able to provide a response to the sceptical argument articulated. These two chapters stress the differences between testimony and memory and perception. Chapters five and six, which consider anti-reductionism, concentrate on the similarities. In chapter five it is the analogy with

perception which informs the anti-reductionism considered; in chapter six it is the analogy with memory. Thus issue two is tackled. The theories developed in each of these chapters are evaluated likewise in terms of whether they enable a response to scepticism of testimony. A response to scepticism is provided at the end of chapter six. This response, maybe unsurprisingly, requires a hybrid of reductionism and anti-reductionism. This hybrid is conceived to be a mix of individual internalism and social externalism. Chapter seven develops this theory. In so doing it attempts to conceptualise how an individual knower is related to a community of knowledge. That is, it attempts to tackle issue one.

## SCEPTICISM AND OUR FACULTIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Insofar as we *trust* that another's testimony will be a source of knowledge, we rely on them, at least, to express something they believe.<sup>1</sup> But speakers need not express their beliefs. Where a speaker's testimony expresses something he does not believe, the speaker is *artful* and, let me say, the testimony is a *lye*.<sup>2</sup> Lies as ordinarily understood, that is, false statements made with deceptive intent, are a particularly pernicious variety of lies in being deceptive through purporting to be informative. A lie need not be deceptive, the artful speaker might be the perennial kidder but in not expressing his beliefs the kidder's lies should not be informative. Thus if we trust that another's testimony will be informative and his testimony is a lie, our trust will have been betrayed.<sup>3</sup> Is it, then, wise to trust testimony?

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<sup>1</sup> "Trusting someone does not involve relying on them and having some belief about them: a belief, perhaps, that they are trustworthy. What it involves is relying on them to do something, and investing that reliance with a certain attitude." Holton (1994), 67. Holton develops the account of trust provided by Baier (1986).

<sup>2</sup> 'Lye' is an older variant spelling of 'lie'. The O.E.D. quotes, amongst others, Lloyd, "Shrewd Suspicion .. To truth declar'd prefers a whisper'd lye".

<sup>3</sup> Arguably our trust may be betrayed even by truthful testimony: one can state something one believes but implicate a falsehood. See Adler (1997). I do not consider falsely implicating because I focus on the proposition the speaker expresses, rather than what the speaker says, and where the false implication is strong enough to be deceptive it could be regarded as the proposition expressed.

“A wise man”, Descartes advises, “never entirely trusts those who have once cheated him”.<sup>4</sup> This advice is given to those who think it is obvious that knowledge can be acquired “by means of the senses”. However the senses rarely deceive us, we tend not to believe illusions, hallucinations are mostly recognisable. By contrast testimony frequently deceives us; sometimes the deception is unwitting, as when we fail to discern a speaker’s irony, sometimes it is intentional, as when we accept a lie. Thus, insofar as we trust testimony to be informative, we have all been cheated. At times it can seem as if others only use speech to disguise their thoughts; at times the phantasms created by another’s lies can seem impenetrable. Thus were Descartes wise to treat the beliefs he acquired by means of the senses as “wholly false and imaginary”, shouldn’t we be wise to treat testimonial beliefs likewise?

Couldn’t it be the case that most people lie to me most of the time? Couldn’t it be the case that if there exists much consistency in testimony, this is only because others have conspired to agree in their lies? Couldn’t I be the victim of a massive conspiracy whereby nearly everyone has consented to lie to me most of the time and agreed in their lies? This is certainly possible. And were this possibility the case, the world need seem no different to me.<sup>5</sup>

This possibility is believable in a way that other sceptical possibilities are not. I doubt whether anyone has ever believed that they

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<sup>4</sup> First Meditation, Descartes (1641), 62.

<sup>5</sup> That is, this sceptical possibility satisfies condition (1) in §1.3.1.

were a brain-in-a-vat or that the world started five minutes ago but the belief that one is the victim of a massive conspiracy of liars is a common paranoid delusion. One *could* pathologically reason, 'Why else should others joke than to disguise what they believe? If there is agreement in what others assert, that only reveals that they conspire in deceiving me!' Pathological or not, this possibility allows a sceptical argument against testimony as a source of knowledge.

This sceptical argument is directed against acquiring beliefs by means of testimony: its target is believing those propositions which *prior* to understanding a given testimony an audience had *no, or insufficient*, reason to believe. I shall call propositions belonging to this class *testimonial propositions*, t-propositions for short. Thus a proposition which testimony has caused a speaker to believe whilst being irrelevant to the justification of this belief would not be a testimonial proposition.<sup>6</sup>

Suppose a speaker uttered 'U' and expressed the t-proposition that *p*. Let 'lye(*p*)' stand for 'in expressing the t-proposition that *p* the speaker did not express a belief'. The sceptical argument then employs two premises: 'we are justified in believing that if *p* is true, then the speaker did not lie'; and 'we are not justified in believing that the speaker did not lie'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The qualifier 'or insufficient' must be included because of examples like that of the bus in §1.1.2. My perception provides me with *a* reason to believe this is the bus we want, I can see that it is a bus, but it does not provide me with sufficient reason to believe that it is: I cannot make out the number. Thus, with your better eyesight, when you say that it is the bus we want, the proposition you express is testimonial, if not in any very interesting manner: I can verify your testimony a moment later.

<sup>7</sup> The argument is similar to the sceptical argument for perception offered by Stroud (1984) and Tymoczko (1992).



(P1)  $JB(p \rightarrow \neg lye(p))$

(C2)  $JB(p) \rightarrow JB(\neg lye(p))$  By Transmission

(P3)  $\neg JB(\neg lye(p))$

Hence:

(C4)  $\neg JB(p)$  By *modus tollens*

Must one then conclude that ‘we are not justified in accepting any testimony which expresses a proposition that we have otherwise insufficient reason to believe’? First, premises (P1) and (P3) require consideration.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to (P1) the conditional ‘ $p \rightarrow \neg lye(p)$ ’ is not a logical truth: its consequent, the claim that the speaker did not lye, is not factive. A speaker could clearly express a belief and, in so doing, express a falsehood. Thus it is not evident that we are justified in believing this conditional. However, I believe that (P1) is defensible and this can be seen through considering how the embedded conditional could be strengthened. The obvious way to strengthen it would be to require that the belief expressed by the speaker is justified. Where the t-proposition a speaker artlessly expresses is justified, I said that, he is *competent*. Let ‘Cpt( $p$ )’ stand for

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<sup>8</sup> It is presumed, first, that the justification of a belief should state for what reasons the belief is held *and* should determine that the belief is likely to be true. Thus a belief would be unjustified if *either* a subject’s reasons for believing were somehow inadequate *or* the belief formed were just as likely to be false as true. That the justification of a belief is both an ‘internal’ and an ‘external’ matter is claimed by amongst others: Peacocke (1986); Alston (1988); Sosa (1985); and Goldman (1993). Second, the following principle of transmission is presumed.  $JB(p)$  and  $JB(p \rightarrow q)$  imply  $JB(q)$ . Were this principle not to hold, valid inference would not be a means of rational persuasion. This principle is defended by R. Feldman (1995) and see also Wright (1985; 1991).

‘insofar as the speaker is artless, that  $p$  is justified’. (P1) could then be modified to read:

(P1\*)  $JB(p \rightarrow (\neg lye(p) \ \& \ Cpt(p)))$

Given an infallibilist conception of justification the conditional ‘ $p \rightarrow (\neg lye(p) \ \& \ Cpt(p))$ ’ would be a logical truth: if justification entails truth, then the consequent of this conditional would be factive.<sup>9</sup> Thus (P1\*) would be clearly true: we are clearly justified in believing logical truths. On a fallibilist conception of justification, by contrast, that  $p$  could be justified and false. Our justification for believing ‘ $p \rightarrow (\neg lye(p) \ \& \ Cpt(p))$ ’ could not be our justification for believing logical truths. Nonetheless, insofar as ‘ $\neg lye(p) \ \& \ Cpt(p)$ ’ implies that  $p$  is justified, we are justified in believing that  $p$  and therefore justified in believing ‘ $p \rightarrow (\neg lye(p) \ \& \ Cpt(p))$ ’ as (P1\*) states. As the inference from  $(P \rightarrow (Q \ \& \ R))$  to  $(P \rightarrow Q)$  is valid, (P1) correspondingly holds. The sceptical argument is then couched in terms of (P1) rather than (P1\*) because of the charitable assumption that the *beliefs* of others are by and large true and justified. The issue is whether others give expression to these beliefs or not.

Thus the crux premise is (P3). ‘We are not justified in believing that the speaker did not lye’. An utterance, just like an appearance, does not reveal its causal provenance, the speaker’s fantasy or belief. If scepticism of testimony is to be avoided, this premise must be rejected. It can be rejected only insofar as we can, in fact, reliably discriminate lies *and* are

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<sup>9</sup> Fricker appears to hold an infallibilist conception of justification, stating, “S is competent with respect to  $p$  at  $t =_{df}$  at  $t$ , S believes  $p \rightarrow p$ ”. Fricker (1987), 73.

justified in believing that we possess this reliable ability. The premise (P3) must not be simply rejected: its rejection must be justified.

The reason for this requirement is that were it only claimed that (P3) is false, because we can, in fact, reliably discriminate lies, scepticism would emerge at the second-order. The first-order sceptical conclusion is that stated, ‘we are not justified in accepting any testimony expressing a t-proposition’. The second-order sceptical conclusion is that we are not justified in believing that this first-order conclusion is not the case; that is, ‘we are not justified in believing that we are justified in accepting a testimony expressing a t-proposition’. This second-order sceptical conclusion is implied by our inability to justify rejecting (P3) given the starting hypothesis that the sceptical possibility is realised. Thus to defeat this second-order conclusion we must justify the rejection of (P3) through *establishing* that we can reliably discriminate lies.<sup>10</sup> Short of such a justification, one must be sceptical of testimonial beliefs. Insofar as many of our beliefs are testimonial, there is a sense in which this sceptical conclusion is radical, *pace* Feldman.

The next four chapters are framed by the project of finding a response to this argument; by so doing I hope to uncover how testimonial beliefs are justified. This chapter is devoted to providing the details of this epistemological strategy. In §2.1 I will sketch a justification for using scepticism methodologically and a corresponding epistemology for our

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<sup>10</sup> Thus Wright states, “A satisfactory response to scepticism must deal with scepticism at both first- and second-order.” Wright (1991), 90.

faculties of knowledge. I shall apply this conception to the epistemology of testimony. In §2.2 I will show how this application is compatible with divergent theories of justification *provided* the epistemological project of investigating our faculties of knowledge is entertained. I shall acknowledge that if this epistemological project is not entertained, then short responses to scepticism seem possible. First I need to make a further comment on the sceptical argument just given.

### *2.0.1. A Localised Sceptical Argument*

A sceptical possibility must, of course, be possible. And it must be phenomenologically indistinguishable from what we take to be the case. Further, *if there is to be any hope that responding to a sceptical argument will reveal how beliefs from a certain faculty are justified, then the scepticism must be directed solely against this faculty.* The scepticism sought must be local.<sup>11</sup>

A global sceptical argument is an argument to the conclusion that most of our beliefs are false; a local sceptical argument is more limited: it

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<sup>11</sup> See, Dancy (1985), 8.

is an argument directed against *either* some source of knowledge *or* some domain of knowledge. These two targets may be connected. A sceptical argument directed against memory will imply that propositions about the past cannot be known. And a sceptical argument directed against perception will imply that propositions about the external world cannot be known. Insofar as most of our beliefs concern the external world, a local scepticism of perception would be equivalent to global scepticism.

A sceptical argument directed against some faculty of knowledge can be independent of scepticism of any domain of knowledge. As a faculty of knowledge testimony yields knowledge of various domains; testimonial beliefs concern the external world, the past, other minds and our own minds. Testimonial beliefs are integrated *only* through being testimonial. Thus it should be possible to give a sceptical argument that is exclusively targeted on testimony as a source of knowledge and which does not imply scepticism of any domain of knowledge. The sceptical argument given in §2.0 realises this possibility. Its focus is provided by the supposition that speakers have conspired to lie most of the time and to agree in their lies. Other sceptical possibilities for testimony *would not* provide this focus.

Consider the following sceptical possibilities. (1) No one speaks and the utterances we believe we hear are no more than perturbations of air. (2) Speakers use a language which sounds, and is written, just like English but in fact others always mean something different by their utterances than the proposition we understand. (3) speakers are incompetent and if they express a proposition they believe, then the proposition will probably be false. In addition to generating scepticism of testimony possibilities (1) and

(2) generate scepticism of our knowledge of other minds. How could we believe that others possess mental states like ourselves if they are *always* silent? How could we ever know what these mental states were if we *never* understood them? Whilst possibility (3) requires the supposition that the beliefs of others are by and large unjustified, and therefore by and large false, and this is simply a third person construal of global scepticism. Contrary to (1) and (2) the epistemology of testimony must presume that by and large we understand the utterances of others. This starting point presupposes that by and large we veridically perceive what others utter. It is hard to see how this presupposition is compatible with possibility (3).

A more promising possibility is the following. (4) Speakers never express a proposition they believe but always lie. The problem is that if (4) were the case, our world would appear very different. It is apparent that speakers do not lie all the time. When another speaks of presently observable affairs it is sometimes obvious that a belief is expressed. If we can charitably infer that a belief was expressed from the truth of the proposition expressed, then we can sometimes judge that others are, or were, artless. Thus (4) requires modification. Consider the following. (5) Speakers are so sophisticated in their lies that any judgement of artlessness could be no more than accidentally true. This hypothesis is radical. There are, I presume, constitutional limits on how artful any human could be: sometimes one cannot avoid expressing a belief and deception is not always possible.<sup>12</sup> Thus this hypothesis seems comparable to supposing that

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<sup>12</sup> This presumption could be supported: experimental psychologists claim some considerable success in detecting lies from behavioural clues. See Ekman (1988).

Descartes' evil demon is embodied in everyone encountered: only such a creature could possess such resourceful duplicity. At first sight this seems to make the hypothesis attractive because it integrates scepticism of testimony into a tradition. However it is unattractive because again it generates scepticism of our knowledge of other minds. If it is supposed that others are this sophisticated in disguising their beliefs, their behaviour could provide no more evidence as to their mental states than their speech: it could equally be a played out exercise of intentional deception. Any show of pain, for instance, could be shammed for some ulterior motive.

Further, radical though it is, (5) alone would not suffice to generate scepticism of testimony because there are indirect ways of judging whether another is artless. In particular the testimonies of others may be correlated and in this manner corroborate each other or not. Thus what is needed, in addition to supposing that others are demonic in their artfulness, is the hypothesis that others are somehow in cohorts and thereby manage to get their lyes, at least where these lyes are lies as ordinarily understood, to cohere. The hypothesis that there is a conspiracy, however, is sufficient in itself to generate the needed sceptical argument.

Thus the sceptical argument given starts from the possibility that testimony is mostly lyes and any agreement is the consequence of there being a massive conspiracy of which one is a victim. This possibility allows an argument directed exclusively against the claim that testimony is a faculty of knowledge. If testimony were a faculty of knowledge, then we must be justified, at least in certain circumstances, in accepting testimony. However the sceptical argument concludes that we are *not* justified in the

fundamental case where the testimony expresses a proposition that we otherwise have insufficient reason to believe. In the next section I outline how and why I propose to use scepticism as a method in epistemology.

## **2.1. Epistemology and Methodology**

The epistemological project of investigating our faculties of knowledge presumes that the way in which a belief is acquired or retained is epistemologically significant. If the belief that  $p$  is formed by way of method  $S$ , then this fact will be relevant to its epistemic status. One manner in which this can be seen is that were the justification for believing that  $p$  challenged, an initial, though not necessarily complete, response would be to cite the fact that the belief was formed by method  $S$ . This response would be complete if  $S$  were a *fundamental* source of knowledge. These sources may be identified as those for which a principle of the following form holds:

- S) One is justified, other things being equal, in accepting the deliverances of  $S$ .

To formulate such a principle is to provide a philosophical response to the justificatory challenge. It is to claim that being derived from this source is a



criterion of justification such that if a belief is so formed, then it is defeasibly justified. Call principles of this form *fundamental source principles*. Thus one manner of conceiving the investigation into our faculties of knowledge is to suppose this project as asking, for any way of forming beliefs *S*, whether a fundamental source principle can be posited for *S*; if so, then how can this principle be justified and if not, then how could beliefs formed by way of *S* be justified. To provide answers to these questions would be to provide, in its essential outline, an epistemology of *S*.

One could motivate this manner of conceiving the investigation into our faculties of knowledge in the following way. To issue a justificatory challenge for a belief is to start upon a regress of justification. According to foundationalism this regress terminates when one reaches *basic beliefs*; that is, beliefs which are not justified by reference to further beliefs. The very idea of such beliefs, Bonjour claims, is problematic. He gives the following argument.

- (1) Suppose that there are *basic empirical beliefs*, that is, empirical beliefs
  - (a) which are epistemically justified, and
  - (b) whose justification does not depend on that of any further empirical beliefs.
- (2) For a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be a reason why it is likely to be true.
- (3) For a belief to be epistemically justified for a particular person requires that this person be himself in possession of such a reason.
- (4) The only way to be in possession of such a reason is to believe with justification the premises from which it follows that the belief is likely to be true.

(5) The premises of such a justifying argument for an empirical belief cannot be entirely *a priori*; at least one such premise must be empirical.

Therefore, the justification of a supposed basic empirical belief must depend on the justification of at least one other empirical belief, contradicting (1).<sup>13</sup>

Premise (4) could be denied by claiming that the premises of a justification for a basic belief appeal not to further beliefs but more rudimentary cognitive states such as appearances or sense data. However, BonJour argues, it is questionable how such cognitive states could be employed as the premises of a justifying argument and it is therefore questionable how they could provide *reason* to think that a belief, thus grounded, is true. Consequently foundationalism could remain viable only by becoming externalist. This strategy allows the denial of (3): it is not necessary that a believer be “in possession” of the reason why a basic belief is likely to be true.

The introduction of fundamental source principles seems to offer a way of responding to this argument. I suppose that by empirical beliefs BonJour means perceptual beliefs. Premise (4) could be denied by claiming that it is perceptual appearances, not further beliefs, which provide a reason for belief. This claim is asserted by:

**P)** One is justified, other things being equal, in accepting perceptual appearances.

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<sup>13</sup> BonJour (1985), 32.

However, this is not to assert that appearances could be the premises in a justifying argument. It is, rather, to make the distinction between *being justified* and *justifying*: a perceptual belief may *be justified* even if the percipient could not *justify*, by argument, his belief. This is not, in the manner of externalism, to deny (3): it is to claim that premise (4) is false because of a level confusion. **P** stipulates that perceptual beliefs *are justified* by perceptual appearances. This is not to claim that perceptual appearances can be employed as premises in arguments *to justify* perceptual beliefs. It is to claim that perceptual appearances provide reasons for perceptual beliefs because and insofar as a justification of **P** can be articulated.

This level-confusion results from failing to allow for the following two epistemological levels. A first-order epistemology of *S* should provide a statement of how beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified. A second-order epistemological account would be given by a statement of why the satisfaction of these conditions justifies beliefs formed by way of *S*. To posit principle **S** is to provide a first-order account: this principle states that if a subject forms the belief that *p* by accepting a deliverance of *S* then, other things being equal, this belief is justified. A second-order account would then require the justification of principle **S**.

In effect this response to BonJour's argument generates a 'dilemma'. If a subject *need not justify* a perceptual belief formed by accepting how things perceptual appear under appropriate circumstances, then the subject's belief *can be regarded as justified* only if *either* the belief is justified simply by facts about the way it is caused, and this would be to deny (3), *or*

the principle **P** can be justified. Thus I take Bonjour's argument to demonstrate that wherever a fundamental source principle is posited, the second-order epistemological justification of this principle *is essential*.

These two epistemological levels can be understood as responses to two justificatory challenges. The first challenge raises what could be called the *question of epistemic fact* in that a response would be provided by a statement of how beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified and whether, in particular, *S* is a fundamental source of knowledge. To any response to a question of fact a further justificatory challenge can be raised. This raises what could be called the *question of epistemic right* in demanding that *we justify these claims* about how beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified.<sup>14</sup>

On this conception of the epistemology of our faculties, questions of epistemic right are fundamental in at least two ways.<sup>15</sup> First, insofar as the epistemology of *S* is framed around principle **S**, the justification of this principle is imperative. Were a justification lacked, the deliverances of *S* could not be regarded as providing a reason for belief. A belief in these deliverances could be regarded as justified only by facts about the way it was caused. This is the force of Bonjour's argument. Second, this imperative is a consequence of it being the justification of **S** which determines that *S* yields, other things being equal, *justified* belief. It is the statement of *why* we are justified in believing the deliverances of *S* which

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction between questions of fact and questions of right derives from Kant (1787), A84.

<sup>15</sup> That questions of epistemic right pose *the* fundamental problems of epistemology is claimed by Pollock (1968), 183.

determines those conditions under which believing the deliverances of *S* is justified and thereby determines how beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified. That is, it is the answer given to the question of right which determines what answer can be given to the question of fact. Thus questions of right are epistemologically fundamental.

To use scepticism as a *method* in epistemology is then to employ a local scepticism of *S as a way of raising the question of epistemic right*. A local sceptical argument against *S* will conclude that beliefs formed by way of *S* are unjustified or that we have no justification for believing otherwise. Thus scepticism of *S* will raise the question of our epistemic right to make claims about how beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified. It will raise this question in a particularly forceful fashion: the conjunction of the sceptical hypothesis and argument constituting a justification of the claim that we have no epistemic right to believe the deliverances of *S*, any such belief being, in fact, unjustified.

A refutation of this local scepticism of *S* should demonstrate that, contrary to what the sceptic claims, we do possess the epistemic right to believe the deliverances of *S*; it should demonstrate *why* we are justified in forming beliefs by way of *S*. Thus where a local scepticism of *S* is used to raise the question of right, a response should determine how, in fact, beliefs formed by way of *S* are justified. Thus, it is hoped, the correct epistemology of *S* will be revealed. This may be stated as two methodological rules.

- (A) *The correct epistemology of S will imply the falsity of a local sceptical argument to the conclusion that beliefs formed by way of S are unjustified.*<sup>16</sup>
- (B) *Any epistemology of S which a local sceptical argument against S implies is false is not the correct epistemological account of how beliefs formed by way of S are justified.*<sup>17</sup>

Rules (A) and (B) stand in agreement with Rorty's statement that "scepticism and [epistemology] have a symbiotic relationship. They live one another's death, and die one another's life."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Descartes' method of doubt, in Bernard Williams's terms, is a form of *pre-emptive* scepticism: any doubt that knowledge is possible is calmed by stretching doubt to its limit. This method, I believe, is to follow this rule (A). The key difference is that Descartes seeks to demonstrate the *impossibility of scepticism*. He aimed through "undercutting every conceivable source of error ... [to overcome] any systematic distortion ... in our representation of the world ... [and thereby achieve] the absolute standpoint", Williams (1978), 66.

<sup>17</sup> Malachowski similarly suggests that scepticism could be used methodologically. On his account: (1) scepticism must be assumed metaphysically possible; (2) any theory is mistaken if it implies the "practical possibility" of scepticism; and (3) this methodological test rests on the presumption that scepticism is necessarily false. The central problem with this account is a dilemma Malachowski notices: (1) and (3) are contradictory. His resolution is to claim that (2) "requires an account of pragmatic entailment ... which leaves the rule of necessitation out of play", Malachowski (1993), 310, n.13. Malachowski does not provide such an account. This dilemma can be avoided, I suggest, through distinguishing the *possibility of scepticism* and *scepticism proper*. The possibility of scepticism is simply the possibility that for any way of forming or retaining beliefs a sceptical argument can be articulated. Scepticism proper is any specific sceptical argument. Thus one can seek to refute a sceptical argument without refuting the possibility of scepticism. It may even be that the conclusions of these arguments are necessarily false, given that we form beliefs in the way that we do, but this still allows the possibility of scepticism. Thus even if all sceptical arguments are refuted the 'sceptre' remains; this term is Wright's (1994), 239-40. Or, one could say, the possibility of its re-employment remains.

<sup>18</sup> Rorty (1980), 113. Rorty would accept neither of these rules because, to his mind, epistemology is a 'dead' subject.

I shall now apply this epistemology and methodology to the case of beliefs formed by way of testimony.

### *2.1.1. The Application of this Epistemology and Methodology to Testimony*

How are testimonial beliefs justified? Replies to this question could be said to fall into two classes. Let me say that when a speaker's intelligible expression of a proposition is *evidence* that this proposition is probably true, then the testimony is *credible* and otherwise that it is *non-credible*. Credible testimony, therefore, *reliably* expresses true propositions. *Reductive* replies, then, could be characterised. First, they claim that the mere fact that a speaker intelligibly expressed a proposition *provides no reason* to believe this proposition. Second, they claim it is only insofar as an audience possesses reasons for believing that a testimony is credible that he is justified in accepting it.<sup>19</sup> *Anti-reductive* replies can be characterised conversely. First, they claim that the mere fact that a speaker's testimony is intelligible justifies an audience, other things being

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<sup>19</sup> The reductionist does not hold that intelligible testimony provides a reason for belief but a reason that is insufficient for justification: intelligible testimony does not provide a reason for belief.

equal, accepting it.<sup>20</sup> And, second, they claim that a belief formed through credulous acceptance of testimony can be justified simply because it is a testimonial belief.

These two positions within the epistemology of testimony can consequently be characterised in terms of their relation to the fundamental source principle,

**T)** One is justified, other things being equal, in accepting intelligible testimony.

This may be called a *principle of credulity*.<sup>21</sup> The reductionist would reject any principle credulity. An audience is justified in accepting testimony *only if* he possesses reason to believe it credible. These reasons are supplied by our past experience of testimony. Thus the justification of our testimonial beliefs reduces to our justification for beliefs deriving from other sources of knowledge. The anti-reductionism would accept some principle of credulity. An audience is justified, other things being equal, in credulously accepting testimony. The justification of our testimonial beliefs does *not* reduce to our justification for beliefs deriving from other sources. Testimony is a *fundamental* source of knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The anti-reductionist will probably want to define ‘testimony’ as presentations-as-true, assertions, seeming-knowledge-expressions or the such like.

<sup>21</sup> Reid posited a principle of the same name and although his ‘principle of credulity’ concerned our psychological “disposition to ... believe what [others] tell us” rather than our epistemic right to do so, it is clear that Reid also intended the latter. See Reid (1764), 196-7.

<sup>22</sup> To say that testimony is a fundamental source of knowledge is just to posit **T**. It is not to say that testimony is independent of the other faculties: the speaker’s utterance, at least, need be perceived. In Audi’s terms testimony is *operationally* dependent on perception. (Arguably it is operationally dependent on memory as well, “*viz.* our retention of our acquired knowledge of the language to which sentences belong.”



These replies to the question of how testimonial beliefs are justified provide answers to the question of epistemic fact. To answer the question of right requires the anti-reductionist must justify the acceptance of **T**. This acceptance could be justified by justifying a claim such as:

(TA) Intelligible testimony provides a reason for belief.

Insofar as many testimonies will not be credible, the justification of (TA) could not be empirical. Rather, appeal must be made to the conceptual connections between knowledge, belief, understanding and reason. Conversely, if the reductionist is to answer the question of right, it must be demonstrated that **T** can be rejected and yet an account of testimony as a source of knowledge still be provided. This requirement would be discharged only if our actual ability to judge credible testimony justifies the claim that:

(TR) Intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of belief.

Thus a justification of (TR) should be provided by an account of our reasons for believing certain testimonies credible.

The claims (TA) and (TR) allow the justification of the claim that testimonial beliefs are justified. Thus it should be possible to fashion

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Strawson (1994), 24.) This is to say, “even if testimonial knowledge need not inferentially depend on *having* knowledge grounded in another mode, it does epistemically depend on having grounds *for* knowledge in that other mode.” Audi (1997), 413. Thus **T** is not put forward, as Lehrer notes, “as the basic principle of epistemology”: “the problem of perception” cannot be solved by asking another “whether my perceptual beliefs are true when she perceives the same things I do.” Lehrer (1994), 51.

whatever considerations are adduced in support of either (TA) or (TR) into responses to the sceptical argument against testimony.

The anti-reductive response to scepticism aims to argue for (TA). Insofar as the sceptical possibility and (TA) are incompatible the argument for (TA) must provide a transcendental denial of the sceptical possibility. The basis of such an argument seems to be available. From the fact that an audience possesses a testimonial belief one can, at least, infer that there is a speaker who intelligibly expressed the proposition the audience believes. Thus facts about speakers testifying and audiences understanding testimony must provide the basis of a transcendental argument for (TA). Such an argument should refute scepticism of testimony by showing that a presupposition of framing the sceptical possibility entails its falsity.

The reductive response to scepticism aims to argue for (TR). Intelligible testimony *can be* a reliable source of testimonial belief because audiences possess the ability to distinguish credible testimonies.<sup>23</sup> Thus (TR) is incompatible with scepticism of testimony which would conclude either that we cannot distinguish credible testimonies or that we possess no justification for thinking we can distinguish credible testimonies. That is, scepticism of testimony implies either that (TR) is false or that it cannot be justifiably believed. Thus if our reasons for distinguishing credible testimony can justify (TR), scepticism of testimony is refuted. Even if others

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that (TR) is not a claim about the overall credibility of testimony, like “what there is said to be (or have been) there is (or was) more often than not.” Price (1969), 119. The reductionist, contrary to Price, does not claim our justified reliance on testimony presumes any such principle. Were our reasons for judging testimony credible able to support such a presumption, the acceptance of **T** would be justified.

lye most of the time they do not lye all the time and, therefore, it is possible that an audience could see around these ‘deceptions’.<sup>24</sup>

Insofar as it is not clear whether the epistemology of testimony should be reductionist or anti-reductionist I suggest that the success of these positions in enabling a response to scepticism of testimony can be evaluated to resolve this matter. This is to employ scepticism methodologically.

## **2.2. The Epistemology of Our Faculties of Knowledge**

The belief that  $p$  might be formed because one can see that  $p$ , remember that  $p$  or understand another to express that  $p$ . Are these

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<sup>24</sup> Given the epistemic centrality of perception, and the consequence that a local sceptical argument for perception amounts to a global sceptical argument, this method seems hopeless for the case of perception. With respect to the epistemology of perception the correlate of (TA) would be (PA): *Perceptual appearances provide reasons for perceptual belief*. And the strengthened correlate of (TR) would be (PR): *Perceptual appearances are a reliable source of belief*. And it is questionable whether either (PA) or (PR) could be fashioned into a response of scepticism of perception. With respect to (PA) the difficulty is that, given the hypothesis that every seeming perceptual experience is, in fact, a dream, any ‘reason’ a perceptual appearance provides for belief would be, in fact, only a seeming reason. And with respect to (PR) the difficulty is that any demonstration of reliability will require appeal to particular instances of perceiving veridically but no such appeal can be made given the sceptical hypothesis. See Alston (1986). Descartes pursued this method despite this implausibility through a judicious appeal to God. See van Cleve (1979) and Sosa (1997).

differences in why the belief that  $p$  might be formed merely causal differences? To entertain the epistemological project of investigating our faculties of knowledge is to presume not. This epistemological project presupposes that *the different ways in which we acquire and retain knowledge should be associated with different epistemological accounts*. Call this presupposition the *assumption of epistemic difference*.

As epistemological options facing any account of how testimonial beliefs are justified reductionism and anti-reductionism are neutral across differing theories of how it is that beliefs are justified. I shall make this claim in §2.2.1. In §2.2.2 I shall consider two theories of justification for which this claim about neutrality fails. These theories also allow two short responses to the sceptical argument given. I shall explain this failure of neutrality in terms of neither theory assuming epistemic difference. Insofar as epistemic difference is rejected, I will put aside these short responses to scepticism.

### *2.2.1. The Epistemic Neutrality of Reductionism and Anti-reductionism*

Foundationalism, impure coherentism and virtue reliabilism are all theories of justification. If each of these theories is applied to the epistemology of testimony, then the account given by that theory of how testimonial beliefs are justified must arbitrate between reductionism and anti-reductionism. To make this claim I shall provide an outline sketch of the application of each of these epistemological theories to testimony.

#### FOUNDATIONALISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

Foundationalist theories of justification divide our beliefs into two classes: those that are justified *independently of* other beliefs and those that are justified *by inference from* other beliefs. The former class of beliefs are the ‘foundational’.<sup>25</sup>

This division of our beliefs into two classes is motivated. Unless some beliefs are independently justified and constitute the epistemological foundations of our belief system a regress of justification ensues. The

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<sup>25</sup> See Sturgeon (1995), Dancy (1985) or Pollock (1986).

argument for the existence of foundational beliefs could thereby be expressed as a *reductio* of the assumption that all beliefs are justified by inference from other beliefs. That is, assume that for a belief to be justified is for a believer to justify it by means of some argument. The justification of a belief cannot exceed that of the justification of the premises employed in justifying it. Therefore if some of our justifying premises are not independently justified, there is an infinite regress of justification. If there is an infinite regress of justification, none of our beliefs are justified. However, many of our beliefs are justified. Therefore contrary to the starting assumption some beliefs must be independently justified. These are our foundational beliefs: upon these foundations the justification of the rest of our beliefs depend.

Thus foundationalism may be formally stated: (i) every belief that is foundational is justified; (ii) if a belief is inferred from a set of justified beliefs then it is itself justified; and (iii) every belief that is justified is so in virtue of (i) or (ii).<sup>26</sup> Varieties of foundationalism are then distinguished along three axes. First, how foundational beliefs are defined. Second, what inferential relations are recognised as justifying. Third, whether these justifying relations concern the subject's reasons-for-believing or the subject's evidence-for-belief. In this respect, foundationalism may be taken to describe the epistemic structure of belief in the believer's mind. Or it may be taken to describe the evidential relations existing between the propositions believed. It may be *causal* or *hypothetical*.

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<sup>26</sup> Compare Sosa (1980), 151.

Any variety of foundationalism must substantiate how foundational beliefs are defined. In order to be independently justified, foundational beliefs must be *either* (epistemically) certain *or* justified because of their method of formation. Too few beliefs are certain to act as the foundations of our justification, thus I disregard this option.<sup>27</sup> To claim a belief justified because of its method of formation is to claim *either* it is justified because this method reliably yields true beliefs *or* it is to stipulate a fundamental source principle. The former of these options, as I classify it, states an ‘externalist’, rather than ‘foundationalist’, theory of justification.<sup>28</sup>

Thus foundational beliefs may be understood as those formed by a method *S* for which **S** holds. To suppose that **S** is to suppose that *S* is a source of foundational beliefs. Formed by way of *S*, the belief that *p* is *justified*, other things being equal; it is a foundational belief. The believer need not believe that other things are equal: were this belief necessary to the justification of that *p*, a ‘foundational belief’ would *not* ‘be justified independently of other beliefs’. Thus the believer need only not believe that other things are not equal to be justified in believing that *p*.

With respect to testimony, the foundationalist must decide whether or not testimony is one of our foundations. To claim that testimony is a source of foundational beliefs is to suppose a principle of credulity holds. One need only not believe a testimony non-credible to be justified in acceptance. Otherwise, to claim that testimony is not a source of

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<sup>27</sup> The problems of this ‘classical’ version of foundationalism have been well-documented, see Dancy (1985).

<sup>28</sup> Pollock (1986) similarly classifies foundationalism as ‘internalist’.

foundational beliefs is to treat a testimonial belief as justified by inference from beliefs formed by way of other sources. A belief formed through acceptance of testimony would thereby be justified only insofar as reasons for thinking the testimony credible were provided by beliefs formed by way of other sources.

#### IMPURE COHERENTISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

Coherence designates *both* a property of doxastic-systems *and* a relation which a belief may or may not bear to a doxastic-system. The central idea is that if a doxastic-system is coherent, then the beliefs which form it will be largely true and, therefore, if a belief coheres with a coherent doxastic-system, it will be justified.

Varieties of coherentism are distinguished by how this central idea is interpreted. Coherence could be a property of belief-systems and the coherence relation describe a believer's reasons-for-belief. Or coherence could be a property of the system of propositions believed and the coherence relation describe the evidential relation existing between a proposition and what else is believed.<sup>29</sup> And the coherence relation could be given either a negative or a positive epistemic role. Justification could

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<sup>29</sup> This distinction is parallel to that between causal and hypothetical foundationalism..



require that the proposition believed in fact cohere, with the believer needing only to not believe that it did not cohere. Or justification could require that the believer (justifiably) believe that the proposition believed coheres.<sup>30</sup>

‘Impure coherentism’ can be understood as a particular response when this central idea of coherentism is threatened by (1) the sceptical possibility of putatively coherent but largely false belief-systems and (2) the putatively incoherent but actually true proposition.<sup>31</sup>

A coherent belief-system, the response runs, must be more than logically consistent, it must be also explanatory. Our belief system ‘aims at’ explaining as much as possible. Thus a requirement on the content of belief systems is that they contain *epistemic beliefs* which epistemologically integrate the belief system through stating the conditions under which beliefs about the world are likely to be true. Thus BonJour claims that any system of beliefs capable of conferring justification upon its members must meet the “observation requirement”. This is the requirement that a system of beliefs include epistemic “laws” which attribute a high reliability to certain processes yielding non-inferential beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Were the subject to possess systematic and comprehensive epistemic beliefs the threat posed by (1) and (2) is removed. Contrary to (2) the rejection, for instance, of a recalcitrant observation would have widespread epistemic consequences and it is

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<sup>30</sup> The two versions of coherentism which result from giving the coherence relation these different epistemic role terms Pollock (1986) labels ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ coherentism respectively.

<sup>31</sup> The distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ is owed to Plantinga (1993a), 77-80.

<sup>32</sup> See BonJour (1985), 141.

wrong to say its disregard would preserve coherence. Contrary to (1) if the subject were to possess systematic and comprehensive epistemic beliefs his belief system could not be largely false short of incoherence. To demand that a coherent belief system include epistemic beliefs is to adopt impure coherentism.

Epistemic beliefs concern the conditions under which beliefs formed by way of a certain source are likely to be true; that is, conditions whose satisfaction determines that beliefs from this source are justified. Thus a fundamental source principle would be an epistemic belief. A principle like **S** is compatible with the central idea of coherentism. It is compatible because the justification of a belief formed by way of *S* is *conditional* on **S** being justified. That is, unless the justification of the belief is taken to be a consequence of *S* reliably yielding true belief, but this claim characterises an ‘externalist’ rather than a ‘coherentist’ theory of justification.<sup>33</sup> Thus, for the coherentist, the justification of beliefs formed by way of *S* ultimately rests on the justification of **S** and this is determined by **S**’s coherence with the subject’s doxastic-system. Coherence is the ultimate source of justification.

With respect to testimony, the coherentist must decide whether the mere fact that a testimony has intelligibly expressed a proposition is a condition that justifies believing this proposition. To claim that it is, is to posit a principle of credulity. To reject this principle would to claim that the testimonial beliefs are likely to be true only if formed on the basis of

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<sup>33</sup> Pollock (1986) similarly defines coherentism as ‘internalist’.

credible testimony. A testimonial belief would then be justified to the extent that the belief that it was formed on the basis of credible testimony coheres with what else is believed.

#### VIRTUE RELIABILISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

From the believer's epistemic perspective the reliability of a cognitive process seems to be neither necessary nor sufficient for the justification of any belief it produces. The brain-in-vat seems to be as capable of justifying as many beliefs as we are. And the clairvoyant seems to be unjustified in believing her reliably produced clairvoyant hunches.<sup>34</sup> Virtue reliabilism is a response to these criticisms.<sup>35</sup> It accommodates the believer's epistemic perspective through making considerations of *epistemic virtue* necessary to the justification of belief.<sup>36</sup> The justification of a belief is made a two stage, part 'external' part 'internal' hybrid affair.

First, it must be decided what cognitive processes are virtuous where *S* is cognitively virtuous if and only if *S* reliably produces true beliefs under certain conditions. Second, it must be decided whether the belief in question was formed by way of a cognitive virtue. Thus a belief that *p* is fully, or reflectively, justified if and only if (1) it is formed by way

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<sup>34</sup> These claims are made respectively by Lehrer and Cohen (1983) and Bonjour (1980).

<sup>35</sup> See Goldman (1993), Greco (1993), Plantinga (1988) and Sosa (1985; 1993).

<sup>36</sup> The term 'virtue' aims to emphasise the deontological sense of justification: a justification determines that a belief *should* be believed.

of a cognitive virtue *S* and (2) the subject believes both (a) that *S* is virtuous and (b) that the belief that *p* was yielded by *S*.

It is possible that a cognitive process could be virtuous even though it would not be reasonable to believe that it was virtuous given what else was believed. The exercise of such a cognitive virtue could be said to yield *animal knowledge* but it could not yield *reflective knowledge* because the virtue exercised would not appear on the subject's 'list' of virtues.<sup>37</sup> This is the situation of the reliable but reluctant clairvoyant. The clairvoyant possesses a cognitive virtue and can thereby possess animal knowledge. But her clairvoyant beliefs should not be justified because she does not believe clairvoyance virtuous: condition (2a) is not met.

Equally it is possible that a certain way of forming belief could be believed to be cognitively virtuous when in fact it is not. In this case the subject could reflectively justify a belief yielded by this 'virtue' but such a belief could never be reflectively justified; it could never be known. This is the situation of the brain-in-a-vat. This unfortunate victim possesses both meta-beliefs (2a) and (2b) and can thereby justify his beliefs. But his beliefs should not be justified because all his type (2a) meta-beliefs are false: condition (1) is not met.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This distinction between 'animal' and 'reflective' knowledge is Sosa's (1988), 240.

<sup>38</sup> Given that the brain believes it is embodied in the actual world it is natural to appeal to *our* virtuous belief forming methods when evaluating the brain-in-the-vat's justification. Insofar as we do so appeal it seems that in some sense the brain is justified even if our methods would not be appropriate for that situation. Thus it must be allowed that we can justify (by argument) a belief and yet the belief not be justified.

With respect to testimony, the virtue reliabilist must decide what is the cognitively virtuous way of forming testimonial beliefs. This requires deciding the conditions under which accepting testimony reliably produces true beliefs. Is it cognitively virtuous to form testimonial beliefs through credulously accepting testimony? Or is it cognitively virtuous to only accept those testimonies one has reason to believe are credible? The issue is whether or not there can be a principle of credulity.

### *2.2.2. Epistemic Difference and Two Short Responses to Scepticism*

As accounts of how testimonial beliefs are justified reductionism and anti-reductionism are neutral with respect to each of the theories of justification considered in §2.2.1. In this section I shall consider two theories of justification, generic externalism and pure coherentism, which provide accounts of how testimonial beliefs are justified that do not confront the choice between reductionism and anti-reductionism. This is a consequence of both theories rejecting the assumption of epistemic difference: neither theory attributes epistemic significance to the particular way a belief was formed. These rejections allow both theories to provide short responses to scepticism of testimony.

## GENERIC EXTERNALISM AND SCEPTICISM OF TESTIMONY

I shall consider generic externalism by focusing on reliabilism.

Reliabilism could be defined as:

S's belief that p at t is justified iff it is the outcome of a process of belief acquisition or retention which is reliable, or leads to a sufficiently high preponderance of true over false beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

Thus reliabilism denies epistemic difference: two ways of forming belief as different as you please but alike in their reliability would not be epistemically differentiated. This allows a short response to scepticism which could likewise be made by any generic externalist theory, that is, any epistemological theory which explicates epistemic concepts *exclusively* in terms of nomological concepts.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sosa (1991), 131. An example of reliabilism is "Historical Reliabilism" as defined by Goldman's early writings, see Goldman (1979).

<sup>40</sup> In particular what I say applies to Nozick's conditional theory of knowledge which is not a form of reliabilism. See Nozick (1981). Whilst Goldman takes the justification of a belief to supervene on the complex nomological property of being caused by a process which satisfies some description and thereby reduces justification directly to indefinite objective, or nomic, probabilities. Nozick takes knowledge to supervene on the complex nomological property of being such that the belief would not have occurred if certain other conditions had not occurred and the truth of this counterfactual property likewise depends on nomic probabilities.

Through its concern with nomic probabilities Historical Reliabilism also possesses a counterfactual element. A process of belief acquisition or retention would not be reliable if it only lead to a high preponderance of true over false beliefs in this world because this result could be a chance occurrence: it must lead to such a preponderance in this world and close possible worlds.

Suppose we possess a *testimonial faculty*. This faculty takes as input the fact of the speaker's uttering 'U' and intelligibly expressing that *p*, the circumstance of the speaker's utterance and any other relevant beliefs of the audience. As output the faculty produces the disposition to either believe or disbelieve that *p*. If we possessed a *reliable* testimonial faculty which disposed us to believe credible testimony and disposed us to disbelief otherwise, then we would be justified in accepting testimony when we in fact do accept testimony.

The third premise of the sceptical argument against testimony states that we are not justified in believing that the speaker did not lie; that is, '¬JB(¬lye(*p*))'. If we possessed reliable testimonial faculty, then this third premise of the sceptical argument would be *a fortiori* false.<sup>41</sup>

Are we justified in believing that we possess such a reliable testimonial faculty? Suppose there is psychological evidence which could be appealed to. We should be disposed to believe this psychological evidence upon reading or hearing of it. We should thereby be justified in believing the original supposition that we possess a reliable testimonial faculty because this faculty should dispose us to believe the evidence for its existence. Hence we should be justified in accepting testimony when we do and justified in believing that our accepting testimony when we do is justified.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Obviously specific refutations of this *a fortiori* claim could be made but in terms of the long range probabilities underpinning justification it should hold.

<sup>42</sup> Externalism, in Sosa's terms, thus offers *self-supporting* arguments in the face of sceptical arguments. See Sosa (1994a).

There is something quite unsatisfactory about this response. Consider the following ‘externalist’ response to the above sceptical argument. An audience A believes that when a speaker express a true proposition the truth of the proposition causes the speaker’s voice to possess the dulcet qualities of an angel’s song. If A’s ‘theory’ is true, A should be justified in accepting testimony when he does: such a quality should be plainly perceptible and thereby reliably discernible. Suppose A believes his ‘theory’ because a person with a beautifully dulcet voice told him it was true. If A’s ‘theory’ is true, then A is justified in believing it; his ‘theory’ is self-supporting in the manner just considered. Does A’s ‘theory’ provide a response to the sceptical argument considered? No, it is obviously false. (Unfortunately it is *not* clear that the psychological evidence is optimistic.<sup>43</sup>)

Is this the only reason that A’s response to scepticism is unsatisfactory? Suppose A considers the above sceptical argument. According to Stroud he might muse,

I wonder whether I understand how my knowledge .. [by means of testimony].. is possible? I have a lot of beliefs about it. If what I believe about it is true, I do; if it is not, I don’t. Of course, I believe all of it is true,

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<sup>43</sup> Ekman has written extensively on how we reveal lies (not lyes) in our behaviour, see Ekman and Friesen (1969; 1974) and Ekman (1985; 1988). He has assembled a battery of criteria that indicate lying. Through correlating these criteria in an experimental situation he claimed to detect lies 96% of the time. *However* when ordinary untutored audiences, in the same experimental situation, were asked to detect lies, “the face, body, voice and text clues which are most relevant to spotting deceit were ignored (with the exception of mannerisms). Those behaviours which were least useful for differentiating when someone was lying were most relied on” Ekman (1988), 78. (Our social judgements, it seems, are quite error prone, see Nisbett and Ross (1980).)



so I believe that I do understand my knowledge. But I wonder whether I do.<sup>44</sup>

If this wonder were pushed, A should seek reasons for believing that he does reliably discern credible testimony. If the only reason A possesses is the testimony of the speaker with a dulcet voice, then the question raised is what could A's reason be for accepting this testimony? Similarly, one could ask, what could the reliabilist's reason be for accepting the testimony of psychology?

The problem Stroud alludes to is that the self-supporting arguments of reliabilism allow a response to first-order scepticism but fail to address second-order scepticism. Reliabilism gives a constitutive account of justification which allows that a belief could be justified even if we could not justify it.<sup>45</sup> However a treatment of second-order scepticism requires that we *justify* denying the premises of the sceptical argument. A justification is required for the thought that we are justified in believing certain testimonies credible (and *a fortiori* certain speakers artless). This requirement the reliabilist cannot discharge without epistemic circularity.

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<sup>44</sup> Stroud (1994), 302. The previous illustration and the use to which I put it are also a straightforward modification of an illustration from this paper.

<sup>45</sup> Nozick is explicit: "Our goal is not, however, to refute scepticism, to prove it is wrong or even to argue that it is wrong. ... Our task here is to explain how knowledge is possible, given what the skeptic says that we do accept" Nozick (1981),197. This goal leads Nozick to deny a version of the principle of transmission, *ibid.* 203-11. Reliabilists have done the same, see Dretske (1970). This denial also allows a response to the sceptical argument given: (C2) could no longer be inferred from (P1). I have focused on the denial of (P3) because it is the claim that we can be justified in believing propositions in a domain threatened by scepticism which provides the rationale for denying versions of transmission.

The bones of this response are reductionist. The limitations of the sceptical possibility allow that we could reliably discern credible testimony. The attempt to articulate reasons for believing that we do reliably discern credible testimony is the reductionist project. A short response to scepticism cannot be given by asserting that reasons are not required and that we simply do reliably discern credible testimony. Scepticism makes the demand for such reasons imperative.

#### PURE COHERENTISM AND SCEPTICISM OF TESTIMONY

Pure coherentism holds that justification can only be *argumentative*. A subject is justified in believing a proposition if and only if it could be justified on the basis of other propositions believed. This basis would be justified if and only if it could be justified on the basis of other propositions believed; and so on.<sup>46</sup> Thus the only *source* of justification is coherence with the whole doxastic-system. Epistemic difference is not assumed; the fact that a belief is testimonial is a fact about its cause which is of no intrinsic epistemic relevance.

The pure coherentist's positive account of testimony amounts to no more than claiming that an audience is justified in accepting testimony if and

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<sup>46</sup> The term 'argumentative justification' derives from Sosa (1986). The 'could' is equivocal to allow for negative and positive versions of coherentism. However, insofar as the coherentist employs this concept of justification, it seems that positive coherentism would engender a regress.

only if the proposition it expresses coheres with what else is believed. If a testimony were believed to be credible, then the proposition it expressed should cohere with what else is believed. But it is the coherence between this proposition and what else is believed that justifies the audience accepting this testimony not the belief that the testimony was credible.

This account allows the pure coherentist to give short shrift to scepticism of testimony. The second premise of the sceptical argument against testimony states that if we are justified in believing that  $p$ , then we are justified in believing that the speaker did not lie when he expressed that  $p$ ; that is, ' $JB(p) \rightarrow JB(\neg \text{lye}(p))$ '. The pure coherentist will deny this premise claiming its contrapositive to be false. The fact that an audience is not justified in believing that a speaker did not lie when he expressed that  $p$  does *not* imply that he is not justified in believing that  $p$ . The audience is justified in believing that  $p$  if and only if that  $p$  coheres with what else is believed.

I assume that the first premise is accepted. Thus the denial of the second premise seems to amount to a denial of transmission. This does not seem to square with the coherentist's argumentative conception of justification. However this is not the case. Suppose that  $q$  possesses the property of being-believed-on-the-basis-of  $JB(p)$  and  $JB(p \rightarrow q)$ . The underlying assumption of principle of transmission is that *this* property of  $q$  justifies  $B(q)$  because  $(p \text{ and } (p \rightarrow q))$  implies  $q$ . The coherentist accepts this assumption but adds: this property of  $q$  justifies  $B(q)$  because it is logical relations, like  $(p \text{ and } (p \rightarrow q))$  implying  $q$ , which constitute the coherence of a doxastic-system. Thus the property of  $q$  which ultimately justifies  $B(q)$  is

its coherence with the whole doxastic-system. It is not the principle of transmission which is rejected but its sceptical employment.<sup>47</sup>

This short response evokes a problem traditionally taken to afflict the central idea of coherentism. This problem may be posed as a question. Don't sceptical thought experiments demonstrate that even if a proposition coheres with a coherent doxastic-system it could still be as likely to be false as true?<sup>48</sup> In the present case the pure coherentist's denial of the second premise results from the claim that an audience's justification in believing that *p* is determined only by the coherence of that *p* with what else is believed. But why should this determine that *p* is likely to be true?

By definition, until the speaker expressed that *p* the audience had insufficient reason to believe that *p*. Testimonial propositions concern those facts and events that, lacking testimony, we would otherwise be ignorant of. Thus a t-proposition could not be knowingly inferred from what else is believed.<sup>49</sup> Whatever determines that the audience had insufficient reason to believe that *p* should by and large determine that any beliefs which cohere with that *p* would be largely testimonial beliefs. Thus the audience's justification for accepting that *p* should be determined by this t-proposition cohering with by and large testimonial beliefs. However the sceptical hypothesis demands that any coherence in testimony be explained as a

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<sup>47</sup> This is the correlate of the pure coherentist's response to foundationalist regress arguments. The regress of justification does not suggest the need to posit independently justified beliefs but suggests that the source of justification is the coherence of the whole doxastic-system.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see Russell (1912), 71. (Though Russell criticises the coherence theory of truth.)

<sup>49</sup> It may be that what I know about *this* metal determines that it must be molybdenum but I could not knowingly infer this.

consequence of there being a conspiracy rather than the testimony being true. Thus an audience's justification for believing that  $p$  should not determine that  $p$  is likely to be true. Thus pure coherentism succumbs to rather than refutes scepticism.

Impure coherentism, I claimed, was one response to this traditional problem. Another would be to meet this criticism head on and argue that coherence *is* truth-conducive. Such a direct response is provided by Donald Davidson.<sup>50</sup> Unsurprisingly Davidson's arguments also tell against the sceptical possibility I have envisaged. How they do so I should like to consider now.

#### DAVIDSON'S "DEFENCE OF COHERENTISM" AND SCEPTICISM OF TESTIMONY

Davidson has given principled reasons for the following two claims:

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<sup>50</sup> Whilst Davidson described himself as a coherentist in Davidson (1983), he repudiated this self-description in Davidson (1987a). Thus it would be wrong to describe Davidson as a coherentist. Nonetheless he claims that: (1) beliefs can only be identified within a body of belief; (2) any body of belief will be consistent; and (3) belief is intrinsically veridical. These claims allow a coherentist to hijack Davidson's arguments, ignoring his repudiation of allegiance, and see in these arguments a defence of the claim that coherence is truth-conducive. This I have done.

- (CU) A condition on understanding the utterances of a speaker is that by and large what the speaker is believed to hold true, in fact he does hold true.
- (CB) A condition on the possession of belief is that by and large what is believed to be true, in fact is true.

The second of these claims provides a reason to believe that, contrary to sceptical reply to the coherentist, coherent belief systems must by and large be true. The first of these claims provides the central premise in a transcendental refutation of the sceptical argument.

A full statement of Davidson's theory is beyond my present purview. I shall attempt only to sketch his reasons for holding (CU) and (CB). "The point of language", Davidson claims, "is communication, getting across to someone what you have in mind by means of words that they interpret (understand) as you want them to".<sup>51</sup> In communication what a speaker and audience share is an understanding of what the speaker is trying to get across. A philosophical account of language should thereby attempt to explain how this is possible. This question Davidson addresses through considering how a competent interpreter, that is, one with a language of his own, can come to understand a speaker of an alien tongue.

The central problem of radical interpretation is that what a speaker means by his utterance depends upon what he believes and intends, what he intends depends upon what he desires and yet in order to identify the

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<sup>51</sup> Davidson (1994), 11.

speaker's beliefs and desires his utterances must be understood.<sup>52</sup> In order to breach this interdependence what is required is a basis for simultaneously interpreting a speaker's utterances and attributing beliefs to him. Such a basis is provided only if the interpreter can discern which sentences a speaker holds true. Sincere assertions are not "the only reason to suppose that a person holds a sentence to be true. Lies, commands, stories, irony, if they are detected as attitudes, can reveal whether a speaker holds his sentences to be true."<sup>53</sup> Provided "even the compulsive liar and perennial kidder may be found out" the interpreter has the basic evidence to generate a theory of interpretation, or, correlatively, confirm such a theory.<sup>54</sup> Thus, "a speaker who wishes to be understood cannot systematically deceive his would be interpreters about when he assents to sentences - that is, holds them true."<sup>55</sup> Hence (CU).

Once the interpreter discerns which sentences are held true he proceeds by correlating their circumstances of utterance in order to judge what salient feature of these circumstances the utterance was a response to.<sup>56</sup> Suppose the speaker uttered 'Gavagai'. "This sentence appears to be held true", the interpreter might reason, "so the speaker must intend me to understand him to be saying that \_\_\_\_\_", and here he looks to the world for the salient cause and sees a rabbit scurrying. Through being apparent to both speaker and audience this cause forms the basis for communication; it is this

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<sup>52</sup> Davidson (1990b), 316.

<sup>53</sup> Davidson (1973), 135.

<sup>54</sup> Davidson (1974a), 144-5.

<sup>55</sup> Davidson (1983), 315.

<sup>56</sup> Davidson (1990a), 77.

judgement of the cause of the speaker's utterance which allows the interpreter to assign the speaker's utterance of 'Gavagai' the truth condition of his sentence, Rabbit. In this manner beliefs are attributed to the speaker and an initial interpretation is gained of the speaker's utterance.<sup>57</sup> Further, insofar as the objects and events which by and large *cause* the speaker's utterance of sentences held true "*constitute* the truth conditions, and hence the meanings, of [these] sentences", the speaker's beliefs must be largely true.<sup>58</sup> Beliefs are by nature veridical because the content of a belief, in the methodologically most basic cases, is largely determined by the circumstantial causes of that belief.<sup>59</sup> Hence (CB).

Contrary to pure coherentism it was claimed that cohering with what else an audience believed would not determine that a t-proposition was likely to be true. It should not do so because the coherence relation would relate the t-proposition to a body of largely testimonial beliefs and such beliefs though coherent, should largely be false. This reply is overridden by

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<sup>57</sup> In this manner the process of interpretation consists of the interpreter *optimising* the agreement between his beliefs and those he interprets. In so doing the interpreter is guided by his, "hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course [his] common-sense, or scientific knowledge of explicable error." Sometimes he will be forced to attribute a false belief rather than alter the axioms of his theory and so "the methodology of interpretation is, in this respect, nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning". Davidson (1975), 169. Insofar as Charity simply requires the attribution of the maximum number of true beliefs, Grandy (1973) suggests it should be replaced by a principle of Humanity.

<sup>58</sup> Davidson (1996), 275. The circumstances which cause a speaker's belief do not always constitute its truth conditions: the interpreter sometimes attributes error.

<sup>59</sup> To illustrate this Davidson supposes an omniscient interpreter who proceeds, despite his omniscience, in the manner of the ordinary interpreter, *optimising* agreement between his beliefs and those he interprets. See Davidson (1983; 1977). Since the omniscient interpreter's beliefs are objectively true, the fallible speaker's beliefs are seen to be objectively true by and large. I take this argument to be only a heuristic: omniscience is too problematic a notion for it to be otherwise. Compare Foley and Fumerton (1985) and Vermazen (1983) for different interpretations and criticisms.



(CB). Insofar as the coherence of a t-proposition is evaluated with respect to a body of testimonial *beliefs*, rather than a body of t-propositions, its coherence is a presumption in favour of its truth.<sup>60</sup>

The sceptical hypothesis is that a coherent body of t-propositions could be largely false. The simple act of believing this body of t-propositions should not make them largely true. Given that (CB)'s rebuttal holds, must the sceptical 'possibility' be an impossibility? Not at all. Davidson does *not* claim every possible coherent set of beliefs is true because "it might be held that the range of possible maximal sets of belief is as wide as the range of possible maximal sets of sentences".<sup>61</sup> If the sceptical body of t-propositions *were* believed, then the audience's body of belief would be coherent but largely false. However it would *not* be believed. This is an implication of (CU).

A presupposition of the sceptical hypothesis is that the audience can understand testimony. This presupposition entails he must have largely true beliefs about what speakers holds true. "Although most utterances are not concerned with truth", the audience must still possess mainly true beliefs about what speakers hold true.<sup>62</sup> The audience's beliefs about when

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<sup>60</sup> Davidson takes his argument for (CB) to establish that "there is a presumption in favour of the truth of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief." Davidson (1983), 308. I assume with the sceptic that the body of testimonial beliefs is massive. If this were not assumed (CB) would pose a dilemma for the sceptic: if the body of testimonial beliefs is large enough for the sceptical hypothesis to undercut our reason for believing coherence truth-conducive, it is large enough for (CB) to override this undercutting reason.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>62</sup> Davidson (1975), 162. Although this quotation is out of context, its guiding thought is not. Davidson says nothing incompatible with supposing most people lie most of the time. There need be no presumption of artlessness: every speaker may be 'the compulsive liar and perennial kidder'. What cannot be supposed is that the liar and

speakers are artless and when artful must largely be true and justified. Thus, short of irrationality, the audience simply would not believe the sceptical body of coherent *t*-propositions. Consequently, Davidson provides a principled refutation of scepticism of testimony. With (CB) he offers a substantial defence of the coherentist's denial of the second premise. With (CU) he provides a transcendental denial of the third premise.

Davidson's arguments, however cogent against their intended opponent, are not pertinent to my concerns. I am employing scepticism *methodologically*. That is, I hope that a response to the sceptical argument against testimony will reveal an adequate epistemological theory of testimony. This Davidson's response does not do. It does not do so because Davidson does not assume *epistemic difference*; he evinces no interest in epistemological accounts of our sources of knowledge. He has the following to say about perception.

The reason the senses are of no primary theoretical importance to the philosophical account of knowledge is that it is an empirical accident that our ears, eyes, taste buds and tactile and olfactory organs play a causal role in the formation of beliefs about the world. The causal connections between thought and objects and events in the world could have been established in entirely different ways without this making any difference to the contents or veridicality of belief.<sup>63</sup>

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kidder cannot be found out, that audiences can possess largely false beliefs about what speakers hold true. (The quote continues, "it is the pattern of sentences held true that gives sentences their meaning".)

<sup>63</sup> Davidson (1986), 165. Davidson does allow for three 'varieties of knowledge': knowledge of the world, our own minds and other minds. See Davidson (1991).

Insofar as it is an “empirical accident” that we acquire beliefs in the way we do, there is nothing of epistemological consequence to say about the way we acquire beliefs. Is this so? Even if it is a mere empirical accident that we acquire beliefs in the way we do, should we conclude that there is nothing of epistemological consequence to say about our ways of acquiring belief? Insofar as the epistemological project of investigating our faculties of knowledge is entertained, this conclusion would be resisted. If testimony is a way of acquiring belief that makes an immense difference to our lives, shouldn’t there be something of epistemic consequence to say about it? I presume as much.<sup>64</sup>

Given that the epistemological investigation into our faculties of knowledge presupposes epistemic difference, the following methodological rule may be asserted.

(C) *If a response to a local sceptical argument against S is to reveal the correct epistemology of S, then the response must presume epistemic difference.*

In conjunction with (A) and (B), this rule defines what it is to use scepticism methodologically. Davidson’s response to the scepticism of testimony fails (C). Thus it is the wrong sort of response.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Rather than denying Davidson’s major premise one could deny that it is an empirical accident that we acquire beliefs in the way we do. Thus Plantinga states that “The way to be a naturalist in epistemology is to be a supernaturalist in ontology.” Plantinga (1993b), 215. That is, ‘the way to justify the claim that an interest in our actual methods of acquiring belief is epistemically significant is to claim that it is divinely ordained that we employ just those methods’.

<sup>65</sup> This point is completely missed by Coady who extensively employs Davidsonian considerations in an attempt to “provide some justification or philosophical rationale

Rule (C) may be defended. I shall defend it by arguing for the following two claims. (1) If a response to scepticism of testimony were sought not for methodological reasons but for its own end, then it is not clear that Davidson could provide a response. (2) The question of how testimonial beliefs are justified is an alive issue even for Davidson. I consider these claims in turn.

(1). It should be mistaken, Davidson claims, to describe his theory as realist.<sup>66</sup> However it is realist in at least a minimal sense: there is a distinction between a sentence being held true and being true.<sup>67</sup> This seems sufficient to engender the possibility of scepticism. Thus whilst Davidson refutes the sceptical argument given it is not clear that a more troublesome argument could not be articulated.

With scepticism no longer being employed methodologically, let me take the adversarial stance. Couldn't the sceptic suppose ...

In a distant galaxy there is planet called Twin-Earth. Twin-Earth is exactly like Earth except in the following details.<sup>68</sup> Most of the testimonial beliefs which D has acquired on Earth are false on Twin-Earth. On Twin-Earth, for instance, water is not H<sub>2</sub>O, as D learnt at school, but XYZ. And, on Twin-Earth there is massive conspiracy whereby most people lye to D most of the time and their lyes cohere around the supposition that D is still on Earth. He is not: only last night whilst he was sleeping soundly the

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for what is in fact our very extensive trust in testimony", Coady (1992), 152, and see Ch. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson (1990b), 304.

<sup>67</sup> This, M. Williams (1991), 238, claims, is the only epistemological aspect of realism.

<sup>68</sup> Twin-Earth was first introduced by Putnam (1975), 238.

conspirators transported D to Twin-Earth.<sup>69</sup> On Twin-Earth every thing seems to D as it ever was. He certainly *seems* to understand what Twin-Earthians say to him; at least he understands the Twin-Earthians as they desire to be understood. When they talk about water he understands them to be talking about H<sub>2</sub>O and they desire him to understand just this. What D doesn't grasp is that there is conspiracy to feed him t-propositions which are mainly false, at least, with respect to Twin-Earth. When they say that Antarctica is frozen H<sub>2</sub>O, for instance, the joke is on D: where D believes Antarctica should be there is just twater.

This supposition differs from most Twin-Earth thought experiments in that it involves Twin-Earthians knowing all about Earth. Maybe it could not be supposed. But this is not clearly so. And if it could be supposed, then the sceptical argument against testimony could be re-asserted. It is not clear to me how Davidson could avoid the sceptical implications of *this* argument.<sup>70</sup>

(2). Even given Davidson's considerations, the question of how testimonial beliefs are justified can still be meaningfully raised. Whilst being a believer entails that one's beliefs must by and large be true, this

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<sup>69</sup> The idea of employing transportation between Earth and Twin-Earth to generate a sceptical possibility I derive from Boghossian (1994).

<sup>70</sup> In particular insofar as scepticism in *not employed methodologically* there need be no presupposition that the audience understands. Thus, if it is concluded that scepticism of testimony cannot result because the audience simply does not understand the Twin-Earthians, then the sceptical implication should simply be displaced because the audience seems to understand and should be justified in believing that he does understand. Similarly, McDowell (1994b), Ch. 1§6 and M. Williams (1991), Ch. 7§7 argue that Davidson's refutation of scepticism of the external world simply displaces the scepticism to knowledge of our own minds. (I should note that charity should question this criticism because Davidson makes the same criticism of externalist theories of language and mind. See Davidson (1987b), 445.)

veridical nature of belief is compatible with the falsity of any given belief.<sup>71</sup> Similarly whilst the intelligibility of a speaker's utterances entails that the audience must know by and large what the speaker believes, this knowledge is compatible with not knowing whether the speaker believes what he expresses. When one knows what the speaker by and large believes, one knows that the speaker and oneself are by and large in agreement. But "what is shared does not in general call for comment; it is too dull, trite, or familiar to stand notice."<sup>72</sup> Suppose that you have a gun in your hand and tell me it is loaded. I know, because I can interpret you, that we share beliefs about what it is to possess a gun, what a gun is, what it is for a gun to be loaded and so on. But, and crucially, the fact that I can interpret you does not entail that I know whether you believe that the gun is loaded or are merely saying that it is. Thus the question can be raised, What would it take for me to be justified in believing that the gun is loaded? And this is just to ask how testimonial beliefs are justified.

Thus rule (C) may be defended and Davidson's response to the sceptical argument put to one side.

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<sup>71</sup> "The independence of belief and truth requires only that *each* of our beliefs *may* be false." Davidson (1983), 309.

<sup>72</sup> Davidson (1977), 200.

## **2.3. Conclusion**

This has been a long and arduous chapter. I started in §2.0 by giving a localised sceptical argument against testimony. This argument concluded that we are not justified in accepting any testimony which expresses a proposition that we have otherwise insufficient reason to believe.

In §2.1 I outlined in tandem a particular way of conceiving the epistemological investigation into our faculties of knowledge. And a justification of the claim that local sceptical arguments could be used methodologically. I then applied this meta-epistemological conception to testimony. The two epistemological accounts of how testimonial beliefs are justified, distinguished in chapter one, were explicitly conceptualised in terms of the meta-epistemology outlined. The key issue dividing these accounts was considered to be whether or not a principle of credulity holds for testimony. The anti-reductionist would claim that some such principle holds: one can be justified in credulously accepting testimony. The reductionist would claim that no such principle holds: one can never be justified in credulously accepting testimony. I then outlined the strategy the advocate of each account would employ in responding to scepticism. Insofar both accounts are well-motivated, their success in responding to the sceptical argument against testimony was put forward as the method of arbitration.

In §2.2 I argued that any theory of justification which entertained the project of investigating our faculties of knowledge must arbitrate between these two competing accounts of how testimonial beliefs are justified. I made this point specifically with respect to foundationalism, impure coherentism and virtue reliabilism. I acknowledged that certain theories of justification would not need to arbitrate between these epistemological positions. And here I considered generic reliabilism and pure coherentism. But I claimed that this was a consequence of these theories rejecting an assumption definitive of the given epistemological project. Thus even if these theories allowed short responses to scepticism, I put these responses to one side by claiming that scepticism was being considered as a method rather than a problem.

In chapters three and four I shall consider reductionism as an account of how testimonial beliefs are justified and in chapters five and six, anti-reductionism.



## ESTABLISHING THE CREDIBILITY OF TESTIMONY

In this chapter I shall outline a reductionist epistemology of testimony. I shall attempt to place this position in its most favourable light. The exposure of any fundamental flaws must wait till the next chapter when I evaluate reductionism by considering the reductive response to scepticism of testimony.

Reductionism in the epistemology of testimony is the view that the *mere* fact that a speaker intelligibly expressed that  $p$  provides *no* reason to believe that  $p$ . To be justified in believing that  $p$ , an audience needs to possess a reason to believe that  $p$  is true. In the fundamental case, where the audience has otherwise insufficient reason to believe that  $p$ , the only reason that could be possessed for believing that  $p$  would be a belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony. Thus, as a position in the epistemology of testimony, reductionism must provide an account of how we establish the credibility of testimony; a psychological description and an epistemological evaluation are required.

It may seem that this concern with an audience's reasons carries the implausible consequence that the epistemology of testimony cannot be

construed in terms of the transmission of knowledge. This maybe illustrated by the following case. Suppose the audience is responsible for the physical welfare of the British Prime Minister and consequently possesses a direct video link-up with the Prime Minister. On this basis he observes that certain a speaker is always correct in her statements of the whereabouts of the Prime Minister. This audience thereby possesses adequate reason to accept this speaker's testimony to the whereabouts of the Prime Minister and, consequently, for justified testimonial beliefs on this basis. Thus, it might be claimed, given that these testimonial beliefs are justified and true, the audience has acquired testimonial knowledge *even though* the speaker were only expressing her clairvoyant hunches and, as such, was *not* expressing knowledge. Thus whether the speaker were expressing knowledge or not seems immaterial to the reductionist account of testimony.

However this is not so. It is certainly not immaterial whether or not a speaker expresses knowledge. If a speaker expresses knowledge, then his testimony *will be credible*. And if a speaker's testimony *is evidence* that the proposition it expressed is true, then it is equally evidential that it was knowledge that was expressed. It may seem that the clairvoyant case refutes this last claim. But there is a sense in which the clairvoyant *does* express knowledge; given the reliability of the speaker's clairvoyance, her testimony is an expression of *animal* knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is *only* for this reason that the audience can judge the speaker's testimony to be credible. Thus it is only for this reason that the audience can acquire (reflective) knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> See Sosa (1988).

Reductionism is incompatible with construing the epistemology of testimony in terms of knowledge transmission in the following sense. The *mere fact* that the speaker expressed knowledge does not provide the audience with the epistemic opportunity of acquiring knowledge. To claim that it does is to adopt anti-reductionism. The reductionist would allow knowledge to be acquired only if the audience is justified in accepting the speaker's testimony. And, it is claimed, the audience would be so justified if and only if he believed the testimony credible.<sup>2</sup> If it were *believed* that the speaker expressed knowledge, then it would be believed that his testimony was credible.

What reasons could be possessed for believing testimony credible? The reductionist holds that it is the audience's *experience* which provides his reasons for believing testimony to be credible. As I see it there seem two ways in which experience could support a belief in the credibility of testimony. First experience yields, what I shall call, *prior reasons*. The audience's experience prior to encountering a speaker and his testimony provides him with certain hypotheses about the credibility of testimony. Second, experience yields, what I shall call, *contextual reasons*. The experience of encountering a speaker and his testimony provides the audience with evidence as to the truth of the expressed proposition.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In §3.1 I will give a

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<sup>2</sup> Acceptance must be distinguished from believing what is expressed: these cases can be equated only insofar as it is a t-proposition that is expressed. Believing that a testimony is credible can be epistemically irrelevant to believing the propositions this testimony expresses: the speaker might express something the audience already knows. In this case the audience merely agrees with the speaker. Until Ch. 7 my focus, with the sceptic, is on the fundamental case.

detailed account of prior reasons. In §3.2 I will provide an interpretation of Hume's reductionism. By this means I shall introduce an alternative conception of our reasons for believing testimony to be credible. This alternative I will elaborate in §3.3 where I give an account of contextual reasons. First, however, I must lay some necessary groundwork.

### *3.0.1. Credibility and Probability*

To say that a testimony is credible is to claim that the speaker's utterance is evidence that the proposition expressed is *probably* true. What notion of probability is involved here?

The answer I shall give to this question will be brief. I should begin by making two distinctions.<sup>3</sup> The first distinction concerns the objects of probability, the second its metaphysics.

First, consider the schema: the probability that  $\phi$  is the case is  $r$ . ' $\phi$ ' may be replaced by a statement which either does or does not express something true or false *in situ*. For example, 'the next card will be the

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<sup>3</sup> These are taken from Sturgeon (1997b), 2, though I draw the second distinction differently.

queen of hearts', 'a Londoner will be involved in a road crash'. In former the case the probability is *definite*, and in the latter, *indefinite*. A definite probability is the probability that a single case proposition is true. An indefinite probability is the probability that an arbitrary instance of a certain kind is also an instance of another.

Second, the probability that  $\phi$  is the case could be construed *subjectively* or *objectively*. In the former case it should be an expression of a subject's degree of confidence that  $\phi$  is the case. Roughly, this degree is measured by finding out the odds which the subject would be prepared to bet on  $\phi$  being the case.<sup>4</sup> In the latter case the probability states a mind and language independent feature of the world. For example, the world is such that there is a certain probability that a radioactive atom will decay.

These two distinctions distinguish four types of probability; reductionism is concerned with two further types of probability which are neither subjective nor objective but, as it were, face both ways. Take the probability that  $\phi$  is the case. Objectively, this simply *is* the probability that  $\phi$  is the case; subjectively, this is the degree to which a subject believes that  $\phi$  is the case. The reductionist is concerned with a 'subjectified' objective probability: the probability that  $\phi$  is the case *to the best of our knowledge*. And an 'objectified' subjective probability: the degree to which a subject *should* believe that  $\phi$  is the case. The first of these probabilities is *statistical*, and the second, *epistemic*.

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<sup>4</sup> S's degree of confidence in  $\phi$  could be specified as:  $x / y$  if and only if [value  $x$ ]  $\sim_S$  [value  $y$  if and only if  $\phi$ ], where ' $\sim_S$ ' indicates that S is indifferent. See Horwich (1982), 26.

Statistical probability can be definite or indefinite. It is determined by observing the relative frequency of Gs in a large number of Fs. Given this observation it can be stated as an indefinite probability: the probability that an arbitrary F will also be a G. Or it can be stated as a definite probability: the probability that the next F will be a G. If an infinite number of observations were made, then indefinite statistical probability would be identical to objective indefinite probability or *nomic* probability. And definite statistical probability would be identical to objective definite probability or *chance*. Thus the idea of ‘the limit of finite relative frequencies’ offers a way of *defining* these objective probabilities. Statistical probability, however, can be equated with nomic probability and chance *only* at this limit. This is because statistical generalisations depend upon our observations and the frequencies we observe *could* be accidental.<sup>5</sup> By contrast nomic generalisations and chances are radically non-epistemic. The former specify natural laws, the latter are specified by natural laws.

Epistemic probability is definite. It states the degree to which a single case proposition is evidentially supported. To claim that a proposition is epistemically probable is to claim that *given the evidential situation*, this proposition should be believed; like reasons, evidence is truth-conducive. Thus if subjects were *ideally rational*, epistemic probability would be identical to subjective definite probability. These probabilities cannot be equated because if something is epistemically probable it *should be* subjectively probable for *everyone*.

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<sup>5</sup> This divergence is most easily illustrated by sceptical possibilities: a fair coin is tossed a million times and yet by chance comes up heads every time.

Thus, to return to the opening question, the probability involved is *epistemic*. To say that a testimony is credible is to claim that the speaker's utterance makes the proposition expressed epistemically probable. *If* the proposition expressed *is* epistemically probable, then an audience would be justified in believing it. According to reductionism, testimony may be accepted *only if* it is *judged* to be credible.<sup>6</sup>

A speaker utters 'U' and expresses that *p*. Let me denote this whole occasion of the speaker's testimony by disquoting the speaker's utterance, U.<sup>7</sup> How does our experience enable us to judge that this speaker's testimony is credible? That is, how does our experience enable us to judge that U makes it epistemically probable that *p*? I symbolise this epistemic probability as  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$ . Thus the question is, how does our experience enable us to judge  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$ ? The reductionist gives two answers: we possess prior and contextual reasons for judging  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$ . I outline prior reasons in §3.1 and contextual reasons in §3.3.

### **3.1. Prior Reasons for Believing Testimony**

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<sup>6</sup> A generic reliabilist epistemology of testimony would claim that a testimonial belief is justified iff the audience tends to accept testimony only when there is a high objective probability that the proposition expressed is true. Thus what distinguishes reductionism from generic reliabilism is a concern with reasons. (It is this concern which allows reductionism to stand as a response to scepticism of testimony.). Nonetheless generic reliabilism is clearly related to reductionism: epistemic probabilities should be reflect objective probabilities.

<sup>7</sup> I shall speak of audiences believing U. This *façon de parler* is acceptable: we speak of believing speakers as well as propositions.

## **Credible**

We can judge  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$ , the reductionist holds, in the following manner. First, we can judge that  $U$  belongs to a certain type of testimony. Second, our experience allows the establishment of statistical generalisations about the probable truth of types of testimony. Third we can *directly infer*  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$  from these statistical generalisations.<sup>8</sup> Let me consider each of these claims in turn.

First, we distinguish between different types of testimony. We take the testimony of certain types of speaker to be more credible than that of others and we take testimony about certain types of topic to be more credible than that about others. For example, we are more likely to believe friends, family and lovers than strangers. We are more likely to believe doctors than apothecaries, craftsmen than cowboys. We are likely to believe speakers talking about everyday events, giving us directions, or telling us the football scores. Whilst we tend to be sceptical of speakers talking about government policies, the greatness of their exploits, the statistics which favour their opinion or the innocence of their desires. Yet we might be more inclined to believe certain types of speaker talking about government

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<sup>8</sup> The generic reliabilist hopes to reduce epistemic facts to nomic probabilities. The reduction considered here is different: the justification for our testimonial beliefs reduces to our justification for beliefs from other sources. Nonetheless the two reductions are related: reductionism similarly appeals to 'objective', *viz.* statistical, probability.



policies or the greatness of their exploits such as professors of politics or renowned adventurers. Certain specific speakers are believed competent when talking on certain types of topic. And the testimony of some speakers may even be believed generally credible. Thus we distinguish different types of testimony.

Second, we can discriminate credible from non-credible testimony because our experience enables us to establish statistically the credibility of certain types of testimony. To claim that a type of testimony is credible is to claim that a high proportion of these testimonies will express true propositions. The establishment of statistical generalisations stating which types of testimony are credible requires the observation of the correlation between expressions of a type of testimony and the states of affairs which make the proposition expressed in each case true. Our experience, it is hoped, should allow the completion of the following table.

Type of testimony	<b>a</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>c</b>		<b>z</b>
Observed expressions of type					
True propositions observed					
Relative frequency of truth					

The statistical probability that a proposition is true given, for instance, that it belongs to type **x** testimony could then be ‘read off’ this table. I shall

symbolise this probability as,  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x})$ . We might not seem to establish hypotheses of the form, ‘Testimony of type  $\mathbf{x}$  is probably true’; we certainly do not complete tables like that illustrated. However the reductionist claim is that an adequate *epistemological*, rather than psychological, description of our ability to discriminate credible testimony will describe this ability in terms of our explicitly formulating and employing such hypotheses.

Third,  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x})$  enables the judgement that type  $\mathbf{x}$  testimony is credible because  $\text{PROB.}(p/U)$  can be directly inferred from  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x})$ . Justification is conferred on the audience’s testimonial belief by the statistical syllogism: testimony of type  $\mathbf{x}$  is probably true; this testimony is of type  $\mathbf{x}$ ; therefore this testimony is credible. Consequently, where  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x})$  is higher than a certain bound, the generalisation, ‘Testimony of type  $\mathbf{x}$  is credible’ has been established.

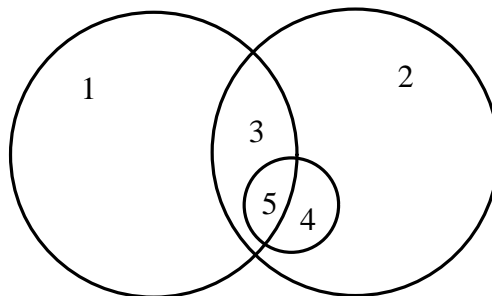
Thus the reductionist should claim that we possess prior reasons for believing testimony credible. I should like to clarify this claim through considering each of these three stages of articulating prior reasons. I shall do this by raising some problems for each stage in the next three sections respectively.<sup>9</sup> I hope to show that each problem is surmountable.

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<sup>9</sup> The problems considered are raised by Coady (1973), reprinted with minor alterations as Ch. 4 Coady (1992).

### *3.1.1. The Problem of Type Identity for Probability Calculation*

Any given testimony could be identified as belonging to five generic types of testimony. These are: (1) type of content; (2) type of speaker; (3) type of speaker and type of content; (4) named speaker; (5) named speaker and type of content.<sup>10</sup> These types ascend in specificity; I presume that (1) and (2) are co-specific. A named speaker is one amongst many types of speaker.<sup>11</sup> Thus the ascending specificity of (1) to (5) could be represented as:



With five generic types of testimony and as many specific types as

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<sup>10</sup> It would be plausible to include named content as a generic type identity thereby extending these types to eight. I have not done this because for any proposition which seems generally credible, credible when expressed by certain types of speaker or certain named speakers one can imagine many fractionally different propositions which should be no less credible. Thus I conclude the named content should be better construed as a narrowly defined type of content.

<sup>11</sup> I presume that being a particular person, i.e. a 'named' speaker, can be treated as a property that is more specific than, say, being a doctor or looking shifty which designate 'types' of speaker.

the audience care to posit, the first difficulty that could be raised for the reductionist conception of prior reasons is that of classifying any given testimony. In particular, Coady states,

some sort of decision would presumably be required as to whether or not the report 'There is a sick lion in Taronga Park Zoo' belonged to the kind, medical report or geographical report or empirical report or existence report. Perhaps it could be said to belong to all of them or to some of them and not others but whatever was said it would be of considerable importance to the establishing of conjunctions, since a decision here is a decision about the actual identity of the conjunctions and hence, in consequence, about the degree of correlation likely to be established.<sup>12</sup>

The problem Coady identifies is: U could be classified into many different types, the audience could add U, one might suppose, to columns **a**, **b**, **c**, or **z** in the above table. The purpose of classifying testimony into types is to establish the relative frequency of truth for each type: any decision as to which type of testimony U belongs to will therefore alter the calculation of the relative frequency of truth for this type of testimony. If U is assigned arbitrarily, the relative frequency calculated will also be arbitrary. This defeats the purpose of calculating relative frequencies.

Coady's thought is that if the classification of U is *utterly arbitrary*, then generalisations of the form 'testimony of type **x** is credible' *cannot* be used to justify type **x** testimonies. But is this so? Even if the basis used to classify U for the purpose of establishing statistical generalisation were

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<sup>12</sup> Coady (1992), 84.

utterly arbitrary, provided the same basis were used when inferring the credibility of U, then wouldn't any arbitrariness be immaterial? In any case U clearly can be classified on a non-arbitrary basis: it is classified as being a token of a given type. If this results in U being assigned to three or four types, then U should be assigned to three or four types. In the long run the relative frequency which emerges for each type should still be accurate.

Further, couldn't potential arbitrariness be undermined by reference to the relative frequency calculations of others? Let type **t** be testimony as to another speaker's observation of the relative frequency of truth for types of testimony. Couldn't type **t** testimony then corroborate the audience's own observations? I turn to this question in the next section.

### *3.1.2. The Observational Problem*

The statistical probability that a type **x** testimony will express a truth is established by observing the relative frequency of true propositions expressed by a sequence of type **x** testimonies. Thus the audience must be able to observe the truth of tokens of type **x** testimony. Consequently, reductionism, Coady claims, is "plainly false", "because it seems absurd to suggest that, individually, we have done anything like the amount of

fieldwork ... require[d]”.<sup>13</sup>

Spatio-temporal constraints certainly limit how much testimony anyone could *personally verify*. Consider the following testimonies: ‘blood circulates in many fine vessels around the body’, ‘box jellyfish are rare in the Atlantic’, ‘the venom of the North European adder is rarely fatal’ and ‘the Nuer have 54 distinct adjectives for cattle’. The personal verification of these testimonies would be arduous: it should see the audience lurking in graveyards, stalking fernlands, trawling the Atlantic and sweating in the Sudan. If these testimonies were to be personally verified, the criteria of adequate verification would also need to be lax. For instance, should the ‘testimony’ of the compass be trusted? Could one be sure the adder possessed is representative and that the rare people who die, died of the adder bite? Could one be sure that the count of box jellyfish is not influenced by personally unknown tides and currents? A more severe constraint on how much testimony anyone could *personally verify* is the limitation imposed by one’s own knowledge. Some, for instance, would not be able to identify box jellyfish. If this were the case, the testimony could not be verified because the audience *would not know how to determine when the testimony was true*. This seems to be our epistemic position vis-à-vis *expert* testimony. Consider the following diagnosis, ‘the anterior interosseus nerve is compressed under the fibrous origin of the flexor digitorum sublimis.’<sup>14</sup> It seems that only other doctors would know how to

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> For interest, see Collier, et al. (1995), 662.

verify, or falsify, this diagnosis.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst it is plausible to suppose that much testimony as to matters of fact we could verify, Coady is surely right: it is implausible to suppose that *individually* we could verify anything but a fraction of our testimonial beliefs. If reductionism requires the *personal observation* of the veracity of testimony, then it should be a wildly revisionary proposal.

One might distinguish varieties of reductionism. *Stringent* reductionism requires assessments of credibility to proceed exclusively from the audience's own observations with no recourse allowed to other testimony. There is no reason for reductionism to be stringent. The crux of reductionism is the view that the mere fact that a proposition is expressed is not a reason to believe it; reasons are required to justify acceptance. These reasons will be supplied by what the audience believes about the testimony, why couldn't the audience rely on a testimonial belief? If a testimonial belief is justified, then it should be so irrespective of its content. This content could be a statement of the speaker's observations of the veracity of a certain type of testimony. In the last section I called testimony with such content type **t**. If an audience used a justified type **t** testimonial belief to justify accepting testimony, then it would be *as if* the other's observations justified this acceptance. Thus *liberal* reductionism should allow that we possess reason to accept testimony *if either* we have observed a significant

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<sup>15</sup> An ordinary patient would not know how to verify the diagnosis given because, whilst he knows what the doctor said, he does not know the import of what was said, and, in this sense, he does not understand the doctor's testimony. Nonetheless this is no bar on him believing what the doctor said. As Burge (1979) notes, "our attributions do not require that the subject always correctly or fully understand the content of his attitudes." 563.

correlation between testimonies of a type relevantly similar to the given testimony and the truth of these testimonies *or* we have received testimony to the existence of such a correlation and any regress of reasons entailed by accepting this testimony terminates in a correlation which has been personally observed.<sup>16</sup>

If reductionism isn't to be wildly revisionary, it cannot be stringent and must allow such a regress of reasons. This requires a certain simplifying assumption. To see this recall the five generic ways of individuating types of testimony and consider the following argument.

Suppose a speaker S expressed that *p* and this testimony is identified as the fifth generic type above: specifically it belongs to the class of testimony made by S on topics like *p*, or type *s* for short. What must an audience A do, if he is to be justified in believing that *p*? Simplifying slightly, it seems that the audience must have: either (1) established the credibility of type *s* testimony; or (2) received testimony from another speaker T to the credibility of type *s* testimony and established the credibility of this type of testimony, call it type *t*. If reductionism were stringent, the audience's testimonial belief would be justified only if (1) were the case. (1) should require the observation of the correlation between tokens of type *s* testimony and the truth of these tokens. (2) should require

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Stevenson (1993), 437. Coady claims that reductionism must be stringent otherwise it is "question-begging". He states his reason for this claim to be, "the experience upon which our reliance upon testimony as a form of evidence is supposed to rest is itself reliant upon testimony which cannot be reduced in the same way." Coady (1992), 81. That is, if we justify testimony<sub>1</sub> by reference to our experience of testimony<sub>2</sub>, then we can neither justify testimony<sub>2</sub> by reference to our experience of testimony<sub>3</sub> nor by reference to experience. These consequences are *non sequiturs*.



the observation of the correlation between T's judgements of the credibility of tokens of type *s* testimony and the truth of these judgements. In order to observe such a correlation A must observe the truth of tokens of type *s* testimony. This is exactly the observations required by (1). Therefore (2) is redundant: liberal reductionism collapses into stringent reductionism. If A could not make the observations (1) requires, for instance if S's testimony were expert, then A could not be justified in believing that *p*.<sup>17</sup>

However, suppose this example were fleshed out as follows. S is the orthopaedist above who diagnosed that A's anterior interosseus nerve is compressed under the fibrous origin of the flexor digitorum sublimis. A, not being a doctor, could not personally observe the veracity of S's testimony. However he observes S's framed and mounted certificate stating his medical qualifications. This certificate transcribes examiner T's testimony that type *s* testimony is credible. Having taken many exams and correlated the examiners' marks with what he subsequently knew were the correct answers, couldn't A directly infer the credibility of T's testimony? If so, liberal reductionism does not collapse: A could rely on T's testimony to justify his belief that *p*.

How is this response possible? The argument for the collapse of liberal reductionism operates by identifying types *t* and *s* as generic type (5), and identifying type *t* as a *convergent and narrower* specific type than

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<sup>17</sup> This argument is loosely based on Schmitt's argument that a key problem for reductionism is that only experts can establish the credibility of expert testimony. See Schmitt (1987).

s.<sup>18</sup> Consequently the task of establishing the credibility of type **t** is more problematic than that of establishing the credibility type **s**. By contrast the response operates by identifying type **t** as a *divergent and broader* type than **s**. Whilst S's testimony is identified as generic type (5), T's testimony is identified as generic type (3). Specifically it belongs to the class of 'judgements made by people like T on the credibility of testimony like type **s**'; i.e. it belongs to the type 'examiner's judgements of the credibility of an examinee's statements on an examined subject'. This introduces the possibility that A might have made the observations needed to establish the credibility of type **t** testimony even if he could not establish the credibility of type **s** testimony. Thus the simplifying assumption is that this kind of move is acceptable; that audiences are justified in working with whatever observations they possess. I shall consider this assumption in more detail in §4.1.3. For the moment I should like to note the intuitive acceptability of the response made.

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<sup>18</sup> The adjectives 'narrow' and 'broad' state the specificity of types. The adjectives 'convergent' and 'divergent' state how two types are related; whether they are identified by similar or dissimilar criteria respectively.

### *3.1.3. The Problem of Type Identity for Direct Inference*

The reductionist aims to produce statistical generalisations of the form,  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x}) = r$ .<sup>19</sup> From this generalisation the reductionist hopes to infer an epistemic probability. An audience is represented as reasoning:  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x}) = r$ ;  $U \in \mathbf{x}$ ; therefore  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = r$ . This raises a problem parallel to that considered in §3.1.1; the quote from Coady given there continues,

For instance, if the report were treated as belonging to the kind ‘existence report’ then it might be that Jones had personally established quite a large number of conjunctions between existence reports and the relevant existence situations ... On the other hand, if it were treated as a medical report then Jones may have had very little personal experience of correlations between medical reports and medical facts ... Jones would ... now have a strong reason for accepting the report if he classifies it one way and no reason for accepting it if he classifies it another.<sup>20</sup>

The problem Coady raises is:  $U$  may not only be testimony of type  $\mathbf{x}$ , it may also be testimony of type  $\mathbf{y}$  and it need not be the case that  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x}) =$

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<sup>19</sup> It may seem that  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x})$  should not be real valued but should be interval valued, i.e. that  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x}) \in [x,y]$  where  $x=0$  and  $y=1$ . However insofar as we do not marshal the evidence our experience provides for the credibility of types of testimony by completing tables like that above, both interval and real values equally introduce too much precision into the description of people’s judgements. Thus for simplicity I work with real values.

<sup>20</sup> Coady (1992), 84.

prob.( $p/U \in y$ ). If prob.( $p/U \in y$ ) =  $s$ , then it need not be the case that  $r = s$ . This is a problem because the statistical probability that testimony of a given type is true is intended by the reductionist to be one basis for justifiably accepting tokens of this type of testimony. Thus the reductionist requires an *acceptance rule* stating, roughly, *U makes it epistemically probable that p if the statistical probability of type U testimony is  $>q$* .<sup>21</sup> The problem, then, is that it could be that  $r > q$  but  $s < q$  and the audience would therefore be justified in believing U if he treated U to be type  $x$  but unjustified if he treated U to be type  $y$ .

Direct inference is problematic, but again this provides no objection to reductionism in principle. The issue is, faced with a number of direct inferences, which inference should be made? A rough rule could be stated: *a direct inference should always proceed from the narrowest available reference class*.<sup>22</sup> With respect to the last example, if  $x \supset y$ , then the inference should proceed from prob.( $p/U \in x$ ) =  $r$  whilst if  $y \subset x$ , then the inference should proceed from prob.( $p/U \in y$ ) =  $s$ . This rough rule Pollock formulates as two rules:

(RDI)  $\langle \text{prob.}(F_x/x \in G) = r \ \& \ JB(c \in G) \rangle$  is a prima facie reason for  
 $\langle \text{PROB}(F_c) = r \rangle$

(RSD)  $\langle \forall (H \rightarrow G) \ \& \ JB(c \in H) \ \& \ \text{prob.}(F_x/x \in H) \neq \text{prob.}(F_x/x \in G) \ \rangle$  is an

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<sup>21</sup> This rule needs a *ceteris paribus* clause: contextual reasons may defeat this sufficiency claim. Thus the rule is 'rough'. But it is clear enough to make the points that follow.

<sup>22</sup> Reichenbach (1949), states: "An individual thing or event may be incorporated in many reference classes ... we then proceed by considering the narrowest reference class for which suitable statistics can be compiled." 374.

undercutting defeater for (RDI).<sup>23</sup>

These are respectively *the rule of direct inference* and *the rule of subset defeat*. To illustrate their application consider the testimony that, ‘there is a sick lion in Taronga park zoo’. Suppose the audience had ‘filled in’ the above table such that: **a** is ‘health reports’ and **b** is ‘animal health reports’. (RDI) licenses two direct inferences:

- (1) From  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{a}) = a$  to  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = a$
- (2) From  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{b}) = b$  to  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = b$

If  $a \neq b$ , then as **b** is a narrower type than **a**, (2) undercuts (1) in accordance with (RSD).

The rough rule of direct inference is that one should always infer from the narrowest reference class. However reference classes can be artificially narrowed. For instance, suppose type **c** testimony is ‘health reports which contain the word *sick*’, and  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{c}) = c$  where  $c = a$ . Type **c** is an artificial strengthening of type **a**. Nonetheless the audience now possesses *prima facie* reasons for three direct inferences. (1) and (2) and now also:

- (3) From  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{c}) = c$  to  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = c$

Two reasons are possessed for believing  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = a$ , and one reason for believing  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = b$ . Even if (2) undercuts (1), this still leaves (2) and (3), which inference should be drawn? To resolve such questions

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<sup>23</sup> Taken, and slightly modified, from Pollock (1990), 111-6.

Pollock's posits a *rule of domination defeat*.<sup>24</sup> This rule effectively states that (3) should be ignored because containing the word 'sick' is irrelevant to the probable truth of health reports. Type **c** is an artificial strengthening of **a**, it introduces factors irrelevant to the probable truth type **a** testimony, consequently (3) is true *only because* (1) is true. This consequence is revealed by  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{c}) = \text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{a})$ .

Even with this sophisticated apparatus of rules the problem of the reference class still arises. Suppose **z** identifies zoo reports and  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{z}) = z$ . The audience can now make four direct inferences. (1), (2) and (3) and now also:

(4) From  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{z}) = z$  to  $\text{PROB.}(p/U) = z$

By the rule of subset defeat (2) provides an undercutting defeater for (1) and by the rule of domination defeat (2) also undercuts (3). This leaves (2) and (4) as possible direct inferences. There is no reason for thinking either that **b** is a narrower type than **z** or that **z** is a narrower type than **b**. Which inference should be drawn? Obviously both inferences should be drawn. The issue is whether U can be justifiably accepted? I have been supposing an acceptance rule is being used such that U can be justifiably accepted if  $\text{prob.}(p/U \in \mathbf{x}) > q$ . It should be unjustifiable to believe that *p* because  $b > q$  if  $z < q$  and one had no more reason to regard U as type **b** than as type **z**.<sup>25</sup> Consequently U can be justifiably believed only if *both* b and z are  $> q$ . Thus

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>25</sup> "Where there is a difference in the consequences of two judgements, there should all the more be a difference in their grounds, for it is unreasonable that there should be no more grounds for applying one of a pair of judgements to a situation rather than the other, and yet one judgement carry consequences not carried by the other." B. Williams (1960), 20.

the problem of the reference class for direct inference does not provide an objection to reductionism in principle. Direct inference is a complicated affair not an insurmountable problem.

All of Coady's criticisms of reductionism considered here, §3.1, are directed against Hume's 'theory of testimony'. In §3.2 I offer an interpretation of Hume's 'theory'. I hope to show that Hume's conception of our reasons for believing testimony credible is *not* a conception of prior reasons. If this is the case, Coady's criticisms are off-target. Through outlining an interpretation of Hume I shall introduce contextual reasons.

### **3.2. David Hume's Reductionist Epistemology of Testimony**

Hume does not give a *theory* of testimony. His remarks on testimony are primarily to be found in the section 'Of Miracles' in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Hume's concern is the impossibility of testimony supporting belief in the miraculous. Nevertheless a coherent position can be extracted from these remarks. This position is reductionist: the mere fact that  $p$  is expressed by intelligible testimony provides no reason to believe that  $p$ . An audience should be justified in accepting

testimony to  $p$  only if the testimony were judged to be credible. How does Hume suggest that we judge the credibility of testimony? Coady interprets Hume as claiming that we possess prior reasons for making this judgement. I suggest that Hume should be interpreted in another way.

### *3.2.1. Coady's Hume*

Coady's account of Hume's theory of testimony primarily derives from the consideration of the following two passages taken from 'Of Miracles':

- (1) [Our trust in testimony derives from] no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connexion together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident, that we ought not to make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hume (1777), §88, 111. Quoted in Coady (1992), 79.



- (2) And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on experience so it varies with the experience and is regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability* according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable.<sup>27</sup>

From these two quotes Coady interprets Hume as follows. (1) suggests that we are justified in believing testimony only because we have observed past conjunctions between reports and reported facts. (2) suggests that the conjunctions we observe are between types of testimony and the truth of instances of these types. With this I concur.

However Coady proceeds to interpret (1) and (2) on the model of prior reasons. That is, our past observations of the conjunctions between testimony and the testified facts establish certain types of testimony to be credible and allow us thereby to infer the credibility of any such testimony. However Hume does *not* state that we *infer* the credibility of testimony from our past observations of the conjunctions between testimony and the testified facts *but* that we judge there will be such a conjunction because we *observe the veracity of testimony*. That is, we can make a *direct*, rather than inferential, judgement of the credibility of testimony. How could we make such a judgement? Hume continues:

had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities inherent in human

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<sup>27</sup> Hume (1777), §88, 112. Quoted in Coady (1992), 82.

nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony.<sup>28</sup>

Our experience of *human nature* includes our experience of the “usual conformity of the facts to the reports of witnesses”. This experience allows us to directly judge the credibility of testimony, to “observe its veracity”. Thus it seems that Hume possesses a different conception of our reasons for believing testimony credible. In the next section I shall attempt to provide an interpretation of this conception.

### *3.2.2. Testimony Judged by the Principles of Human Nature*

Testimonial beliefs are formed on the basis of causal reasoning. It is custom which allows the system of ideas of one individual to be connected to those in another.

For finding with this system of perceptions, there is another connected by custom, or if you will, by the relation of cause and effect, it proceeds to the consideration of their ideas. ... The first of these systems is the object of the memory and senses; the second of the judgement. 'Tis this latter principle which peoples the world, and brings us acquainted with such

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<sup>28</sup> Hume (1777), §88, 112.

existences as by their removal in time and place lie beyond the reach of the senses and memory.<sup>29</sup>

This permutation of custom is highly fortuitous: without it the world would not be peopled. In fact, “there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men”.<sup>30</sup> There is no species of reasoning more common; equally

No weakness of human nature is more universal and conspicuous than what we commonly call CREDULITY, or a too easy faith in the testimony of others, and this weakness is also very naturally accounted for from the influence of resemblance.<sup>31</sup>

The cause of our credulity lies in the resemblance between the proposition expressed by the speaker and the fact which the audience envisages would make this proposition true. The world is stated to be such and so and in the very act of understanding how the world is so stated to be we conceive of it so being and the mind hereby moves *too easily* from the comprehension of what another says to a belief in what is said.

The words or discourses of others have ... a connexion with the facts or

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<sup>29</sup> Hume (1740), §1.3.9, 108.

<sup>30</sup> Hume (1777), §88, 111.

<sup>31</sup> Hume (1740), §1.3.9, 112-3. Hume distinguishes between “the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular. ... the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected.” *Ibid.*, §1.4.4, 225. The “latter principles” which Hume rejects are those of *resemblance* and *contiguity*, along with cause and effect (or the principle of *custom*) these are the “only three principles of connexion among ideas”. *Ibid.*, 225. However, matter of fact beliefs are justified only if they derive from the operation of custom; it is through being guided by the principle of resemblance that we are “seduc’d” into holding a “false opinion”, *ibid.*, 209.

objects, which they represent. This ... connexion is generally much over-rated, and commands our assent beyond what experience will justify ... Other effects only point out their causes in an oblique manner; but the testimony of men does it directly, and is to be consider'd as an image as well as an effect. No wonder, therefore, we are so rash in drawing our inferences from it.<sup>32</sup>

Our propensity to be credulous is unreflective; “*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures*”.<sup>33</sup> Presented with intelligible testimony to *p* we unreflectively infer a resembling cause (that *p*).

How, then, are testimonial beliefs justified? Section XV of the *Treatise* is entitled ‘Rules by which to judge of causes and effects’, by these Rules “we ought to regulate our judgement concerning causes and effects; and these rules are form’d on the nature of our understanding.”<sup>34</sup> Thus,

In every judgement which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgement, deriv’d from the nature of the object, by another judgement, deriv’d from the nature of the understanding.<sup>35</sup>

Our “first judgement” derives from the nature of testimony: it represents the world as being a certain way and by the principle of resemblance we are led into a “too easy faith in its truth”. Testimonial beliefs are justified only

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.3.9, 113.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.4.1, 183.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.3.13, 149.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.4.1, 181-2.

if this first judgement is “corrected”. The passage, “No weakness of human nature ...”, continues:

When we receive any matter of fact upon human testimony, our faith arises from the very same origin as our inferences from causes to effects, and from effects to causes; *nor is there anything but our experience of the governing principles of human nature, which gives us any assurance of the veracity of men.*<sup>36</sup>

How could this experience of “the governing principles of human nature” yield the understanding necessary to “correct” our credulity?

Testimonial beliefs are formed on the basis of causal reasoning. Testimony is an effect and our experience supplies us with knowledge of its past causes. The criterion of justification for such beliefs is *constancy of conjunction*.<sup>37</sup> Thus the belief that this testimony is credible is justified by our observation of the constancy of the conjunction between *this type* of testimony and the testified event being its cause. ‘This type’ is defined by our judgement of the speaker’s nature.

Thus we can judge that the “inclination to truth” is dominant in some speakers on some occasions. Conversely our experience of human nature demonstrates that the testified event need not be the cause of testimony. Thus we should be sceptical in accepting testimony, for instance, were the speaker,

of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm;

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.3.9, 113. My italics.

<sup>37</sup> This claim is supported in §4.2.1.

when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument derived from human testimony.<sup>38</sup>

Given any testimony we can “observe its veracity” because we can judge the nature of the testifier. We can thereby judge whether the testimony is similar to those whose cause were the testified fact.

Once we have judged the credibility of testimony we weigh it against our judgement of the prior probability of the proposition expressed. Alongside our judgement of the credibility of testimony we consider the plausibility of the proposition it expresses. This consideration is informed by such things as “the opposition of contrary testimony” and whether “the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation”.<sup>39</sup> The Indian Prince was wise to be sceptical of reports that water freezes when he had no experience of water freezing: “it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent”.<sup>40</sup> Once this judgement is formed the given piece of testimony can be “regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability*”.<sup>41</sup>

This is essentially what I take to be Hume’s account of testimony. I should like to raise three further points.

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<sup>38</sup> Hume (1777), §89, 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, §89, 112-3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, §89, 113.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, §88, 112.

First, Hume does not clearly distinguish descriptive from normative matters.<sup>42</sup> How should our understanding of a speaker's nature "correct" our natural credulity? Should it *replace* this credulity? Or should it *temper* this credulity? Clearly it should replace our credulity: a testimonial belief fixed only by credulity is not justified. A testimonial belief is justified only insofar as it is based on our experience of the governing principles of human nature. As such Hume should state those particulars which support belief in testimony. However he only lists particulars which "destroy the force of any argument derived from human testimony".

Second, this lack of clarity seems to be a consequence of the fact that Hume is decidedly non-sceptical of testimony. In allowing that testimony could constitute a *proof* for a matter of fact belief Hume allows testimony to provide the "highest certainty" one may possess for an empirical belief. This gives considerable credit to our ability to judge the nature of others. Hume believes that

Even characters, which are peculiar to each individual, have a uniformity in their influence, ... [such that] the most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for.<sup>43</sup>

Thus it is not his scepticism but his optimism towards the possibility of a science of human nature which Hume demonstrates in writing on testimony. This optimism he expresses at the beginning of his *Treatise on Human*

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<sup>42</sup> Similarly Traiger (1993), 137, notes that it is difficult to distinguish Hume's theory of the formation of testimonial beliefs from his theory of the justification of testimonial beliefs.

<sup>43</sup> Hume (1777), §67, 86 and §68, 88.

*Nature* where he states his intention to “explain the principles of human nature” and thereby “propose a compleat system of the sciences”.<sup>44</sup>

Third, Hume’s conception of our reasons for believing testimony credible is significantly different to the conception of prior reasons outlined. Types of testimony are *demonstratively* identified rather than identified descriptively prior to encountering testimony. In the next section I attempt to articulate a similar conception to Hume’s yet one which avoids reference to human nature.

### **3.3. Contextual Reasons for Believing Testimony Credible**

Our ability to assess the credibility of testimony seems more sophisticated than our ability to articulate prior reasons for believing testimony credible. Consider the following illustration. A tourist in a foreign land approaches a passer-by to ask for directions to the cathedral. It seems intuitive, assuming that the tourist understands the passer-by, that the passer-by *could* communicate her knowledge of the whereabouts of the

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<sup>44</sup> Hume (1740), introduction, xvi.



cathedral to him. The tourist might possess a belief about the probable truth of ‘testimony as to local directions’ but it seems that his reasons for believing the passer-by will consist less in his reasons for this belief and more in his perception of the context. That is, he responds to his perception of the passer-by’s appearance and demeanour, her air of confidence and seeming familiarity with her environs. He judges that she was not hurrying and that when they communicated she seemed well disposed towards him, repeating her directions and parting with a smile.

I presume two things. First, that the tourist’s reasons for believing the passer-by *are* more extensive than his prior reasons, that at least part of the tourist’s reason for accepting the passer-by’s testimony is provided by his perception of contextual details. Reasons thus provided I call *contextual reasons*. Second, I presume that these contextual reasons are *not only* relevant to the fixation of belief, with prior reasons accounting for justification, but are also relevant to the justification of the tourist’s testimonial belief.

Two things seem immediately apparent about contextual reasons. First, no circumstantial detail in isolation provides a reason to believe the passer-by’s testimony. The parting smile alone does not provide the audience with any reason; the wicked also smile. Second, contextual reasons operate at an intuitive level. Asked why he believed the passer-by the tourist would not advert to the complex of perceived contextual details but state something like, “she seemed trustworthy”. Or he might focus on one detail which could be taken as intuitively representative of the whole context, “her smile was honest”.

Our judgement of contextual reasons is comparable to our judgement of a testifier's nature: both judgements are demonstratively grounded. Thus the question raised is, how can these context-based, holistic, intuitive and yet justifying reasons be conceptualised? I shall offer what I take to be a reasonable answer to this question in §3.3.2. First I consider some related ideas put forward by Fricker.

### *3.3.1. Monitoring a Speaker*

A testimonial belief is justified, Fricker claims, if and only if the audience is justified in believing that the speaker is *trustworthy*. This Fricker defines as:

Trus(S,U): A speaker S is trustworthy with respect to an assertoric utterance by her U, which is made on an occasion O, and by which she asserts that P if and only if

- (i) U is sincere, and
- (ii) S is competent with respect to 'P' on O, where this notion is defined as follows:

If S were sincerely to assert that P on O, then it would be the case that

p.<sup>45</sup>

Trus(S,U) is the “minimal gap-bridging” premise which in conjunction with “S asserted that P” entails “P”. How is the audience’s belief that a speaker is trustworthy, in this sense, justified?

We are justified in beginning our assessments of a speaker’s trustworthiness from the “default positions” of sincerity and competence “with respect to a certain range of subject matters - namely, all those for which common-sense person theory tells that people are nearly always right about such things”.<sup>46</sup> This is justified because:

[It] is part of common-sense person theory, that (i) nearly all utterances which seems sincere are so; and (ii) About these everyday subject matters, where there are no special circumstances, normal people are nearly always right.<sup>47</sup>

Fricker talks of “default positions” rather than “presumptive epistemic rights”, which would amount to a principle of credulity, because an audience must always *monitor*, and may not presume, the trustworthiness of the speaker.

Monitoring consists being sensitive to untrustworthiness, it is typically conducted at a non-conscious level ... the specific cues in a speaker’s behaviour which constitute the informational basis for this

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<sup>45</sup> Fricker (1994), 147. Fricker’s definition of competence shifts between *mention*, “S is competent with respect to ‘P’ on O” and *use*, “If S were to sincerely assert that P ...”. This is an error; I read, “If S were to sincerely assert ‘P’ ..”.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-2.

judgement will often be registered and processed at an irretrievably sub-personal level.<sup>48</sup>

A belief in the speaker's trustworthiness is justified provided the audience is sensitive to those cues that indicate untrustworthiness. These cues are found in the contextual particulars of the speaker's testimony. (It is such cues, Hume would claim, that reveal the speaker's nature.) However insofar as these cues are "processed at an irretrievably sub-personal level" what could be "fished into consciousness" might be little more articulate than "I didn't like the look of him" or "Well, she seemed perfectly normal".<sup>49</sup>

"Well, she seemed perfectly normal" does *not* combine with "S asserted that P" to *entail* "P". Thus Fricker supposes that this statement expresses an intuition whose possession demonstrates the operation of the following subjunctive sensitivity:

It is true throughout of the hearer that if there were signs of untrustworthiness, she would register them, and respond to them.<sup>50</sup>

Three consequences, I believe, follow from positing this subjunctive sensitivity.

First, it is not clear that even if we do possess such a sensitivity, it is sufficiently sensitive for its operation to allow "Well, she seemed perfectly normal" to combine with "S asserted that P" to *entail* "P". Our sensitivity to trustworthiness must be set against the following background.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

The trustworthy can exhibit signs of untrustworthiness: speakers can be nervous and possess odd mannerisms. The trustworthy might seem to exhibit signs of untrustworthiness: audiences can be paranoid and deluded. The untrustworthy can exhibit signs of trustworthiness: speakers can be beguiling and persuasive. And the untrustworthy can seem to exhibit signs of trustworthiness: audiences can be gullible and naïve.

Second, if we are justified in positing *this* subjunctive sensitivity, then surely we are equally justified in positing the correlative subjunctive sensitivity: ‘it is true throughout of the hearer that if there were signs of trustworthiness, she would register them and respond to them’. Such a sensitivity must be posited if our perception of the circumstantial particulars of testimony are to provide *positive reasons* for belief. The conjunction of these two sensitivities specifies the application of Nozick’s third and fourth conditions on knowledge to the epistemology of testimony.<sup>51</sup> Thus to posit these two sensitivities is very similar to claiming that we possess a reliable *testimonial faculty*. This faculty takes as input U and any relevant beliefs of the audience and provides as output the disposition to believe or disbelieve that *p*. Fricker’s testimonial faculty would output the disposition to believe the speaker trustworthy or untrustworthy. Consequently, Fricker’s avowed justificationism seems better understood as a hybrid of externalism and

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<sup>51</sup> These are: ‘If *p* were not true, S would not believe that *p*’ and ‘If (under changed circumstances) *p* were true, S would believe that *p*’. Writing the subjunctive ‘if-then’ as an arrow, these are: ‘not-*p*  $\emptyset$  not-(S believes that *p*)’ and ‘*p*  $\emptyset$  S believes that *p*’. See Nozick (1981), Ch. 3§1.

internalism.<sup>52</sup>

Third, if it is supposed that we possess a reliable testimonial faculty, then the claim that the audience's assessment of the speaker's trustworthiness starts from the "default positions" of sincerity and competence-with-respect-to-a-range-of-subject-matters is completely superfluous. The cues which are believed to indicate sincerity and beliefs about which subject matters audiences tend to be competent with respect towards would be simply inputs into the posited reliable testimonial faculty.

This raises the question, are we justified in positing the possession of a reliable testimonial faculty? Or, equally, how do the circumstantial particulars of each testimony allow an assessment of credibility? It is to these questions I now turn.

### *3.3.2. Our Testimonial Faculty*

The guiding thought is that our perception of the circumstantial details of each testimony allows judgement as to whether the testimony is

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<sup>52</sup> This consequence is contrary to Fricker (1987), the purpose of which is to conclude that "the epistemology of testimony yielded by a certain Justificationist conception of knowledge is superior to that yielded by any version of Reliabilism", *ibid.*, 58.

credible or not. The thought is that rather than reason, 'this testimony belongs to a certain type, this type of testimony is probably true, therefore this testimony is credible', we can immediately judge the credibility of each testimony as we encounter it. This claim the reductionist should do well to defend because otherwise testimonial beliefs could only be as justified as those generalisations used to infer the credibility. However, how do circumstantial particulars allow an assessment of credibility?

I think the first thing that should be noted is that not all circumstantial particulars will be treated as epistemologically relevant. Rather we identify certain features in each circumstance as relevant. In the case of the tourist the fact that the passer-by wore black tights, that the sun was over-head and that the tourist had to pause whilst a scooter went past lest it drown his voice seem irrelevant; not so, the fact that the passer-by seemed well-disposed, smiled, repeated her directions and did not seem in a hurry. Other circumstantial features that seem relevant include:

- (1) The speaker looked suspicious.
- (2) The speaker seemed to pay attention to what was said.
- (3) The speaker contradicted himself.
- (4) The speaker's other utterances cohered around what he expressed.
- (5) The speaker showed too much interest in being believed.
- (6) The truth of what the speaker said would count against him in other ways.

Thus the question becomes, why do we identify certain circumstantial features as evidence for the credibility of testimony? An appeal to intuition would be possible. Intuitively (1), (3) and (5) provide reason to believe the associated testimony non-credible and (2), (4) and (6) provide reason to believe it credible. However this appeal does not aid the reductionist: a reason is needed for thinking that these intuitions are rational. It is hoped that our sensitivity to the circumstantial particulars *justifies* our acceptance of testimony. To realise this hope the reductionist must appeal to our past experience.

Our past experience of testimony, the reductionist must claim, should enable us to intuitively judge a testimony's credibility on the basis of our experience of those circumstantial particulars which individuate it. In order to support this claim and the consequent presumption that we do, in fact, form beliefs in this manner, the reductionist could turn to empirical psychology. "The principle way that cognitive science can contribute to epistemology", Goldman states, "is to identify basic belief forming processes."<sup>53</sup> Can empirical psychology support the reductionist's presumption and thereby ground the epistemological model sought?

The truth and falsity of certain propositions expressed by testimony has been observed. These observations allow an audience to divide past testimonies into three classes: 'Verified testimony', 'Falsified testimony' and 'Testimony that has been neither verified nor falsified'.<sup>54</sup> Given the

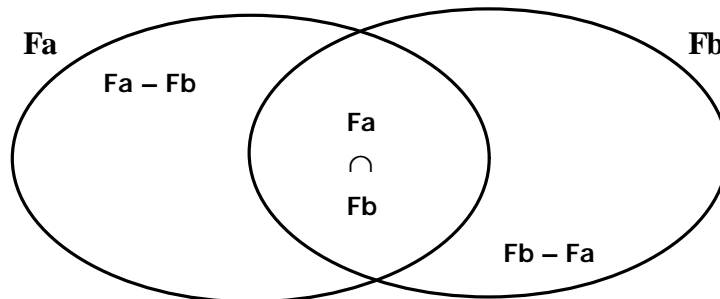
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<sup>53</sup> Goldman (1986), 181.

<sup>54</sup> I am working with liberal reductionism for the reasons stated above: otherwise the first two classes would be too small to ground but a fraction of our testimonial beliefs.



reductionist project it is the first two of these classes which are of concern. Let **V** and **F** be these two classes. The identification of which circumstantial details are epistemologically relevant is then based on the recognition of the similarities and dissimilarities amongst the testimonies which are members of **V** and **F**; respectively,  $\{V_a, V_b, V_c, \dots\}$  and  $\{F_a, F_b, F_c, \dots\}$ . We clearly seem able to recognise when two things are similar and when dissimilar.<sup>55</sup> This recognition seems to require that we can represent something as a set of features: the similarity of two things being a function of the features that are common to both and the features that belong to one but not the other. Let **V<sub>a</sub>**, **V<sub>b</sub>**, **V<sub>c</sub>**, **F<sub>a</sub>**, **F<sub>b</sub>** and **F<sub>c</sub>** denote the sets of features associated with  $V_a$ ,  $V_b$ ,  $V_c$ ,  $F_a$ ,  $F_b$  and  $F_c$ . The similarity of  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  could be illustrated:



Similarity =  $\Upsilon[(\mathbf{Fa} \cap \mathbf{Fb}), (\mathbf{Fa} - \mathbf{Fb}), (\mathbf{Fb} - \mathbf{Fa})]$ ; where ‘ $\Upsilon$ ’ stands for some function of the three arguments which follow it. Suppose  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  are

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There is no incompatibility between contextual and prior reasons which should prohibit this.

<sup>55</sup> “Indeed the concept of similarity is ubiquitous in psychological theory.” Tversky (1977), 327. The following account of similarity derives from Tversky.

similar in point of feature  $\phi$ ; that is, the set  $(\mathbf{Fa} \cap \mathbf{Fb})$  contains  $\phi$  as a member. Other testimonies in  $\mathbf{F}$  could also be similar in point of  $\phi$ , thus let  $\mathbf{f}$  stand for the set of  $\phi$  features extracted from  $\mathbf{F}$ . From  $\mathbf{f}$  a *proto-typical*  $\phi$  can be judged. Again this involves no more than similarity judgements.<sup>56</sup> In this manner a set of proto-typical features can be extracted from each  $\mathbf{V}$  and  $\mathbf{F}$ . It seems reasonable to suggest that our intuitive acceptance of (1) to (6) is the acceptance of such proto-typical features.

Consequently, we can be represented as judging the credibility of any given testimony  $U$  on the basis of its circumstantial details in the following manner. First the epistemologically relevant circumstantial features of  $U$  are identified. This may be a matter of consideration or it may be immediate. Each of these features will be similar to a proto-typical feature extracted from  $\mathbf{V}$  and  $\mathbf{F}$ . Thus  $U$  will be judged to be similar to those testimonies which have been observed true and those testimonies which have been observed false. These two similarity relations will be weighed up by the audience to decide which is the stronger. Thus, in defining a similarity relationship to the audience's experience of verified testimony these details allow the assessment of a testimony's credibility. It is as if we reasoned in terms of an abbreviated syllogism: this testimony is similar to testimony observed true, (it seems to be of the same type as  $\mathbf{V}$ ) therefore this testimony is probably true.

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<sup>56</sup> The proto-typicality of an object with respect to a class Tversky defines as a linear combination of the measures of the features of that object which are shared with the other members of that class and the features that are not shared with the other members of that class. A proto-type maximises proto-typicality. The state of empirical psychology in 1977 was such that Tversky could claim that "Research has demonstrated the importance of prototypicality or representativeness to perceptual learning, inductive inference, semantic memory, and the formation of categories." *Ibid.*, 347.

Certain weaknesses and strengths of this model are transparent. On the positive side the model accounts for how our reasons for believing testimony can be (1) contextual, (2) intuitive, (3) learnt and (4) justifying. On the negative side this model seems too oversimplified and it seems a hostage to fortune. Let me take the positive points first.

(1) Our reasons for believing testimony credible can be contextual because their ground can be the identification of certain contextual features *as evidence* for the credibility of the testimony. (2) The judgement of the credibility of a given testimony is intuitive because the audience need not occurrently remember any of the past occasions where similar features were identified. These occasions simply define the proto-type by means of which the present identification is effected. (3) Our ability to assess the credibility of testimony improves with experience: each newly verified or falsified testimony alters the sets of the relevant features, such as  $\phi$ , and thereby the proto-typical feature associated with each such set.<sup>57</sup> (4) Finally this model explains why such reasons justify the associated testimonial belief through grounding these reasons in the audience's own observations.

On the negative side this model is too oversimplified. Relations of similarity exist not simply amongst the testimonies in **V** and **F** but also between the testimonies of both classes. Thus whilst  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  might be in

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<sup>57</sup> An analogy suggests itself. On a Davidsonian theory of meaning, the meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of the words which compose it and the meaning of these words depends on what they contribute to the truth conditions (meaning) of all the sentences which contain them. See Foster (1976), 10. Similarly, the credibility of a testimony depends on the circumstantial features which individuate it and the relevance of each of these features depends on all the observed credible testimonies which contain them. On this analogy judging the credibility of testimony from its circumstances is analogous to understanding a sentence.

similar in point of  $\phi$ , so too might  $Fa$  and  $Vc$ . I presume that this similarity could be accommodated only if  $Fa$  and  $Fb$  emerged as *more similar than*  $Fa$  and  $Vc$ . Were this the case the proto-typical  $\phi$  could still be associated with  $F$  and thereby define a similarity relationship to this class when identified. However to explicate the ‘more similar than’ relationship reference would need to be made to the whole configurations of features which define  $Fa$ ,  $Fb$  and  $Vc$ , that is, to all members of  $Fa$ ,  $Fb$ , and  $Vc$ .<sup>58</sup> Thus the identification of those features which indicate credibility and non-credibility would be considerably more difficult than suggested. I shall leave this complication aside however, as it is not clear that insurmountable problems are posed.

The second negative point is that this model seems a hostage to fortune. This point is the more significant. Recent work in cognitive and developmental psychology has employed the idea that theory change is a model of cognitive development.<sup>59</sup> Our inductive inferences, even as young children, seem influenced more by causal notions than measures of similarity.<sup>60</sup> This seems to be because in forming concepts we act as if guided by theories about the essence of the corresponding entities.<sup>61</sup> If this is the case, and the ‘theory theory’ does have its objectors, then an alternative model of contextual reasons suggests itself. What follows is the crudest of sketches.

Audiences are sensitive to the circumstantial particulars of any

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<sup>58</sup> For details of how similarity increases with the addition of common features see Tversky (1977).

<sup>59</sup> See Gopnik and Meltzoff (1997).

<sup>60</sup> See Carey (1985), 136-9 and Gelman and Wellman (1986).

<sup>61</sup> See Medin and Ortony (1989).

given testimony, as noted. But these particulars do not allow a direct judgement of the credibility of the testimony. Rather on the basis of these particulars speakers are judged to have certain characters or 'natures'. That is, as Hume claims, we judge the speaker's 'nature' *qua* an individual.<sup>62</sup> Then on the basis of this judgement about the speaker's 'nature' the credibility of his testimony is inferred.

From the reductionist's perspective the problem of this alternative model of contextual reasons is two-fold. First, it seems that our tendency to infer essences leads our *social* judgements into error.<sup>63</sup> It is not clear that an assessment of the credibility of testimony is *not* a social judgement. Thus contextual reasons would, arguably, only be seeming reasons. Second, it seems that contextual reasons collapse into prior reason. A belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony would seem to be determined by the audience's prior beliefs as to the credibility of testimony from speakers with this character or 'nature'.<sup>64</sup>

However irrespective of changes in empirical psychological theories contextual particulars are clearly relevant to whether or not we accept testimony. And the reductionist could always retreat to the claim that

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<sup>62</sup> Thus Ross and Anderson (1982), 135, observe that when we explain another's actions we tend "too readily infer broad personal dispositions and expect consistency in behaviour or outcomes across widely disparate situations and contexts" and we tend to almost totally ignore situational pressures even though these tend to be the more significant. That is, we explain another's actions in terms of their 'individual nature' rather than their 'human nature'. And the conjunction of these tendencies leads us to make "fundamental" errors.

<sup>63</sup> See Nisbett and Ross (1980). However the tendency to act as if things had essences, also seems to be the cornerstone of the success of our inductively formed explanations of the *natural* world. See Kornblith (1993), 165.

<sup>64</sup> Were this the case, Hume *would* be forced to the prior reasons model and, in one sense, Coady vindicated.

our experience *is sufficient* to provide us with contextual reasons for judging the credibility of testimony, as the similarity-model shows, *even if in fact* our judgements are little more than demonstrations of our prejudices. Thus I shall continue to adopt, albeit with great hesitation, an epistemologically optimistic outlook. I shall presume that these contextual particulars provide further *positive reasons* for belief; I shall presume that not only could we articulate these reasons but that in fact we do so.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

There is an immeasurable diversity in our particular reasons for uttering. We communicate for many more reasons than transmitting information in our possession. These purposes can determine that it is rational to express something we believe false. Our desire, for instance, might be to make our audience laugh. Thus the reductionist is motivated to deny that the mere fact that a speaker intelligibly expressed a proposition provides a reason to believe this proposition.

Nonetheless we acquire knowledge through testimony. We could do so only if we possessed a reason to accept what another intelligibly expressed. The mere fact that another intelligibly expressed something does

not supply a reason for acceptance. Thus reductionism is motivated to claim that we can and do possess reasons to believe that a speaker's expressing a proposition is evidence that this proposition is true. A speaker's expression of a proposition can make it epistemically probable and as audiences we can judge when testimony is thus credible.

Our past experience of observing when testimony has been true and when it has been false supplies us with reasons for judging that a given testimony is credible. Our experience prior to encountering any given testimony has supplied us with generalisations about which types of testimony tend to express true propositions. And our perception of the contextual particulars of any given testimony allows us to formulate a judgement as to whether or not this testimony is credible. Thus our experience supplies us with reasons for believing testimony credible. Where a testimony expresses a t-proposition, a proposition that we have otherwise insufficient reason to believe, it is these reasons that support the testimonial belief we form through acceptance.

I take this reductionist epistemology of testimony to be well-motivated and plausible. In the next chapter I shall evaluate whether it is correct. I shall do so through considering whether it enables a response to the sceptical argument articulated against testimony.

## **REDUCTIONISM AS A RESPONSE TO SCEPTICISM OF TESTIMONY**

I have characterised reductionism in the epistemology of testimony in terms of a pair of theses, one negative and one positive. The negative thesis asserts that the mere fact that a speaker intelligibly expresses a proposition provides no reason to believe it: only the belief that the speaker's testimony was credible provides a reason for acceptance. The positive thesis is that an account of testimony as a source of knowledge can still be given: intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of testimonial belief because our experience provides us with reasons to believe that certain testimonies are credible. By contrast, scepticism of testimony implies that intelligible testimony cannot be a source of knowledge. The basis of this scepticism is the possibility that one could be the victim of a massive conspiracy whereby most people one encounters lie to one most of the time. The sceptical hypothesis is the supposition that this possibility is realised. This hypothesis implies the negative thesis of reductionism and allows a sceptical argument to the conclusion that the positive thesis is, at least, unjustifiable.

The issue between scepticism and reductionism focuses on the following claim.



(TR) Intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of belief.

If we are able to discriminate credible from non-credible testimony, and accordingly only accept credible testimony, then the testimonial beliefs we form through acceptance of testimony should be true. Intelligible testimony should be a reliable source of belief. Scepticism of testimony implies *either* that (TR) is false, and credible testimonies cannot be discriminated, *or* that (TR) cannot be justified, and there is no reason to believe that credible testimonies can be discriminated. The first of these implications follows from our inability to deny the sceptical argument. The second from our inability to justify denying the sceptical argument; that is, to deny the second-order sceptical conclusion. Reductionism implies both that (TR) is true and that it can be justified. Our experience allows the *justified* identification of which testimonies are credible. Reductionism denies scepticism *tout à fait*.

A reductive response to scepticism of testimony could then be given if a justification of (TR) can be mounted which is not defeated by the sceptical hypothesis. To employ scepticism methodologically is to claim that only if such a justification of (TR) can be mounted does reductionism provide an adequate account of the epistemology of testimony.

Again it may seem that this is a very stringent condition on the formation of epistemological theories. Our experience does undoubtedly provide us with reason to believe testimony yet it seems that many of the experiences we should take to provide reason to believe testimony should no longer do so were the sceptical possibility the case. The evidence our

experience provides should diminish rapidly given the sceptical hypothesis. However epistemological theories need not be purely descriptive and to employ scepticism methodologically is to focus first and foremost on our epistemic right to the deliverances of a source of knowledge. Undoubtedly our experience provides us with our ‘reasons’ for believing testimony but do these *justify* the testimonial beliefs we form? Or are these ‘reasons’ no more than the *causes* of our testimonial beliefs? If our experience could justify our testimonial beliefs in the face of the sceptical possibility, then the answer to this last question should be, ‘No’.<sup>1</sup>

How, then, should reductionism justify (TR)? As I have presented it, reductionism claims that we possess two kinds of reason for believing a testimony to be credible. We possess prior reasons and we possess contextual reasons. Credible testimonies reliably express true propositions. Thus two arguments seem available to justify (TR). Respectively these are:

- (JP). (1) If *a* can judge type *x* testimony credible, then *a* can judge which types of testimony are credible.
- (2) If *a* can judge which types of testimony are credible, then intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of testimonial belief.
- (3) *a* can judge type *x* testimony credible. This is demonstrated by the possibility of the following argument:

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<sup>1</sup> Using scepticism as a method may seem stringent but, for the reductionist, it carries an emphasis on the normative-epistemological, rather than the descriptive-psychological, aspect of justification which allows the *reductive retreat*: even if our ‘reasons’ in fact amount to little more than causes, we have the *ability* to articulate reasons. Of course, were such a retreat needed, the reductionist would be left in an unsatisfactory position.

i) At  $t_1$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony type  $x$  and observed that  $p_1$ .

ii) At  $t_2$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_2$ , judged the testimony type  $x$  and observed that  $p_2$ .

....

Therefore (TR).

(JC). (1) If  $a$  can judge when a testimony is credible, then intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of testimonial belief.

(2)  $a$  can judge when a testimony is credible. This is demonstrated by the possibility of the following argument:

i) At  $t_1$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony credible and observed that  $p_1$ .

ii) At  $t_2$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_2$ , judged the testimony credible and observed that  $p_2$ .

....

Therefore (TR).

The task of this chapter is to consider if these justifications can be mounted. Crucially, this requires the consideration of whether the embedded arguments *are possible* given the sceptical hypothesis. In §4.1 I will consider the background to argument (JP). In §4.2 I will consider the background to argument (JC). I will show that both justifications depend

upon a certain assumption. In §4.3 I will consider whether the arguments (JP) and (JC) provide a means of refuting scepticism of testimony.

## **4.1. Prior Reasons and Acceptance Rules**

Behind the claim that we possess prior reasons for believing testimony credible is the thought that the *statistical syllogism* states a manner in which beliefs may be justified. We can justify our belief that this is a G by reasoning: most Fs are Gs; this is an F; therefore this should be a G. Suppose the correlation between type **x** testimony and the expression of true propositions has been observed to be high. The thought is that the conjunction, this testimony is type **x** and statistically type **x** testimony is probably true, then provides a reason to accept this testimony. The correlation established determines that it is statistically probable that this type **x** testimony expresses a true proposition and, therefore, this testimony makes the proposition it expresses epistemically probable. Thus our prior reasons for believing testimony credible depend upon certain claims about the relation between epistemic and statistical probability. How epistemic and statistical probability are related is stated by *acceptance rules*. Acceptance rules state when one is justified in believing something on the basis of statistical probability.

Acceptance rules are central to prior reasons in another way. In order to establish the statistical probability of type **x** testimony being true observations need to be made of the relative frequency of true propositions expressed by a sequence of type **x** testimony. Given the limited number of observations possible any observed relative frequency is compatible with a radically different relative frequency in a longer run of observations. What is required, therefore, is some principle stating that the relative frequency which has been observed justifies the belief that this frequency is the one which would obtain in a longer run of observations. Such a principle is an acceptance rule.

The purpose of this section is to show that an adequate acceptance rule presupposes a certain assumption about testimony. In §4.1.1 I shall introduce a simple acceptance rule. In §4.1.2 I shall state what is, I assume, an adequate acceptance rule. In §4.1.3 I shall state what this rule presumes with respect to our prior reasons for believing testimony credible.

#### *4.1.1. The Simple Rule*

How should statistical and epistemic probability be related? The simplest answer is to equate epistemic and statistical probability by means

of the statistical syllogism. This equation is stated by the acceptance rule:

(SR) The belief that  $p$  is justified if and only if it is statistically probable that  $p$ .

If degrees of justification and degrees of belief are introduced, this acceptance rule can be replaced by:

(SR<sub>J</sub>) The belief that  $p$  is justified to the degree that  $p$  is statistically probable.

(SR<sub>B</sub>) One ought to believe that  $p$  to the degree that  $p$  is statistically probable.

The thought behind (SR<sub>J</sub>) and (SR<sub>B</sub>) is that the epistemic probability of a proposition is the degree of belief which one rationally ought to have in accordance with statistics and the probability calculus. The probability calculus should capture facts about statistics and justification.<sup>2</sup> Let me call (SR) the *simple rule simpliciter* and (SR<sub>J</sub>) and (SR<sub>B</sub>), conjointly, the *proportional simple rule*.

Can reductionism operate with either the simple rule simpliciter or the proportional simple rule? The answer, I think, is that it can operate with neither without amendment. First I will raise a problem for the proportional

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<sup>2</sup> With respect to testimony, Hume claimed that the wise should weigh their judgement of testimony's credibility against their judgement of the likelihood of the testified fact being the case. See Hume (1777), §89, 110-3. Olin (1995) and Owen (1987) claim this balancing of evidence can be represented in terms of the probability calculus. Let  $e$  stand for the occurrence of an event and let  $T$  stand for the testimony that  $e$  occurred; then, Owen suggests,  
$$\text{prob.}(e/T) = [\text{prob.}(e) \times \text{prob.}(T/e)] \div [[\text{prob.}(e) \times \text{prob.}(T/e)] + [\text{prob.}(\neg e) \times \text{prob.}(e/\neg T)]]$$

simple rule and second a problem for the simple rule simpliciter.

#### THE PROPORTIONAL SIMPLE RULE AND HISTORICAL SCEPTICISM

John Locke explicitly advocated the proportional simple rule. “The grounds of probability ... as they are the Foundations on which we our Assent is built; so are they also the measure whereby its several degrees are, or ought to be, *regulated*.”<sup>3</sup> This rule, Locke argued, leads to historical scepticism. Despite acknowledging that “Assent is unavoidable” to testimony which concerns history (i.e. “that there is such a city in Italy as Rome: That about 1700 years ago, there lived in it a man called Julius Caesar”) his advocacy of the proportional simple rule meant “Truth itself force[d him] to say”:

That any Testimony, the further off it is from the original Truth, the less force and proof it has. The Being and Existence of the thing itself, is what I call the original Truth. A credible Man vouching his knowledge of it, is a good proof: But if another equally credible, do witness it from his Report, the Testimony is weaker; and a third that attests the Hear-say of an Hear-say, is yet less considerable. So that in traditional Truths, each remove weakens the force of the proof: And the more hands the Tradition has successively passed through, the less strength and evidence does it receive

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<sup>3</sup> Locke (1689), §4.16.1, 657.

from them.<sup>4</sup>

Locke claims that the evidential value of testimony decreases at each remove, along a chain of testimony, from the situation in the world which made it true.<sup>5</sup> Locke's argument could be expressed as follows. Consider the chain of testimony:

$$p \sim Aap \text{ -- } Bap \text{ -- } Cap \text{ -- } \dots \text{ -- } Zap \text{ -- } \dots$$

(Where  $p$  is the fact attested, Locke's original Truth, A, B, C, ..., Z, are the speakers in the chain of testimony, 'Aap' means 'speaker A attests that  $p$ ', ' $\sim$ ' is the source relation, for instance perception, and '--' the transmission relation.<sup>6</sup>) Suppose each member of the chain has ascertained that the previous member of the chain is 80% credible. That is, where ' $T_\alpha$ ' designates 'testimony by the previous member of the chain' and ' $\alpha$ ' refers to the previous member, each has ascertained that  $\text{prob.}(p/\alpha p \in T_\alpha) = 0.8$ .

Consider audience B. What probability should B assign the proposition that  $p$ ? In accordance with the statistical syllogism B should directly infer  $\text{PROB.}(p/Aap)$  from  $\text{prob.}(p/Aap \ p \in T_A) = 0.8$ . According to

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, §4.16.10, 663-4.

<sup>5</sup> This problem could be presented in information-theoretic terms. If we allow that speakers need be neither artless nor competent, then there is the possibility that things are not as they say. Thus associated with any testimony that things are a certain way there will be, in information-theoretic terms, a certain amount of *equivocation*, or, from the audience's perspective, a certain amount of *noise*. As we pass along the chain of testimony this equivocation accumulates so that eventually no information is received from the source. Dretske gets over this problem by claiming that an audience can acquire testimonial knowledge only if the speaker's testimony possesses *information content*. He then builds into the definition of information content the requirement that there be no equivocation. See Dretske (1981), 102-6. As such Dretske's conception of testimony fits those detailed in Ch. 5.

<sup>6</sup> This notation is taken from Coady (1992), 211.



the proportional simple rule  $\text{prob.}(p/\alpha a p \ p \in T_\alpha)$  should thereby determine both the degree to which B should believe that  $p$  and the degree to which B should be justified in believing that  $p$ . Thus B will 80% believe that  $p$ .

Now consider audience C. Unlike A, B only 80% believes that  $p$ . Let ' $x\text{B}\alpha(p)$ ' mean ' $\alpha$   $x\%$  believes that  $p$ '. Consequently C's statistical syllogism should incorporate an additional premise: C should infer  $\text{PROB.}(p/\text{B}ap)$  from  $\text{prob.}(p/\text{B}ap \ p \in T_B)$  and  $\text{prob.}(p/x\text{B}B(p))$ . I presume (1) that  $\text{prob.}(p/x\text{B}\alpha(p)) = x/100$ . And I presume (2) that a speaker believing that  $p$  and attesting that  $p$  are independent from one another. Are these presumptions reasonable? Given the background assumptions both are clearly reasonable: (1) states no more than  $(\text{SR}_B)$ ; and (2) is the claim is that there is no presumption of artlessness, a speaker expressing that  $p$  is one thing and a speaker believing that  $p$  another. This latter claim, I argued, constitutes an intuitive motivation for reductionism.<sup>7</sup> Given these presumptions C should infer that  $\text{PROB.}(p/\text{B}ap) = \text{prob.}(p/\text{B}ap \ p \in T_B) \propto \text{prob.}(p/x\text{B}B(p)) = 0.8 \propto 0.8 = 0.64$ . Thus C will 64% believe that  $p$ . In this manner by the time the twentieth testifier T is reached the probability that  $p$  is true should be less than 1%. Thus the proportional simple rule entails historical scepticism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> However (2) is defensible for reasons extrinsic to the reductionist project. If the probability of an inferred conclusion is not only a function of the probabilities of the premises but also depends on how these premises are related to one another, then for  $N$  unrelated premises at least  $2^{N-1}$  probability assignments would need to be made. Thus, Harman notes, "Given a modest 300 unrelated atomic propositions, more than  $10^{90}$  explicit assignments would be needed." Harman (1980), 155. Yet there are only an estimated  $10^{78}$  atoms in the observable universe.

<sup>8</sup> In presuming (2) my presentation follows Locke's. However suppose (2) is rescinded and C infers  $\text{PROB.}(p/\text{B}ap)$  from the more elaborate conditional probability  $\text{prob.}(p/[(\text{B}ap \ p \in T_B) \& (x\text{B}Bap)])$ . If this were supposed, then credibility could no longer

The simple rule *simpliciter* does not entail historical scepticism. Consider again audience C. C should only require the premise  $\text{prob.}(p/B \mid p \in T_B)$  because B believes *simpliciter*. Thus C should judge  $\text{PROB.}(p/B \mid p) = 0.8$  and likewise believe *simpliciter* that  $p$ .

#### THE SIMPLE RULE SIMPLICITER

Insofar as the proportional simple rule leads to historical scepticism, the simple rule *simpliciter* should be preferred by the reductionist.

The simple rule *simpliciter*, however, while adequate in most contexts visibly fails in others. Occasionally we are not justified in believing something even if it is statistically probable. We may, for example, believe that a high statistical probability does not state a feature of the world but states a feature of our observations. For instance it could be that as a type of speaker those ‘having a mellifluous voice’ might be observed to express true propositions nearly all the time. But this observation should not justify accepting the testimony of the next speaker

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be presumed constant. Rather just as the audience’s degree of belief should only be a proportion of the speaker’s degree of belief, namely that proportion determined by the extent to which the speaker was taken to be artful or incompetent, so too should the credibility of the audience’s testimony be a proportion of credibility of the speaker’s testimony. To be precise, it should be  $0.8^n$  where ‘n’ designates the number of testifiers separating the audience from the original fact that  $p$ . Thus historical scepticism follows from (1) alone. As (1) states the proportional simple rule, historical scepticism follows from this rule.

who has a mellifluous voice. The statistical generalisation seems simply a chance or accidental occurrence and our belief that this is so would render any direct inference unjustifiable. Thus sometimes we possess additional information which defeats our justification for making a direct inference. A case in point is the lottery paradox.

Suppose there is a fair lottery,  $L$ , with a million tickets and one prize. Prior to the lottery being drawn the probability of ticket  $n$  winning is  $1/1000000$  and the probability of *any* ticket *not* winning is  $999999/1000000$ ; that is,  $\text{prob.}(\neg w_{t_n}/t_n p \in L) = 0.999999$ . Thus if (SR) is accepted, one should clearly be justified in believing that ticket  $n$  will *not* win. From  $\text{prob.}(\neg w_{t_n}/t_n p \in L)$  and  $t_n p \in L$  (SR) licenses the inference to  $\text{PROB.}(\neg w_{t_n}/L)$ . In the same manner the belief of every ticket that it will not win should be justified. This contradicts the justified belief that some ticket will win. Thus (SR) implies that an explicitly contradictory set of propositions can be justifiably believed.<sup>9</sup>

How, then, could (SR) be modified so that it does not license *any* direct inference?

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<sup>9</sup> This paradox is owed to Kyburg Jnr. (1961).

#### 4.1.2. An Adequate Acceptance Rule

The key notion in defining an adequate acceptance rule, Pollock suggests, is *projectibility*.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of projectibility derives from Goodman's *New Riddle of Induction*.<sup>11</sup> Suppose it is believed that all F are G. Does this allow the prediction that the next F will be G? Goodman's riddle starts by defining a type a predicate with the form,  $[(G(x) \ \& \ \phi(x)) \ \vee \ (H(x) \ \& \ \neg\phi(x))]$  where  $\phi(x)$  has the extension of all the *examined* instances which confirm the hypothesis that 'all F are G' and  $\neg\phi(x)$  has the extension of all *unexamined* instances of this hypothesis. 'Grue' is such a predicate:  $x$  is grue at  $t$  iff ( $x$  is examined by  $T$  and  $x$  is green at  $t$ ) or ( $x$  is unexamined by  $T$  and  $x$  is blue at  $t$ ).<sup>12</sup> In short a thing is grue if it is green and examined or blue and unexamined. The hypothesis, 'all emeralds are green' is confirmed by the fact that every emerald that has been examined has been green; the hypothesis 'all emeralds are grue' equally so. These hypotheses carry different predictions: 'all emeralds are green' supports the direct inference that the next, *as yet unexamined*, emerald will be green, whilst 'all emeralds are grue' supports the inference that it will be grue and therefore blue. Thus if the appropriate predicate is chosen on the basis of these same

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<sup>10</sup> See Pollock (1990), Ch. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See Goodman (1955), Ch. 3 and 4.

<sup>12</sup> This definition is taken from Jackson (1975), 118.

observations *any prediction whatever* can be supported.<sup>13</sup>

To respond to this riddle some means is needed to distinguish *nomic* generalisations such as ‘all emeralds are green’ or ‘all copper conducts electricity’ from *accidental or gerrymandered* generalisations such as ‘all men are third sons’ or ‘all emeralds are grue’. The notion of projectibility marks this distinction. Nomic generalisations allow prediction because they refer to projectible properties such as ‘being copper’ and ‘conducting electricity’. Thus projectibility may be trivially defined: *G is projectible with respect to F if and only if believing that most Fs are Gs justifies, other things equal, believing that any F will be a G.*<sup>14</sup>

We know that most tickets in lottery L will not win. However, I claimed, this does not justify believing that this ticket will not win. Consequently it seems that ‘will not win’ is not projectible with respect to ‘is a ticket in lottery L’ and the notion of projectibility seems to be what is needed to modify the simple rule simpliciter: (SR) could be modified to give the following acceptance rule:

(AR) If F is projectible with respect to G, then, other things equal,  $\langle Gc \ \& \ \text{prob.}(F/G) > \frac{1}{2} \rangle$  justifies believing  $\langle Fc \rangle$ <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example Davidson (1966) defines the predicate “emerose” as applying to examined emeralds or unexamined roses. On the basis of observed green emeralds the hypothesis that “all emerose are grue” is confirmed and it can be predicted that the next rose examined will be blue.

<sup>14</sup> By ‘most’ I mean that the relative frequency of Fs which are G is greater than the relative frequency of Fs which are not Gs.

<sup>15</sup> This is pretty much taken straight from Pollock (1990), 85. This acceptance rule employs what might be called *The Minimal Conception of Justification*. Chisholm (1966), Ch. 3, distinguishes thirteen epistemic categories: [6] Certain; [5] Obvious; [4] Evident; [3] Beyond Reasonable Doubt; [2] Epistemically in the Clear; [1] Probable; [0] Counterbalanced; [-1] Probably False; [-2] In the Clear to Disbelieve; [-3] Reasonable to

Is this an adequate acceptance rule?

There is an alternative strategy for defusing the lottery paradox. Knowing that most tickets in L will not win does not justify believing that this ticket will not win. But it does it justify this belief *other things equal*. It is simply that this justification is defeated by the knowledge that one ticket must win.<sup>16</sup> However the trivial definition of projectibility contains a *ceteris paribus* clause. Thus it could be claimed that 'will not win' is projectible with respect to 'is a ticket in lottery L'. The motivation for (AR) would then seem misplaced. I do not think that this can be concluded; to say why I must return to the New Riddle of Induction.

Goodman's riddle may be succinctly posed as the question, how do we identify which predicates denote projectible properties? Let me focus this question by considering why 'is grue' is not projectible with respect to 'is an emerald'. Intuitively what is wrong with arguing from examined emeralds being green and hence grue to unexamined emeralds being grue and hence blue is that the emeralds which were examined were grue solely in virtue of being examined. Suppose all observed lobsters have been red. We should not predict that the next unboiled lobster will be red if we knew that the observed lobsters were red solely in virtue of being boiled. This intuition could be generalised: *F is projectible with respect to G only if there is no property H such that those Fs which are G are H and if they*

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Disbelieve; [-4] Evidently False; [-5] Obviously False; and [-6] Certainly False. Thus the Minimal Conception could be defined: a proposition is justified iff it belongs to an epistemic category  $> 0$ . If the audience is justified in believing that  $F_c$  provided  $\text{PROB.}(F_c) > 0.5$ , he is justified in believing  $F_c$  provided it is probable. As the probability is *epistemic*, I treat *probable* and *reasonable* as equivalent.

<sup>16</sup> This objection invokes the *principle of collective defeat*. See Pollock (1990), 81.

*had not been H they would not have been G.*<sup>17</sup> Now consider again the generalisation ‘Most tickets in lottery L will not win’. I claimed ‘will not win’ is not projectible with respect to ‘is a ticket in lottery L’. There is a reason for this claim: there is a property, ‘being a potentially winning ticket’, such that if those tickets which will not win had not been potentially winning tickets they would not have been tickets in lottery L.

(AR) is motivated; I assume that it is an adequate acceptance rule. This acceptance rule conceptually underpins the reductionist claim that we possess prior reasons for believing testimony credible. (AR) entails the need for certain presumptions. I consider these now.

#### *4.1.3. The Uniformity of Types of Testimony*

Suppose an audience observes that a relatively high frequency of true propositions is expressed by a sequence of type **x** testimony. (AR) has two consequences. (1) These observations justify the belief that type **x** testimony is credible *only if* ‘is probably true’ is projectible with respect to ‘is type **x** testimony’. And (2) these observations justify believing, other

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<sup>17</sup> The idea for such a counterfactual condition comes from Jackson (1975), 123-4, who also gives the lobster analogy, and Sainsbury (1988), 89.

things equal, instances of type  $x$  testimony *only if* 'is probably true' is projectible with respect to 'is type  $x$  testimony'.<sup>18</sup>

This is getting to the heart of the matter. We can articulate prior reasons for believing testimony credible *only if* 'is probably true' is projectible with respect to those types of testimony we identify. This entails certain presumptions. Types of testimony, I claimed, can be classified into five generic types. (1) Type of content; (2) type of speaker; (3) type of speaker and type of content; (4) named speaker; and (5) named speaker and type of content. To claim that the property of being probably true is projectible with respect to each of these generic types is to claim that the following presumptions hold for types (1) to (5) respectively.

- (a) If some speakers have been observed to express mostly true propositions when the propositions expressed possess a certain type of content, then, other things being equal, testimonies expressing this type of content should probably be true.
- (b) If some types of speaker have been observed to express mostly true propositions, then, other things being equal, testimonies from these types of speakers should probably be true.

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<sup>18</sup> (2) follows trivially from (1). However this implication may be illustrated. An audience could not reason, "testimony of type  $x$  is credible, testimony of type  $y$  is not, therefore let type  $z$  testimony be either testimony of type  $x$  or testimony of type  $y$ . A disjunction is at least as probable as one of its disjuncts, therefore type  $z$  testimony is credible. This testimony is type  $y$  therefore it is type  $z$  and credible." This direct inference should not justify believing the testimony because 'is true testimony' is not projectible with respect to 'is testimony of type  $z$ ': projectibility is not closed under disjunction. Thus (RDI) and (RSD), stated in §3.1.3, should be modified to incorporate a projectibility constraint: 'If  $F$  is projectible with respect to  $G$ , then ...', should be prefixed to each.



- (c) If some types of speaker have been observed to express mostly true propositions when the propositions expressed possess a certain type of content, then, other things being equal, testimonies from these types of speakers expressing these types of content should probably be true.
- (d) If a certain named speaker has been observed to express mostly true propositions, then, other things being equal, testimonies from this speaker should probably be true.
- (e) If a certain named speaker has been observed to express mostly true propositions when the propositions expressed possess a certain type of content, then, other things being equal, testimonies from this speaker expressing these types of content should probably be true.

In effect these presumptions state that the credibility of types of testimony can be presumed *uniform*. If any specific type of testimony is uniformly credible, all sub-type's will be uniformly credible. The generic types (1)-(5) are ranked in terms of their specificity, where '«' symbolises 'is a sub-type of': type (5) « type (3); type (3) « type (2) and type (1); and type (4) « type (2). Consequently: presumption (c) implies (e); presumptions (a) and (b) jointly imply (c); and presumption (b) implies (d).

This hierarchy amongst (a) to (e) is illustrated in my response to the argument for the collapse of liberal reductionism. (See §3.1.2.) Recall that the patient A justified accepting the orthopaedist S's statement that *p* by reliance upon the testimony of T. Let *q* be the t-proposition expressed by T's testimony and *t* the type A identifies T's testimony as belonging to. The

argument for collapse of liberal reductionism claimed A should individuate T's testimony as the narrow type  $t_N$  'T's judgements of the credibility of type s testimony'. Were this the case, reliance on T would not aid A's epistemic position. My response claimed A was justified in individuating T's testimony as the broader type  $t_B$ , 'judgements made by people like T of the credibility of testimony like type s', where this broader type can be specified as 'examiners' judgements of the credibility of an examinee's statements on an examined subject'. Thus A could reason, "I know that examiners tend to be good judges of the truth of examinee's statements on examined subjects so I can infer that T is a good judge of the credibility of S's statements on orthopaedics".

If 'T's testimony' is symbolised as  $T$  then the argument for the collapse of liberal reductionism claimed that A need establish  $\text{prob.}(q/T p \in t_N)$  whilst the response claimed that A could establish  $\text{prob.}(q/T p \in t_B)$  and then infer  $\text{prob.}(q/T p \in t_N)$  from  $\text{prob.}(q/T p \in t_B)$ . Such an inference from one indefinite probability to another indefinite probability Pollock calls *non-classical direct inference*, like ordinary or classical direct inference it is associated with the rule of subset defeat.<sup>19</sup> The rule of non-classical direct inference and the corresponding rule of subset defeat may be formulated as follows:

(RDI<sub>nc</sub>) If F is projectible with respect to G then  $\langle H \ll G \ \& \ \text{prob.}(Fx/x p \in G) = r \rangle$  is a prima facie reason for  $\langle \text{prob.}(Fx/x p \in H) = r \rangle$ .

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<sup>19</sup> See Pollock (1990), Ch. 4, §3-6. The following rules may be found on page 131.

(RSD<sub>nc</sub>) If F is projectible with respect to J then  $\langle H \ll J \ll G \ \& \ \text{prob.}(Fx/x$   
 $p \in J) \neq \text{prob.}(Fx/x \ p \in G) \rangle$  is an undercutting defeater for (RDI<sub>nc</sub>)

Insofar as **t<sub>N</sub>** is generic type (5) and **t<sub>B</sub>** generic type (3), **t<sub>N</sub>**  $\ll$  **t<sub>B</sub>** and (RDI<sub>nc</sub>) justifies A's inference. Nonetheless this inference should be defeated if there were a type **t<sub>X</sub>**, such that (i) **t<sub>N</sub>**  $\ll$  **t<sub>X</sub>**  $\ll$  **t<sub>B</sub>** and (ii)  $\text{prob.}(q/T \ p \in \mathbf{t}_X) \neq \text{prob.}(q/T \ p \in \mathbf{t}_B)$ . Thus the argument for the collapse of liberal reductionism may be posed as a dilemma: if **t<sub>B</sub>** is broad enough to allow A to make the needed observations then it is too broad for the presumption that there is no type **t<sub>X</sub>**. However in moving from **t<sub>N</sub>** to **t<sub>B</sub>** presumption (c) is evoked in place of presumption (e) and given (c) this dilemma is avoided. Let **t<sub>N</sub>** denote *any* type for which **t<sub>N</sub>**  $\ll$  **t<sub>B</sub>** holds. Given (c),  $\text{prob.}(q/T \ p \in \mathbf{t}_N) = \text{prob.}(q/T \ p \in \mathbf{t}_B)$ . Thus there is presumed to be no type **t<sub>X</sub>** and A's inference justifies reliance on T's testimony.

## THE CRUX OF THE REDUCTIONIST CONCEPTION OF PRIOR REASONS

Presumptions (a) to (e) underpin the reductionist project of articulating prior reasons for believing testimony credible. In effect these presumptions state that types of testimony are uniform in their expression of true propositions. Given the observation that type **x** testimony has expressed mostly true propositions an audience may presume that this observed frequency is *not* simply an accidental feature of his observations but that *all*

type **x** testimony, in particular as yet unobserved expressions of type **x** testimony, will equally express mostly true propositions. This is to say that the observation that type **x** testimony has expressed mostly true propositions allows the formulation of a nomic rather than merely statistical generalisation.

Consequently, insofar as presumptions (a) to (e) concern *all* testimony and presumptions (a) and (b) imply presumptions (c) to (e), the latter are superfluous. Thus presumptions (a) and (b) are the *foundations* of our prior reasons for believing testimony credible. These two presumptions maybe stated as one principle: *Humans are constituted in such a way that all tend to be credible when speaking on some topics and some tend to be credible in all topics they speak on.* I shall call this the *principle of the uniformity of testimony.*

The reductionist conception of prior reasons presumes that the ways in which testimony expresses true propositions are law-like. These ways can be identified by thinking of any testimony in terms of its type. It seems plausible that the ways in which testimony expresses true propositions are law-like because the ways in which propositions are justified are law-like. It is certainly plausible that we are all competent about some topics and some are competent in all they say.<sup>20</sup> But to claim that a speaker is competent is to claim that his artless expression of a proposition is evidence that it is true. It is evidence because the proposition expressed is

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<sup>20</sup> Thus Fricker (1994), 151, claims we are justified in assuming (not presuming) that people are competent about those subject matters “for which common-sense” tells us people tend to be right.

justified. With these thoughts the reductionist could support the principle of the uniformity of testimony. Insofar as it is these reasons which support the principle of the uniformity of testimony, the reductionist would be committed to thinking of artfulness as noise. It would then be hoped that this noise could be eliminated by of our knowledge of the systematic ways in which speakers are competent.

I must now consider our contextual reasons for believing testimony credible. These reasons, I hope to demonstrate, rest on a similar principle of uniformity. Once this has been shown I shall return to arguments (JP) and (JC) and the possibility of a reductive response to scepticism of testimony.

## **4.2. Contextual Reasons and Human Nature**

I claimed that both prior and contextual reasons provide *positive* reasons for believing testimony, both provide reasons for believing testimony credible. However insofar as prior reasons depend upon the principle of the uniformity of testimony, a different relation between prior and contextual reasons is suggested. The principle of the uniformity of testimony seems grounded in an appeal to the nature of competence. Artfulness should then be represented as epistemic noise. This seems to

suggest that contextual reasons do *not* provide another source of positive reasons for believing testimony but function to eliminate epistemic noise. I shall not pursue this suggestion because I desire to supply reductionism with the richest source of evidence possible and thus conceived contextual reasons would better complement an anti-reductive conception of the epistemology of testimony.

However, the aim of this section is to demonstrate that contextual reasons depend upon a certain assumption. And, I shall claim, contextual reasons depend upon this assumption *irrespective* of whether they supply positive reasons for thinking testimony credible or function only eliminate epistemic noise. Again I shall introduce this issue by turning to David Hume.

#### *4.2.1. The Evidence of Miracles*

Hume's remarks on testimony are primarily to be found in the section 'Of Miracles' in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Testimony, Hume contends, cannot support belief in the miraculous. To explain why this is the case I need to provide a sketch of Hume's concept of epistemic justification.

Hume divides knowledge into two categories: the *a priori*, or “demonstrative reasoning” and the empirical, or “moral reasoning, or that concerning matter of fact and existence”.<sup>21</sup> The criterion of justification for *a priori* knowledge is non-contradiction. As such matter of fact beliefs *cannot be a priori*;

whatever is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning *a priori*.<sup>22</sup>

That the sun will *not* rise tomorrow is no less intelligible than that it will and likewise implies no contradiction: neither claim is demonstratively certain nor can any matter of fact belief be.

This claim constitutes Hume’s scepticism with respect to causation (science). The causal relation holds between two distinct events such that the former necessitates the later. This connection cannot be supported by “demonstrative reasoning”: one can conceive of an effect beginning to exist separately of conceiving of a cause of the effects beginning to exist.

When we reason *a priori*, and consider merely any object or cause, as it appears to the mind, independent of all observation, it never could suggest to us the notion of any distinct object such as its effect; much less, show us the inseparable and inviolable connexion between them.<sup>23</sup>

Causes and effects are discovered only by *experience* which reveals no

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<sup>21</sup> Hume (1777), §30, 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, §30, 35.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, §27, 31.

more than the *constant conjunction* of what we take to be causes and what we take to be effects. The inference to a cause (or effect) cannot therefore be justified by reason for it depends upon the supposition that past conjunctions give good reason to presently infer a cause (or effect), this is to suppose that “*the course of nature continues always uniformly the same*”.<sup>24</sup> And this supposition cannot be supported by “demonstrative reason” because we can conceive of a change in the course of nature. Rather knowledge of matters of fact depends solely on experience and “all inferences from experience ... are effects of custom, not of reasoning”.<sup>25</sup>

“Custom” denotes our natural propensity to suppose the future resembles the past. Knowledge of matters of fact cannot be demonstratively certain but only probable. Probability ranges from a proof to a probability, properly so called. Experience provides a proof for a proposition where it has hitherto been uniform, for instance our belief that the sun will rise tomorrow. Experience makes a proposition probable when there is “an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other and [in which case experience] produce[s] a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority”.<sup>26</sup> In this manner our experience shows it probable that June will be hotter than April. Thus the criterion of justification for empirical knowledge is *constancy* of conjunction between the belief and its evidence.<sup>27</sup> The more constant the past conjunction of two events, “objects”, the greater the degree of

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<sup>24</sup> Hume (1740), §1.3.6, 89.

<sup>25</sup> Hume (1777), §36, 43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §87, 111.

<sup>27</sup> See Costa (1981) and Stanley (1935).



justification the present impression of one conjunct provides for inferring the existence of the other.

Testimonial beliefs are formed on the basis of causal reasoning. Testimony is an effect and we are justified in believing a t-proposition only if we are justified in believing that the states of affairs which the t-proposition represents were the cause of the testimony.

Thus we believe that CAESAR was kill'd in the senate house on the *ides* of *March*; and that because this fact is establish'd on the unanimous testimony of historians, ... and these ideas were either in the minds of such as were immediately present at that action ... or they were derived from the testimony of others, and that again from another testimony ... 'till we arrive at those who were eye-witnesses and spectators of the event. 'Tis obvious all this chain of argument or connexion of causes and effects, is at first founded on those characters or letters, which are seen or remember'd and without the authority either of the memory or senses our whole reasoning wou'd be chimerical and without foundation.<sup>28</sup>

Our justification for believing that the attested fact were the cause of testimony depends on the constancy of the past conjunctions we have observed between this type of testimony and the attested facts. Types of testimony, I claimed, are identified by our judgement of the nature of the testifier. "Our experience of the governing principles of human nature" allows us to "observe the veracity of testimony". We can judge of each testimony whether it is the type which possesses the attested fact as its

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<sup>28</sup> Hume (1777), §34, 83.

cause.<sup>29</sup>

Knowledge of matters of fact depends upon the supposition that nature is uniform. Testimonial knowledge depends on the correlative but *subordinate* supposition that *human nature is uniform*. Only given this supposition could our experience reveal the governing principles of human nature. It is for this reason that Hume claims,

we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.<sup>30</sup>

The qualifier “and make it a just foundation ...” is relevant, Hume continues:

I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony.<sup>31</sup>

Hume is aware that our knowledge of the laws of nature is imperfect and we ordinarily improve this knowledge through observing what we take to be

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<sup>29</sup> Thus the interpretation I offer of the previous passage differs notably from that offered by Anscombe (1973), 86. Let *p* refer to the proposition that Caesar was killed in the Senate House on the Ides of March. Anscombe interprets this passage normatively. We must infer the existence of a chain of testimony if we are to be justified in believing that *p*. She contests that we are more certain that *p* is true than we are that there is such a chain of testimony. Thus if our belief that *p* depends for its justification on an inference to there being such a chain of testimony, historical scepticism results. If this passage is interpreted part normatively and part descriptively, then historical scepticism does not result. We are justified in believing that *p* only if we judge that the testimony presenting that *p* is the kind that has the attested fact as its cause. Thus in believing that *p* we believe there is a chain of testimony connecting us to the original eye-witnesses.

<sup>30</sup> Hume (1777), §98, 127.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, §99, 127.

violations of these laws. However given the supposition that nature is uniform these falsifying observations simply prompt the formulation of more sophisticated laws which explain both old and new observations. Thus Hume supposes that testimony *could* establish that “from the first of January 1600, there was total darkness over the whole earth for eight days”.<sup>32</sup> It *could not* establish a miracle defined as “*a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity*”.<sup>33</sup> If a Deity violates a law of nature, it is not our knowledge of the uniformities of nature that is proved lacking but the supposition that nature is uniform that is defeated. Such a miracle would be needed to be the foundation of a system of religion but its occurrence could never be established by testimony because it implies defeat of the supposition that nature is uniform. Insofar as whatever epistemic force testimony possesses derives from the supposition that human nature is uniform it cannot endeavour to establish that nature, and *a fortiori* human nature, is not uniform. To believe a testimony as to the miraculous would be to tantamount to believing that one had no reason to believe testimony.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, §99, 127.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, §90 n. 1, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Root (1989) gives a similar interpretation of Hume. The key difference is my emphasis on the uniformity of *human* nature rather than simply nature. That there should be this emphasis is a consequence, I think, of Hume’s ‘theory’ of testimony.

#### *4.2.2. The Uniformity of Human Nature*

Assuming I have accurately presented his argument, the evidential support testimony provides a testimonial belief depends, for Hume, on the supposition that human nature is uniform. Consequently he argues that testimony cannot justify belief in divine miracles because such phenomena defeat the supposition that nature is uniform. This assumes that one cannot deny that nature is uniform and yet suppose that human nature is uniform. Though I am inclined to accept this assumption it could be denied. Couldn't one's faith in a speaker's 'human nature' be unshaken by his testimony? Couldn't this unshaken faith be reasonable?

My concern is the claim that the evidential support provided by testimony depends on supposing that human nature is uniform. Hume's conception of our reasons for believing testimony is similar to my conception of contextual reasons. Does this suggest that contextual reasons must depend on an analogous supposition?

Contextual reasons for believing testimony credible are reasons provided by the perception of the circumstantial features of the testimony. I gave the illustration of the tourist believing the passer-by's directions because she seemed friendly and well disposed towards him. The past observation of the truth and falsity of testimony, it is hoped, should allow the identification of certain features as evidence for or against the

credibility of newly encountered testimony. Suppose many verified testimonies were associated with feature  $\omega$ . If the circumstances of a newly encountered testimony were similarly associated with this detail, it should be judged similar, in this respect, to verified testimony. The perception of  $\omega$  should thereby provide evidence for the testimony's credibility. It should justify the audience believing the testimony to be credible and thereby justify accepting it.

Justification is truth-conducive. Thus the perception of  $\omega$  should support the belief that this newly encountered testimony is credible *only if* being probably true is projectible with respect to being associated with feature  $\omega$ . To claim this condition satisfied is to presume that if more verified than falsified testimonies have been observed to be associated with feature  $\omega$ , then most testimonies associated with  $\omega$  should be true. Suppose that the following set of proto-typical features has been extracted from those testimonies which have been verified,  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$ . The possession of any of these features by the circumstances of a testimony should be evidence that the proposition this testimony expresses is true *only if* the following presumptions holds:

- (a) If more verified than falsified testimonies have been observed to be associated with feature  $\alpha$ , then most testimonies associated with  $\alpha$  should be true.
- (b) If more verified than falsified testimonies have been observed to be associated with feature  $\beta$ , then most testimonies associated with  $\beta$  should be true.

- (c) If more verified than falsified testimonies have been observed to be associated with feature  $\chi$ , then most testimonies associated with  $\chi$  should be true.

.....

Obviously analogous presumptions should hold for those features extracted from falsified testimonies. All these presumptions rest on the thought that the contextual features which indicate the credibility of one speaker's testimony should indicate the credibility of all testimony; credible testimony is systematically associated with certain features and non-credible testimony likewise. Thus all these presumptions could be denoted by one generic principle. *Humans are uniform in the manner in which they reveal the credibility of their testimony.* This principle, after Hume, I shall call the *principle of the uniformity of human nature*. The principle of the uniformity of human nature is the crux of our contextual reasons for believing testimony credible.

### **4.3. Can Reductionism Provide a Response to Scepticism of Testimony?**

Testimony is certainly a source of knowledge. It would be so only if

we can be justified in accepting testimony. The issue is whether reductionism can account for our justification once it is claimed that the mere fact of a speaker intelligibly expressing something provides *no* reason to believe it. The issue is whether reductionism has any answer to scepticism of testimony. The matter of contention is the following.

(TR) Intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of belief.

A reductive response to scepticism of testimony could be given if and only if reductionism has the resources to enable a justification of (TR). The existence of prior and contextual reasons for believing testimony credible allows two arguments justifying (TR). I labelled these arguments (JP) and (JC) respectively. (See §4.0.)

Argument (JP) depends on the lemma that an audience *a* can judge type *x* testimony credible. This lemma is supported by the possibility of articulating premises of the form, ‘At  $t_1$  *a* received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony type *x* and observed that  $p_1$ ’. These premises support the conclusion that *a* can judge type *x* testimony credible only if the principle of the uniformity of testimony holds. It is this principle which grounds the presumption that ‘is probably true’ is projectible with respect to ‘is type *x* testimony’. Were this principle not to hold, *a* would possess no reason to believe that his observations of the truth of type *x* testimony were not merely accidentally fortuitous. Thus only if this principle holds can a lemma of argument (JP) be supported. Consequently argument (JP) can be employed to justify (TR) only if the principle of the uniformity of testimony holds.

Argument (JC) depends on the lemma that an audience  $a$  can judge when a testimony is credible. This lemma is supported by the possibility of articulating premises of the form, ‘At  $t_1$   $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony credible and observed that  $p_1$ ’. These premises support the conclusion that  $a$  can judge when testimony is credible only if the principle of the uniformity of human nature holds. It is this principle which grounds the presumption that ‘is probably true’ is projectible with respect to ‘the property of being identified by whatever contextual details allowed  $a$  to form the credibility judgement’. If this principle were not to hold,  $a$  should possess no reason to believe that his observation that  $p_1$  is the case were related to his judgement of the probable truth of the testimony expressing that  $p_1$  in any but an accidental manner. Thus only if this principle holds can a lemma of (JC) be supported. Consequently argument (JC) can be employed to justify (TR) only if the principle of the uniformity of human nature holds.

Consider (JP). We possess prior reasons for believing testimony credible. Thus we can articulate argument (JP) and justify (TR). Argument (JP) depends on the principle of the uniformity of testimony. How does this dependency affect the possibility of a reductive response to scepticism of testimony?

In the sceptical possible world where most people lie to  $a$  most of the time *ex hypothesi* one should *not* expect all to be credible when speaking on some topics and some to be credible on all topics. That is, the



principle of the uniformity of testimony would not hold.<sup>35</sup> The sceptical hypothesis is that the sceptical world is actual; the sceptical possibility that testimony is mostly lyes is realised. Thus argument (JP) cannot provide a refutation of scepticism of testimony: (JP) must presume, contrary to the sceptical hypothesis, that the sceptical possibility is not the cases in order to articulate a reason for believing scepticism false. In response to scepticism of testimony the reductionist conception of our prior reasons for believing testimony credible is simply question begging.

The principle of the uniformity of testimony is based on the thought that human epistemic competencies are law-like. This thought is surely plausible. However in order for a speaker's testimony to be credible the speaker need be not only competent but also artless. In the sceptical possible world speakers are by and large artful. Thus the fact that human epistemic competencies are law-like could support the claim that our ability to articulate prior reasons for believing certain testimonies to be credible *is* the ability to discriminate credible types of testimony *only if* there is a presumption of artlessness. The sceptical hypothesis requires supposing that the converse is the case. Give the sceptical hypothesis there must be a presumption of artfulness.

Thus our prior reasons for believing testimony credible *are*

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the sceptical possibility is implicitly defined with respect to an audience. The possibility is that most people lye *to me*. Most people could not lye to each otherwise there could be no conspiracy. How could others conspire *against me* if they lyed to each other most of the time? Thus it is implicitly presupposed that the audience's perspective, namely the perspective of the acquirer of testimonial beliefs, is the epistemic perspective from which a theory of testimony should be formulated. But see Ch. 7.

*undercut*. The reductionist can articulate (JP) and therefore deny first-order scepticism. But (JP) requires a principle which the sceptical hypothesis implies is false. Thus the sceptical hypothesis implies that we have no reason to believe that we possess prior reasons for believing certain testimonies to be credible.

What, then, of our contextual reasons for believing testimony credible? Is argument (JC) equally question-begging? It seems that it need not be. The availability of contextual reasons depends on there being a justifiable principle, the principle of the uniformity of human nature, which states that humans are uniform in the manner in which they reveal the credibility of their testimony. Doesn't this principle hold, that is, don't humans systematically reveal the credibility of their testimony because both human epistemic competencies *and* how humans reveal their lies are *law-like*? If this is the case, then contextual reasons for believing testimony credible draw on a richer source of evidence than our prior reasons for believing testimony credible. Further, if this is the case, the principle of the uniformity of human nature should still hold even in the sceptical possible world. There maybe a presumption of artfulness but the laws stating how lies reveal themselves imply that artlessness is still discriminable. Thus the sceptical presumption of artfulness should not undercut contextual reasons and argument (JC) should provide a non-question begging response to scepticism of testimony. However, if the sceptical hypothesis implies that reliance on the principle of the uniformity of human nature is unjustifiable for the reductionist, then argument (JC) goes the way of argument (JP).

I presume human epistemic competence law-like. The question is,

Are humans law-like in the revelation of their lies? In the next section I will argue that the intuitions which motivate reductionism also motivate a negative answer to this question. Reductionism, therefore, cannot provide a response to scepticism of testimony.

#### *4.3.1. The Motivation for Reductionism and the Parallel with Scepticism of Induction*

To clarify the place of the reductionist's motivations I should like to compare scepticism of testimony with scepticism of induction.

The comparison with scepticism of induction should be immediately visible. A reductionist epistemology of testimony claims that testimony is not a fundamental source of knowledge. In the fundamental case where a belief is formed through acceptance of testimony expressing a t-proposition, then the justification of the testimonial belief formed is *inductive* and can only be so. We observe certain regularities between testimony and truth and predict that these regularities will also pattern as yet unobserved testimony. Thus with respect to reductionism, scepticism of testimony is allied to general sceptical concerns about induction. That is, concerns about how past observations allow future predictions. However, it is questionable

whether these general concerns pose a particular problem for the reductionist project of grounding our testimonial knowledge in experience. No doubt the inductive judgement of whether any given testimony will be credible can be problematic but the general philosophical problems which plague inductive reasoning should be separated from any problems particular to the case of testimony.

The sceptical problem particular to the reductionist conception of testimony is rooted in the thought motivating reductionism, namely that there is no reason, short of experience, to think an utterance is true rather than false because there is no *a priori* reason to presume that speakers are artless: humans have the liberty not to express their beliefs *and* it can be rational that they do not do so. This thought implies a particular interpretation of the principle of the uniformity of human nature. The principle states that humans are uniform in the manner in which they reveal the credibility their testimony. This can be given two distinct interpretations: a *metaphysical*, and an *epistemological* interpretation. The former interprets the principle as stating that *there are laws governing how humans reveal the credibility of their testimony*. The latter interprets the principle as stating that *there are regularities in how humans reveal the credibility of their testimony*. Insofar as reductionism is motivated by the thought that there is no rational imperative constraining speakers to artlessness, it is motivated to deny that *necessarily* human are uniform in how they reveal the credibility of their testimony. Thus an epistemological interpretation of the principle of the uniformity of human testimony must be given.

Given this interpretation, what reason is there, available to the reductionist, for the principle of the uniformity of human nature? This principle was introduced in lieu of a set of presumptions of the form, 'If more verified than falsified testimonies have been observed to be associated with feature  $x$ , then most testimonies associated with  $x$  should be true', where the prototypical features,  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$ , extracted from verified testimony are the substituends of  $x$ . Thus in support of the principle, the reductionist could appeal to the conjunctive premise:

- (1) For all  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$  *observed*, if the speaker's testimony possesses this circumstantial feature, then it is credible.

Premise (1) supports the principle by demonstrating the regularities in how humans reveal the credibility of their testimony.

It may seem that this conjunctive premise renders the reductive response to scepticism of testimony epistemically circular. A response can be given *only if* the major lemma in argument (JC) is supported by premises of the form, 'At  $t_1$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony credible and observed that  $p_1$ '. These premises support this lemma *only if* the principle of the uniformity of human nature holds. How, then, can our observations of the form 'At  $t_1$ ,  $a$  received intelligible testimony that  $p_1$ , judged the testimony credible and observed that  $p_1$ ' support the principle of the uniformity of human nature? There is no problem here. These observations are not employed as evidence for this principle. Rather they supply the list of proto-typical features  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$  that allow (1) to be articulated. This conjunctive premise is then evidence

for the principle. The principle in turn determines that these observations can be used as premises in argument (JC) and a response to scepticism of testimony given.

The problem lies elsewhere. Given the sceptical hypothesis that testimony is mostly lies the problem is that there is every reason to think that the conjunctions observed between prototypical features  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$  and verified testimony are merely accidental. The reductionist needs to claim to have uncovered persisting regularities. In order to justify the principle his observations must support

- (2) For *all*  $\{\alpha, \beta, \chi, \dots\}$ , if the speaker's testimony possesses this circumstantial feature, then it is credible.

The observations made could support (2) only if there are *laws* governing how humans reveal the credibility of their testimony. But this is to assert the metaphysical interpretation of the principle of the uniformity of human nature. Thus, insofar as reductionism is motivated to deny the metaphysical interpretation of this principle, no response to scepticism of testimony can be made.

Argument (JC) fails as a response to scepticism of testimony. Whilst this failure is a consequence of the motivations unique to a reductionist epistemology of testimony, the manner in which these motivations render impossible a reductive response to scepticism of testimony seems to directly parallel the manner in which Hume is particularly vulnerable to scepticism of induction. That is, *insofar as* Hume takes there to be no necessity in nature, he is likewise compelled to give an epistemological

interpretation of the principle of the uniformity of nature. Thus he should recognise the sceptical possibility that all hitherto existing regularities could cease to exist. Faced with the hypothesis that this is possibility is realised he would, I suppose, be forced to conclude that our matter of fact beliefs are simply quite *instinctual*.<sup>36</sup>

It is this conclusion which confronts the reductionist in the epistemology of testimony. The circumstantial features of testimony which we have learnt to respond to, might, as a matter of instinct, prompt us towards credulity or scepticism but these dispositions do no more than demonstrate our prejudices. Credulity is a psychological disposition which in no way indicates that the belief thereby formed is justified.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON MOTIVATION

The supposition that the ways in which speakers reveal the credibility of their testimony are law-like is considerably less plausible than the supposition that human epistemic competencies law-like. We take it that people can be erratic, inconstant and capricious. And there is something quite intuitive about the thought that speakers have the liberty not to express their beliefs. This intuition, I claimed, constitutes one of the motivations for

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<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that if one claims that natural laws are not necessary laws, then scepticism of induction ensues. Bayesians would make this claim yet deny this consequence. Rather it is to say that if one makes this claim, one is vulnerable to scepticism of induction and that this vulnerability is marked on Hume's account of induction.

reductionism.

Reductionism is also motivated by an awareness that communication serves so many other purposes that the transmission of information. It is for this reason that the reductionist claims not only that humans have the liberty not to express their beliefs but that this liberty may be rationally exercised: this liberty is a rational liberty. This motivation, in stressing the expressive rather than the representative dimension of language, is rooted in, what could be called, *Romantic* intuitions.<sup>37</sup>

But then it seems reasonable to suppose that humans possess this rational liberty because they are language users. And it seems reasonable to suppose this freedom borne with the acquisition of language. Our *nature as humans*, McDowell suggests, is acquired with language.<sup>38</sup> If this is the case, then one may suppose facts about *understanding* testimony are epistemically significant. A consideration of what is implied by understanding, I suggested, can be one motivation for an anti-reductive epistemology of testimony.

Anti-reductionism is also motivated by an awareness of the simplicity with which communication can transmit information. According to McDowell the phenomenological claim that understanding speech consists of the perception of content will be central to any description of this simplicity. And this phenomenological claim, McDowell contends, is

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<sup>37</sup> I take this term and its sense from Taylor. See Taylor (1980; 1985).

<sup>38</sup> See McDowell (1994b), Ch. 4.



an insight of Romanticism.<sup>39</sup> Irrespective of whether this is so, it shall be seen that McDowell's epistemology of testimony draws on a radically different source of intuitions to reductionism.

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<sup>39</sup> McDowell (1994a), n. 8.

## THE TRANSMISSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE

There is a fire in a hotel lobby. The night-porter rushes upstairs shouting, “Fire! Fire!” The guests do not recognise the shouts as those of the night-porter: this isn’t the kind of hotel one spends more than one night in; the shouts could just as easily be those of some bum or crazy drunk. Nonetheless one might think the guests foolish to roll in their beds until the sirens arrive; after all their lives are potentially at risk. If the mere fact that something is intelligibly expressed by a speaker provides no reason to believe it, as reductionism contests, then, insofar as one thinks the guests foolish not to jump out of bed, this folly must be explained in expedient terms. It is not that they know there is a fire but that it is expedient for them to act as if they knew.

The two theories I want to consider in this chapter take the contrary view. The hotel guests know there is a fire. Or, to be precise, they possess the opportunity of knowing there is a fire if only they take on board the night-porter’s screams. The thought here is that in expressing his knowledge the night-porter is doing something epistemically significant: he is *testifying*. In testifying what the night-porter does is express his knowledge that there is a fire and gives the guests the opportunity of knowing there is a

fire. If they take this opportunity, the night-porter will have transmitted his knowledge, he will have made it *common* knowledge. The two theories I shall consider construe the epistemology of testimony in terms of acts of testifying. Let me call theories of this type *transmission theories*.

The claim that knowledge can be transmitted is compatible with a reductionist epistemology of testimony. Such an epistemology would allow that the hotel guests can know, as the porter knows, that there is a fire provided they possess a reason to believe that the night-porter's testimony is credible. Such a reason could be supplied by no more than the belief that it was the hotel's night-porter that was shouting; hotel porters, the guests might believe, tend to be credible on matters relating to their hotel. However, short of possessing such a reason, the guests could not acquire testimonial knowledge. By contrast transmission theories would contest that the night-porter's shouts were an act of testifying. The night-porter does not simply express a t-proposition he expresses knowledge; it is knowledge, therefore, that the guests possess the opportunity of acquiring. Thus transmission theories are not reductive. It is not just that knowledge can be transmitted, knowledge is essentially transmissible.

Transmission theories are anti-reductive. In certain circumstances, namely those where the speaker testifies, *the mere fact* that the speaker's testimony was intelligible provides an audience with the opportunity of acquiring knowledge. Nonetheless it maybe thought that this is insufficient for anti-reductionism. Insofar as communication serves so many purposes other than the transmission of information, the mere intelligibility of the speaker's testimony seems to imply no presumption that what the speaker is

doing is testifying, or, as I shall also say, that the speaker's testimony is a *testament*. However to claim that the audience's reasons for believing that a speaker *is* testifying are relevant to the epistemic status of his testimonial belief suggests a reductive epistemology. Transmission theories reject this claim: such reasons are not relevant to the epistemic status of the *knowledge* audiences can acquire from a testament. To make good this rejection, acts of testifying must be taken as epistemologically basic. All an audience requires is a sensitivity to when the testimony *is not* a testament; a sensitivity to when other things are not equal. This is the characteristic anti-reductionist claim.

The two theories I will consider in this chapter, §5.1 and §5.2 respectively, are those of Welbourne and McDowell. My consideration of Welbourne's theory of testimony shall be unfortunately cursory. Through outlining Welbourne's theory of testimony I hope to do no more than further situate transmission theories. This orientation seems necessary before embarking on the extensive explication needed to do justice to McDowell's complex epistemology. McDowell, it shall be seen, provides a cogent dismissal of scepticism of testimony. However in §5.3 I will argue that this dismissal of scepticism and (disjunctive) transmission theories in general are untenable.

## 5.1. Telling the Facts and Commoning Knowledge

“Knowledge”, Welbourne claims, “is essentially *commonable*. That is, by its very nature it can be made the common possession of two or more people by simple say-so.”<sup>1</sup> We can grasp that this is the nature of knowledge, not through attempting an analysis of the concept of knowledge, but through a consideration of the linguistic practices which knowledge dominates. In fact, “there is no more to understanding the concept of (factual) knowledge than understanding the linguistic practices which it dominates.”<sup>2</sup> When we look to these practices we find that our concept of knowledge dominates the practices of enquiry and telling the facts. We ask questions because we desire to *know* answers and what we *know* we can tell others.

Suppose a speaker utters ‘U’ and expressed that *p*. “In the know-context [this utterance] refer[s] to a fact, whereas in the belief-context [it] introduce[s] a proposition; the former context is factive and the latter non-factive.”<sup>3</sup> The know-context is the “language game of telling”, in this language game the speaker’s utterance provides “information as to the facts” where such facts are common public and objective. By contrast the believe-

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<sup>1</sup> Welbourne (1986), 1. My account of Welbourne’s theory of testimony derives from Welbourne (1979; 1981; 1986; and 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Welbourne (1994), 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 311. This claim was first made, as far as I know, by Vendler (1972), 89-119.

context is the “language game of opining and guessing”, in this language game the speaker’s utterance states his private attitude to a proposition.

Through its connection with these practices of enquiry and telling the facts knowledge emerges as “categorically different” to belief. If knowledge were not categorically different to belief, but some species of belief, for instance the justified and true, then one would not be able “to account for our strong intuitions about transmissibility”. Welbourne’s intuition is that “I can believe that you [the speaker who uttered ‘U’] believe that *p* without believing that *p* myself; I might think you were deluded, credulous or plain silly. On the other hand, it is plausible to say that I could not believe *that you know that p* and not think that I know it too.”<sup>4</sup>

When two people believe that *p*, there are two beliefs but when two people know that *p*, they *share the same knowledge*. A consideration of these ‘language games’ consequently shows that “knowledge is not primarily a property of individuals as such but only in so far as they are members of some actual or possible community.”<sup>5</sup> The sharing of the knowledge that *p* through telling that *p* as fact defines communicators as a *community of knowledge* where that *p* is commonly known. Within this community each can tell the fact *p* and to be able to do so *is* to know that *p*.<sup>6</sup>

Belief and knowledge are related only insofar as the practice of *commoning* knowledge requires belief in the speaker. If a speaker tells me

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<sup>4</sup> This and the last quote Welbourne (1994), 309.

<sup>5</sup> Welbourne (1986), 74-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

that *p*, I must *believe him* in order to acquire the knowledge that *p* and this is *all* I need do.

*All* that is required of a listener who understands a knowledgeable teller if the knowledge is to be successfully transmitted to him is that he believe the teller.<sup>7</sup>

By this principle no matter how many times the boy cried wolf, were he to be speaking from knowledge, the villagers could know there was a wolf simply by believing the boy. Of course, the villagers would be irresponsible if they were to believe the boy, but his utterance, were he speaking from knowledge, would, nevertheless, provide them with an opportunity for knowing.

In order to transmit his knowledge the speaker must perform an act that “is of the knowledge imparting type”. And “Telling (indicative, not imperative, telling) is *par excellence* the speech act for imparting knowledge.” The “basic process (Adam directly telling Eve what he found)” by means of which knowledge is *commoned* runs,

A sincere speaker, knowing that *p* and speaking from that knowledge, utters an indicative sentence - “*p*”. The hearer, being hitherto ignorant that *p*, understands and believes the speaker. The outcome is that the hearer as well as the speaker now knows that *p*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. This principle describes the “primitive act of commoning knowledge”. One respect in which Welbourne’s, otherwise very similar, theory differs from Vendler’s is the latter rejects this principle: once the audience understands the speaker he knows, though he still may not believe. For evidence Vendler cites such phrases as: “What do you mean you do not know, how can you not know when I just told you.” Vendler (1979), 232.

<sup>8</sup> This and last two quotes Welbourne (1994), 302-3.

This is the epistemologically basic case: a speaker sincerely expressing his knowledge. “Insincerity corrupts”.<sup>9</sup>

In order to acquire a speaker’s knowledge all an audience need do is believe the speaker. The audience’s reasons for believing the speaker might well be reasons for believing that the speaker is knowledgeable and speaks from knowledge but the epistemic role of these reasons is not to justify the audience’s testimonial belief. The audience does not acquire a testimonial belief: he acquires knowledge. Thus these reasons function solely to put the audience in a position whereby he can take the opportunity of knowing provided by his comprehension of the speaker’s utterance.

## **5.2. McDowell’s Disjunctive Epistemology of Testimony**

McDowell, like Welbourne, gives a transmission theory of testimony. Confronted by an act of testifying, that is, by a speaker giving intelligible expression to his knowledge, an audience can be in a position to pick up, and thereby share, the speaker’s knowledge.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.



The idea of knowledge by testimony is that if a knower gives intelligible expression to his knowledge, he puts it into the public domain where it can be picked up by those who understand the expression.<sup>10</sup>

The audience need not articulate a justification in order to determine the testimonial belief acquired knowledge. When speakers testify it is *knowledge* that is expressed and knowledge that can be acquired; provided, that is, it would not be “doxastically irresponsible to believe the speaker”. It should be doxastically irresponsible to ignore signs of deceit or incompetence but an audience need do no more than be sensitive to such signs to possess the opportunity of acquiring knowledge. The audience need do no more because

language is essentially communicative - ... speaking and understanding are primarily the issuing and reception of communication ... [and] communication is the sharing of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Thus “when the communicative process functions properly” an audience will acquire the knowledge which a speaker has expressed.

Further, McDowell claims to provide a justification for refusing to bother with sceptical challenges. Scepticism, in his view, “looks urgent only in the context of a visibly dubious assumption, which imposes a certain shape on the space of epistemological possibilities”. This assumption is rejected by McDowell’s disjunctive epistemology. Thus insofar as McDowell’s transmission theory of testimony is a direct extension of this

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<sup>10</sup> McDowell (1994a), 212.

<sup>11</sup> These are two quotes joined by [and] McDowell (1980), 124 and 127.

disjunctive epistemological framework, which it is, it seems plausible to hope for a response to scepticism of testimony.

I shall proceed as follows. In §5.2.1 I will outline McDowell's disjunctive epistemology. I shall focus on the epistemology of perception as it is with respect to perception that McDowell has most frequently articulated his epistemological framework. In §5.2.2 I will apply this framework to the epistemology of testimony. In §5.2.3 I will outline McDowell's justification for refusing to bother with sceptical challenges. And in §5.2.4 I will apply this argument to the epistemology of testimony and the sceptical argument given.

### *5.2.1. The Disjunctive Conception of Knowledge*

In presenting his disjunctive conception of knowledge McDowell employs the traditional conjunctive conception as a foil. Knowledge, on this conception, is justified true belief and therefore a metaphysical hybrid of mental states, a belief and its justification, and a mind-independent condition of the world, whatever determines the truth of what is believed. McDowell's foil is thereby any epistemology which decomposes knowledge into justified true belief such that, "a satisfactory standing in the

space of reasons is only one part of what knowledge is; truth is an extra requirement.”<sup>12</sup> Such epistemologies McDowell labels *hybrid*.<sup>13</sup> Insofar as the justification of a belief should not only articulate the subject’s reasons for believing but should also consider the reliability of the process by which the belief was formed, all traditional internalist epistemologies *and* any epistemology which is a composite of internalism and externalism is hybrid in this sense.<sup>14</sup>

McDowell’s attack on the hybrid conception of knowledge could be considered as two pronged. The first prong consists of the claim that hybrid epistemologies lead to scepticism. McDowell employs an Argument from Illusion to make this claim. The second prong consists of accommodating those epistemological intuitions which are ordinarily taken to support the hybrid conception *and* which are ordinarily drawn from the same Argument from Illusion.

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<sup>12</sup> McDowell (1995), 884.

<sup>13</sup> McDowell (1994a) used the term ‘hybrid’ to refer to those epistemologies which were a composite of internalism and externalism. I follow McDowell (1995) in reading ‘hybrid’ metaphysically rather than epistemologically.

<sup>14</sup> This, McDowell (1995), 880, plausibly claims, is a “critical function of reason”. McDowell dismisses “full-blown externalist approaches”, stating “we do not attribute knowledge to properly functioning thermometers.” *Ibid.*, 882.

## THE ARGUMENT FROM ILLUSION

There need be no distinguishable difference for a subject between his knowing that something is the case and his falsely believing that it is. Whenever such a situation arises, that is, whenever two different states are indistinguishable, an Argument from Illusion can be employed to establish, what might be called, a conjunctive thesis. Such theses explain the difference between the states as the result of one state being the conjunction of two independent elements: an element which is common to both, hence their indistinguishability, and a further something.<sup>15</sup> Thus an Argument from Illusion seems to support the hybrid conception of knowledge. If a subject cannot distinguish whether his mental state is one of knowing or falsely believing, then knowledge must be a conjunction of belief plus, at least, truth. For the subject's mental state to be one of knowing, it should be the case that "truth is an extra requirement". McDowell's contention is that, contrary to establishing the hybrid conception, the Argument from Illusion demonstrates that this conception leads straight to scepticism.

The hybrid conception of knowledge "structures epistemology around the Argument from Illusion", epistemology is thereby structured, McDowell claims, in the following manner.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Dancy (1995).

<sup>16</sup> McDowell (1995), 880.

- (P1) “One’s epistemic standing on some question cannot intelligibly be constituted, even in part, by matters blankly external to how it is with one subjectively.”<sup>17</sup>
- (P2) How things are subjectively during perception can be the same as how things are subjectively during hallucination: “the way things look can be deceptive: it can look to one exactly as if things were a certain way when they are not”.<sup>18</sup>
- (C3) Therefore one’s epistemic standing on the question of whether the world is a certain way can be no better during perception than during hallucination.
- (P4) During hallucination “what is embraced within the scope of experience is an appearance that such and such is the case, falling short of the fact: a *mere* appearance.”<sup>19</sup>
- (C5) Therefore during perception one’s epistemic standing on the question of whether the world is a certain way can be no better than this; “what is embraced within the scope of experience is [similarly] an appearance that such and such is the case, falling short of the fact: a *mere* appearance.”

This argument structures epistemology because it seems to suggest that the subject’s status as a knower must be constituted by a justification which starts from mere appearances. It suggests that “the true starting point in the space of reasons must be something common to the favourable and potentially misleading cases”.<sup>20</sup> Such a justification would be non-question-begging: it should not employ the truth of what is believed as a justifying

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<sup>17</sup> McDowell (1982), 476.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>20</sup> McDowell (1995), 879.

premise, it would not refer to the world as seen, but would start from the world as it appears.

The problem is that knowledge is factive, if one knows that  $p$ , then  $p$  is the case, and seeing, like remembering or hearing from another, is a “way of getting to know how things are”. The locutions, “sees that ...”, “remembers that ...” and “hears another say that ...” are, correspondingly, all “epistemic and thereby factive”.<sup>21</sup> However the subject’s reasons for believing the world a certain way seem constant across deceptive and non-deceptive cases; this is (P2). Thus the Argument from Illusion seems to demonstrate that ‘being justified’ must be compatible with ‘being false’; this is (C3). If knowledge is factive, then truth must be added as “an extra requirement”. But, McDowell rhetorically asks,

How can a difference in respect of something conceived as cognitively inaccessible to both subjects, so far as the relevant mode of cognition goes, make it the case that one of them knows how things are in that inaccessible region while the other does not - rather than leaving them both, strictly speaking, ignorant on the matter?<sup>22</sup>

To claim that knowledge cannot depend upon “cognitively inaccessible” facts, or, similarly, “blankly external” facts, is to evoke internalist intuitions.<sup>23</sup> However *cognitive accessibility* is a term of art for McDowell. A fact is cognitively inaccessible to a subject if the subject’s mental state is

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 879.

<sup>22</sup> McDowell (1982), 460. This rhetorical question is also posed at McDowell (1994a), §7; and McDowell (1995), 884.

<sup>23</sup> That McDowell intends this is claimed by Robinson (1991), 69.

consistent with there being no fact; that is, if the subject could be in that mental state even if the fact did not obtain. In the deceptive case, when the world merely appears to be a certain way, the fact which is believed to obtain is *ex hypothesi* cognitively inaccessible: its obtaining is not necessary for the subject's mental state. But now it can be seen that the Argument from Illusion given is a sceptical argument because it concludes that even in the non-deceptive case the fact believed to obtain is cognitively inaccessible.

An Argument from Illusion is possible, "whenever appearances can be misleading, in such a way that the potential deception cannot be blamed on defects in how one has conducted oneself in the space of reasons."<sup>24</sup> Such misleading cases show that there is a logical gap between our thinking that the world is a certain way and the world being a certain way. This logical gap, McDowell contests, is a cognitive gap because it allows that the subject's mental state could be as it is even when the world is otherwise than it is taken to be; it allows that, at times, the world is cognitively inaccessible. The Argument from Illusion then asserts the world to be inaccessible at all times. Thus, on pain of scepticism, the following conditional principle must be accepted:

If we want to be able to suppose the title of a belief to count as knowledge is constituted by the believer's possession of an argument to its truth, then

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<sup>24</sup> McDowell (1995), 878.

it had better not be the case that the best argument he has at his disposal leaves it open that things are not as he believes them to be.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately the Argument from Illusion seems to demonstrate that this condition is unsatisfiable. Our justifications leave it open that things are not as they are believed to be.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the disjunctive conception of knowledge shows a way to accept this conditional principle and deny the sceptical force of the Argument from Illusion.

The disjunctive conception of knowledge avoids scepticism because it shows the Argument from Illusion to be inconclusive. It is inconclusive because (C3) does not follow from (P2) which is *only* a phenomenological claim; “what is given to experience in the two sorts of cases [is] the same *in so far as* it is an appearance that things are thus and so”.<sup>27</sup> This leaves it open that, “an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be *either* a mere appearance *or* the fact that such-and-such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone.”<sup>28</sup> *Only* a mere appearance would “fall short of the fact itself, in the sense of being consistent with there being no such fact”.<sup>29</sup> By contrast when a subject sees that such-and-such is the case,

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<sup>25</sup> McDowell (1994a), 200. McDowell claims, “this principle strikes me as obviously correct”. Similar principles can be found at: McDowell (1982), 458; McDowell (1981), n.29; and McDowell (1995), 880.

<sup>26</sup> Adding an externalist condition to justification does not resolve matters because even if the method of belief formation were completely reliable this fact should need to be known to the subject and this would require some “cognitive purchase on an objective fact”. McDowell (1995), 881. For instance establishing the reliability of perception would require premises of the form ‘at t1, a formed the beliefs that p1 and p1’. If facts in the world are cognitive inaccessible, as the Argument from Illusion concludes, there is no such purchase.

<sup>27</sup> McDowell (1982), 475.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.



when the fact that it is the case is made perceptually manifest, the fact seen is not cognitively inaccessible; that is, the subject's mental state is not consistent with the fact not being the case. Consequently (C3) does not follow from (P2). When the world is seen to be a certain way the subject's reason for believing that the world is that way does *not* 'leave it open that things are not the way he believes them to be'. Rather the subject's knowledge of his own mental state provides him with a deductive basis for inferring that the world is the way it appears.

There is a *single characterisation* that can be applied to the situations where the fact that *p* is made manifest *and* where that *p* is a mere appearance: in both situations it appears that *p*. However the disjunction of these states of affairs is mutually exclusive. In the deceptive case the subject believes falsely and his mental state is consistent with *not-p*. Whilst in the veridical case the subject knows and his mental state is *not* consistent with *not-p*. These cases are radically different: there is no *single state of affairs* common to both.<sup>30</sup> Thus knowledge cannot be analysed as justified true belief, it cannot be metaphysically hybrid.<sup>31</sup> When a fact is manifest to a subject, he might see that something is so, remember that it is or hear another state that it is, the subject is in a mental state necessary *and*

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<sup>30</sup> See Child (1994), 144.

<sup>31</sup> Williamson (1995), §VI, notes that one must distinguish between the claims (1) believing is a proper component in knowing and (2) when one knows one believes. McDowell's disjunctivism denies (2), thereby implying the denial of (1). Williamson denies (1), a position which could be labelled anti-conjunctivism, and this leaves (2) undetermined.

sufficient, in the non-technical sense of no more being needed, for knowing that the fact is so.<sup>32</sup>

#### EPISTEMIC INTERNALISM AND FALLIBILITY

This is the first prong of McDowell's attack on the hybrid conception of knowledge: rather than establish this conception the Argument from Illusion demonstrates that it leads to scepticism. This claim may not seem persuasive. The intuition marshalled by the Argument from Illusion seems to undercut the disjunctivism McDowell offers in place of the hybrid conception. This intuition being that insofar as the two disjuncts are subjectively indistinguishable, the situations described by these disjuncts are not merely phenomenally equivalent, they are also *epistemically equivalent*. To the extent that this intuition is held, McDowell's disjunctivism is undercut.<sup>33</sup> Thus the second prong of McDowell's attack on the hybrid conception consists of the attempt to redirect this intuition about epistemic equivalence.

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<sup>32</sup> Three further points about McDowell's disjunctive conception of knowledge should be noted. (1) It makes knowledge *indefeasible*; this is to say that if a subject knows that *p*, no further information could undermine the subject's knowledge. On the hybrid conception knowledge is defeasible because justifications are. (2) It makes knowledge *infallible*; this is to say that the subject could not be in the state characterised as his knowing that *p*, were that *p* not the case. Infallibility entails, but is not entailed by, factiveness. (3) It requires a commitment to a particular externalist conception of mental states. Only if the identity of a mental state is dependent on the particular *objects* it concerns would its possessing the identity it does be inconsistent with the non-existence of these objects.

<sup>33</sup> This claim is made by Sturgeon (1997a), 51-2.

There are two entwined issues. There is the question of how our reasons, for taking things to be as they seem, are related to our status as knowers. And there is the question of how the fallibility of our ways of getting to know is to be understood.

Knowledge, on the hybrid conception, is justified true belief. Internalist intuitions demand that a justification articulates a subject's reasons for believing. In order to do this, justifications must be available to the subject and cannot refer to facts which the subject has no reason to believe obtain. Thus, it is argued, the two cases described in the Argument from Illusion are epistemically equivalent. Further, insofar as both subjects possess the same reasons for believing that the world is a certain way, both should certainly be epistemically blameless in believing that the world is the way it seems to be, our justifications cannot be truth entailing. Our reasons for believing that the world is a certain way can only be *prima facie* and our justifications can only be *defeasible*. It is the defeasibility of our justifications which the hybrid conception then offers as an explanation of the fallibility of our ways of getting to know.

McDowell's disjunctivism accommodates these claims by, respectively, suggesting a different manner in which our reasons are relevant to our knowing something and giving a new role to fallibility. I consider fallibility first.

McDowell gives a new role to fallibility: simply put, the acceptance of the deliverances of some source of knowledge is *risky*. For some such way of getting to know, suppose that *p* is taken to be the case because it

seems to be the case and there is no reason to believe things are not as they seem. Nonetheless it might not be the case that  $p$ ; our ways of acquiring and retaining knowledge are fallible. This fallibility does not suggest, McDowell claims, that  $p$  seeming to be the case only provides defeasible reasons for thinking that it is. Our justification for taking things to be as they seem does not start from appearances, conceived as some 'highest common denominator' of what is presented in deceptive and non-deceptive cases. Rather our justifications start "from facts riskily accepted as such on the basis of [our] direct modes of cognitive contact with them."<sup>34</sup> Thus that  $p$  seeming to be case should be understood as either a mere appearance or a fact being made manifest and thereby providing either no reason for thinking that  $p$  is the case or a deductive reason for thinking that  $p$  is the case. In the latter situation the justification would be trivial taking the form, ' $p$  therefore  $p$ '.<sup>35</sup> We are fallible because we run epistemic risks in accepting that the world is as it seems when our reason could be either deductive or no reason at all. We are fallible because epistemic luck is ineliminable; "our powers of acquiring and retaining knowledge ... are at the mercy of factors that cannot be made subject to our rational control."<sup>36</sup>

However our justification for taking the world to be the way it seems does not seem trivial. Rather it seems relevant to the epistemic status of our taking of the world to be a certain way just as the hybrid epistemologist claims. Thus McDowell's second accommodation of our

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<sup>34</sup> McDowell (1995), 889.

<sup>35</sup> "One acquires ... knowledge by confrontation with appearances whose content is, or includes, the content of the knowledge acquired." McDowell (1982), 473.

<sup>36</sup> McDowell (1994a), 216.

intuitions concerning justification consists of suggesting a different manner in which such purportedly justifying reasons are relevant to our knowing something.

Seeing, remembering and hearing from another are ‘ways of getting to know’. By means of seeing that the world is a certain way one is in a position to know that the world is this way. However one needs be sensitive to when experience yields manifest facts and when mere appearances. Sometimes one can possess reasons for not believing what, in fact, is seen. In such cases, “something which might otherwise be an opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge is [thereby] closed.”<sup>37</sup>

One’s status as a knower is undermined, even if things still are as one takes them to be, if one’s taking things to be that way is, as I put it, doxastically irresponsible.<sup>38</sup>

With this claim McDowell “is not suggesting that doxastic responsibility ensures that what one has is knowledge.” With respect to the deceptive cases employed by the Argument from Illusion “a maximally careful exercise of doxastic responsibility still leaves it open that the world may be playing one false.”<sup>39</sup> Knowledge does not leave this open. Doxastic responsibility does not provide a substitute for justification, which for McDowell is simply trivial, rather the notion of doxastic responsibility suggests another way in which reasons are relevant to knowledge: they are relevant to its *acquisition*.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>39</sup> This and the last quote *ibid.*, 208.

The ability to articulate justifying arguments is a sign of doxastic responsibility, such arguments exhibit the subject's sensitivity to when appearances are deceiving. However the epistemic role of these justifying arguments is not to determine a belief knowledge. Rather doxastic responsibility is necessary to the acquisition of knowledge: only if one is "rationally responsive to the bearing of how things look on the question of how things are" could one acquire knowledge.<sup>40</sup> The epistemic role of doxastic irresponsibility is, thereby, essentially negative: irresponsibility "closes" opportunities of knowing. "One does not count as seeing something, ... if one's taking it that that is how things are is doxastically irresponsible."<sup>41</sup>

*One does not count as seeing* if one is doxastically irresponsible. Suppose two cases, in both the subject 'sees' the world to be a certain way, that is, the way the world appears results, in the characteristic manner of seeing, from the way the world is, and in both cases the world is taken to be the way it appears. The two cases differ in that in one the subject is doxastically irresponsible in taking the world to be the way it appears. How, then, does this irresponsible subject "not count as seeing"?

McDowell's claim is *not* that the doxastically responsible subject does not in fact see. This claim would require supposing that doxastic responsibility is somehow necessary to the possession of the *ability* to see. Were this the case the two subjects would only seem to be in the same state;

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, n.24.

in fact the two states which result from 'seeing' would be disjoint resulting from two different abilities. However the ability to see, like the ability to hear from another, are capacities which are "as it were, pre-factive: that states which result from them, once they are taken into the space of reasons, are going to be factive is in the nature of the capacities even as pre-rationally exercised."<sup>42</sup> The ability to see is part of our animal inheritance; the two subjects do not differ at this point. Rather, McDowell's claim concerns seeing as 'a way of getting to know'. The two subjects differ, not in terms of their 'seeing' but in terms of whether they know what they see to be case. The doxastically irresponsible subject cannot acquire knowledge because of the irresponsibility involved in accepting what he sees to be the case; the claim that the world is as seen does not stand justified in the space of reasons. Seeing is not a 'way of getting to know' and the subject thereby does not 'count as seeing'. Thus, "the epistemological role of the rational sensitivities that I have summed up under the head of doxastic responsibility is to cash out the idea of taking cognitive capacities in the space of reasons. ... Factiveness then takes care of itself."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-10.

### 5.2.2. *The Disjunctive Conception of Testimony*

Let me summarise what I have said about disjunctivism with reference to the epistemology of testimony.

The acquisition of knowledge by means of testimony must be understood in disjunctive terms. The epistemology of testimony should not be structured by the Argument from Illusion: the knowledge the audience acquires cannot be accorded that title on the basis of an argument from the speaker's saying what he did to the truth of what the speaker said. The premises sufficient for an adequate argument are not available to the audience and the premises which are available are insufficient. Consider a tourist in a strange city who acquires knowledge of the whereabouts of the city's only cathedral by asking a passer-by. The tourist cannot know that the passer-by is sincere and competent; "it is always possible for a human being to act capriciously ... however favourable the case". But the belief that the passer-by is sincere and competent only provides defeasible support for what the tourist knows and, therefore, cannot account for the tourist's knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

An audience can acquire knowledge, in the favourable cases, through simply accepting what the speaker tells him. Obviously in acquiring

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<sup>44</sup> This argument is found at *ibid.*, 198-9.



the knowledge that things are a certain way the audience does not experience things to be the way he comes to know they are; the audience possesses no perceptual access to the fact known. But in testifying that  $p$  the knowledgeable speaker makes the fact that  $p$  manifest to the audience who likewise can know that  $p$ .<sup>45</sup>

If testimony is to provide an audience with the epistemic opportunity of acquiring knowledge, the audience must be doxastically responsible: the audience who knew the boy who cried wolf could not acquire knowledge from the boy's utterance of "Wolf", even if the boy were expressing knowledge.<sup>46</sup> Thus the audience must be rationally sensitive to whether the speaker was testifying or not. The audience could be epistemically blameless and yet mistake the speaker's intentions and misjudge his act or he could be deceived: there is an ineliminable element of luck in the acquisition of knowledge by means of testimony. However the audience's sensitivity to the delicacies of the communication of knowledge does not determine whether or not he acquires knowledge; this sensitivity functions solely to entitle him to accept what appears to be a testament as such. That is, it entitles him to be credulous. In the favourable case where the speaker is testifying, credulity provides the audience with the epistemic opportunity of knowing what the speaker tells him.

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<sup>45</sup> This dovetails with McDowell's claim that in understanding language sounds *are perceived as* sayings that such and such. See McDowell (1977), 167; and McDowell (1981), 241. That is the content of a speaker's utterance is made perceptually manifest in comprehension.

<sup>46</sup> "Consider the story of the boy who cried 'Wolf'. After a long series of frivolous cries, those who knew the boy were rendered unable to derive knowledge of the presence of a wolf from him, even on an occasion when his cry really was an expression of knowledge; it would have been doxastically irresponsible for them to take his word for it". McDowell (1994a), 211. Contrast Welbourne.

### *5.2.3. Scepticism and Our Entitlement to Acceptance*

The assumption purportedly established by the Argument from Illusion is that one's status as a knower must be constituted by a justification which starts from appearances. This assumption places a "veil of appearances" between the thinker and the world. Once this veil is in place, McDowell contests, the epistemological consequence is scepticism. Further, "scepticism looks urgent *only* in the context of [this] visibly dubious assumption." Thus once a disjunctive conception of knowledge is adopted one possesses "a justification of a refusal to bother with [sceptical challenges]."<sup>47</sup>

This justification does not amount to an *answer* to sceptical challenges. But this is only because, in the case of scepticism of perception, a sceptical challenge

*requires* that the epistemic status of the thought that one is not dreaming must be established independently of the epistemic status of whatever perceptual knowledge of the environment is in question.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This and the previous quote McDowell (1995), n.19. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>48</sup> McDowell (1986), 148. My emphasis. What scepticism requires, it should be noted, is a moot issue. M. Williams (1991), for instance, argues at length that scepticism

Only our knowledge of appearances could be a candidate for being independent of our knowledge of the world: its candidacy being articulated by the Argument from Illusion. Thus to accept the sceptical challenge, in McDowell's view, is just to assume that our knowledge of appearances *is* independent of our knowledge of the world. And this is just to make the "visibly dubious" assumption of the last paragraph.

One is entitled to take one's apparent perceptions at face value. This is not an entitlement to accept appearances; appearances can seem to be deceptive, to be merely appearances. Rather it is an entitlement to accept what seems to be non-deceptive, what seems to be manifest fact. A sceptical argument for perception should conclude, conversely, that one is *not* entitled to take one's apparent perception at face value. However, such arguments do not look urgent to McDowell.

Only if the veil [of appearances] is supposed to be in place can it seem that one would need to establish ... that one is not dreaming *before* one can be entitled to take one's apparent perceptions at face value. Once the veil is lifted, things can be the other way round; one's good reason to believe that one is not dreaming can reside in all the knowledge of the environment that one's senses are yielding one - something that does not happen when one is dreaming.<sup>49</sup>

How could this argument be laid out? I suggest as follows:

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requires a certain relation of epistemic priority: knowledge of the world must be based on knowledge of our mental states. But McDowell could accept this relation of priority: our knowledge of our mental states, on his view, provides a deductive basis for our knowledge of the world.

<sup>49</sup> McDowell (1995), n.19.

- (P1) If one were not to possess any reason to believe one were not dreaming, then one would not be in a position to acquire perceptual knowledge of one's environment.<sup>50</sup>
- (P2) One would possess no reason to believe one were not dreaming only if the truth of what is apparently seen were cognitively inaccessible.
- (P3) The truth of what is apparently seen would be cognitively inaccessible only if "what is embraced within the scope of experience were a mere appearance". (That is, only if there were a veil of appearances between oneself and the world).
- (P4) What is apparently seen is either a mere appearance or a manifest fact: what is embraced within the scope of experience need not be a mere appearance. (That is, there is no veil).
- (C5) Therefore one does possess reason to believe one is not dreaming: "one's good reason to believe that one is not dreaming can reside in all the knowledge of the environment one's senses are yielding one".

This, I believe, is McDowell's justification for refusing to bother with sceptical challenges and, correlatively, his argument for an entitlement to accept what is apparently perceived.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This is the crux premise in sceptical arguments for perception; see Stroud (1984).

<sup>51</sup> When one is justified one's reason for thinking the world a certain way is truth entailing. Thus McDowell acknowledges neither the distinction between being justifiably believed and being true nor *the possibility of scepticism* which depends on this distinction. That McDowell then dismisses all sceptical arguments seems unsurprising. What might seem more surprising is his vehement claim that his position is not idealist; see McDowell (1994b), Ch. 2. Whether McDowell successfully rebuts the accusation of idealism is a difficult question; for the claim that he does not see Friedman (1996), 442-444.

#### 5.2.4. *Scepticism of Testimony*

McDowell, I believe, should articulate a structurally similar argument to that just given in response to scepticism of testimony. Hitherto I have been using the term 'lye' to mean an utterance which expresses a proposition the speaker does not believe. For the purpose of giving, what I take to be, McDowell's argument I shall use 'lye' to mean an utterance which does not express knowledge. McDowell's dismissal of scepticism of testimony should then run:

- (P1) If one were not to possess any reason to believe the speaker were not lying, then one would not be in a position to acquire testimonial knowledge of one's environment.
- (P2) One would possess no reason to believe that the speaker was not lying only if the truth of what is understood were cognitively inaccessible.
- (P3) The truth of what is understood would be cognitively inaccessible only if what is understood were merely the speaker's testimony. (That is, only if there were a veil of testimony between oneself *qua* audience and the world).
- (P4) What is understood is either a lye or a testament: what is understood need not be a lye. (That is, there is no veil).

(C5) Therefore one does possess reason to believe the speaker was not lying: one's good reason to believe that the speaker was not lying can reside in all the knowledge of the environment understanding yields.

If this argument were offered as a direct response to scepticism of testimony, it would be simply question-begging: acts of testifying have been defined as those which can provide an audience with the epistemic opportunity of acquiring testimonial knowledge.

However McDowell claims not to provide a response to sceptical challenges but a justification for dismissing them. This dismissal is nonetheless adequate as a response, on McDowell's view, because to accept a sceptical challenge is already to make a 'visibly dubious assumption'. McDowell's justification for dismissing sceptical challenges is then based on the fact that his disjunctive epistemology denies this assumption. The assumption in question is that thinkers are separated from the world by a 'veil of appearances'. McDowell's disjunctive epistemology denies there is a veil because it pictures "the inner and outer realms as interpenetrating".<sup>52</sup> And this is just to say that a subject could not have the thought he has when a fact is made manifest, were there no fact; were there no fact the subject would merely be under the illusion of entertaining this thought.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> McDowell (1986), 150. When a fact is made manifest, the particular constituents of the fact '*figure in* the subject's thought', *ibid.*, 146.

<sup>53</sup> Thus McDowell requires a particular externalist account of mental content. *World-dependence* may be distinguished from *object-dependence*. "The issue" between these varieties of externalism Child claims, "is whether we can give an adequate account of the content of an experience which ... does not *presuppose the existence and identity of the actual thing experienced*." Child (1994), 153, my emphasis. McDowell claims

Thus the contrast between the case where a fact is made manifest and that where a mere appearance is presented is at the centre of McDowell's dismissal of scepticism. It is upon the plausibility of contrasting these cases at the fundamental level, with what is common falling under a higher-level characterisation, that the tenability of this dismissal depends. And this fundamental contrast is sustained by a claim about what gives thought content.

In the case of testimony the place of it looking to the subject as if something is the case is taken by the subject understanding another to express that something is the case. This should be understood disjunctively as a either a case of understanding a testament or a case of understanding a lye where the latter is simply understanding any other communicative act.<sup>54</sup> Thus the argument just offered as a dismissal of scepticism of testimony rests, at (P4), upon the contrast between acts of testifying and other communicative acts. This contrast seems immediately implausible. Whilst 'acts of testifying' refers to distinctive states of affairs, those occasions where 'a knower gives intelligible expression to his knowledge, putting it in the public domain', the same cannot be said for 'other communicative acts'. 'Other communicative acts' are defined as a class purely through being potentially indistinguishable to the parallel cases of testaments. But if there is no further identifying characteristic of 'other communicative acts', then

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that we cannot. World-dependence externalists, for example Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979), would disagree.

<sup>54</sup> For the case put forward in the Argument from Illusion the lye considered must be indistinguishable from a parallel testament; it should most likely be a lie or a joke. But for the disjunctive theory a lye is any utterance which is not an expression of knowledge. See Dancy (1995), 435.

such acts cannot form a distinct class because testaments, by virtue of identity, are also indistinguishable from testaments. As such understanding, which seems clearly present *whatever* the communicative act, must be a ‘highest common denominator’ between acts of testifying and other communicative acts.<sup>55</sup>

With respect to the epistemology of testimony, at least, the sceptical challenge seems reasonable. We are frequently ‘sceptical’ of others. And even if the philosophical challenge were to rest, as McDowell would claim, on the parallel presumption that the audience’s knowledge of what it is that the speaker has expressed *is independent of* his knowledge that the world is as that speaker expressed it to be, this presumption seems reasonable.

Thus the ‘visibly dubious’ assumption whose denial justifies McDowell dismissing sceptical challenges does not seem dubious at all in the case of scepticism of testimony. If this is the case, shouldn’t one conclude that McDowell’s answer to scepticism of testimony is simply question-begging? Not yet. In parallel with perception McDowell sustains the fundamental contrast between acts of testifying and other communicative acts by a claim about what gives utterances content. I consider this claim in the next section.

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<sup>55</sup> See M.G.F. Martin (1997), §1.



### **5.3. Scepticism and Acts of Testifying**

To claim that understanding is a common element between acts of testifying and other communicative acts is not yet to claim that these two situations cannot be fundamentally contrasted. If communication were essentially knowledge transmitting, then the contrast could be generated: only acts of testifying would be *genuinely* communicative. That communication is so, McDowell claims, is revealed by consideration of the verb ‘to communicate’. Whilst communication occurs whenever the speaker, by means of his utterance, establishes the mutual awareness, between himself and his audience, that he has expressed that such and such, ‘communicate’, like ‘see’, is a factive verb. Consequently the concept of communication can be seen to apply at two levels:

At the first level, communication takes place ... only when information is actually transmitted about the topic of discourse. But at the second level, the information whose sharing is relevant to the question of whether communication is taking place concerns, not the topic of discourse, but the nature of the speaker’s intentions; and when a properly executed speech act is understood, such information is always transmitted.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

Only acts of testifying, it seems, are genuinely communicative.<sup>57</sup>

Should the factiveness of ‘communicate that’ imply this conclusion? If it is communication in general which is being considered, why not focus on ‘communicate with’? After all, communication, unlike seeing, essentially involves at least two subjects. Would we want to say that there is a sense in which a speaker *miscommunicates* with his audience if he makes a joke rather than expresses knowledge? To focus on ‘communicate that’ is already to presume that communication is fundamentally a matter of transmitting information about the topic of discourse.

At this juncture deep intuitions about the nature of communication are confronted; McDowell compares linguistic communication to the instinctive communicative behaviour of non-intentional creatures. This comparison grounds the thought that testifying is the proper function of communicating and yields a claim about how utterances come to have content. Insofar as acts of testifying are thereby given a fundamental explanatory role, the fundamental contrast between acts of testifying and all other communicative acts is sustained. I consider this comparison and the conclusions McDowell draws in §5.3.1. In §5.3.2 I will briefly reconsider the place of the Argument from Illusion.

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<sup>57</sup> McDowell pursues the analogy with perception: “the concept of misperception is, precisely, the concept of a defective exercise of a capacity whose non-defective exercises issue in knowledge”. McDowell (1980), 128.

### *5.3.1. Communication and Our Animal Inheritance*

A concept akin to knowledge-transmission, namely ‘information-transmission’, can be applied to non-intentional creatures. It can be applied to any non-intentional creature which possessed in their behavioural repertoire a propensity to visibly respond to certain features of the environment and a propensity to manifest a comparable reaction to the exhibition of such responses by other animals of the same species. For instance perception of danger or the perception of a behavioural response provoked by danger, such as squawking, might similarly prompt flight. For such primitive communication one can say that:

When the communicative process functions properly, sensory confrontation with a piece of communicative behaviour has the same impact on the cognitive state of a perceiver as sensory confrontation with the state of affairs which the behaviour, as we may say, represents; elements of the communicative repertoire serve as epistemic surrogates for the represented states of affairs.<sup>58</sup>

For such instinctive communicative behaviour an ‘utterance’ would only be *genuinely* communicative if it transmitted information. How is human linguistic communication different? The relevant difference, McDowell claims, “lies in the intentions which are overt in speech”.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

In successful linguistic exchange speaker and hearer are mutually aware of the speaker's intentions, in a way which could have no counterpart in merely instinctive responses to stimuli.<sup>59</sup>

The thought, then, is that the difference between human communication and the communicative behaviour of non-intentional creatures is essentially a second-order difference. At the first-order there is continuity and it is on the basis of this continuity that the analogy is drawn. The comparison then supports the claim that there are two levels of communication because the act of representing the world in its most basic instance is an act of transmitting information.

Thus it is plausible, McDowell claims, to suppose that the assertoric use of language is "a descendent, now under intentional control" of such pre-linguistic communication.<sup>60</sup> The supposition is that we have inherited, as individuals from exposure to the utterances of others in childhood, and as a species from our primordial past, the practice of using sounds to represent states of affairs. Consequently "the acquisition of linguistic competence by a contemporary human being may be expected to

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>60</sup> Is McDowell really offering a pseudo-empirical history of the origins of language? If he is, shouldn't other great speculators be considered? For example Durkheim's mythical history of human society and language located its origins in ecstatic gatherings which formed proto-rituals; see Durkheim (1912). From such an origin the essential purpose of language would arguably be invocative. Whilst Levi-Strauss's mythical history located the origins of human society and language in the exchange systems which developed with sister exchange; see Levi-Strauss (1949). From such an origin the essential purpose of language would arguably be the generation of intimacy or trust. In the face of such conflicting stories, shouldn't one agree with Davidson? "It would be good if we could say how language came into existence in the first place. These matters are, however, beyond the bounds of reasonable philosophical speculation." Davidson (1991), 157.

recapitulate, in some salient respects, the evolution of language from instinctive communicative behaviour.”<sup>61</sup> It seems that it does just this. “The utterances which [children] hear on the relevant occasions”, for instance “impinge on them with content, so to speak, in advance of being taken as expressive of belief.”<sup>62</sup> Children learn that things are thus and so long before they can question the sincerity or competence of their informers. A child’s response to an assertion is analogous to a bird’s response to a squawk: it will be “a matter of something like conditioned reflex.” As language is acquired it will dawn on the child that utterances are expressive of the speaker’s beliefs. *Only then* will it dawn on the child that speakers can be both insincere and incompetent.

Consider McDowell’s metaphysical claim, ‘it is only through being available for representing reality that utterances are available for representing their utterers’ beliefs’. This claim does not imply that other communicative acts can only be explained by reference to acts of testifying. The act of lying is an act of representing the world to be a certain way. If it is only the *availability* for representing the world that must be metaphysically prior, all that is established is that communication is essentially *capable of* transmitting knowledge. This conclusion does not make acts of testifying basic and does not, therefore, support the fundamental contrast between acts of testifying and other communicative acts.

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<sup>61</sup> McDowell (1980), 136.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

What needs to be claimed is that communication is essentially knowledge transmitting. The derivation of *this* claim about essence depends upon construing communication broadly to cover both linguistic *and* non-intentional communication. Were communication used this broadly it could be concluded that the fact that testimony can communicate anything at all depends, in the evolutionary first instance, on speech-like behaviour transmitting information. On this conclusion acts of testifying would possess the required explanatory centrality.

Linguistic and non-intentional communication, I should now like to contest, cannot be considered under the same rubric. (1) From the epistemological perspective there is a fundamental ‘first-level’ difference. And (2) the metaphysical significance of the ‘second-level’ difference is fundamental. I shall use other ideas advanced by McDowell to make these claims.

(1). Linguistic communication does not merely transmit information: it can transmit knowledge. Instinctive communicative behaviour cannot transmit knowledge because knowledge “is a certain sort of standing in the space of reasons.” One is initiated into the space of reasons only through acquiring language: “language, in initiating subjects into the space of reasons, puts them in possession of the world, which needs to be distinguished from the mere ability to live competently in a habitat.”<sup>63</sup> Instinctive communicative behaviour allows non-intentional creatures to live competently in an environment. There can be no doubt that McDowell’s

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<sup>63</sup> McDowell (1994a), 209.

birds would be less evolutionarily successful if they did not possess the behavioural disposition to flight in response to each others' squawks. However in responding to the squawk of another bird the responding bird could not be said to *know* there is a predator. But it is the acquisition of knowledge by means of testimony which needs to be explained. This knowledge is made available through *understanding* a speaker's testimony. In responding to the squawk of another bird the responding bird cannot be said to understand: the bird behaves instinctively.

On hearing another testify, what is known in understanding is how the world is. Elsewhere McDowell proposes that it is only by presupposing our knowledge of what it is to understand another that one can give an account of what is known in understanding.<sup>64</sup> Couldn't one therefore say that it is only by presupposing our knowledge of what it is to understand another that one can give an account of our testimonial knowledge of the world? If a perspective is taken which attempts to embrace both our linguistic behaviour and such instinctive communicative behaviour under the same rubric, then it seems that the "sense which, from our participant perspective, we see in our linguistic behaviour would be invisible."<sup>65</sup> The 'sense that is invisible' is all that is epistemologically significant: unlike us non-intentional creatures do not stand in the space of reasons; they are not 'in possession of their world'.

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<sup>64</sup> McDowell (1981).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

(2). Linguistic behaviour differs from instinctive communicative behaviour insofar as it is intentional. The ramifications of this claim are significantly greater than the implication that ‘in a successful linguistic exchange speaker and hearer are mutually aware of the speaker’s intentions’. I take the central metaphysical implication to be that a speaker does *not* instinctively respond to stimuli: he intentionally represents the world. Thus there is a fundamental metaphysical difference between the linguistic and the instinctual ‘practice of using sounds to represent states of affairs’. In the former case this practice is intentional and this intentionality gives the speaker the liberty to be expressive. Two sincere speakers who have seen the same event will not produce the same testimony as to the facts. And, of course, it is this liberty which allows speakers to be deceitful.

This liberty cannot be peeled away from communications to reveal an essential continuity with instinctive responses to stimuli, an epistemologically basic act of testifying. The liberty we manifest in thought is considerably less than that manifested in speech: self-deception is a sign of irrationality in a way that deceiving others is not. However with respect to our liberty in thought, what he calls our faculty of spontaneity, McDowell claims, “exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualising ourselves as animals”.<sup>66</sup> Thus one could equally regard the intentionality we exhibit in communicating as part of ‘our way of actualising ourselves as animals’ and, as such, one could not peel this liberty away: it is part of our

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<sup>66</sup> McDowell (1994b), 78.



‘second nature’. One might put this point, somewhat rhetorically: an initiation into the space of reasons is an initiation into the possibilities of expressiveness and deceit.

In short, it is plausible to regard acts of testifying as epistemologically basic only if linguistic communication is *essentially similar* to instinctive communicative behaviour. I think that the converse is true: linguistic communication is *essentially different* to instinctive communicative behaviour.<sup>67</sup> The acquisition of knowledge is possible only by linguistic communication, and when we focus solely on linguistic behaviour the metaphysical picture which comes into focus is fundamentally different to that of instinctive communicative behaviour. We find that in linguistic communication we do not respond instinctively to stimuli in the world but are free to represent the world as we find it. It is this freedom that is manifest in communication.

According to McDowell’s disjunctive epistemology of perception if one is having an experience, then it is rational to accept the content of that experience provided only that perception is fulfilling its rational function. The same could not be said for testimony. To make the same claim for testimony the rational function of communication must be the transmission of knowledge. This requires there to be a fundamental contrast between

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<sup>67</sup> Similarly A. Ross claims that primitive forms of communication should be compared not to linguistic communication but, rather, to “our unreflective responses to natural signs.” and McDowell’s analogy “fails to capture what is distinctive about our perception of acts of linguistic communication.” Ross (1986), 76. Thus, “Suppose we find a natural sign occurring in the absence of the phenomenon of which it is a sign, say smoke without fire, we may not be pleased to ... have been misled ... but criticism, at least of the smoke ... will be out of place. If someone speaks falsely, however, that *is* a matter for criticism.” *Ibid.*, 77.

sincere speakers expressing knowledge and all other communicative acts. There is no such contrast: in receiving testimony we confront what we understand another to express. This is the common denominator to all intelligible communications. Thus testimony is mediated by ‘appearances’ in a way that perception is not. This renders McDowell’s dismissal of scepticism of testimony merely question begging. As I am employing scepticism methodologically (disjunctive) transmission theories may be rejected.<sup>68</sup>

#### APPENDIX: DISJUNCTIVISM AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

To treat linguistic communication as similar in substance to primitive non-intentional communication and, as a consequence, equate in essence the epistemologies of perception and testimony is to miss what is fundamentally distinctive about testimony. Underlying this claim are certain intuitions about communication. Crucially there is the thought that *whether and how* an audience knows by testimony is determined by whether and how the speaker presents his knowledge. At play here are, what I termed

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<sup>68</sup> As characterised transmission theories are disjunctive; my criticism of them implies no defence of the hybrid conception of knowledge. In particular anti-conjunctivism is consistent with the view that ‘understanding the speaker’s utterance’ is a state of affairs common to the cases of testaments and lies. It is consistent with making reasons necessary to knowledge and with having a subject’s reasons, in the case of testimony, start from his understanding testimony. There has been no claim about these reasons sufficing for knowledge.

Romantic intuitions. If these intuitions are not shared, it may seem that I have not done enough to undermine McDowell's comparison. Thus in this appendix I shall attempt to buttress these intuitions by arguing that to apply McDowell's disjunctive epistemology to testimony is to get the phenomenology of testimony wrong.

Knowledge, McDowell claims, is not metaphysically hybrid. It cannot be factored into a combination of mental states and a mind-independent condition of the world. When something is known to be the case the subject's mental state "incorporates the relevant portions of the external world."<sup>69</sup> Thus "we have to take seriously the idea of an unmediated openness of the experiencing subject to 'external' reality."<sup>70</sup>

Suppose that a subject is attentively looking at some scene and, suffering no privation, clearly sees what is before him. In this position we can imagine a list of true demonstrative judgements the subject can make: *that* leaf is *that* green shade whereas *this* leaf is *this* green shade, *that* river is flowing in *that* direction and so on. In making each of these demonstrative judgements a fact is manifest to the subject. If the subject sees that  $\phi$  is F, then he can, at least there and then, make the true demonstrative judgement that *that*  $\phi$  is F. Insofar as McDowell's disjunctive account of perception can be generalised, and he does just this, this connection could be generalised: if a fact is made manifest to a subject, then the subject has demonstrative access to that fact. Further, I suggest, if a subject has no

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<sup>69</sup> McDowell (1986), 167.

<sup>70</sup> McDowell (1982), 478.

demonstrative access to the fact that  $\phi$  is F, then this fact cannot be manifest to him. The idea of an “unmediated openness” to reality seems to *require* demonstrative access to reality.

In favourable cases, hearing from another is a way of getting to know. It is a way in which facts can be made manifest. Suppose our knowledgeable percipient testifies that  $\phi$  is F. An audience who understands this testament can thereby be in a position to know that  $\phi$  is F. Obviously in acquiring this knowledge the audience does not *experience* things to be the way he comes to know they are; he possesses no *perceptual* access to the fact known. But in testifying that  $\phi$  is F, the speaker makes this fact manifest to the audience who must, therefore, possess demonstrative access to this fact. That is, if there is to be an act of testifying which allows *object-dependent thought* to be transmitted across a communicative link, then McDowell requires a *testimony demonstrative*. McDowell is committed to the antecedent of this conditional. Were things otherwise, testimony stand as a ‘veil of appearances’ separating us, *qua* audiences, from the world.

The idea here is that the audience should be able to identify the  $\phi$  demonstratively *through* the speaker’s testimony: he need only refer to ‘*that*  $\phi$ ’ as he invokes his memory of the occasion the speaker spoke of the  $\phi$ .<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This idea derives from Evans (1982), 306. “Or again, the speaker might advert to information he presumes the hearer has from the testimony of others, perhaps from a newspaper article, or a rumour, or a conversation, saying something like ‘That mountaineer is F’; here I do not think that the hearer can be said to have understood what the speaker is saying unless he possesses this information and thinks, in a way which is informed by it, ‘That mountaineer is F: that’s what the speaker is saying’. (I call these uses of demonstratives, ‘testimony demonstrative’)” However Evans’s ‘testimony demonstratives’ are too weak for McDowell: they advert to shared information and the *only* information shared by speaker and audience in the case considered is that the speaker has said that the  $\phi$  is F.

The disjunctive approach to testimonial appearances would then be upheld. If the speaker were expressing his knowledge that the  $\phi$  is F, then the  $\phi$  would ‘figure in’ the content of the audience’s knowledge: the audience could demonstratively identify the  $\phi$  through referring to *that*  $\phi$  and invoking his memory of the speaker telling him that it was F. Whilst if the speaker were merely saying that the  $\phi$  is F, any demonstrative reference to the  $\phi$  would be an illusion: there could be no singular thought ascribable to the audience, and his thought would be empty.

It may seem that the Argument from Illusion poses a particular problem for this disjunctive conception. Deceptive cases can be described that are phenomenologically indistinguishable from non-deceptive ones so that a subject could be epistemically blameless in taking the world to be a certain way when it merely appeared that way. As such, the thought is, there must be a certain epistemic equivalence between any case thus described and the non-deceptive case it is indistinguishable to: if these situations are not epistemically equivalent, then it seems that whether the subject knows or not becomes a matter that is beyond his ken. Whilst acknowledging that “there is something gripping about the ‘internalism’ that is expressed here”, McDowell asserts that in the non-deceptive case the “obtaining of the fact is precisely not blankly external to [the subject’s] subjectivity.”<sup>72</sup> Which is to make a claim first about the contents of thought and second about phenomenal consciousness: when a fact is manifest the subject’s mental

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<sup>72</sup> McDowell (1982), 476. In §5.2.1 I stated that McDowell attempts “to redirect this intuition about epistemic equivalence”; this is *ad rem, ad hominem* he simply denies it in the manner quoted.

state “incorporates the relevant portions of the external world” *and it is therein apparent to the subject how the world is*. If there is to be any pretence of sating the internalist’s intuitions, then *both* these claims are needed.

This claim about phenomenal consciousness, about what it is like to see, does not carry over with respect to what it is like to receive testimony. Suppose the speaker says that  $\phi$  is F and the audience cannot tell whether he is testifying or merely kidding. Suppose, in fact, he is testifying. Were the audience, despite his doubts, to accept the speaker’s testimony, he would know that  $\phi$  is F. What of the audience’s epistemic position *prior* to acceptance? Prior to acceptance, at least on McDowell’s view, he would be in a position to know that  $\phi$  is F.<sup>73</sup> The audience can, therefore, entertain the singular thought that  $\phi$  is F and demonstratively refer to *that*  $\phi$ . (Perhaps asking, “Is *that*  $\phi$  really F?”) But the audience does not know that he is in a position to know.<sup>74</sup> And, given how the case is described, he has no more reason to believe that he is in a position to know than to believe that he isn’t. And this is to say that it is *not apparent to the audience how the world is*.

Testimony does not offer ‘unmediated openness’ to reality. In order to claim that it can McDowell’s disjunctive epistemology requires a

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<sup>73</sup> This is a delicate point because it makes assumptions about McDowell’s ill-defined notion of doxastic responsibility; that is, it assumes that it would not be irresponsible of the audience to accept that  $\phi$  is F. *However, if it is supposed that  $f$  being F is a matter of little consequence, then this follows from the primacy of the non-deceptive case.*

<sup>74</sup> That is, *posterior* to acceptance the audience’s epistemic position might be that of not being in a position to know that he knows but *prior* to acceptance it is that of not knowing that he is a position to know.

testimony demonstrative. The postulation of such a demonstrative may be theoretically motivated but it runs counter to descriptions of what it is like to receive testimony. The knowledge we gain by testimony seems genuinely mediated in that the content of the audience's thought, what it is he thinks, is determined, first and foremost, by what the speaker says rather than by the fact in the world that caused the speaker to say what he did.

### *5.3.2. The Argument from Illusion Reconsidered*

McDowell provides no dismissal of scepticism of testimony. However, if, as audiences acquiring knowledge of the world by means of testimony, we are separated from the world by a 'veil of appearances', then doesn't McDowell demonstrate that the Argument from Illusion makes scepticism of testimony an inevitability?

McDowell's rendering of the Argument from Illusion starts with the thought that one's epistemic standing on some question cannot be constituted by cognitively inaccessible facts. (This is (P1) in the argument given in §5.2.1.) To claim that knowledge cannot depend upon cognitively inaccessible facts is to evoke internalist intuitions. The truth of a knowledge attribution, internalists would argue, cannot depend upon the obtaining of a

fact which the putative knower has no reason to believe obtains. However it does not seem that facts about the world being certain ways are cognitively inaccessible in *this* sense. Couldn't an appearance, where this is understood to mean whatever is constant across deceptive and non-deceptive cases, defeasibly justify belief?

McDowell would give a negative answer to this question. However, insofar as this answer amounts to little more than an assertion of his particular construal of cognitive accessibility, such a negative response need be given only if this construal is antecedently accepted. Alternatively, if the appearance that the world is a certain way could be said to defeasibly justify believing that the world is this way, then the world being this way should not be 'blankly external'. Thus McDowell's rendering of the Argument from Illusion need not be accepted.

In response to McDowell's Argument from Illusion one could pursue the thought that appearances, understood to mean whatever is constant across deceptive and non-deceptive cases, can defeasibly justify belief. Thus, with respect to the parallel Argument from Testimonial Illusion, the question is raised as to whether an audience's *understanding* of a speaker's testimony provides the audience with a defeasible justification for accepting the speaker's testimony. I shall consider this in the next chapter.



## UNDERSTANDING OUR ENTITLEMENTS: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ACCEPTANCE

An epistemology of testimony is anti-reductive if it credits us with the epistemic right to simply accept intelligible testimony, other things being equal. Transmission theories are anti-reductive in this sense insofar as they hold that one may presume an intelligible testimony to be an act of testifying; by definition an act of testifying places knowledge in the public domain. No such presumption, I claimed, could be supported: it is an audience's understanding, rather than a speaker's act of testifying, which must be epistemologically basic.

In this chapter I shall consider an argument for anti-reductionism which starts from this premise. This argument is provided by Tyler Burge.<sup>1</sup> Starting from this premise Burge's principle conclusion is that

Sometimes, the epistemic status of beliefs acquired from others *is not empirical*. In particular, it is not empirical just by virtue of the fact that the beliefs are acquired from others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burge (1993). Burge defends and clarifies this article in Burge (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Burge (1993), 466.

Our experience, Burge hereby claims, can be irrelevant to the epistemic status of testimonial beliefs.

Burge draws this conclusion from three major premises. First, we are *a priori* entitled to presume that we understand what we seem to. It is our seeming understanding which constitutes our epistemic starting point in the acquisition of testimonial beliefs. Second, given that we possess the ability to understand, certain facts about the rationality of speakers support an *a priori* entitlement to accept those propositions that seemingly intelligible testimony presents-as-true. Burge labels this entitlement the *Acceptance Principle*. Third, perception plays no indispensable justificatory role in the process of understanding testimony and acquiring testimonial beliefs. Thus neither our understanding that a particular proposition was expressed nor our acceptance of this proposition need be empirically justified.

Burge's argument depends extensively on his background epistemology. Thus I will start in §6.1 by introducing this background and trying to clarify Burge's key epistemic notions. In §6.2 I shall consider each of the three major premises in turn. Each of these premises constitutes a significant claim irrespective of their conjointly yielding Burge's principle conclusion. In particular the *Acceptance Principle* and the justification Burge gives of it constitutes a transcendental argument for an anti-reductive epistemology of testimony. In §6.3 I will consider how the *Acceptance Principle* relates to scepticism of testimony.

## **6.1. Epistemic Justification: Burge's View**

A proposition can be known only if it is true and justifiably believed.<sup>3</sup> There are two species of justification: argumentative justifications and entitlements. For clarity I will follow Burge's usage and employ the term 'warrant' to refer to justification generically, and use the term 'justification' to refer only to argumentative justification.

A belief is warranted by the reasons that support it. There are two kinds of reason: demonstrative or non-defeasible, and *prima facie* or defeasible. *Prima facie* reasons confer warrant only when unaccompanied by defeaters, or, to use Burge's term, only when there are no counterconsiderations. Such counterconsiderations are themselves defeasible. Thus in defeasible reasoning contents are connected together which rationally support one another in the absence of defeaters. Each link in such an argumentative chain will be defeasible but provided no defeaters are activated, provided there are no counterconsiderations, the argument will be warrant conferring.

Justifications, thus construed, are arguments articulated by a

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<sup>3</sup> There is no claim of sufficiency here: testimony illustrates Gettier's point. "The recipient's dependence for having knowledge on the interlocutor's having knowledge is itself an instance of Gettier's point. The recipient could have true justified belief, but lack knowledge because the interlocutor lacked knowledge." *Ibid.*, 486, n.24.

believer to the truth of a proposition. The reasons articulated “must be available in the cognitive repertoire of the subject”.<sup>4</sup> Thus if a subject believes a theorem “but has no access to the proof, then the person is not *justified* (has no justification, in my sense of justification) for believing the theorem.”<sup>5</sup>

A central characteristic of entitlements, by contrast, is that they need not be available to the believer.

The distinction between justification and entitlement is this: Although both have positive force in rationally supporting a propositional attitude or cognitive practice, and in constituting an epistemic right to it, entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject.<sup>6</sup>

How should this be understood? Boghossian suggests that the relevant distinction is one of intellectual sophistication.

Philosophers are often in a position of articulating a warrant for an ordinary belief that the man in the street would not understand. If we insist that a person counts as justified only if they are aware of the reason that warrants their belief, then we will simply have to find another term for the kind of warrant that ordinary folk often have and that philosophers seek to articulate. Tyler Burge has called it an “entitlement”.<sup>7</sup>

I do not think this is correct but seeing how is revealing.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

<sup>5</sup> Burge (1997), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Burge (1993), 458.

<sup>7</sup> Boghossian (1996), 387. The previous quote from Burge then follows.

Ordinary folk are in the habit of finding reasons for their beliefs, for justifying their beliefs (in Burge's sense). Suppose a man-in-the-street sees that *p*. His justification of the perceptual belief that *p* would consist in no more than the claim that he saw that *p* was the case. Philosopher's would then ask why *apparently* seeing something to be the case should justify believing that it were. A response to this question should be provided by the stipulation of a principle such as:

- P)** One is warranted, other things being equal, in believing what one appears to see.

This principle is not a premise in a justifying argument but a philosophical response to the question raised: **P** states that the subject is warranted in believing that *p* irrespective of his ability to justify that *p*. Thus Burge's stating that the distinction between justifications and entitlements is a distinction between warrants that are and warrants that need not be available to the subject. This distinction could equally be phrased as one between *being warranted* (that is *being justified* in the broad sense) and *justifying*: it should then be clear that Burge's distinction is only coincidentally one of intellectual sophistication.

The distinction between justifications and entitlements is a distinction between two ways in which belief may be warranted. A justification provides epistemic warrant through referring to a set of premises which support the given belief. An entitlement provides epistemic warrant through referring to the procedure by which the belief was formed. Thus Burge states that epistemic warrant may be "an entitlement that

consists in the status of operating in an appropriate way in accord with the norms of reason".<sup>8</sup> To form the belief that *p* because one apparently sees that *p* is the case is to operate in accord with the norms of reason. Given that one can perceive, apparently seeing that *p* warrants one believing that *p*, other things being equal. This is stated **P**.

This meta-epistemology is essentially that stated in §2.1. Such a conception, I claimed, raises the questions of what fundamental source principles, principles such as **P**, should be stipulated, and of our justification for stipulating these principles. This latter question of right is the question of *why* we are entitled to beliefs formed in a certain way. The answer, according to Burge, "derives from jurisdiction". "Epistemic entitlement derives from jurisdiction - from the place of judgements in reasoning."<sup>9</sup> Fundamental source principles are justified through showing *how* forming beliefs in a certain way is to operate in accord with the norms of reason. Thus entitlements need not be available to a subject *because* their constituting premises, unlike the premises of justificatory arguments, will not state the subject's reasons for believing but will describe the method of belief formation in such a way as to demonstrate that forming beliefs through this method accords with the norms of reason. These arguments are articulated by philosophers: a justification of **P** would be one example, Burge's justification of the Acceptance Principle another.

A justification or entitlement is *a priori* whenever the contents

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<sup>8</sup> Burge (1996), 93.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

connected by the argument determining it can be understood conceptually. A content can be conceptually understood if it can be understood without thinking about any particular object.<sup>10</sup> Thus,

A justification or entitlement is *a priori* if its justificational force is in no way constituted or enhanced by reference to or reliance on the specifics of some range of sense experiences or perceptual beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

To be *a priori* the argument which confers warrant, either in the form of an entitlement or justification, need not be demonstrative. However if an *a priori* warrant is defeasible, any counterconsiderations will necessarily be empirical: were the counterconsiderations to be non-empirical the argument which ostensibly conferred warrant would not in fact do so being invalid. This does not suggest that the warrant conferred is empirical, provided no defeaters are activated the warrant will be *a priori*:

The fact that overriding considerations are empirical does not show that ... [an] entitlement ... is empirical. The nature of the initial positive justificational force is one matter. The nature of the overriding considerations another.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly our entitlement to rely upon the beliefs formed in a certain way could be *a priori* and yet all instances of reliance on this procedure

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<sup>10</sup> That is, whenever “thinking the intentional content with understanding does not require on particular occasions an empirically warranted *de re* application of an element in that content.” Burge (1997), 22. As an example Burge gives, ‘Zebras are larger than red poppies’.

<sup>11</sup> Burge (1993), 458. “The issue over apriority begins with conceptual understanding and asks whether perceptual experience is needed to supplement the understanding for one to be justified or entitled to one’s belief.” *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>12</sup> Burge (1997), 27.

yield empirically justified beliefs. And the warrant supporting a belief could be both *a priori* and empirical.

The question in judging whether a warrant is *a priori* is always whether there is a line of justification or entitlement to whose justificational force sense experience makes no contribution.<sup>13</sup>

There is such a line with respect to our entitlement to testimonial beliefs. The propositions testimony expresses can sometimes be *a priori* justified, for instance testimony as to mathematical theorems, thus ‘sometimes the epistemic status of beliefs acquired from others is not empirical’. In the next section I shall consider the three major premises leading to this conclusion.

## **6.2. The Epistemology of Acceptance**

- (P1) We are *a priori* entitled to presume that we do understand what we seem to understand.
- (P2) We are *a priori* entitled to accept a proposition intelligible testimony presents-as-true.
- (P3) Perception need play no justificatory role in either our seeming to understand testimony or our accepting the propositions intelligible

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



testimony expresses.

(C4) Therefore testimonial beliefs can sometimes be *a priori* warranted.

Thus Burge's argument for the principle conclusion stated could be written out. My *primary* concern is (P2); this is the Acceptance Principle. I will consider this principle and its justification in §6.2.3. A major premise in the justification of the Acceptance Principle is (P1). I will consider this entitlement in §6.2.2. First I will consider the epistemic role Burge accords perception in interlocution; that is (P3). I will consider these premises in this order because (P2) depends on (P1) and an objection I shall raise concerning Burge's use of (P1), in arguing for (C4), depends on contesting (P3).

### *6.2.1. The Epistemic Role of Perception in Interlocution*

Distinguishing between the cause of a belief and its justification is clearly important. Insofar as reliabilism equates the cause of a belief with its justification it is vulnerable to the criticism that it can be irrational to believe a proposition produced by a reliable belief-forming-mechanism. However this distinction Burge claims "is fundamental to any view that

takes *a priori* justification seriously.”<sup>14</sup> It is fundamental because were this distinction not made, very little would be *a priori* warranted: the cause of our beliefs is rarely other than our experience. We first come to understand many mathematical propositions, for instance, because of testimony. Thus one must distinguish what is causally necessary for understanding and believing a proposition from the justification supporting belief in a proposition if one is to give an account of *a priori* justification.

The perception of a speaker’s utterance is causally necessary for the formation of testimonial beliefs: were no utterance perceived, no communication would be possible<sup>15</sup> But this does not thereby imply that testimonial beliefs are empirical. Rather, on Burge’s view, “perception functions only as a causal enabling condition”.<sup>16</sup>

The use of perception is a background condition necessary for the acquisition of belief from others ... but perception plays a triggering and preservative role, in many cases, not a justificatory one.<sup>17</sup>

In order to support and explain this claim Burge appeals to two analogies. The perception of an utterance *triggers* understanding like the perception of symbols and diagrams triggers understanding of mathematical truths. The perception of an utterance *preserves* content and warrant in the acquisition of testimonial beliefs like memory preserves content and warrant in

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<sup>14</sup> Burge (1993), 460.

<sup>15</sup> This modal claim only holds for the fundamental cases: if a proposition is believed because of testimony even though sufficient reason were otherwise possessed for believing this proposition, then the *perception* of the testimony is not necessary for this ‘testimonial belief’ because the testimony is not necessary.

<sup>16</sup> Burge (1997), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Burge (1993), 466.

reasoning. Perception plays a triggering role and it plays a preservative role.

#### PERCEPTION'S TRIGGERING ROLE

The epistemic status of perception in normal communication is like the status it was traditionally thought to have when a diagram is presented that triggers realization of the meaning and truth of a claim of pure geometry.<sup>18</sup>

Geometrical diagrams are used to express the propositions of geometry. The perception of such diagrams is “probably *necessary*” if we are to understand the propositions the diagrams are used to express.<sup>19</sup> However this is to speak only of the genesis of our beliefs about geometry. The warrant we possess for accepting a proposition of geometry is not ‘constituted or enhanced by reference to or reliance on’ our perception of any given geometrical diagram. Rather our warrant for accepting a proposition of geometry derives from our understanding it. The perception of a speaker’s utterance can be analogous to the perception of a geometrical diagram in that

perception of words makes understanding possible, but justificational force can be derived from the individual’s understanding without supplementary appeal to perception.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 480, n.19.

It is analogous whenever an audience's understanding of a speaker's testimony is conceptual and there are no counterconsiderations defeating his entitlement to acceptance. In such cases perception only plays a *triggering* role; that is to say, perception of the speaker's utterance is causally necessary to understanding the proposition expressed but unnecessary to the warranted acceptance of this proposition.

The triggering role of perception is illustrated by our entitlement to seeming understanding being independent of particular perceptual entitlements. Supposing that being perceptually careless defeats one's perceptual entitlement on an occasion;

Suppose that one's interlocutor misspeaks and one fails to notice the tongue slip by being perceptually careless ... then one could be entitled to rely upon one's seeming understanding of what the other person said, even though one might lack entitlement to, and be mistaken about, one's perception of what the other person uttered.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly a poorly drawn geometrical diagram does not defeat one's warrant in believing the proposition of geometry the diagram is used to express.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Burge (1997), 29. This is independence from *particular* perceptual entitlements: one's perception functioning properly is necessary to the ability to understand and it is upon this ability that one's entitlement to seeming understanding depends.

<sup>22</sup> There are four key differences. (1) Understanding a proposition of geometry yields a justification; understanding a speaker's utterance yields an entitlement. (2) Knowledge of a truth of geometry requires no more than understanding and believing it; testimonial knowledge requires there be "knowledge in the chain of sources beyond the recipient." Burge (1993), 480, n.19. (3) It is understanding a proposition of geometry that yields warrant; it is seeming to understand a speaker's testimony that yields warrant. (4) Understanding a proposition of geometry is an understanding of a content in abstract; understanding a speaker's testimony is an understanding of an event: a presentation of a content. I consider difference (4) further in §6.2.2.

## PERCEPTION'S PRESERVATIVE ROLE

In interlocution, perception of utterances makes possible the passage of propositional content from one mind to another rather as purely preservative memory makes possible the passage of propositional content from one time to another. Memory and perception of utterances function similarly, in reasoning and communication respectively.<sup>23</sup>

No matter how short the argument considered, reasoning takes time. Consider the following syllogism. 'All men are mortal. Greeks are men. Therefore Greeks are mortal.' Going through this syllogism takes time but our warrant for believing that Greeks are mortal involves no appeal to memory. Rather our warrant derives from the argument itself: this conclusion is warranted to the extent that the premises are warranted. If memory did not preserve content, our warrant could not derive from the argument itself insofar as this argument takes time. But all reasoning takes time and argument would not, therefore, be a way of conferring warrant. Thus memory must preserve content. If memory did not preserve warrant, we could not be warranted in accepting that Greeks are mortal even though this is the conclusion of a valid argument from, one may suppose, warranted premises. But argument is a way of conferring warrant. Thus memory must preserve warrant. *Preservative memory*, then, is memory functioning to

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

preserve content and warrant from one time to another.

The contrast between preservative and substantive memory is an epistemic contrast between two roles memory may play in reasoning.

Substantive memory is an element in a justification; it imports subject matter or objects into reasoning. Purely preservative memory introduces no new subject matter, constitutes no element in a justification or entitlement. It simply maintains in justificational space a cognitive content with its judgmental force.<sup>24</sup>

This contrast can be illustrated by a comparison of deduction with induction. Whilst a deductive argument requires reliance only upon the preservative function of memory an inductive argument requires reliance upon both the preservative and substantive functions of memory. Any argument, whether deductive or inductive, will take time to run through, thus the transitions from premises to conclusion requires preservative memory. However the premises of an inductive argument ordinarily state past observations thus memory imports subject matter into the argument and plays, in addition, a substantive role.

Burge's claim that memory possesses a purely preservative function is a substantial claim. I sketch how I think this claim should be understood. The epistemic distinction between preservative and substantive memory does not map onto the psychological distinction between short-term and long-term memory. Short-term memory preserves content and warrant and in

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

running through an argument it is short-term memory that we rely on. However preservative memory cannot be equated with short-term memory. Burge considers a person who twenty years ago proved a mathematical theorem. Provided this person ‘has a properly functioning preservative memory’ they should still be *a priori* warranted in believing this theorem because the nature of their warrant for the acquisition of this belief would be preserved. Thus preservative memory is not short-term.

Memory is the capacity to both retain knowledge that was acquired in the past and the capacity to recall past experiences. *Factual* memory can thereby be distinguished from *episodic* memory.<sup>25</sup> The preservative function of memory is introduced by Burge with a case of factual memory. However this function should not be equated with type of memory.<sup>26</sup> The preservation of warrant does not require episodic memory.

Most of what one is entitled to believe from past reading, past interlocution, past reasoning or past empirical learning, derives from sources and warrants that one has forgotten.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Martin and Deutscher (1966) call episodic memory ‘direct’ memory and Shoemaker (1963) calls it ‘personal’ memory.

<sup>26</sup> If preservative memory is not factual memory, then is it memory functioning to *preserve past cognitive achievements*? If this is Burge’s supposition, then the type of achievement needs to be considered. Burge is concerned with the achievement of having had propositional knowledge. Thus he considers memory functioning to preserve content and warrant. But knowing a person, for instance, is also a cognitive achievement. What is required for the retention of knowledge differs in this case: it is not enough to know a person that one’s past knowledge is preserved; one must have an ongoing involvement with that person. People change. If propositional knowledge concerns standing but changeable states of affairs, then an ongoing involvement with that state of affairs might also seem to be needed for knowledge. For instance, if I do not keep myself apprised of the situation in the Balkans, then it seems that (not all of) my knowledge can be preserved no matter how effective my memory.

<sup>27</sup> Burge (1997), 38.

But whether the warrant preserved takes the form of an entitlement or justification seems to turn on the possession of an episodic memory of the occasion of acquiring the belief in question. This seems to be Burge's view because of his claim that if the person who believes the theorem no longer has access to the proof he once gave, then he should be *a priori* entitled to believe this theorem but this belief would not be justified.<sup>28</sup> As a corollary of this suppose that a subject S once saw that *p* and presently believes that *p*. As long as S's preservative memory serves its rational function S should inherit his original warrant for belief.<sup>29</sup> But whether this warrant consists of an entitlement or a justification plausibly turns on whether S remembers the occasion of seeing that *p* was the case.

Thus to give memory a preservative function is to offer what has been called the Pure Storage Account of memory.<sup>30</sup> Memory, in its preservative function and when functioning properly, preserves content and warrant. Peacocke gives the following criticism of this view. Suppose that as an undergraduate S attended a lecture on the lives of Enlightenment Philosophers. S now truly recollects that Hume died in 1776 and falsely recollects that Voltaire died in 1779. If the Pure Storage Account is correct, then, were S to believe that Hume died in 1776 and Voltaire died in 1779, the first of these beliefs would be warranted whilst the second would not,

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<sup>28</sup> Burge's claim does not imply this interpretation: possessing an episodic memory of giving the proof would not suffice for justification because such a memory could not distinguish giving a proof from trying to give a proof. However, I suggest, this is to just to say that mathematical theorems require an *a priori* rather than empirical justification.

<sup>29</sup> "as long as preservative memory works to preserve a warranted belief from its initial acquisition, one has at least a prima facie entitlement to the belief, which derives from entitlements or justifications originally associated with the belief." *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Peacocke (1986), 160-70.



even though S has no reason to discriminate between them. The suggestion, then, is that insofar as S's preservative memory is functioning properly, S is entitled to believe the first but not the second of these memories. And the possession of this entitlement does *not* require that S also possess some reason to discriminate between these memories: entitlements need not be accessible. S should require a reason to discriminate between these memories only if S were justified in believing the first but not the second but insofar as S does not remember attending the lecture neither belief would be justified.<sup>31</sup>

However his claim that memory possesses a purely preservative function is worked out, the purpose of introducing preservative memory was *only* to draw an analogy between the role of perception in acquiring testimonial beliefs and the role of memory in deductive argument. This analogy suggests that whilst perception is necessary to understanding testimony it need constitute no element in the warrant supporting a testimonial belief. Rather perception simply makes possible the transmission of content and warrant from a speaker to an audience.

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<sup>31</sup> It should be clear that this is not a sufficient response to Peacocke's objection. This objection may be simply rephrased. How can entitlements be a species of epistemic warrant if it is implied that a belief can be unwarranted even when formed on indiscriminable grounds to another that is warranted?

### 6.2.2. *Our Entitlement to Seeming-Understanding*

In communicating we do not ordinarily need to work out what proposition(s) a speaker is expressing. Understanding “seems, in normal cases, to be epistemically immediate, once the capacity for understanding is in place.”<sup>32</sup> *Given that* we have the ability to understand,

we are entitled to the following presumption *apriori*, other things equal: We understand what we seem to understand. Or rather, other things equal, we need not use a distinction between understanding and seeming to understand. We need not take what we hear as an *object* of interpretation, unless grounds for doubt arise.<sup>33</sup>

I agree but do not think this claim can be used in an argument to Burge’s principle conclusion. Burge’s principle conclusion is that ‘sometimes the beliefs we acquire from others are not empirical.’ To infer this conclusion, from (P1) and (P2), Burge must return a negative answer to the following question. Couldn’t we possess an *a priori* entitlement to rely on our seeming understanding and yet all instances of understanding (whether seeming or actual) be empirically warranted? I will claim all instances of understanding *are* empirically warranted and thereby deny that perception only plays a triggering role.

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<sup>32</sup> Burge (1997), 30.

<sup>33</sup> Burge (1993), 488.

Let me first outline the ground on which I am in agreement with Burge. Burge states,

I think that the most salient epistemic issues arise about understanding *expressive events*, or uttered presentations of content as opposed to abstract content. ... In interlocution, the understanding that perception triggers and to which the entitlement attaches is an understanding of an event, a presentation of content, not merely understanding content abstracted from any instantiations.<sup>34</sup>

Our ability to understand testimony is not merely an ability to understand content abstracted from any instantiation. It is the ability to understand an expressive event: a speaker's utterance. Utterances are intentional: speakers *present* content. Thus in interlocution we understand not merely the sentence uttered but the speaker's intentional use of this sentence. We understand not merely 'content abstracted from any instantiation' but 'a presentation of content'. And, Burge claims,

[With respect] to understanding the content of a presentation event ... understanding the mode of instantiation of content is ... a necessary condition for understanding instantiations.<sup>35</sup>

By 'mode of instantiation', I assume that, Burge intends to evoke the Fregean term 'mode of presentation'.<sup>36</sup> A word is a 'mode' by which its referent can be presented. Similarly, I assume that, by 'mode' Burge refers to the utterance, or the speaker's intentional use of a sentence, by which the

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<sup>34</sup> Burge (1997), 22 n.3, and 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> See Frege (1892).

content is instantiated. How a word presents its referent determines its sense. Thus Burge's claim is that to understand the content a sentence expresses in interlocution one must understand how the speaker presents this content with his utterance. Only if we possessed the ability to understand speakers' use of the sentences they utter could we be said to possess the ability to understand. Our ability to understand testimony is an ability to understand "conceptual content in application or use".<sup>37</sup> Consequently, insofar as it is the possession of *this ability* which grounds our entitlement, the entitlement thus grounded is one to presume that we understand both the sentence uttered and the use to which it is put. We are entitled to presume that when we seem to understand a speaker's *utterance* we do so. This much I accept.

Understanding mathematical truths, or the propositions of geometry, however, is quite different. As Burge notes, what is understood is not a presentation of content but a content abstract from any instantiation. This difference, I should like to suggest, implies that particular instances of understanding speakers' utterances can only be empirically warranted; in interlocution perception cannot play only a triggering role.

The crucial difference, as I see it, is that in understanding a proposition of geometry how the proposition is presented by diagram is of no epistemic consequence. Our warrant for believing the proposition stems solely from our understanding the proposition abstracted from its presentation by any particular diagram. By contrast how a proposition is

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<sup>37</sup> Burge (1993), 482.

presented by an utterance is epistemically significant. Presented by different utterances the same content could be communicated as an assertion, a joke, a fiction, a plea for help and so on. *Thus*, as Burge states, understanding how a content is presented is necessary to understanding an uttered presentation of content.

In order for finite intellects to understand geometrical propositions it is 'probably necessary' that these propositions are presented by means of geometrical diagrams. However, in order to understand a given geometrical proposition, the perception of the *particular* diagram used in its presentation will be inessential. It will be inessential because this proposition could equally be presented by a different but geometrically equivalent diagram. In this sense perception of geometrical diagrams is only a heuristic to understanding.<sup>38</sup> And for *this reason* perception of a geometrical diagram plays no indispensable justificatory role, but merely 'triggers' understanding.

The same could not be said for interlocution because understanding the content presented does presuppose understanding how the content is presented. Perception of a speaker's utterance, in the fundamental case, cannot be said to be a heuristic to understanding the proposition expressed. And I suggest that Burge's claim that perception need only play a triggering role only appears plausible because understanding ordinarily seems to be epistemically immediate. We do not ordinarily need to infer what another means. As a claim about how it seems to understand an utterance this

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<sup>38</sup> Compare Christensen and Kornblith (1997), 3.

phenomenological insight in no way implies that perception has no indispensable justificatory role in understanding utterances.

Understanding how a content is presented by a speaker's utterance is clearly dependent on the particular perception of the speaker's utterance and this dependence does not seem only causal. Insofar as the same sentence can be used in many different ways the audience is dependent on the particulars of their perception to grasp how the token-sentence is being used. This perception provides the audience with his *reasons* for understanding the speaker's utterance as he does. But if reliance on the particulars of perceptual experience is partly constitutive of understanding an uttered presentation of content, then particular instances of understanding can only be empirically warranted.

Burge acknowledges this difference between understanding mathematical truths and understanding utterances and yet claims that perception need play no indispensable justificatory role in understanding utterances. His reason is as follows:

For contents in the indicative (declarative) mood presentation-as-true is the defeasible default case. The connection between declarative mood and presentation-as-true is conceptual. The justificational force of the entitlement to rely on the connection is correspondingly conceptual, not perceptual. In the absence of overriding reasons, the default presumption stands. Nonassertive uses (jokes, irony, fiction) that drain declaratives of assertive implications must employ context to make themselves

understood.<sup>39</sup>

Even if there is an entitlement to presume an utterance of a declarative is a presentation-as-true, this entitlement would imply that perception plays no indispensable justificatory role in understanding only if understanding a content to be presented-as-true could equally be presumed to depend *solely on the perception of the sentence uttered*. This presumption Burge makes in claiming that a declarative which does not present its content as true must employ context to be understood. However this claim, and the presumption it expresses depends on an untenable division between linguistic understanding and understanding in general.

Alongside jokes, irony and fiction one could place understatement, hyperbole, metaphor and implicature: all could involve the utterance of an indicative that does not present its content as true. If *any* utterance of an indicative that does not present its content as true *must* employ context to be understood, then ‘context’ must be understood in a certain way. Consider Susie’s statement “That last set of tennis almost killed me”. Susie does not present it as true that the last set of tennis nearly killed her; her statement is hyperbole. In order to understand this her audience need not refer to specific facts about the context of Susie’s utterance. All that is required is general knowledge about tennis in order to know that Susie’s statement is hyperbole. Tennis, her audience knows, is not a dangerous sport. Context is

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<sup>39</sup> Burge (1993), 482-3. It should be noted that jokes, irony and fictions can still be assertions. Thus Burge is employing the phrase ‘nonassertive uses’ in the restricted sense of uses of declaratives that do not present their content as true. And this seems to require understanding certain jokes etc. as merely make-believedly presenting their contents as true. See Walton (1990).

exploited only in the sense that the audience judges, that Susie is not involved in some dangerous game of tennis; she is not, for instance, playing ‘tennis’ with hand-grenades.

However, this manner of depending on contextual knowledge is characteristic of understanding in general; it is not a dependence that can be restricted only to our understanding of certain uses of indicatives. Thus insofar as there is no clear way of separating specifically linguistic understanding from understanding in general, even if we are *a priori* entitled to presume that utterances of indicatives present their contents as true, context is so inseparably involved in understanding a content to be presented as true that this entitlement cannot be taken to imply that perception plays no indispensable role in understanding.

It might be contested that Susie’s utterance, whilst non-literal, nonetheless, employs a conventionally used expression. And “conventional implicatures”, Burge claims, “may be inferred ‘intuitively’ from the meaning of the words ... [thus] understanding based on conventional implicatures can rest on *apriori* entitlement.”<sup>40</sup> However to claim that understanding is ‘intuitive’, I suggest, is just to recognise that our contextual ‘judgements’ ordinarily occur at a sub-personal level: understanding is epistemically immediate. As such, the idea that perception ‘triggers’ understanding seems to be supported by no more than the claim that understanding a speaker’s utterance can be epistemically immediate. This insight does not support Burge’s claim that perception need play no

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<sup>40</sup> Burge (1993), 483, n.21.



indispensable justificatory role: our seeing the world to be a certain way can also be regarded as epistemically immediate.

The claim that perception plays an indispensable justificatory role in our seeming to understand testimony is compatible with our possessing an *a priori* entitlement to presume, other things equal, that we understand what we seem to. However insofar as perception does play an indispensable justificatory role a premise in Burge's argument to his principle conclusion is false. The suggestion, then, is rather that the epistemology of understanding is analogous to Burge's view of the epistemology of perception. We are *a priori* entitled, other things being equal, to presume that what seems to be perceptually the case, is so and what we seem to understand, we do so. But both perception and understanding only yield empirically warranted beliefs.

Nothing has yet been said which counts against Burge's Acceptance Principle. I shall consider this principle in the next section.

### *6.2.3. The Acceptance Principle and its Justification*

We are entitled to trust testimony; when a speaker presents his testimony as true the audience is entitled to accept it, other things being

equal.

*A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so.*<sup>41</sup>

This is Burge's *Acceptance Principle*; it is a principle of credulity. The entitlement it states is neither demonstrative nor irrevocable; rather it articulates, at least, 'a position of non-neutrality'. Unless the audience possesses reason to reject the proposition a speaker presents-as-true he is entitled to accept this proposition.<sup>42</sup>

The Acceptance Principle states that an audience is *a priori* entitled, other things being equal, to accept those propositions speakers present-as-true. The question of the epistemic status of testimonial beliefs formed as a result of acceptance is another matter. Burge states,

In the absence of countervailing considerations, application of the Acceptance Principle often seems to provide sufficient entitlement for knowledge. ... Our entitlement to ordinary perceptual belief is usually sufficient for perceptual knowledge. ... Something similar holds for acquisition of belief from others. Other things equal, ordinary interlocution suffices for knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 467. Burge states that this should be read as "A person is [*a priori*] entitled to accept a proposition that is [taken to be] presented as true and that is [seemingly] intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so." Burge (1997), 22, n.4.

<sup>42</sup> I.e. the "entitlement holds unless there are stronger reasons (*available to the person*) that override it." Burge (1997), 22, n.4. My emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> Burge (1993), 485.

It seems that the Acceptance Principle alone provides sufficient warrant for knowledge. If this is the case, intelligible testimony constitutes a unique *source* of warrant. The propositions intelligible testimony presents-as-true need only be true for the audience to be in an epistemic position to acquire testimonial knowledge. However, this is not the case.

If the recipient depends on interlocution for knowledge, the recipient's knowledge depends on the source's having knowledge as well. The recipient's own proprietary entitlement to rely on interlocution is insufficient by itself to underwrite knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

An audience's 'proprietary' entitlement with respect to the propositions intelligible testimony presents-as-true is stated by the Acceptance Principle; it is the entitlement, other things being equal, to acceptance. This entitlement is insufficient for knowledge because intelligible testimony does *not* constitute a unique *source* of warrant; rather the comprehension of testimony allows the *preservation* of warrant.<sup>45</sup> In accepting a proposition intelligible testimony presents-as-true whatever warrant the speaker possesses is preserved across the communicative link. Thus if the speaker does not express a warranted proposition, if he is incompetent, then there is no warrant to be preserved.

The thought that communication allows the preservation of warrant

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>45</sup> This interpretation of Burge, though I believe correct, requires reading the previous quote but one as, "In the absence of countervailing considerations, the application of the Acceptance Principle often seems to provide sufficient entitlement for knowledge [transmission]". And it requires disputing the analogy between the epistemologies of perception and testimony which Burge draws in this quote.

bears on Burge's conclusion that sometimes the beliefs we acquire from others are not empirical. If a proposition that is supported by an *a priori* warrant is presented-as-true by intelligible testimony, then, other things being equal, an audience is given the epistemic opportunity of forming a testimonial belief likewise supported by an *a priori* warrant: he need only accept the speaker's testimony. "People who depend on interlocution for knowledge of mathematical theorems but do not know the proofs can have *apriori* knowledge in this sense."<sup>46</sup> However if perception does *not merely* play a triggering role in understanding testimony, then testimonial beliefs are necessarily empirical. Thus people who depend on interlocution for knowledge of mathematical theorems but do not know the proofs are empirically justified in believing a proposition that is *a priori* justified. (I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.)

To be entitled to accept a proposition a speaker presents-as-true, according to the Acceptance Principle, an audience need *not* possess any reason to believe that the speaker is artless and competent, but may accept 'the information instinctively'. This is so even if the Acceptance Principle applies at an extremely high level of idealisation in most actual communication', rarely do we not possess empirical reasons for believing or disbelieving a speaker, and even though it 'is often a much weaker sign of truth ... than empirically justified beliefs about the interlocutor.' The Acceptance Principle makes no statistical claim about speakers tending to tell the truth, 'falsehoods might conceivably outnumber truths in a society';

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

it is not an empirical principle but the specification of ‘an entitlement that comes with being a rational agent’. Again this involves no statistical assumption, ‘we could learn empirically that most people are crazy’, only the presupposition that there is a conceptual relation between intelligibility and rational entitlement. The claim that testimonial beliefs are necessarily empirical is compatible with this presupposition.

The justification Burge offers for this ‘entitlement that comes with being a rational agent’ takes the following general form:

*A person is entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so, because it is prima facie preserved (received) from a rational source, or resource for reason; reliance on rational sources - or resources for reason - is, other things equal, necessary to the function of reason.*<sup>47</sup>

Entitlements derive from following procedures of belief-formation which accord with the norms of reason. To rely on a resource for reason would be to operate in accord with the norms of reason. Perception and memory, Burge assumes, are resources for reason. “The Acceptance Principle is an extension of this assumption: we are rationally entitled to rely on interlocution because we may presume it has a rational source.”<sup>48</sup> Reliance on rational sources is only ‘other things equal’ necessary to the function of reason because there could be a rational being that did not rely on rational sources other than itself. However whilst “relying on others is perhaps not

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

metaphysically necessary for any possible rational being ... it is cognitively fundamental to beings at all like us.”<sup>49</sup>

The general form of the justification of the Acceptance Principle Burge fills out as follows.<sup>50</sup>

- (P1) One is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that a rational source of presentations-as-true is a source of true presentations.
- (P2) If a message seems to be intelligible, then one is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that it has a rational source.
- (P3) If a message which seems to be intelligible is presented-as-true, then one is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that it is true.
- (C4) One is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that a seemingly intelligible message presented-as-true is true.
- (P5) One is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that if a message is seemingly intelligible then one understands it.
- (P6) If one understands a message that one is entitled, other things being equal, to presume is true, then one is entitled to accept it.
- (C7) *One is entitled to accept, other things being equal, an intelligible message presented-as-true.*

Testimony is a resource for reason because it presents seemingly intelligible propositional contents. Seeming intelligibility is an *a priori* prima facie sign of intelligibility. Intelligibility is an *a priori* prima facie sign of rationality. And there is an *a priori* prima facie relation between a

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

<sup>50</sup> This argument is abstracted from *ibid.*, 470-2.

content's being presented-as-true by a rational source and its having rational backing and between its having rational backing and its being true.

This justification of the Acceptance Principle demonstrates Burge's meta-epistemology. Each of the entitlements stated by the premises are defeasible. The entitlements hold only given no counter-considerations. The entitlement stated by the conclusion only follows from the premises insofar as none of these defeaters are activated. Thus the entitlement stated by the conclusion would be defeated by a defeater of *any* premise entitlement.

Let me illustrate, (the list which follows does not purport to be complete). (P1) would be defeated by a reason to believe either (1) that the source was incompetent or (2) that the source was artful. (P2) would be defeated by a reason to believe that (3) the message did not have an intentional source, for instance if the sound resembling intelligible speech was thought to be no more than the crackling of the spit in the fire. (P3) would be defeated by a reason to believe, again (1) that the source was incompetent, or, (4) that the source was irrational. (P5) would be defeated by a reason to believe (5) that one misheard, or (6) that one misunderstood. (P6) would be defeated by a reason to believe (7) that the message expressed a falsehood. And the entitlement stated by the conclusion, that is the Acceptance Principle, would be defeated by any of (1) to (7). Thus,

Given life's complexities, this default position is often left far behind in reasoning about whether to rely on a source. One might wonder, with some hyperbole, whether it can ever be the last word in the epistemology

of acceptance for anyone over the age of eleven.<sup>51</sup>

However provided there are no counter-considerations, provided life's complexities do not get in the way, the premises support the conclusion and audiences are entitled to accept those propositions which intelligible testimony presents-as-true. In doing so communication can preserve warrant.

### **6.3. Our Reliance upon Rational Sources**

If we are *a priori* entitled to rely on the resources of reason, then what must be established is that testimony is such a resource. Burge's strategy is to assert that if our reliance upon testimony were a reliance upon the presentations of rational sources, then testimony would be established as a resource for reason. This strategy seems vulnerable to scepticism. Burge notes,

There are deeper questions about rational entitlement that I cannot pursue in depth here. One can ask why one is entitled to rely on rational sources in view of the fact that they can be mistaken or misleading. This is

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.



tantamount to a traditional skeptical question about how putative rationality or justification is associated with truth. ... I will not take on scepticism here. I will assume that ... we are rationally entitled to rely on interlocution because we may assume that it has a rational source.<sup>52</sup>

Burge's assumption that we are entitled to rely on rational sources is stated by (P1) in the justification of the Acceptance Principle. It is this premise that the sceptic should contest. Why should we be entitled to presume that those contents presented-as-true by a rational source are true when rational sources can be both incompetent and artful? In §6.3.1 I will consider Burge's answer to this question. In §6.3.2 I will consider how this answer, and consequently the Acceptance Principle, engages with the sceptical argument I have given.

### *6.3.1. Concerning the Possibility of Incompetent and Artful Rational Sources*

“A *presupposition* [*not* a consequence] of the Acceptance

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 470. I think this is straightforwardly wrong. Asking why one is entitled to rely on testimony even though others may be incompetent and artful is *not* tantamount to posing a traditional sceptical question. It is tantamount to asking what is unique about testimony as a faculty of knowledge. My methodology creates an unfortunate complicity here.

Principle”, Burge claims, “is that one is entitled not to bring one’s source’s sincerity or justification into question, in the absence of reasons to the contrary.”<sup>53</sup> This entitlement is a presupposition of the Acceptance Principle because (P1) is a major premise in its justification. The possibility of a rational source being incompetent is easier to accommodate than the possibility of a rational source being artful. I will consider the problem of speakers being incompetent first and bracket artfulness.

With respect to the possibility of incompetence, Burge states the following.

[C]ontent is constitutively dependent, in the first instance, on patterned connections to a subject matter, connections that insure in normal circumstances a baseline of true thought presentations. So presentations’ having content must have an origin in getting things right.<sup>54</sup>

This argument moves immediately from ‘true thought presentations’ to ‘[uttered] presentations’. Now it is only a speaker’s competence that is under consideration: the possibility that the speaker might *not* believe what he presents is bracketed. However a speaker’s presentation of a belief will still be sensitive to his purpose in uttering. (For this reason I defined competence with respect to the proposition presented rather than the belief expressed.) And there are variations in the *degree* to which a speaker is warranted in believing the proposition presented that are independent of the warrant for the belief expressed. However this does not defeat Burge’s

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<sup>53</sup> Burge (1993), 468. My emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

fundamental point. The warrant supporting the proposition presented does not vary independently of the warrant supporting the belief expressed: if the proposition is not an expression of belief, the case is bracketed. Thus, for the purpose of the argument, the proposition presented and the belief expressed can be identified. Both are ensured to be true by and large. Thus the possibility of speaker's being incompetent may be overlooked.

This allows a dual reading of (P3) because it is thereby "both the content of intelligible propositional presentations-as-true and the *prima facie* rationality of their source [which] indicate a *prima facie* source of truth."<sup>55</sup> The *content* of intelligible propositional presentations-as-true 'intensifies' the *prima facie* connection to true presentations stated by (P3). But it is the *prima facie* rationality of the source that is the basis of (P3). This basis is the *a priori* connections between a being a rational source and being a source of truth. An artful source would be rational and yet fail to be a source of truth. Thus the possibility of artfulness is more difficult to accommodate than the possibility of incompetence because it threatens the entitlement stated by the major premise (P1).

As it stands, "The Acceptance Principle and its justification are formulated so as to be neutral on whether what is 'presented as true' comes from another person."<sup>56</sup> Thus Burge's use of 'present' is intentionally equivocal. Where the source is oneself the propositions presented-as-true are those presented by one's perception, memory and reason. Where the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

source is other than oneself the propositions presented-as-true are those presented by intelligible testimony. Consequently if it supposed that the source is outside oneself, then Burge acknowledges that the following issue is raised.

The straight-line route from the *prima facie* intelligibility of a presentation-as-true to *prima facie* rational characteristics of the source to *prima facie* acceptability (truth) of the presentation, is threatened by the fact that certain aspects of *rationality* (rational lying) may go *counter* to true presentations. So why should rationality, especially in another person, be a sign of truth?<sup>57</sup>

Given that it can be rational to mislead one's audience, the issue raised is that it seems that the *prima facie rational* characteristics of the source do not suffice to *prima facie* establish the *truth* of the source's presentations. (P1) is thrown into doubt. Why should a speaker's rationality establish the presumption that when his testimony is presented-as-true, it is true? If this presumption cannot, be justified the justification of the Acceptance Principle fails.

Given the assumption that rational speakers' possess largely true beliefs, what is needed is a entitlement to presume that if a speaker presents his testimony as true, he is artless. Burge gives two arguments for this presumption. I take the first argument to be the crux argument in that it legitimises the second. It does so through providing a rationale for Burge's assumption that establishing reliance upon testimony to be reliance upon

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

rational sources amounts to establishing that reliance upon testimony is reliance upon a resource for reason. It is this assumption which underlies the justification of the Acceptance Principle. And it is this assumption which underlies Burge's equivocal use of 'present'. It is upon this equivocation that I take Burge's second argument to depend. I take the second argument first.

Burge's second argument runs:

A condition on an individual's having propositional attitudes is that the content of those attitudes be systematically associated with veridical perceptions and true beliefs ... If a rational interlocutor presents intelligible contents as true, one can rationally presume that the contents are associated with a practice of successfully aiming at and presenting truth. Now an inertial principle appears applicable: since the intelligibility of a presentation-as-true indicates a source of both rational and true content presentations, one needs special reason to think there has been a deviation from rationally based, true truth presentation.<sup>58</sup>

This argument is elegant but unpersuasive in the present context because it rests on Burge's intentionally equivocal use of 'present'. To make this clear let me re-write Burge's argument employing a couple of prefixes. When it is clear that Burge is referring to the presentations of perception, memory or reason I will write 'R-present'. And when it is clear that Burge is referring to the presentations of testimony I will write 'T-present'. I then read Burge's argument as follows.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 475-6.

If a rational interlocutor presents intelligible contents as true, one can rationally presume that the contents are associated with a practice of successfully aiming at and R-presenting truth. Now an inertial principle appears applicable: since the intelligibility of a T-presentation-as-true indicates a source of both rational and true content R-presentations, one needs special reason to think there has been a deviation from rationally based, true truth presentation.

The inertial principle is offered as an answer to the question of why the rationality of a source generates a presumption that what is presented-as-true is true. That is, why (P1) holds. The crux of this question has boiled down to the issue of rational sources being artful. It has been accepted that a rational source of T-presentations will be a source of largely true R-presentations. Thus the inertial principle follows *only if* the intelligibility of a T-presentation-as-true were to provide *prima facie* reason to believe that the rational source would R-present this content as true. But whether it provides such a reason is just the question that is being pursued. Consequently until this equivocal use of ‘present’ is justified I read this argument as circular. Burge’s first argument effects such a justification.

Burge’s first argument runs:

One of reason’s primary functions is that of presenting truth, independently of special personal interests. Lying is sometimes rational in the sense that it is in the liar’s best interests. But lying occasions a disunity among the functions of reason. It conflicts with one’s reason’s transpersonal function of presenting the truth, independently of special personal interests. ... Reason has a function in providing guidance to truth,

in presenting and promoting truth without regard to individual interest. ... Unless there is a reason to think that a rational source is rationally disunified - in the sense that individual interest is occasioning conflict with the transpersonal function of reason - one is rationally entitled to abstract from individual interest in receiving something presented as true by such a source.<sup>59</sup>

I find this argument persuasive but complex. To clarify it I should first say how lying can be rational.

Reason functions to resolve choices.<sup>60</sup> How to act is ordinarily a choice. To present what one takes to be true to another is to act in a certain way and it is an action which, ordinarily, one can chose to perform. Whether it is rational to act in this way depends on what one believes and desires. Consequently whether it is rational to lie depends on what one believes and desires. One should be clear that insofar as a lie is rational its rationality is *independent* of the liar's personal interest in that *any reasonable person* with such beliefs and desires would have acted accordingly. Nor need a lie be to the liar's personal advantage: the beliefs and desires that constituted the liar's reasons for lying could be altruistic. Lies might also present truths. I suppose that a lie is the intentional utterance of what is taken to be a falsehood. But our intentions are fallible and our beliefs can be false. Thus a speaker can lie and yet present a truth or speak artlessly and yet present a falsehood. And a lie could provide "guidance" to

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>60</sup> See Rescher (1988).

truth. For example, suppose a speaker truly believes that the audience falsely believes that he, the audience, has consumed a hallucinatory drug and suppose the speaker desires the audience to accept what he sees. In such a case the speaker could lie and state, “Here is the antidote to the hallucinatory drug you have consumed”, offering the audience a peppermint. Thus the rationality of lies.

To understand a lie as rational one need to consider the liar’s perspective. To understand the presentation of a truth as rational no such relativisation is needed. A primary function of reason is to present truth and truth is not relativised to a believer or time.<sup>61</sup> Thus no relativisation is needed because one can take, so to speak, a transcendental perspective: from this perspective the presentation of truth is a primary function of reason. If it is supposed *that the presentations of rational sources can be presumed to be the presentations of reason*, then lying would effect a disunity in reason: a lie might well be rational from the liar’s perspective but from the transcendental perspective it would be irrational.

Are we entitled to this supposition? I assume so, because a rational source of presentations can surely be presumed to be a source of *reasoned* presentations. Thus insofar as we are entitled to presume that a presentation has a rational source, we are entitled to presume, other things being equal, that the rational source is not rationally disunified. We are entitled to presume that the reasons supporting the presentation are visible not simply from the rational source’s perspective but also from the transcendental

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<sup>61</sup> This has been denied. Truth has been taken as relative to a ‘conceptual scheme’.



perspective. However this is just to presume that if the rational source presents a content as true then the content is rationally supported and may be presumed true. Consequently we are entitled, other things equal, to overlook the possibility of a source being artful.

Burge takes, what I have termed, the transcendental perspective because he is concerned, not with our justification in acquiring testimonial beliefs but with our entitlement to such beliefs. His conception of entitlements is a conception of a form of epistemic warrant that derives from our operating in accord with the norms of reason. A focus on the norms of reason elides many differences between reliance upon perception, memory, reason and testimony. The latter, like the former three, can be assumed to be a resource for reason because a rational source operating in accord with the norms of reason will be a source of reasoned presentations. It is for this reason that the justification of the Acceptance Principle is 'neutral on whether what is "presented as true" comes from another person'. Consequently, when Burge considers our *entitlement* to rely on testimony it turns out that

Many of the differences between content passing between minds and content processed by a single mind derive from differences in modes of acquisition and in necessary background conditions, that do not enter in the justification force underwriting entitlement.<sup>62</sup>

It is just these differences, the distinctiveness of acquiring beliefs by means of testimony, that the sceptical argument for testimony explores. The

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

consequences of this for scepticism of testimony I consider in the next section.

### *6.3.2. The Acceptance Principle and Scepticism of Testimony*

The Acceptance Principle does not derive from a statistical claim about people mostly telling the truth.

The Acceptance Principle is not a statistical point about people's tending to tell the truth more often than not. Falsehoods might conceivably outnumber truths in a society.<sup>63</sup>

Our entitlement to accept those propositions intelligible testimony presents-as-true does not depend on such propositions being (statistically) probably true. Our entitlement depends on our finding the testimony intelligible, understanding it to present a proposition as true and having no stronger reasons prohibiting acceptance. In such a situation we would be entitled because our finding the testimony intelligible is a *prima facie* sign of the speaker's rationality, and, as such, if the speaker's testimony presented a proposition as true, then it is *prima facie* the case that it is true. These *a*

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

*priori* connections would not be altered by a statistical change in the amount of truth telling.

Statistics, by contrast, define the sceptical possibility. The sceptical possibility is that one could be the victim of a massive conspiracy whereby one is lied to *most* of the time and, because of the conspiracy where the lies of others purport to be presentations-as-true they ordinarily agree. This possibility grounds scepticism of testimony. It does so because once it is hypothesised that this possibility is real an epistemic context of doubt is created. In this context it becomes impossible to justifiably deny the premises of a sceptical argument to the conclusion that one is not justified in believing any proposition presented by testimony that one has otherwise insufficient reason to believe. That is, one is not justified in accepting any testimony presenting a t-proposition.

The crucial premise of this sceptical argument is that we are not justified in believing that the speaker did not lie. Until the sceptical hypothesis is made this premise can be denied. We possess extensive and sophisticated reasons for believing testimony to be credible and *a fortiori* for believing that speakers are not lying. Thus the sceptical conclusion *cannot be* the first order conclusion that we are not justified in accepting any testimony presenting a t-proposition. However our reasons for believing testimony to be credible are empirical reasons and the sceptical possibility envisages an empirically divergent world. If it is hypothesised that this world is the actual world, our reasons for believing testimony credible are thereby undercut. Thus the second order sceptical conclusion is yielded: we are not justified in believing that we are justified in accepting

testimony.

The justification Burge gives of the Acceptance Principle is not an empirical justification. This justification accordingly should not be effected by the sceptical hypothesis. Given the sceptical hypothesis there should be little testimonial knowledge to be acquired. Were speakers to lie most of the time, most of the time there would be no warrant to be preserved through understanding. But this should not effect our entitlement to accept testimony that presents-as-true the proposition it expresses. It is immaterial whether or not that proposition is a t-proposition. We are entitled to our acceptance of testimony. Were the sceptical hypothesis made this should only imply we should be entitled to believe many false propositions. This is not a problem for Burge.<sup>64</sup>

The Acceptance Principle might be unaffected by the sceptical hypothesis but it cannot be that the justification of Acceptance Principle and the sceptical argument totally bypass one another. The Acceptance Principle states an entitlement to acceptance. The sceptical argument concludes, at first order, that acceptance of any testimony expressing a t-proposition is not justified. But how could we be entitled to believe a proposition that we should not be justified in believing?

The answer to this puzzle, I suggest, is that if we are entitled to accept certain testimonies, then we *are* justified in believing that we are justified in accepting certain testimonies. This is to claim that the

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<sup>64</sup> Burge is happy with the thought that “we could be *a priori* entitled to false beliefs.” *Ibid.*, 473.

justification of the Acceptance Principle enables a response to second-order scepticism of testimony.

How is this response to scepticism provided? The second-order sceptical conclusion is that we are not justified in believing that we could justifiably believe t-propositions. This conclusion, one may recall, is reached by the sceptical hypothesis *undercutting* our reasons for justifying belief in certain t-propositions. It does this through defeating our reasons for believing the presenting testimony credible. Nonetheless, we are entitled to believe certain t-propositions. We are entitled to beliefs that are formed by procedures that accord with the norms of reason. And it would seem to accord with the norms of reason to believe those t-propositions that are presented by testimonies that we believe credible. Thus I suppose that the justification of the Acceptance Principle provides a rebutting reason to the sceptical hypothesis's undercutting reason: we do not only seem to possess reasons to believe certain testimonies credible, we are entitled to presume that we do in fact possess such reasons.

Here, then, is a response to scepticism of testimony. We possess a reason for denying a premise of the sceptical argument. This reason is provided by the fact that we possess extensive reasons for believing certain testimonies credible. The justification of the Acceptance Principle then demonstrates that these reasons are not undercut by the sceptical hypothesis. We possess *a priori* reasons to believe that we are entitled to these empirical reasons. Thus scepticism can be defeated at both first and second order.

Given my methodology, this response to scepticism should provide an outline of the correct epistemology of testimony. Burge's Acceptance Principle will be fundamental to this epistemology. It is the justification of this Principle that enables a response to second order scepticism. However the correct epistemology of testimony cannot be an epistemology of acceptance. Until our reasons for believing credible are considered, the Acceptance Principle and the sceptical argument paradoxically by-pass one another yielding a state of affairs where we are entitled to accept propositions we could not justifiably believe. Thus our reasons for believing testimony credible are equally fundamental to this response to scepticism.

The question remains as to how the epistemology suggested by this response to scepticism is to be developed. A major issue concerns the warrant supporting our testimonial beliefs. How are the Acceptance Principle and our reasons for believing testimony credible to be related? In the fundamental case, are our testimonial beliefs warranted by whatever warrant is preserved in acceptance? Or, are our testimonial beliefs warranted by our reasons for believing the presenting testimony credible? Even though Burge acknowledges that 'the epistemic default position articulated by the Acceptance Principle applies at an extremely high level of idealisation in most actual communication', he nonetheless claims that

unquestioned reliance is also common in adult life. ... We make use of a presumption of credibility when we read books, sign, or newspapers, or

talk to strangers on unloaded topics.<sup>65</sup>

This I should contest. We only seem to make use of this presumption. I might seem to unquestionably rely on certain books and newspapers but I do not thus rely on all books and newspapers. I only rely on those I believe tend to be credible. I should be a fool were I to do otherwise. Consequently I shall claim that our reasons for believing testimony credible are an essential part of the warrant supporting our testimonial beliefs. It is not that they are only relevant when there are counterconsiderations prohibiting credulity. Exactly how this epistemological option is worked out is the concern of my next chapter.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 468-9.

## THE SOCIAL CHARACTER OF TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE

My ambition is to provide an epistemological theory of testimony. The attempt to provide such a theory is part of the wider epistemological enterprise of explaining how we acquire and retain the knowledge we have. This project presumes that the different ways in which we acquire and retain knowledge should each be associated with a unique epistemological account; it presumes that the differences in the ways in which we acquire and retain knowledge are epistemologically significant. One epistemologically significant difference between testimony and the other faculties of knowledge, in this respect, is that testimony is *both* a way of acquiring *and* a way of retaining knowledge. An epistemological theory of testimony should account for this fact.

Testimony is most visibly a way of retaining knowledge if chains of speakers and audiences expressing and accepting knowledge claims are considered. Much of our knowledge—that is, the knowledge we possess *as a community*—we possess only because it has been transmitted along such chains. But what is a *community of knowledge*? This is comparable to asking ‘What is a society?’ or ‘What is a language?’ and it is no easier to answer than either of these questions. In one sense a community of



knowledge can be identified as the wider society. But communities bridge societies and outlive civilisations. When we talk of ‘our knowledge of the classical world’, *our* does not refer only to Englishmen.<sup>1</sup> And many communities nest and overlap within one society. An historian need not be a medievalist; a medievalist could also be a mason, a Sunday footballer and so on.<sup>2</sup> In another sense a community of knowledge can be identified in terms of communicated propositions. But we can retell the same events differently and still communicate our knowledge of these events. And whilst there may be little agreement between sceptics and ‘positive epistemologists’ both are still members of the same community.<sup>3</sup> Thus I use ‘community of knowledge’ roughly to mean a social group constituted by acts of communicating about a certain topic. This is not a definition but it is specific enough to go on with.<sup>4</sup>

In trying to provide an account of testimony as a faculty of knowledge I have been hitherto concentrating on the perspective of the individual. As individuals we form testimonial beliefs by believing the propositions intelligibly presented by the utterances of others. Sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> An analogy could be drawn. “Latin is not a dead language; every one in Paris speaks it, everyone in Rome, everyone in Madrid.” Kenner (1971), 96. Similarly communities of knowledge found in the classical world survive.

<sup>2</sup> The overlapping of communities seems a particularly, though not exclusively, modern phenomenon connected to the general division of society. The nesting of communities seems universal; for instance see Evans-Pritchard (1940), Ch. 4. This nesting is pithily expressed in an Arabic proverb: ‘I fight my brother, the two of us fight our cousin, the three of us fight the world’.

<sup>3</sup> I take the term ‘positive epistemology’ from Coady (1992), 3.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘community of knowledge’ comes from Welbourne (1979). He defines a community of knowledge in terms of *sharing* knowledge. If {A, B, ... } share knowledge of the facts that {*p*, *q*, ... }, then {A, B, ... } *are* a community of knowledge. This community of knowledge is constituted by acts of telling that {*p*, *q*, ... } as fact. I find this definition too reified and, therefore, opt for the gloss given. The two are obviously similar.

the propositions others intelligibly express are warranted.<sup>5</sup> And sometimes the warrant supporting a proposition may be supplemented by being passed along a chain of testimony: it will be so whenever an audience possesses stronger warrant for believing the proposition than the speaker. Where testimony expresses a t-proposition its warrant will not ordinarily be supplemented: it will *only* be so when the audience possesses expert knowledge about what the speaker says.<sup>6</sup> But testimony delivers more than t-propositions; speakers also express things that as audiences we have otherwise sufficient reason to believe. Thus with a response to scepticism of testimony found the concentration on t-propositions can be abandoned. This restriction was imposed by the sceptical argument; it was imposed by the focus on what is fundamental to the case of acquiring knowledge through testimony.

Suppose a proposition has been communicated along a chain of testimony, which may have only one speaker-audience link. Let me distinguish between the warrant supporting a proposition and the warrant supporting a belief.<sup>7</sup> And let me define the *extended warrant* of this proposition as the conjunction of the warrant possessed by the original speaker for believing the proposition together with any supplementary warrant provided for this proposition by the chain of communicators.

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<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I shall continue to discriminate justifications and entitlements as species of epistemic warrant.

<sup>6</sup> For instance the doctor who diagnoses A's wrist pains as "the anterior interosseus .." and the bodyguard in §3.0 who listened to the speaker's clairvoyant hunches. For another example see Coady (1992), 219.

<sup>7</sup> This distinction is owed to M.G.F. Martin. I have already used it in defining a speaker's competence in terms of the warrant supporting the proposition his testimony expresses.

An epistemological theory of testimony should provide some account of the fact that testimony is both a way of acquiring and retaining (or preserving) knowledge. This fact seems a consequence of being able to take social and the individual perspectives on the transmission of knowledge. Thus I suggest that to give an account of this fact would be to consider, at least in its preliminaries, how the individual knower is related to the community of knowledge. And this question, I suggest, can be rephrased as the question of how the warrant supporting an audience's testimonial belief is related to the extended warrant of the proposition believed.

Burge's epistemology of acceptance *equates* the warrant supporting an audience's testimonial belief with the extended warrant of the proposition believed. Precedence is thereby given to the community of knowledge because the Acceptance Principle is understood to state an entitlement to be credulous. It is this interpretation of the Acceptance Principle that determines the epistemic role Burge gives to the individual audience's reasons for believing testimony. I would deny that the Acceptance Principle is a principle of credulity. Epistemic subjects are, or more appropriately should be, active members, rather than passive vessels, within a community of knowledge. The existence of a community deserving this name depends on this. This denial requires a different interpretation of the Acceptance Principle.

I begin, in §7.01, by focusing the difference between Burge's position and the position I believe is delineated by the response to scepticism given in the last chapter. The remains of the chapter is then

divided into three main sections. In §7.1 I will characterise how I believe Burge's position relates the individual knower to the community of knowledge. This characterisation motivates my defence, in §7.2, of the position sketched in §7.01. In contrast to Burge's position I will deny that we are entitled to be credulous. The lynch pin of my arguments shall be the notion of doxastic responsibility. In §7.3 I will state how the position reached provides an alternative account of how individual knowers are related to the community of knowledge.

#### *7.0.1. The Epistemic Role of Positive and Defeating Reasons in the Acceptance of Testimony*

The Acceptance Principle, according to Burge, states an entitlement to be credulous. A person is entitled to *simply accept* any testimony that presents-as-true the proposition it expresses "unless there are stronger reasons (available to the person)" not to do so.<sup>8</sup> An audience's entitlement to be credulous is defeated by *his reasons* not to be. Acceptance is entitled, other things being equal. Thus a description of an audience's reasons for rejecting testimony will state defeaters of the Acceptance Principle and a

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<sup>8</sup> Burge (1997), 22, n.4.

description of further reasons for accepting a proposition will potentially state defeaters of these defeaters.

Let me consider an audience's reasons for rejecting and accepting testimony in more detail. Suppose a speaker S utters 'U' and expresses that  $p$ . An audience A who understood S's utterance to present that  $p$  as true would be entitled to believe that  $p$ . However A might possess reasons for rejecting that  $p$  and his entitlement to believe that  $p$  would thereby be defeated. The audience A might possess other reasons to believe that not- $p$ . Call these *rebutting* reasons. Or A might possess reason to believe S's testimony non-credible. Such a reason could be supplied by a reason to believe S's testimony *generally* non-credible, A might, for instance, distrust people like S. Or it could be supplied by a reason to believe S's testimony non-credible *in this instance*, irrespective of the plausibility of that  $p$  or his generally being credible, A might think S would lie in this case. Call both these general and particular reasons *undercutting* reasons.

It would be helpful to illustrate these processes of defeat. Suppose S tells an Indian Prince that rivers become solid in English Winter. The Prince possesses a rebutting reason for rejecting S's testimony, namely his supplementary reasons for believing that water is never solid. Suppose A perceives doctor S to seem unsure as he mumbles his diagnosis. A possesses a particular undercutting reason for rejecting S's testimony, namely his contextual reasons for judging that S's testimony is non-credible.

A proposition may become accepted as these defeating reasons are themselves defeated. A's rebutting reason would be rebutted were A to

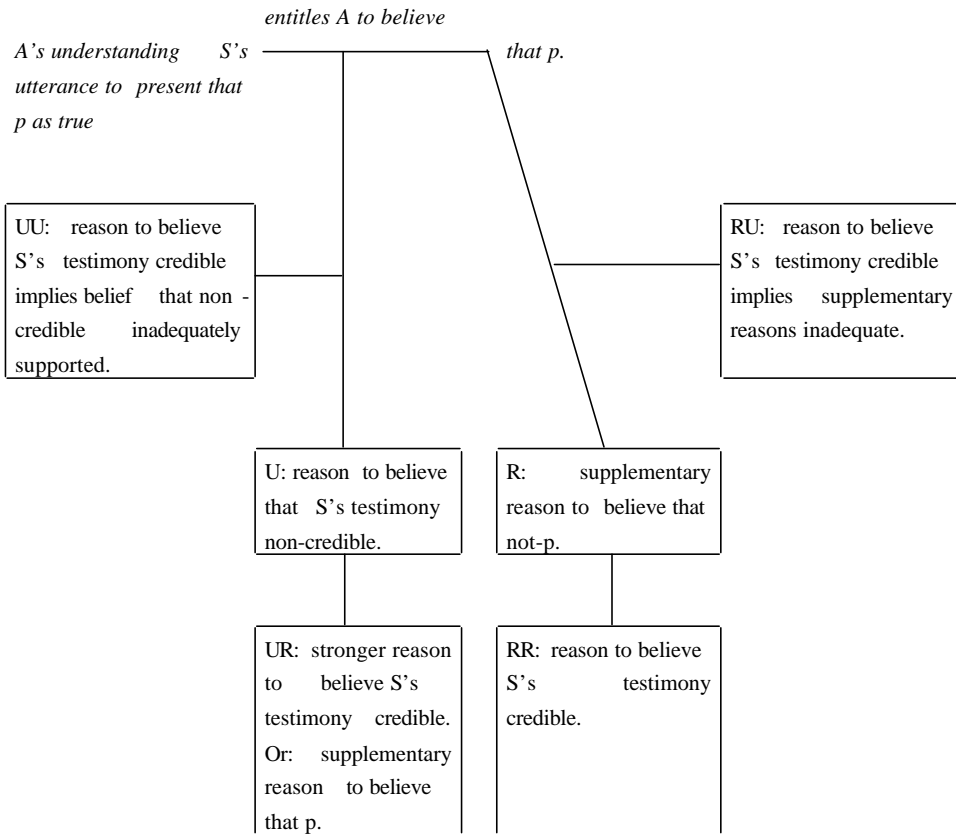
believe that S's presenting that  $p$  as true provided a stronger reason to believe that  $p$  than his other reasons for believing that not- $p$ . A's rebutting reason would be undercut were A to believe that given S's utterance, his other reasons for believing that not- $p$  were inadequate. A's undercutting reason would be rebutted were A to possess other stronger reasons to believe that  $p$  or were A to believe that S's presenting that  $p$  as true provided a stronger reason to believe that  $p$ . And A's undercutting reason would be undercut were A to believe that given S's utterance, his reason to believe that S's presenting that  $p$  as true constituted a reason to believe not- $p$  was inadequate.

Again it would be helpful to illustrate these processes of defeat. Having rejected S's testimony the Prince might articulate a rebutting reason of his rebutting reason. He might believe that he nonetheless possesses reason to believe S's testimony credible. Maybe the Prince has only observed S to have been hitherto correct in all that he has said. Or the Prince might articulate an undercutting reason of his rebutting reason. He might acknowledge that it does not become very cold in his Kingdom and S's testimony is the credible testimony of a man from a very cold Kingdom. Having rejected S's testimony the patient might articulate a rebutting reason of his undercutting reason. He might believe that he possesses prior reason to believe S's testimony credible. Maybe he trusts doctors or maybe S has been accurate in his past diagnoses, or, at least, the treatments he has prescribed have been efficacious. Or he might possess supplementary reasons to accept S's diagnosis. Maybe it corroborates the diagnosis of another doctor or coheres with what else he has reason to believe about his

health and lifestyle. Or the patient might articulate an undercutting reason of his undercutting reason. He might believe he were too hasty in judging S's testimony non-credible, given the nature of S's testimony, its delicacy or S's general awkwardness, maybe S were simply nervous.

Defeaters of defeaters may themselves be defeated. This would be to return the audience to the position of rejecting the speaker's testimony. The audience might judge that his supplementary reasons for disbelieving the proposition were too strong to be defeated by his belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony. Or the audience might judge his reasons for believing the speaker's testimony non-credible were too strong to be defeated by other considerations. I presume that these judgements can be represented as no more than a further balancing of the first- and second-level defeaters already considered; I presume that this third-level of defeasible reasoning adds nothing new.

Let me label rebutting reasons R and undercutting reasons U. And let me label a rebutting reason of a rebutting reason RR, with the rebutter that is rebutted figuring first, and so on. Thus the four defeaters of defeaters are: RR, RU, UR and UU. The picture so far maybe be drawn:



A person is entitled to accept testimony intelligibly presenting a proposition as true unless there are stronger reasons available to that person that defeat this entitlement. These *defeating reasons* would be supplementary reasons to believe the proposition false *and* reasons to believe the speaker's testimony non-credible. Balanced against and potentially defeating these counterconsiderations are *positive reasons* to accept testimony. Positive reasons would be supplementary reasons to believe the proposition expressed true *and* reasons to believe the speaker's testimony credible.



The difference between Burge's position and the position I aim to argue for may now be simply stated. According to Burge the balancing of defeating and positive reasons for acceptance is merely the psychological process by means of which the audience's testimonial belief is fixed. Positive reasons for acceptance can justify the audience's testimonial belief but that is *not* their fundamental epistemic role. In the fundamental case an audience's testimonial belief is warranted by the warrant preserved in understanding. Only if there were no warrant preserved would the audience's positive reasons for acceptance epistemically support his testimonial belief, otherwise the justification conferred by such reasons would simply over-determine the belief's warrant.<sup>9</sup> The fundamental epistemic role of positive reasons for acceptance is to articulate the defeat of defeating reasons and thereby entitle the audience to be credulous.<sup>10</sup>

I will argue that these polarities need to be reversed. The balancing of defeating and positive reasons is fundamentally the rational process by means of which the audience's testimonial belief is justified. It *can* also describe the psychological process of belief fixation. It does so whenever an audience is doxastically responsible and it fails to do so whenever belief is fixed by superstition, fear, optimism, gullibility or some other non-rational process. But it is not fundamentally a description of psychological process.

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<sup>9</sup> "Often we need empirical reasons to defeat reasonable doubts that threaten our right to acceptance. But sometimes empirical reasons simply reinforce and overdetermine the default entitlement." Burge (1993), 484-5.

<sup>10</sup> McDowell's conception of our reasons for believing testimony is similar: our reasons are needed for no other purpose than getting us to the epistemic position where we are entitled to be credulous. In that position McDowell would claim that knowledge is transmitted and Burge that warrant is preserved.

On Burge's view audiences are entitled to be credulous. I presume that this is not an entitlement to be gullible; I presume it is not an entitlement to be doxastically irresponsible. To be doxastically responsible is to be *sensitive* to positive and defeating reasons for acceptance. The ability to balance these reasons and judge that acceptance is reasonable is the ability to be doxastically responsible. If the entitlement to be credulous is not to be an entitlement to be gullible it must be presumed, at least, that audiences possess the ability to be doxastically responsible. This presumption is compatible with asserting a principle of credulity. The ability can be understood as necessary only to get the audience into an epistemic position where he can be credulous. Its necessity would then be understood to be that of a background causal condition; analogously one need be able to perceive to acquire testimonial knowledge. In the fundamental case an audience can acquire knowledge by being credulous.<sup>11</sup>

I will argue that the ability to be doxastically responsible is necessary to the acquisition of testimonial knowledge not in the manner of perception but in the manner of understanding. The ability to understand and the ability to be doxastically responsible are the two abilities binding the individual knower to the community of knowledge.

Before stating how this position is possible and why I believe it is correct, I will consider how Burge's position relates the individual knower

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<sup>11</sup> In effect this makes Burge's position similar to McDowell's who claims that only the doxastically responsible are entitled to take appearances at face value. To be doxastically responsible, in McDowell's terms, is to be 'rationally sensitive to the force of surrounding considerations'.

to the community of knowledge. This shall occupy §7.1. The considerations adduced should motivate the arguments offered in §7.2.

## **7.1. The Preservation of Warrant and Epistemic Authority**

Two kinds of positive reason for accepting a proposition expressed by testimony have been distinguished. One can possess reasons for believing that the presenting testimony is credible. This is to believe that the speaker's expression of this proposition is evidence that it is probably true. This kind of reason justifies believing the proposition on the basis of the speaker's testimony. And one can possess, what I termed, supplementary reasons for believing a proposition. These are reasons for thinking the proposition true independent of its expression by the speaker's testimony. This kind of reason justifies believing the proposition on the basis of what else is believed. If an audience lacks supplementary reasons to believe a proposition, that is, if the only reason an audience possesses to believe a proposition is a belief in credibility of the testimony that expressed it, then

let me say that the speaker is an *epistemic authority* for the audience at that time.<sup>12</sup>

The Acceptance Principle states that we are entitled, other things being equal, to accept those propositions intelligibly presented as true without reason. One need neither possess reason to believe the testimony credible nor the proposition true. One need only lack reasons to believe either the testimony non-credible or the proposition false. Audiences can nonetheless acquire testimonial knowledge by credulously accepting a proposition because in understanding testimony the extended warrant of the proposition believed is preserved. In accepting testimony credulously audiences are *epistemically dependent* on speakers: whether the audience acquires a warranted testimonial belief or not depends on whether the proposition expressed is warranted.

Our relationship to epistemic authorities, Hardwig claims, is one of epistemic dependence. Hardwig goes on to argue that *if our epistemic dependence on authorities is acknowledged, then either one must suppose that an individual can be a knower without possessing reasons for what is known or dramatic changes in our conception of what it is to know must be made*. Let me call this *Hardwig's gauntlet*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Testimony that expresses a t-proposition need not be the testimony of an epistemic authority: one can possess supplementary reasons to believe a t-proposition that would nonetheless be insufficient to justify belief. Other things one believes might make a proposition plausible but not alone justify believing it.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly Welbourne claims that once the transmissibility of knowledge is acknowledged we must stop giving conjunctive analyses of knowledge.

This section is divided into three parts. In §7.1.1 I will outline Hardwig's argument for this gauntlet. In §7.1.2 I will interpret Burge's epistemology in the light of this challenge. I will develop the objection that given Burge's interpretation of the Acceptance Principle, one must suppose that a knower can be such without possessing reasons for what is known. I shall suggest a strategy for escaping this objection. In §7.1.3 I will develop this strategy and argue that Burge's epistemology allows an attractive alternative conception of what it is to know. That is, I will provide an account of how Burge's epistemology of acceptance is challenged by Hardwig's gauntlet and then an account of how he could rise to this challenge.

### *7.1.1. Our Dependence on Epistemic Authority*

Epistemic authority is most salient when the speaker is an expert speaking about his area of expertise. It is with the epistemic authority of experts that Hardwig starts his article on epistemic dependence. He begins:

I find myself believing all sorts of things for which I do not possess evidence: that smoking cigarettes causes lung cancer, that my car keeps stalling because the carburetor needs to be rebuilt ... The list of things I

believe, though I have no evidence for the truth of them, is, if not infinite, virtually endless.<sup>14</sup>

Hardwig claims that he does 'not possess evidence' for these testimonial beliefs, that is 'evidence for the truth of them'. A reason for believing a testimony credible can be no more than 'a good reason to believe the speaker has a good reason to believe' the proposition his testimony expresses. It is the speaker's reasons, not the audience's, that constitute evidence for the truth of the proposition the speaker's testimony expresses. Thus, given the assumption that we can gain testimonial knowledge from epistemic authorities, we must allow that audiences can gain testimonial knowledge even when they possess no evidence for the truth of the proposition believed.

In believing that the speaker has good reasons the audience appeals to the speaker's epistemic authority and

The chain of appeals to authority must end somewhere, and, if the whole chain of appeals is to be epistemically sound, it must end with someone who possesses the necessary evidence.<sup>15</sup>

I assume that to be epistemically sound is to be warranted. Consequently I suppose Hardwig's thought to be that if an audience forms a belief by appeal to the speaker's epistemic authority, then the audience's testimonial belief is warranted if and only if the proposition the speaker expresses is

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<sup>14</sup> Hardwig (1985), 335.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

warranted. In forming a belief by appealing to an epistemic authority an audience is thereby *epistemically dependent* on the speaker.

Once our epistemic dependence on epistemic authorities is accepted, Hardwig goes on to argue, then we face the challenge I called ‘Hardwig’s gauntlet’.

Hardwig’s argument starts with the thought that epistemic dependence does not only characterise the lay audience’s relation to expert testimony. Even within their fields of expertise experts are epistemically dependent. Hardwig provides an illustration to support this claim. Some of the most collaborative work is done by experimental physicists. Hardwig’s illustration is an extreme instance of collaborative effort. The article, “Charm Photoproduction Cross Section at 20 GeV”, *Physical Review Letters*, Vol. 51, No. 5, 1983, stated the results of an experiment, recording charm events and measuring the life-span of charm particles, that was conducted by ninety nine physicists. This immense collaboration was required not simply because the experiment needed approximately 280 man / years to execute but also because a division of skills and knowledge was needed to execute it. Thus the results of the experiment ‘could not have been achieved by any one person’. Supposing the known results are that  $p$ , “we then”, Hardwig claims, “have something like the following.”

$A$  knows that  $m$ .

$B$  knows that  $n$ .

$C$  knows (1) that  $A$  knows that  $m$ , and (2) that if  $m$ , then  $o$ .

$D$  knows (1) that  $B$  knows that  $n$ , (2) that  $C$  knows that  $o$ , and (3) that if  $n$  and  $o$ , then  $p$ .

*E* knows that *D* knows that *p*.<sup>16</sup>

When Hardwig states that “*C* knows that *A* knows that *m*”, I assume that *A* knows that *m*, tells *C* that *m* and, consequently, *C* forms the testimonial belief that *m* which constitutes knowledge because the proposition *A* expressed was known. Thus *C* is epistemically dependent on *A*. As such the published result requires that *C* be epistemically dependent on *A* and *D* be epistemically dependent on *B* and *C*.

As this is a schematic representation of the network of actual epistemic dependencies Hardwig concludes that

Unless we maintain that most of our scientific research and scholarship could *never*, because of the cooperative methodology of the enterprise, result in knowledge, I submit that we must say that *p* is known in cases like this. But if *D* or *E* knows that *p*, we must also say that someone can know “vicariously” - i.e. without possessing the evidence for the truth of what he knows, perhaps without even fully understanding what he knows. And this conclusion would require dramatic changes in our analysis of what knowledge must be. If this conclusion is unpalatable, another is possible. Perhaps that *p* is known, not by any one person, but by the *community* composed of *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E*.<sup>17</sup>

If the extent of our epistemic dependence is acknowledged, then *either we face the problem that an individual can be a knower without possessing reasons for what is known or we must make dramatic changes to our*

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-9.



*conception of what it is to know*. This is Hardwig's gauntlet. In §7.1.2 I will develop the objection stated by its first disjunct. In §7.1.3 I outline a response that satisfies its second disjunct and develops Hardwig's suggestion. Audiences can be thought of as being knowers not as individuals but as members of some community of knowledge.

### *7.1.2. Testimonial Knowledge and Reasons*

Suppose that A can know that  $p$  only if A possesses a reason to believe that  $p$  is true. In order for  $q$  to be a *reason to believe* that  $p$ , A must be able, if only on reflection, to offer  $q$  as a reason for  $p$ . If  $q$  is a reason for belief, then it must provide an explanation of why A believes as he does;  $q$  would not do so were it cognitively inaccessible. The supposition is that an internalist condition is needed in an account of what it is to know.

Now there is a sense in which the fact that an audience can understand a testimony provides him with a *reason to believe* the proposition it presents-as-true. This sense is captured by the justification of the Acceptance Principle. However this, at least ordinarily, is not the sense just outlined. An analogy could be drawn to illustrate this. There is a sense in which the fact that a proposition is output by a reliable belief forming

mechanism could be a reason to believe it. It would be so, were this fact believed to be the case. However if the subject was not aware that a proposition was output by a reliable belief forming mechanism, then the fact that it is so, would not provide him with a reason to believe it. Similarly if a subject were not aware of the justification of the Acceptance Principle, then the fact that he understood a testimony would not provide him with a reason to believe it. Thus the fact that an audience can understand a testimony does *not ordinarily* provide him with a reason to believe it.<sup>18</sup>

We are entitled to acquire information according to the [Acceptance] principle -without *using* it as justification - accepting the information instinctively.<sup>19</sup>

And entitlements are epistemic rights that ‘need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject’.

In the fundamental case, an audience can acquire testimonial knowledge through acting credulously and instinctively accepting the proposition an intelligible testimony presents-as-true. Consider such cases. The title of the audience’s testimonial belief to count as knowledge is not constituted by the audience’s positive reasons for taking the proposition believed to be true. The audience does not accept the testimony because he believes that it is credible. Nor does the audience possess supplementary reasons for believing the proposition the testimony expresses. The information presented has been accepted by *instinct*, that is, *without*

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<sup>18</sup> The caveat ‘ordinarily’ returns me to Boghossian’s understanding of the distinction between justifications and entitlements. See §6.1. Epistemologists are extraordinary.

<sup>19</sup> Burge (1993), 467.

*reason*. The audience acquires knowledge because *understanding preserves warrant*. Through believing the proposition the speaker's testimony intelligibly presents-as-true the testimonial belief the audience instinctively forms inherits the extended warrant of this proposition. Thus audiences can acquire testimonial knowledge.

This conception of testimonial knowledge denies the original supposition: it is claimed that an audience A can know that *p* even if he has no reason to believe that *p* true. Burge's position is, what could be called, *social externalism*: warrant is fundamentally fixed by social factors. Just as the contents of many of our thoughts are fixed by social reality so too, Burge claims, is the warrant supporting many of our beliefs.<sup>20</sup> These social factors need not be cognitively accessible to the individual. Thus Burge's position should be vulnerable to a criticism levelled against externalist epistemologies.

Consider a testimonial belief which satisfies two conditions: (1) the proposition believed is true and possesses an extended warrant that is knowledge supporting; and (2) the existence of any positive reasons for accepting this proposition is perfectly offset by defeating reasons dictating disbelief. This second condition would be satisfied *either* by positive reasons perfectly cancelling defeating reasons *or* by an absence of both types of reason. The former situation is far more frequent. I find, for instance, my very knowledgeable friends saying very implausible things;

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<sup>20</sup> Thus alongside a social externalist account of content, stated first in Burge (1979), Burge provides a socially externalist account of warrant.

nearly any illustration, once considered in realistic detail, will reveal reasons at least for judging the credibility of testimony. An absence of reasons would require an extra-ordinary illustration. However this is the illustration which should be considered: only then would credulity clearly be emphasised as the mechanism of belief formation. On Burge's view such a testimonial belief would constitute knowledge even though the audience possesses no more reason for thinking it to be true than false.

Suppose blind drunk Faith, arriving at a party where she seems to know no one, is confronted by an odd party game. The party-goers type statements about themselves. She receives one such piece of paper from a stranger and is then presented with the choice, 'Is the statement True or False?' Of course, Faith believes it to be true. On Burge's view, given that Faith's testimonial belief satisfies (1), it constitutes knowledge.

It must be *at least* as reasonable to act on what one knows as it is to act on what one reasonably believes. Now suppose the game alters to force Faith into making a rational choice. Faith must choose between the truth of the typed statement or her knowing someone at this party. The stakes are high. Faith believes that she knows someone at this party. She *was* coming to the party with her friends, but given that she did not recognise anyone on entering and did not enter with her friends, having somehow been separated earlier, she judges this choice little more than reasonable. Which bet should Faith choose? I suppose that

It seems relatively clear that it is more reasonable for [Faith] to bet [that she knows someone at the party] than to bet [that this typed statement is true]. But then we have the paradoxical result that ... it is more rational to

act on a merely reasonable belief than to act on one that is adequately justified to qualify as knowledge (and which in fact *is* knowledge). It is very hard to see how this could be so.<sup>21</sup>

This paradoxical result generates an objection to Burge's socially externalist epistemology because it implies that this epistemology severs some of the connections between knowledge and reasons that we take to be fundamental. This may be illustrated. Suppose a pirate spends all day digging, breaking his back under the tropical sun. The pirate's action is reasonable *only because he knows* that he is digging for treasure and he is digging in the right place because he hid the treasure himself and drew a map with 'X' marking this spot. If he didn't know this, if he only had a reasonable belief that treasure could be found here, he wouldn't spend all day digging. But *if it were* more reasonable to act on what one reasonably believed, one could only conclude the pirate's brain addled by the tropical sun.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless the intuitions which generate the paradoxical result just reached could be denied. It could be that a different conception of rationality is in play than that needed to generate this result. It could be that under this conception of rationality it would be more reasonable for Faith to bet that the typed statement is true. It might *seem* reasonable for Faith to bet that she knows someone at the party, but it should merely seem to be so. It is just that from Faith's own perspective at that time she is unable to

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<sup>21</sup> BonJour (1980), 65.

<sup>22</sup> Williamson makes a parallel point. Many of our *causal explanations* of the actions of others would be weakened if based on attributions of reasonable belief rather than knowledge. See Williamson (1995), 548-9.

distinguish what is, from what merely seems reasonable. But, need there be any requirement that an individual can always determine, at any one time, what is in fact rational? Couldn't it be that sometimes it is rational to act in a manner that might seem irrational?

Hardwig explicitly embraces this alternative conception of rationality. He states that “it is sometimes *irrational* to think for oneself - that *rationality* sometimes consists ... in passively and uncritically accepting what we are given to believe.”<sup>23</sup> Equally Burge could claim that it should be irrational for Faith to think for herself because were she to do so she would bet on her merely believing that she knows someone at the party rather than on her knowing what the typed statement says.

This raises the question, why should this external social perspective—a perspective that takes in the fact that the typed statement was an expression of knowledge—determine the rationality of an individual's actions? I consider this question in the next section where I attempt to outline an alternative conception of what it is to know.

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<sup>23</sup> Hardwig (1985), 343.

### 7.1.3. *The Knowledgeable Community*

Consider again the internalist supposition. ‘A can know that  $p$  only if A possesses a reason to believe that  $p$ .’ And in order for  $q$  to be a reason to believe that  $p$ , A must be able on reflection to offer  $q$  as a reason for  $p$ ;  $q$  must be cognitively accessible. What is supposed is that knowledge requires A possess reasons: in order to be a knower A be able *to justify that  $p$* , it is not enough that he possesses an entitlement to believe that  $p$ . I will argue that *if* this internalist supposition is understood in a particular manner, then it is compatible with Burge’s epistemology of acceptance. To see this it would be helpful if the supposition was rephrased.

In characterising an episode or state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons of justifying and being able to justify what one says.<sup>24</sup>

If A is characterised as knowing that  $p$ , then A’s believing that  $p$  ‘must be placed in the logical space of reasons of justifying and being able to justify that  $p$ ’. This supposition is then read under the assumption that this is something that A, as an individual, does.

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<sup>24</sup> Sellars (1963), 169.

According to Burge, an audience's testimonial belief, in this case A's belief that  $p$ , is justified by the reasons that constitute the extended warrant of the proposition the speaker's testimony expressed. Whilst these reasons need be neither accessible to the audience nor to the speaker, and, I believe Hardwig has shown, these reasons need not be accessible to any one individual, the internalist supposition can still be accepted; the reasons that justify A's belief must *be accessible*: they must be accessible to the community.<sup>25</sup> The suggestion, then, is that in characterising an audience as a knower because the audience's testimonial belief is supported by, a possibly community extensive, extended warrant, what we are doing is placing the audience's belief in the socially articulated space of reasons whereby the community could justify the proposition believed. In the fundamental case the reasons which justify the audience's testimonial belief could only be articulated by the community of knowledge of which the speaker and audience are members. The audience 'possesses' these reasons by virtue of being a member of this community of knowledge.

Thus a response is available to the objection made against Burge's epistemology of acceptance. This epistemology is not vulnerable to the criticism frequently levelled against externalist epistemologies. The intuitions generating these criticisms can be diverted and the internalist's condition on knowledge can be satisfied. It is just that this condition is satisfied by the community rather than the individual.

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<sup>25</sup> This argument strategy may seem familiar: it the same as that used to respond to Bonjour's argument in §2.1 where *justifying* was distinguished from *being justified*. Here *cognitive accessibility* is similarly understood as *being accessible*.



Nonetheless the question raised at the end of the last section remains. Why should the community determine the rationality of an individual's actions? An answer to this question is needed if the diversion of our intuitions is not to be plainly counter-intuitive to the individualist. Sufficient answer is given if the non-individualist way of understanding the internalist supposition just outlined can raise an objection to an individualist's way of understanding of this supposition. Such an objection is raised by Brandom. He states:

If one *individualises* the space of reasons, forgetting that it is a *shared* space within which we adopt attitudes towards *each other* - and so does not think about standings in the space of reasons as socially articulated, as potentially including the social difference of perspective between attributing and undertaking commitments, that is between your standing and mine - then one will not be able to understand knowledge as a standing in the space of reasons.<sup>26</sup>

The objection seems to be as follows. 'If the internalist supposition is understood individualistically, then one will not be able to understand A's knowing that  $p$  as a standing in the space of reasons. But that knowledge should be understood as a standing in the space of reasons is just the internalist supposition. Thus if the internalist supposition is understood individualistically, then it cannot be understood.' Is the objection, then, that an individualist's understanding of the internalist condition on knowledge is unintelligible? If it is, this is a very strong objection that I cannot provide

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<sup>26</sup> Brandom (1995), 904.

any clear account of. Nonetheless Brandom's objection reveals a suggestive line of thought. This line of thought provides evidence to support the claim that the non-individualist way of understanding the internalist supposition should be attributed to Burge; it is not just that it is available to him.

The grounds of Brandom's objection is the Davidsonian idea that "the contrast between truth and error - true belief and false belief ... can only emerge in the context of interpretation, which alone forces us to the idea of an objective, public truth."<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile "The Acceptance Principle", Burge says, "is clearly similar to what is widely called a "Principle of Charity" for translating or interpreting others." The "most obvious difference" between these principles is that the Acceptance Principle depends on our possessing an entitlement to presume that testimony is "understood without interpretation".<sup>28</sup> Consequently, I want to suggest that both Brandom's objection and Burge's claim that we are entitled to presume that we understand when we seem to understand *rest on the same Davidsonian idea*. With the Acceptance Principle Burge draws an epistemic consequence from the Principle of Charity that Davidson does not. And the consequences of this inference should be understood in the manner suggested by Brandom.

The Davidsonian idea at issue is that the source of the concept of truth is interpersonal communication. This idea maybe explained as follows. Suppose every time the interpreter sees a rabbit scurry past the

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<sup>27</sup> Brandom (1997), 192 n.2 and Davidson (1975), 170.

<sup>28</sup> Burge (1993), 487.

speaker says 'Gavagai'. The speaker's response was the same in each case and thus the interpreter will judge the cause of utterance to be the rabbit. The similarity of the speaker's responses indicates that in each case he also found the causal event the same. But *by himself* the speaker could not tell whether the causal events were the same. Suppose a warthog trots by and the speaker experiences patterns of stimulation similar to those which the interpreter experienced with the scurrying rabbits. He utters 'Gavagai'. However

Once the correlation [between uttering 'Gavagai' and scurrying rabbits] is established it provides each of us with a ground for distinguishing the cases in which it fails. Failed natural inductions can now be taken as revealing a difference between getting it right and getting it wrong, going on as before, or deviating, having a grasp of the concepts of truth and falsity.<sup>29</sup>

In this case, the interpreter claims, the speaker was wrong to utter 'Gavagai'. He was wrong because the causal event responded to was a warthog not a rabbit.

Burge does not justify the claim that we are entitled to rely on our seeming understanding. However, the Acceptance Principle depends on this entitlement: the entitlement is a major premise, (P5), in its justification. This premise entitlement, I suggest, can be supported by the same Davidsonian idea. It could be so as follows.

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<sup>29</sup> Davidson (1994), 15.

The speaker's utterance of 'Gavagai' has generated a dilemma for the interpreter. Either he has failed to understand or the speaker has a false belief. He seems to understand the speaker to be saying 'Rabbit' but there is clearly a Warthog. In this context it clearly seems to be the speaker who is in error. *Given that* the interpreter *has postulated* how 'Gavagai' should be understood, he is entitled to believe that it is the speaker who is wrong. Past general agreement of the use of 'Gavagai' determines that it is the speaker who is wrong. The speaker has given no notice of any intention to mean anything other than Rabbit. Thus if the accomplished interpreter is to optimise agreement in accordance with the Principle of Charity, he must be entitled to presume that he understands when he seems to. If he were not entitled to this presumption, he could not attribute error to the speaker. The speaker's utterance would demonstrate either that he did not understand what was said or that it was *he* that had hallucinated. Either way the interpreter would no longer be able to understand the speaker's utterance. Thus if the interpreter were not entitled to presume that he understood when he seemed to, interpretation would become an impossibility. One could say that understanding, like belief, is by its nature veridical.

"Knowledge", Brandom claims, "is intelligible as a standing in the space of reasons, because and insofar as it is intelligible as a status one can be taken to achieve in the game of giving and asking for reasons."<sup>30</sup> One can imagine the interpreter stating, 'No, that isn't a warthog. Look at these hoof-prints it has left.' And in understanding him the speaker would recognise his

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<sup>30</sup> Brandom (1994), 904.

utterance false. Thus we can understand external social facts, whether or not the proposition a speaker's testimony expresses is supported by an extended warrant, to provide the reasons supporting an audience's testimonial belief because in the metaphysical first instance 'the logical space of reasons' ain't in any *single* speaker's or audience's head. There could only be a 'logical space of reasons' insofar as speakers and audiences communicate and in doing so form communities of knowledge. Thus an audience's testimonial belief could constitute knowledge not because he can individually justify it but because his understanding testimony integrates him into a community of knowledge. An audience's testimonial belief can constitute knowledge through standing justified in the socially articulated space of reasons.

These metaphysical thoughts could do with considerable development. I shall leave them in this suggestive state. I conclude that with respect to Burge's epistemology, the challenge issued by Hardwig's gauntlet is sound. In the last section I argued that to acknowledge epistemic dependence is to suppose that one can be a knower without possessing reasons for what is known. Thus 'dramatic changes in our [conception] of what knowledge must be' are needed. In this section I have argued that the alteration required is that one must not understand internalism individualistically. A knower can be said to possess reasons in virtue of being a member of a community of knowledge. These reasons are accessible to him in the sense that the community of which he is member could articulate them.

## **7.2. Communal Warrant and Individual Justification**

Hardwig's gauntlet presents Burge with a dilemma. If, in the fundamental case, an audience is epistemically dependent on the speaker, then, from the individual perspective, the connections between testimonial knowledge and reasons are fundamentally severed. In the fundamental case epistemic facts are determined by social facts; it is the community which determines whether an individual audience's belief is justified. Thus it is the community which is the arbiter of the rationality of an audience's actions. Whilst credence should be given to this social externalism, individualist internalist sentiments demand recognition. In this instance, I find the fundamental case unacceptably *epistemically authoritarian*. I propose that an adequate epistemology of testimony should make the connections between knowledge and reasons visible from both social and individual perspectives. Thus I believe that Hardwig's gauntlet presents Burge with a dilemma: if, in the fundamental case, an audience is epistemically dependent on the speaker, then, Burge's epistemology of testimony is fundamentally epistemically authoritarian.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> My epistemic sensibilities need not be shared. Hardwig seems to explicitly endorse epistemic authoritarianism. I quoted Hardwig's statement that "it is sometimes irrational to think for oneself". He goes on to say that this "will strike those wedded to epistemic individualism as odd and unacceptable". Hardwig (1985), 343.

I think that the Acceptance Principle may be embraced and yet Burge's dilemma avoided. This dilemma is a consequence of conceiving the Acceptance Principle to be a principle of credulity. The claim that the Acceptance Principle does articulate an entitlement to be credulous is supported by its justification and determines the epistemic role Burge gives to an audience's reasons for believing testimony. I suggest that it possible to keep the idea that there is an entitlement unique to testimony which takes a preservative form and yet avoid Burge's dilemma. This possibility requires a different understanding of the Acceptance Principle: it involves denying that it is a principle of credulity and thereby making an audience's possession of testimonial knowledge dependent on his possessing reasons for accepting testimony. And this possibility is conditional upon adequately confronting the justification of the Acceptance Principle.

In §7.2.1 I return to Hardwig's gauntlet. This challenge is a consequence of viewing an audience's relation to epistemic authorities as one of epistemic dependence. Hardwig's view depends upon his claim that reasons for believing testimony credible do not constitute 'evidence for the truth' of propositions the testimony expresses. I shall deny this claim and thus *motivate* a different understanding of the Acceptance Principle. I shall flesh out this different understanding an the end of §7.2.2 after considering the justification of the Acceptance Principle.

### *7.2.1. Epistemic Dependence or Reliance?*

In the fundamental case, Burge claims, audiences can be epistemically dependent on speakers. An audience would be so if he exercised his entitlement to credulous acceptance. Hardwig's claim is more limited. Audiences are epistemically dependent when speakers are epistemic authorities. Audiences are epistemically dependent on epistemic authorities *because* believing that a speaker's testimony is credible provides no more than a reason to believe that the speaker possesses good reason to believe the proposition he expresses. A good reason to believe the speaker possessed good reason to believe this proposition does not constitute evidence for the truth of the this proposition.

I would assert that a belief in the credibility of a speaker's testimony *does* constitute evidence for the truth of a proposition. It constitutes evidence in conjunction with the belief that the speaker whose testimony is believed credible expressed just this proposition. It constitutes evidence for the truth of a proposition in exactly the same way that empirical hypotheses constitute evidence for the truth of empirical predictions. If this is the case, audience's need not be epistemically dependent on epistemic authorities. Insofar as an audience possesses evidence for the truth of what is believed he can justify his testimonial belief irrespective of whether the speaker expresses a warranted proposition. Why does Hardwig think this is not the case?



Hardwig gives two arguments.<sup>32</sup> (1) Suppose B possesses reasons to believe that A's expert testimony that *p* is credible. Whilst A's reason for believing that *p* "counts toward establishing the truth of *p*", the case for *p* is no stronger after B has established A's testimony to be credible. (2) "Evidence that *p* counts against evidence that not *p*." Suppose C, another expert, has reason for believing that not-*p*. B's reasons for believing that *p*, which are reasons for believing that A's testimony is credible, "do not count against" C's reason for not-*p*, only A's do.

These arguments do no more than demonstrate that a belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony can only constitute a *defeasible* form of evidence. Given the speaker's testimony, a reason to believe the testimony credible can only establish that the proposition expressed is *probably* true.

Consider (1). B's reasons for forming the testimonial belief that *p* are independent of A's reasons for believing that *p*.<sup>33</sup> B's reasons might be many past occasions of observing the truth of A's judgements. A's reason might be seeing that *p* is the case. A's testimony could, therefore, be credible even if A, uncharacteristically, were to lack reason for believing that *p* in this instance; maybe he fell for an obvious illusion. This is not to say that B's reasons provide additional support for the proposition that *p*. But unless B possessed reason to believe that A was being incompetent or

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>33</sup> This independence operates at the particular level: B could be working with a generalisation like 'A is credible on topics like p' and then B's reasons would not be independent of A's general disposition to believe that p and propositions similar in topic to p.

artful in this instance he still possesses evidence that  $p$  was the case. It is just that B's evidence is defeasible. Something similar could be said in the case of (2). Suppose C is right and A is wrong; A has been uncharacteristically incompetent and not- $p$  is the case. As before B can possess reason to believe that  $p$ , his belief that A's testimony that  $p$  was credible, and this reason constitutes evidence that  $p$  is the case. Further, this evidence *does* count against C's holding that not  $p$  is the case: if C knew that A believed that  $p$ , then he should question his reasons for believing the contrary. It is just that it does not count against C's reasons any more than A's reasons do.

A justification connects an episode of believing with the truth of the proposition believed: it should state for what reasons a belief is held and it should determine that the proposition believed is, at least, likely to be true. These two aspects are conceptually separable: one may discriminate between the justification of a belief and the justification of a proposition. Hardwig's arguments, to my mind, demonstrate that reasons for believing testimony to be credible justify an audience's testimonial *belief* rather than the *proposition* believed. The purpose of Hardwig's argument is to demonstrate that 'B's reasons are logically dependent upon A's'. As a claim about the warrant supporting the proposition believed I accept this conclusion. If A were not to possess any reason to believe that  $p$ , then, fortuitous accidents aside, B's evidence for  $p$  would have been objectively defeated.

Thus if the justification of a proposition is distinguished from the justification of a belief, then epistemic dependence becomes *epistemic*

*reliance*. Whether an audience's testimonial belief is justified does not depend on whether the proposition the speaker expressed is supported by an extended warrant. But, in the case where the speaker is an epistemic authority and ignoring fortuitous accidents, whether the audience's justification for his testimonial belief is objectively defeated *does depend* on whether the proposition expressed by the speaker's testimony is supported by an extended warrant.

The claim that audiences are epistemically reliant rather than dependent on epistemic authorities allows Hardwig's gauntlet to be denied and suggests a different understanding of the Acceptance Principle.

With respect to Hardwig's gauntlet the idea of epistemic reliance allows that physicist E could possess evidence for the truth of *p*. He could possess reasons to believe the testimony of D credible. This is not to claim that the proposition E believes is warranted by E's reasons for believing D's testimony. I accept that Hardwig has demonstrated that E could not fully articulate the extended warrant supporting that *p*. In this sense he would be epistemically reliant on the wider community of knowledge that is A, B, C and D. But this reliance does not imply that we confront Hardwig's gauntlet. Individuals could possess reasons for believing what is known which justify this belief even though the warrant supporting what is known could only be articulated by the community of knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In the situation where an individual believes a socially accepted falsehood Plantinga, comparably, states that "we could put it paradoxically like this: you are entirely warranted in the belief in question, even though the belief has little warrant for you." Plantinga (1993b) 86. Distinguishing between the warrant supporting beliefs and propositions removes the sense of paradox.

If epistemic dependence is re-interpreted as epistemic reliance, then Burge's notion of preservation can be similarly re-interpreted. The suggestion is that the extended warrant of a proposition which is preserved in understanding epistemically supports the *proposition* that becomes an audience's object of belief rather than the audience's testimonial belief. However, if this is the case, then it is possible to assert that an audience *does require positive reasons for accepting testimony*. Lacking such reasons an audience's testimonial *belief* would not be justified *even if* the *proposition believed* were warranted.

Thus a different understanding of the Acceptance Principle is possible: it need not be understood as a principle of credulity. In §7.2.2 I shall argue for this understanding through reconsidering Burge's justification of the Acceptance Principle.

### *7.2.2. An Individual's Doxastic Responsibility*

A presupposition of the Acceptance Principle is that one is entitled to overlook the possibility of a rational source being misleading, other things being equal. Thus we are entitled to overlook those considerations that set testimony apart from memory and perception. Reliance upon other

rational sources can be epistemically identified with reliance upon a resource for reason. Consequently, the epistemologies of these resources will be fundamentally similar: when Burge considers our entitlement to rely on testimony it turns out that

Many of the differences between content passing between minds and content processed by a single mind derive from differences in modes of acquisition and in necessary background conditions that do not enter in the justificational force underwriting entitlement.<sup>35</sup>

The ability to perceive, for instance, “is a background condition necessary for the acquisition of belief from others”.<sup>36</sup> And the ability to articulate positive and defeating reasons for accepting testimony will equally be a background condition. It might be necessary to presuppose that we possess this ability if the Acceptance Principle is not to be read as endorsing gullibility. And a belief in the credibility of the speaker’s testimony might be necessary only to psychologically fix the audience’s testimonial belief. But our reasons for accepting or rejecting testimony play no fundamental justificatory role.

If one sees that  $p$  or remembers that  $p$ , then it is the case that  $p$ . However, if one receives testimony to  $p$ , it need not be the case that  $p$ . What *another* presents-as-true need not be true, and it can be rational for another to present something as true when in fact it is not. Thus it is doxastically responsible to be responsive to considerations which supply reasons for

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<sup>35</sup> Burge (1993), 474.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

believing that what is presented-as-true *is* true. That is, considerations which supply reasons for believing the testimony to be credible. To articulate these reasons, or at least to be disposed to do so, is to be doxastically responsible *with respect to* the formation of testimonial beliefs.<sup>37</sup> This ability to articulate reasons for acceptance, I contend, fundamentally enters into the justificational force underwriting the audience's entitlement to acceptance. Thus the epistemic role of our reasoning about whether to accept testimony is comparable to the role of understanding rather than perception.

On Burge's view two things enters into 'the justificational force underwriting' our entitlement to be credulous. First, our ability, as audiences, to understand and, second, facts about the rationality of speakers. Consider the latter facts. The justification of the Acceptance Principle requires identifying the presentations-as-true of speakers—other *rational* sources—with the presentations of reason. This identification is possible only because and insofar as speakers are presumed to operate in accord with the norms of reason. Only if speakers operate in accord with the norms of reason would a rational lie occasion rational disunity. But the presumption that speakers operate in accord with the norms of reason can be identified as the presumption that speakers are doxastically responsible.

One would clearly not operate in accord with the norms of reason were one's beliefs sensitive to one's desires and insensitive to their truth or

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<sup>37</sup> The doxastically responsible audience need not explicitly articulate a reason to believe that the speaker's testimony is credible but such a reason need be accessible to him.

falsity. To form beliefs on the basis of what one desires to be true would doxastically irresponsible; self-deception would result. And someone “whose reasoning is distorted by self-deception is in a significant way irrational - even when the self-deception serves the individual’s interests.”<sup>38</sup> Thus Burge presumes that speakers operate in accord with the norms of reason because rational: to be rational *is* to operate in accord with the norms of reason. This is to employ a *strong presumption* of rationality: it is to presume not merely that speaker’s possess the ability to be doxastically responsible but that in fact speakers are doxastically responsible.

Thus the facts about the rationality of *speakers*: we are entitled to presume another rational source of presentations-as-true is a source of true presentations *because* there is a *presumption* that a source of presentations-as-true will be doxastically responsible and the presentations of a doxastically responsible source will be backed by reason. Our entitlement to acceptance rests on this presumption. If this presumption did not hold, then we would *not* be entitled to presume that *another* rational source of presentations-as-true is a source of true presentations. That is, premise (P1) of the justification of the Acceptance Principle would not hold when the ‘rational source’ was other than oneself.

However an audience must also be a rational source. One could possess the ability to understand presentations of propositional content only if one possessed the ability to intelligibly present propositional content. But

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

if there is a presumption that a doxastically responsible audience's presentations of content are backed by reasons, there should *equally* be a presumption that the doxastically responsible audience's reasons for accepting what is presented rationally back the belief formed through acceptance. This is to say that, in the fundamental instance, testimonial beliefs are justified by the audience's positive reasons for acceptance; these reasons do not just fix this testimonial belief.

If this is the case, then Burge's comparison of the Acceptance Principle and the Principle of Charity should be taken seriously. The Principle of Charity is primarily a methodological rule of interpretation which could be glossed, *one should optimise the agreement between oneself and another*. However, given Davidson's view of interpretation, this methodological rule has the epistemic consequence that belief by its nature is veridical.<sup>39</sup> This epistemic consequence could be formulated as an epistemological principle: *one is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that any given belief of a rational speaker is true*. Call this the *Charity Principle*.<sup>40</sup> Confronted with a sentence held-true, the Charity Principle does not entitle the interpreter to believe that *this sentence is true*. In forming beliefs as to *which* sentences held-true are true the interpreter is guided by "hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course [his] common-sense, or scientific, knowledge of explicable error."<sup>41</sup> How

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<sup>39</sup> See Davidson (1983), 307-319.

<sup>40</sup> If a Tarski-style truth theory is to provide the conceptual underpinning of interpretation, then the interpreter must be entitled to presume that sentences held true are in fact true, the Charity Principle must hold.

<sup>41</sup> Davidson (1974b), 196.



these beliefs are *individually* warranted “is no easier to specify that to say what constitutes a good reason for holding a particular belief.”<sup>42</sup> The Charity Principle does not state the conditions which warrant belief.

The Acceptance Principle, I suggest, should be interpreted similarly. There is a sense in which an audience is entitled to be credulous: he is entitled to presume that others are like himself and doxastically responsible. Thus an audience is entitled to presume that a *proposition* intelligibly presented-as-true is supported by an extended warranted. But this is *not* an entitlement to credulous acceptance. Whether an audience’s testimonial *belief* is warranted depends on whether reasons were accessible to the audience for accepting the speaker’s testimony, that is, for judging it to be credible.

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<sup>42</sup> Davidson (1984), xvii. This quote is out of context but its guiding idea is not. The whole quote starts, “Understanding can be secured only by interpreting in a way that makes for the right sort of agreement. The “right sort” however is no easier ...” Davidson’s thought here is that the Principle of Charity cannot be made more specific than the rule glossed because whether the interpreter attributes error, whether or not he judges that in this case the sentence held true is not-true, is determined by his hunches etc. That is, the warrant supporting these judgements is a matter of whatever “constitutes a good reason” for belief. It is not the entitlement stated by the Charity Principle.

### **7.3. The Individual Knower and the Community of Knowledge**

An epistemologically significant feature of testimony is that it seems to serve different epistemic functions when viewed from different perspectives. From the individual's perspective testimony seems to be a way of acquiring knowledge whilst from the social perspective testimony seems to be a way of retaining knowledge. An epistemology of testimony should account for this fact. An adequate account cannot be disjoint. To understand how knowledge is retained by testimony one cannot exclude the individual's perspective. Knowledge is retained only because individuals intelligibly express knowledge and accept intelligible expressions of knowledge. And to understand how knowledge is acquired by testimony one cannot exclude the social perspective. Knowledge is acquired as chains of testimony result in the supplementing of warrant. Thus I suggest that an account of this feature of testimony should explain, at least in outline, how testimony relates an individual knower to the community of knowledge. I propose the following.

A community of knowledge is constituted by a speaker intelligibly presenting a warranted proposition as true and an audience accepting the speaker's testimony. Testimony is a way of retaining knowledge because communities of knowledge exist: unlike individuals, communities of knowledge need not die of natural causes.

When a speaker intelligibly presents a proposition as true an audience is entitled to presume that the proposition expressed is warranted for the speaker and, if there is such, the wider community of knowledge of which the speaker is a member. This does not entitle the audience to simply accept the testimony. Reasons are required to justify acceptance. A belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony could be such a reason. A belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony justifies the audience *believing* the proposition expressed but it does not justify this *proposition*. What the audience knows he thereby knows only in virtue of belonging to a community of knowledge. In becoming a member of this community of knowledge the audience acquires knowledge: the proposition believed by the audience is warranted in the community. Understanding preserves warrant because the act of understanding provides the doxastically responsible audience with the epistemic opportunity of becoming a member of a community of knowledge: warrant is preserved when the proposition accepted is warranted in the community.

The warrant supporting a proposition may consist of a justification or an entitlement. To illustrate this distinction consider the following three cases of testimony. (1) A piece of canonical science is recorded in a journal, encyclopaedia, text-book etc. (2) Fermat records his last theorem. (3) A speaker, M(ill) for instance, records every factual memory he has of an event.

(1). An audience's relation to testimony expressing a proposition of canonical science is that the audience is entitled to presume that the proposition expressed is warranted. The audience is justified in believing

this proposition to the extent that he judges the testimony is credible, to the extent, for instance that he judges it to be an expression of canonical science rather than pseudo-science, quackery or mysticism. In understanding and accepting this testimony the audience becomes a member of a community of knowledge which could, hopefully, articulate a justification of the scientific claim expressed.

However this is to speak of ‘ordinary’ audiences: some audiences are themselves scientists. In accepting testimony an audience’s positive justifying reasons need not be limited to his reasons for believing the testimony to be credible: he could, in addition, possess supplementary reasons for believing the proposition expressed. When acceptance is supported by supplementary reasons the audience’s reasons can become part of the community’s justification of this proposition. Equally the audience might possess supplementary reasons for rejecting the scientific testimony. When this is so the audience’s reasons can equally become part of the community’s justification: this time for believing the proposition to be false. For example, in empirically verifying relativity Rutherford supplemented our warrant for this theory and in proposing a superior conception of the movement of the heavenly bodies Copernicus defeated our warrant for the Ptolemaic system.<sup>43</sup> Thus warrant can be defeated and supplemented.

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<sup>43</sup> Of course the history of these changes, exactly how our warranted was supplemented and defeated, is a matter of some complexity.

(2) Fermat's testimony as to his last theorem. A warrant should determine at least that a proposition is likely to be true. Many ordinary empirical propositions, for instance that it is raining outside, we can directly see to be true. Thus our entitlement to rely on perception is sufficient, other things being equal, to determine that such propositions are warranted. The case of scientific theorems is different. We cannot form any direct judgement of these theorems and, therefore, a scientific theorem requires a justification if it is to be believed to be true. The same goes for Fermat's last theorem. Whilst some mathematical or logical truths may be intuitively grasped, or 'seen', to be true, Fermat's last theorem is not one of these: it is warranted only insofar as it is justified, that is, proved.

Suppose Fermat did prove his last theorem. Then all the while Fermat was alive, and not suffering from senile dementia or any other ailment that disabled him from articulating his proof, the community of knowledge created by Fermat's testimony had access to a proof for this theorem because Fermat could supply it. If an audience encountered Fermat's theorem and accepted it on the basis of believing Fermat's testimony to be credible, then the audience would know Fermat's theorem to be true by virtue of being a member of a community of knowledge that could articulate its proof.

After Fermat's death the situation is different. An audience would still be entitled to presume Fermat's testimony expressed a warranted proposition. Belief in Fermat's theorem could still be justified by the belief that Fermat's testimony was credible. However the audience could no longer be said to possess knowledge of Fermat's theorem. The theorem can

be known only insofar as it could be proved but with Fermat's death the community of knowledge created by his testimony lost access to any such proof.

(3). This case is different to the previous two. If a scientific or mathematical proposition is to be warranted, then the warrant supporting this proposition must take the form of a justification. However the warrant supporting an observation or a memory can consist in either a justification or an entitlement. Suppose the autobiographer, M, states that  $p$ . One need then consider whether that  $p$  is supported by a justification or an entitlement. Suppose this distinction hinges on whether M possesses an episodic memory of experiencing that  $p$  and suppose he lacks such a memory. The audience is then entitled to presume that  $p$  warranted. He is justified in believing that  $p$  to the extent that he thinks M's testimony is credible. If he does and accepts M's testimony, then he becomes a member of a community of knowledge where that  $p$  is supported by an entitlement. Thus the proposition the audience believes is likewise supported.

The audience and M differ in their relation to the proposition that  $p$  in that, first, M is entitled to believe that  $p$ , whilst the audience is only entitled to presume that  $p$  is warranted, he is not entitled to believe that  $p$ . And, second, M's justification of his belief that  $p$  need only employ the premise that his memory is functioning properly whilst the audience's justification of his belief must rest on a judgement of credibility that allows for the possibility of artfulness.

When M dies the possibility of episodic memory dies with him. Thus after M's death the audience is entitled to presume that  $p$  is warranted but it is only warranted to the extent that the community judges M's autobiography to be credible. Where it does, the audience's testimonial belief is justified by his reasons for judging M's testimony credible and the proposition believed is warranted by the community's judgement that M's testimony is credible. Of course, this judgement becomes more difficult to support over time. If that  $p$  is true, we can continue to believe truly that  $p$ . The passage of time does alter this. But insofar as the judgement that M's testimony is credible becomes more difficult to articulate, our warrant for this belief is constantly under attrition.

The dialectical engagement between individual knowers and communities of knowledge illustrated by these cases can be expressed in terms of the relation between the extended warrant of a proposition and an audience's justification in believing this proposition.

If the audience's justification provides no supplementary warrant for the proposition, only justifying the audience's belief, then the audience knows only in virtue of being a member of the community of knowledge. Thus knowledge is acquired from the individual's perspective. If the audience's justification provides supplementary warrant, then the community's justification for the proposition can likewise be supplemented. Thus knowledge is acquired from the social perspective. Knowledge is acquired by both the individual audience and the community to which the audience belongs when the supplementary warrant provided by the

audience's justification nonetheless does not recapitulate the extended warrant; Hardwig's illustration fits this pattern.

Knowledge is retained from the social perspective if and only if the extended warrant that supports the proposition known is accessible to the community. It will be accessible only if the community includes sets of members, consisting of one or more individuals, which have, individually or conjointly, access to the extended warrant of this proposition.<sup>44</sup> Where the kind of knowledge retained is that which requires warrant to be some kind of justifying argument, paradigmatically mathematical and scientific knowledge, then the extended warrant the community must have access to must be such a justifying argument. Where the knowledge retained is everyday empirical knowledge then the extended warrant the community must have access to could take the form of *either* (1a) the entitlements originally associated with this piece of empirical knowledge or (1b) a justification based on these original entitlements *or* (2) a justification of the belief that the testimony expressing this piece of empirical knowledge is credible.<sup>45</sup> In the case of (2) one could speak of the community judging this testimony to be credible.

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<sup>44</sup> The sufficiency claim is more difficult to make. For example suppose that prior to his death Fermat's mental acuity had gone into slow decline. At what point would his being a member of the community created by his testimony no longer suffice for his proof of last theorem being accessible to this community?

<sup>45</sup> Consider the following situation. "Perhaps you and I and many others together map the coast of Australia: then I know by nontestimonial means that *this* bit has *this* shape; you know similarly *that* bit has *that* shape, and so on". Plantinga (1993b), 87. Suppose 'you and I and many others' are members of Captain Cook's crew. And consider the community of knowledge constituted by our composition of this map. In this community of knowledge the knowledge that '*this* bit has *this* shape' satisfies (1a). The knowledge that 'Australia is *this* shape' satisfies (1b). Now suppose the ship returns to England, the map is accepted by the Royal Geographical Society and all the crew die. In the



### *7.3.1. Conclusion: A Hybrid Epistemology of Testimony*

An epistemology of testimony, I claimed, must fit into one of two camps: it must be either reductionist or anti-reductionist. A reductionist epistemology of testimony would claim that the mere fact that a speaker intelligibly expressed a proposition provides no reason to believe it and the testimonial beliefs we form through accepting testimony are justified only insofar as we possess adequate reasons for acceptance. Nonetheless testimony is a source of knowledge because our reasons for accepting testimony are sufficiently sophisticated to demonstrably justify the claim that intelligible testimony can be a reliable source of testimonial belief. Thus the justification supporting our testimonial beliefs must reduce to the justification supporting the beliefs that provide our reasons for acceptance. By contrast an anti-reductionist epistemology of testimony would claim that insofar as a speaker intelligibly presented a proposition as true, or seemed to be performing an act of testifying, then credulous acceptance is warranted. This is to assert some principle of credulity where this principle specifies an entitlement unique to testimony. Through credulous acceptance

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community of knowledge created by the now dead crews' testimony the knowledge that 'Australia is *this* shape' satisfies (2).

we acquire beliefs that we could not otherwise justify. Thus the warrant supporting our testimonial beliefs is unique and irreducible.

The conclusion I have reached fits into neither of these camps.<sup>46</sup> With reductionism I would claim that the mere fact that a speaker intelligibly expressed a proposition provides no reason to believe it: believing it should be warranted only insofar as the audience possesses justifying reasons. But this is not to say that the justification supporting testimonial beliefs reduces to other sources of justification. An audience's reasons for accepting testimony justify his believing the proposition a testimony expresses but need not warrant this proposition. Thus an audience's justification, as it were, may be incomplete and refer to the fuller justification that could be articulated by the community of knowledge. The warrant supporting the testimonial beliefs we acquire does not reduce because an individual audience will always be reliant on some community of knowledge: none will be able to fully recapitulate the extended warrant of all that is believed. Thus with anti-reductionism I would claim that testimony is associated with a unique entitlement. An audience is entitled to presume that if a proposition is intelligibly presented-as-true, then it is supported by an extended warrant. But I would deny that this is an entitlement to be credulous; it is not a principle of credulity. Rather, it amounts to an entitlement to presume that testimony is a reliable source of belief because speakers may be presumed to be doxastically responsible.

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<sup>46</sup> Adler (1994) equally argues that the 'opposition between Humean and Reidian views' is 'exaggerated'. And Audi's (1997) account of testimony is anti-reductive with respect to knowledge and reductive with respect to justification. The position I have reached here is also, in some ways, similar to Plantinga (1993b).

Let me briefly summarise this account of how an audience's testimonial beliefs are justified. A community of knowledge is constituted by a speaker intelligibly presenting a warranted proposition as true and an audience accepting the speaker's testimony. When a speaker intelligibly presents a proposition as true an audience is entitled to presume that the proposition expressed is warranted for the speaker and, if there is such, the wider community of knowledge of which the speaker is a member. This does not entitle the audience to simply believe the proposition expressed. Reasons are required to justify acceptance. What is required is a belief that this speaker's testimony is evidence that the proposition it expresses is true; what is required is a belief in the credibility of the speaker's testimony. An audience's experience of testimony provides him with his reasons for judging when testimony is credible and when non-credible. This judgement justifies the audience *believing* the proposition expressed by the speaker's testimony. Ordinarily it would not justify this *proposition*. This proposition is warranted by whatever warrant is possessed by the speaker or, if there is such, the wider community of knowledge. In understanding and accepting a proposition expressed by testimony the audience becomes a member of this community of knowledge and the proposition believed is then warranted for the audience in virtue of his being a member of this community of knowledge.

This theory, I suggest, is delineated by the response to the sceptical argument given against testimony. To employ scepticism methodologically is to prioritise the individual's perspective in giving an epistemological theory of testimony. This, I believe, reflects correct epistemic priorities. It

is not presupposed that individuals are autonomous; the fact that one can generate a *sceptical* argument for testimony suggests the contrary. It is presupposed that individuals owe their primary epistemic allegiance to truth rather society. This is how it should be. It is then the connection between our testimonial beliefs and truth which scepticism of testimony forces us to question.

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