

## CHAPTER 13

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# THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

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JENNIFER LACKEY

TESTIMONY is an ineliminable epistemic source. We rely on the reports of others for our knowledge of the food we eat, the medicine we ingest, the geography of the world, discoveries in science, historical information, and many other areas that play crucial roles in both our practical and our intellectual lives. Even much of our knowledge about ourselves was learned at an earlier time from our parents and caretakers, such as the date of our birth, the identity of our parents, our ethnic backgrounds, and so on. Were we to refrain from accepting the testimony of others, our lives would be impoverished in startling and debilitating ways.

## TESTIMONY AND TESTIMONY-BASED KNOWLEDGE

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The central focus in the epistemology of testimony is not on the nature of testimony itself, but instead on how justified belief or knowledge is acquired on the basis of what other people tell us. Because of this, those interested in the epistemology of testimony often embrace a very broad notion of what it is to testify; one that leaves the distinction between reliable and unreliable (or otherwise epistemically good and bad) testimony for epistemology to delineate (for a narrow view that builds the epistemology of testimony directly into its nature, see Coady 1992; for views of the nature of testimony with other types of restrictions, see Ross 1986 and Graham 1997). So, for instance, Elizabeth Fricker holds that the domain of testimony that is of epistemological interest is that of ‘tellings generally’ with ‘no restrictions either on subject matter, or on the speaker’s epistemic

relation to it' (Fricker 1995: 396–7). Similarly, Robert Audi claims that in accounting for testimonial knowledge and justification we must understand testimony as '... people's telling us things' (Audi 1997: 406). And Ernest Sosa embraces '... a broad sense of testimony that counts posthumous publications as examples.... [It] requires only that it be a statement of someone's thoughts or beliefs, which they might direct to the world at large and to no one in particular' (Sosa 1991: 219).

Despite the virtues of these broad conceptions of what it is to testify, however, there is reason to think that they are too broad. In particular, there is a difference between entirely *non-informational expressions of thought* and *testimony*. For instance, suppose that we are walking down the street and I say, 'Ah, it is indeed a lovely day'. Suppose further that such a statement, though it expresses my thought that it is indeed a lovely day, is neither offered nor taken as conveying information; it is simply conversational filler, comparable to a sigh of contentedness. In such a case, it is doubtful that the statement in question should qualify as testimony, despite the fact that it is a 'telling' or expression of thought. Otherwise put, the concept of testimony is intimately connected with the notion of conveying information, and thus those statements that function, for instance, as mere conversational fillers should fail to qualify as instances of testimony. A more precise account of the nature of testimony, then, should be formulated as a speaker's making an act of communication—which includes statements, nods, pointing, and so on—that is intended to convey the information that *p* or is taken as conveying the information that *p*. To this end, I propose that 'S testifies that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content: (1) S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p*, or (2) *a* is reasonably taken as conveying the information that *p*' (Lackey 2008: 30; for a full development of this view, see Lackey 2006 and 2008).

Moreover, clearly not everything we learn from the testimony of others qualifies as being *testimonially based*. For instance, suppose I say that ten people have spoken in this room today and you, having counted the previous nine, come to know that ten people have spoken in this room today (this type of example is found in Sosa 1991). Here, my statement may certainly be causally relevant with respect to your forming this belief, but your knowledge is based on your having heard and counted the speakers in the room today, thereby rendering it perceptual in nature. Or suppose that I sing 'I have a soprano voice' in a soprano voice and you come to know this entirely on the basis of hearing my soprano voice (this is a variation of an example found in Audi 1997). Again, the resulting knowledge is perceptual in nature since it is based on your hearing my soprano voice rather than on what I testified to. What is of import for distinctively testimonial justification or knowledge is that a hearer forms a given belief *on the basis of the content of a speaker's testimony*. This precludes cases such as those above—where a belief is formed entirely on the basis of features *about* the speaker's testimony—from qualifying as instances of *testimonial* justification or knowledge.

There are also intermediate cases in which a hearer has relevant background information and uses it to derive knowledge from the statement of a speaker. For example, suppose that you know from past experience that I report that there is no coffee in the carafe

only when there is some. Now when I report to you that there is no coffee in the carafe, you may supplement my testimony with your background information and hence derive knowledge that there is coffee in the carafe. Because the epistemic status of beliefs formed in these types of cases relies so heavily on memory and inference, the resulting justification and knowledge are only partially testimonially based. Hence, such beliefs typically fall outside the scope of theories purporting to capture only those beliefs that are entirely based on testimony.

## TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE: TRANSMISSION VERSUS GENERATION

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Does testimony generate new knowledge in its own right, or does it merely transmit across people knowledge that has been generated by more basic sources, such as sense perception? This is a central question in the epistemology of testimony, and the standard view is that testimony, like memory, is not a generative epistemic source. While memory is said to only *preserve* knowledge from one time to another, testimony is thought to merely *transmit* knowledge from speaker to hearer. In particular, there are two main theses to this Transmission View (TV) of testimony; one is a necessity claim and the other is a sufficiency claim. More precisely:

TV-N: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that  $p$  on the basis of A's testimony that  $p$  only if A knows that  $p$ .

(Proponents of the necessity thesis include Welbourne 1979, 1981, 1986, and 1994; Hardwig 1985 and 1991; Ross 1986; Burge 1993 and 1997; Plantinga 1993; McDowell 1994; Williamson 1996 and 2000; Audi 1997, 1998, and 2006; Owens 2000 and 2006; Reynolds 2002; Schmitt 2006; and Faulkner 2007.)

TV-S: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, if (1) A knows that  $p$ , (2) B comes to believe that  $p$  on the basis of the content of A's testimony that  $p$ , and (3) B has no undefeated defeaters for believing that  $p$ , then B knows that  $p$ .

(Proponents of different versions of the sufficiency thesis include Austin 1979; Welbourne 1979; 1981, 1986, and 1994; Evans 1982; Fricker 1987; Coady 1992; McDowell 1994; Adler 1996 and 2006; and Owens 2000 and 2006. Burge 1993; Williamson 1996 and 2000; and Audi 1997 endorse qualified versions of this thesis.)

For instance, just as I cannot now know that  $p$  on the basis of memory unless I non-memorially knew that  $p$  at an earlier time, the thought underlying the TV-N is that I cannot know that  $p$  on the basis of your testimony unless you know that  $p$ . Similarly, just as my knowing that  $p$  at an earlier time is sufficient, in the absence of current undefeated defeaters, for me to now know that  $p$  on the basis of memory, the TV-S holds that your knowing that  $p$  is sufficient, in the absence of undefeated defeaters, for me to know that  $p$  on the basis of your testimony.

There are two kinds of defeaters that are standardly taken to be relevant to the satisfaction of condition (3) in TV-S. First, there are what we might call *psychological defeaters*. A psychological defeater is a doubt or belief that is had by S, but which indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being *had* by S, regardless of their truth value or epistemic status (for various views of psychological defeaters, see BonJour 1980, 1985; Nozick 1981; Goldman 1986; Pollock 1986; Plantinga 1993; Bergmann 1997, 2004; Lackey 1999, 2006, 2008; and Reed 2006). Second, there are *normative defeaters*. A normative defeater is a doubt or belief that S *ought* to have, but which indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being doubts or beliefs that S *should have* (whether or not S does have them) given the presence of certain available evidence (for various views of normative defeaters, see BonJour 1980, 1985; Goldman 1986; Fricker 1987, 1994; Chisholm 1989; Burge 1993, 1997; McDowell 1994; Audi 1997, 1998; Williams 1999; Lackey 1999, 2006, 2008; BonJour and Sosa 2003; Hawthorne 2004; and Reed 2006). The motivation for both psychological and normative defeaters is that certain kinds of doubts and beliefs—either that a subject has or should have—contribute epistemically unacceptable *irrationality* to doxastic systems and, accordingly, defeat the justification possessed by the target beliefs in question. Moreover, a defeater may itself be either defeated or undefeated. When one has a defeater for one's belief that *p* that is not itself defeated, one has what is called an *undefeated defeater* for one's belief that *p*. It is the presence of undefeated defeaters, not merely of defeaters, that is incompatible with testimonial justification.

While there is much intuitive support for the Transmission View, there are also objections that have been raised to both of its claims. Against the necessity claim, cases have been presented where a speaker fails to believe, and hence know, a proposition to which she is testifying, but she nevertheless reliably conveys the information in question through her testimony. So, for instance, suppose that a devout creationist who does not believe in the truth of evolutionary theory nonetheless researches the topic extensively and on this basis constructs extremely reliable lecture notes from which she teaches her students. In such a case, the teacher seems able to reliably convey to her students that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*, thereby imparting knowledge to her students that she fails to possess herself. Against the sufficiency claim, cases have been presented where a hearer's belief fails to be an instance of knowledge even though the hearer has no relevant undefeated defeaters, the speaker from whom it was acquired has the knowledge in question, and the speaker testifies sincerely. For instance, suppose that a speaker in fact knows that there was a bald eagle in the park this morning because she saw one there, but she would have reported to her hearer that there was such an eagle even if there hadn't been one. In such a case the speaker's belief is an instance of knowledge, and yet because she is an unreliable testifier the belief that the hearer forms on the basis of her testimony is not. Both counterexamples show that the Transmission View is false (both types of cases are developed in more detail in Lackey 2006 and 2008).

One of the central conclusions that these considerations motivate is the replacement of the TV with conditions focusing on the *statements* of speakers rather than on their

states of believing or knowing. More precisely, the TV may be replaced with the following *Statement View* of testimony (SV):

SV: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that *p* on the basis of A's testimony that *p* only if (1) A's statement that *p* is reliable or otherwise truth-conducive, (2) B comes to truly believe that *p* on the basis of the content of A's statement that *p*, and (3) B has no undefeated defeaters for believing that *p*.

(For a detailed defence of the SV, see Lackey 2006 and 2008.)

Further conditions may be needed for a complete view of testimonial knowledge. But regardless of what is added to the SV, such a view avoids the problems afflicting the TV. For instance, despite the fact that the devout creationist in the above case does not possess the knowledge in question, her statement that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* is reliably connected with the truth via the extensive research that she did on evolutionary theory. So, though she fails the TV-N, she satisfies condition (1) of the SV, thereby enabling her students to acquire the knowledge in question. Conversely, despite the fact that the speaker in the second case above knows that there was a bald eagle in the park this morning, her statement that this is so is not reliably connected with the truth since she would have reported that there was such an eagle even if there had not been one. Thus, the hearer cannot acquire knowledge about the bald eagle on the basis of the speaker's testimony. The SV can, therefore, handle both types of counterexamples with ease.

Moreover, the SV reveals that testimony is not merely a transmissive epistemic source, as the TV assumes, but that it can instead generate epistemic features in its own right. In particular, hearers can acquire testimonial knowledge from speakers who do not possess the knowledge in question themselves. In this respect, then, testimony is on an epistemic par with sources traditionally considered more basic, such as sense perception and reason.

## NON-REDUCTIONISM AND REDUCTIONISM

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Another question at the centre of work in the epistemology of testimony is how precisely hearers acquire justified beliefs from the testimony of speakers, where justification is here understood as being necessary and, when added to true belief, close to sufficient for knowledge. Traditionally, answers to this question have fallen into one of two camps: *non-reductionism* or *reductionism*. According to non-reductionists—whose historical roots are typically traced to the work of Thomas Reid—testimony is a *basic* source of justification, on an epistemic par with sense perception, memory, inference, and the like. Given this, non-reductionists maintain that, so as long as there are no undefeated defeaters of either the psychological or the normative variety, hearers may be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers.

(Proponents of various versions of non-reductionism include Austin 1979; Welbourne 1979, 1981, 1986, and 1994; Evans 1982; Hardwig 1985 and 1991; Ross 1986; Coady 1992; Burge 1993 and 1997; Plantinga 1993; Webb 1993; Foley 1994; McDowell 1994; Strawson 1994; Williamson 1996 and 2000; Schmitt 1999; Insole 2000; Owens 2000 and 2006; Weiner 2003; and Goldberg 2006. Some phrase their view in terms of knowledge, others in terms of justification or entitlement, and still others in terms of warrant. Audi, 1997, 1998, and 2006, embraces a non-reductionist view of testimonial knowledge, but not of testimonial justification.)

In contrast to non-reductionism, reductionists—whose historical roots are standardly traced to the work of David Hume—maintain that, in addition to the absence of undefeated defeaters, hearers must also possess *non-testimonially based positive reasons* in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers. These reasons are typically the result of induction: for instance, hearers observe a general conformity between reports and the corresponding facts and, with the assistance of memory and reason, they inductively infer that certain speakers, contexts, or types of reports are reliable sources of information. In this way, the justification of testimony is *reduced* to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. (Proponents of different versions of reductionism include Hume 1977; Fricker 1987, 1994, 1995, and 2006; Adler 1994 and 2002; Lyons 1997; Lipton 1998; and Van Cleve 2006. Lehrer 2006 develops a qualified reductionist/non-reductionist view of testimonial justification or warrant.) Broadly speaking, there are two different versions of reductionism. According to *global reductionism*, the justification of *testimony as a source of belief* reduces to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. Thus, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must possess non-testimonially based positive reasons for believing that *testimony in general* is reliable. According to *local reductionism*, which is the more widely accepted of the two versions, the justification for *each instance of testimony* reduces to the justification for instances of sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. So, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must have non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting *the particular report in question*.

Objections have been raised to both non-reductionism and reductionism. The central problem raised against non-reductionism is that it is said to permit gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility (see, for instance, Fricker 1987, 1994, and 1995; Faulkner 2000 and 2002; and Lackey 2008). In particular, since hearers can acquire testimonially justified beliefs in the complete absence of any relevant positive reasons, randomly selected speakers, arbitrarily chosen postings on the Internet, and unidentified telemarketers can be trusted, so long as there is no negative evidence against such sources. Yet surely, the opponent of non-reductionism claims, accepting testimony in these kinds of cases is paradigmatic of epistemic vice.

Against reductionism, it is frequently argued that young children clearly acquire a great deal of knowledge from their parents and teachers and yet it is said to be doubtful that they possess—or even could possess—non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting much of what they are told (see, for instance, Audi 1997. For a response to this

objection, see Lackey 2005 and 2008). For instance, an eighteen-month-old baby may come to know that the stove is hot from the testimony of her mother, but it is unclear whether she has the cognitive sophistication to have reasons for believing her mother to be a reliable source of information, let alone for believing that testimony is generally reliable. Given this, reductionists—of both the global and the local varieties—may have difficulty explaining how such young subjects could acquire all of the testimonial knowledge they at least seem to possess.

There are also objections raised that are specific to each kind of reductionism. Against the global version, it is argued that in order to have non-testimonially based positive reasons that testimony is generally reliable, one would have to be exposed to a wide-ranging sample of reports. But, it is argued, most of us have been exposed only to a very limited range of reports from speakers in our native language in a handful of communities in our native country. This limited sample of reports provides only a fraction of what would be required to legitimately conclude that testimony is *generally* reliable. Moreover, with respect to many reports, such as those involving complex scientific, economic, or mathematical theories, most of us simply lack the conceptual machinery needed to properly check the reports against the facts. Global reductionism, then, is said to ultimately lead to scepticism about testimonial knowledge, at least for most epistemic agents.

Against the local version of reductionism, it is argued that most ordinary cognitive agents do not seem to have enough information to possess relevant positive reasons in all of those cases where testimonial knowledge appears present. In particular, it is argued that most cognitive agents frequently acquire testimonial knowledge from speakers about whom they know very little (see Webb 1993; Foley 1994; Strawson 1994; and Schmitt 1999. For a response to this objection, see Lackey 2008). For instance, upon arriving in Paris for the first time, I may receive accurate directions to the Louvre from the first passer-by I see. Most agree that such a transaction can result in my acquiring testimonial knowledge of the Louvre's whereabouts, despite the fact that my positive reasons for accepting the directions in question—if indeed I possess any—are scanty at best.

The direction that some recent work on testimony has taken is to avoid the problems afflicting non-reductionism and reductionism by developing qualified or hybrid versions of either of these views (see, e.g. Fricker 1995 and 2006; Faulkner 2000; Goldberg 2006 and 2008; and Lehrer 2006). For instance, in an effort to avoid the charges of gullibility and epistemic irresponsibility, some non-reductionists emphasize that hearers must be 'epistemically entitled' to rely on the testimony of speakers or that they need to 'monitor' incoming reports, even though such requirements do not quite amount to the full-blown need for non-testimonially based positive reasons embraced by reductionists (see Goldberg 2006 and 2008, respectively, for these qualifications to a non-reductionist view). And some reductionists, trying to account for the testimonial knowledge of both young children and those hearers who possess very little information about their relevant speakers, argue that positive reasons are not needed during either the 'developmental phase' of a person's life—when a subject is acquiring concepts and learning the

language, relying in large part on her parents and teachers to guide the formation of her belief system—or when hearers are confronted with ‘mundane testimony’—about, for instance, a speaker’s name, what she had for breakfast, the time of day, and so on (see Fricker 1995 for these modifications to reductionism). According to this version of reductionism, then, while positive reasons remain a condition of testimonial justification, such a requirement applies only to hearers in the ‘mature phase’ of their life who are encountering ‘non-mundane testimony’. Such qualified or hybrid versions of both non-reductionism and reductionism often encounter either variations of the very same problems that led to their development, or altogether new objections (see Insole 2000; Weiner 2003; and Lackey 2008).

Arguably, a more promising strategy for solving the problems afflicting non-reductionism and reductionism should, first, include a necessary condition requiring non-testimonially grounded positive reasons for testimonial justification. This avoids the charges of gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility facing the non-reductionist’s view. Second, the demands of such a condition should be weakened so that merely some positive reasons, even about the type of speaker, or the kind of report, or the sort of context of utterance, are required. This avoids the objections facing the reductionist’s position that young children cannot satisfy such a requirement and that beliefs formed on the basis of the testimony of those about whom we know very little cannot be justified. Third, additional conditions should be added for a complete account of testimonial justification, such as the need for the reliability of the speaker’s statement found in the SV. This frees the positive reasons requirement from shouldering all of the justificatory burden for testimonial beliefs, thereby enabling the weakening of its content discussed above (for a detailed development of this strategy, see Lackey 2008).

## THE INTERPERSONAL VIEW OF TESTIMONY

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An alternative family of views has been growing in popularity in more recent work in the epistemology of testimony, one that provides a radically different answer to the question of how testimonial beliefs are justified. Though there are some points of disagreement among some of the members of this family, they are united in their commitment to at least three central theses. First, and perhaps most important, the *interpersonal relationship* between the two parties in a testimonial exchange should be a central focus of the epistemology of testimony. Second, and closely related, certain features of this interpersonal relationship—such as the speaker *offering her assurance* to the hearer that her testimony is true, or the speaker *inviting the hearer to trust her*—are (at least sometimes) actually *responsible for conferring epistemic value* on the testimonial beliefs acquired. Third, the epistemic justification provided by these features of a testimonial exchange is *non-evidential* in nature. For ease of discussion, I shall call the general conception of testimony characterized by these theses the *Interpersonal View of Testimony* (hereafter, the IVT; proponents of the IVT include Ross 1986; Hinchman 2005; Moran 2006; Faulkner 2007; and McMyler 2011).



One of the central motivations for the IVT is a perceived failure on the part of existing views of testimony—particularly those that regard a speaker’s testimony that *p* as merely *evidence* for a hearer to believe that *p*—to adequately account for the import of the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the hearer in a testimonial exchange. For instance, in discussing such evidential views of testimonial justification, Edward Hinchman says:

When you have evidence of a speaker’s reliability you don’t need to trust her: you can treat her speech act as a mere assertion and believe what she says on the basis of the evidence you have of its truth. You can ignore the fact that she’s addressing you, inviting you. You can *treat her as a truth-gauge*.

(Hinchman 2005: 580, emphasis added)

In a similar spirit, Richard Moran maintains that:

if we are inclined to believe what the speaker says, but then learn that he is *not*, in fact, presenting his utterance as an assertion whose truth he stands behind, then what remains are *just words*, not a reason to believe anything.... [T]he utterance as [a] phenomenon loses the epistemic import we thought it had ....

(Moran 2006: 283, second emphasis added)

According to proponents of the IVT, then, a significant aspect of true communication is missing when a speaker is treated as a mere truth gauge, offering nothing more than words.

In contrast, proponents of the IVT argue that speakers should be regarded as agents who enter into interpersonal relationships with their hearers. For instance, according to Moran’s version of the IVT—the *Assurance View*—a speaker’s testimony that *p* is understood as the speaker giving her *assurance* that *p* is true. Since assurance can be given only when it is freely presented as such, Moran claims that a speaker freely assumes responsibility for the truth of *p* when she asserts that *p*, thereby providing the hearer with an *additional* reason to believe that *p*, different in kind from anything given by evidence alone. In a similar spirit, Hinchman argues that there are two different ways of giving an epistemic entitlement:

One way is by influencing the evidence available to you, perhaps by making an assertion or otherwise manifesting a belief, which still makes you epistemically responsible for the belief I want you to form. Another is by inviting you to trust me, thereby taking part of that responsibility onto my own shoulders.... When a speaker tells her hearer that *p* ... she acts on an intention to give him an entitlement to believe that *p* that derives not from evidence of the truth of ‘*p*’ but from his mere understanding of the act she thereby performs.... [U]nlike acts of mere assertion, acts of telling give epistemic warrant directly.

(Hinchman 2005: 563–4)

Now, whereas Moran claims that the assurance of truth that the speaker gives to the hearer is the non-evidential feature of their interpersonal relationship that confers epistemic value on testimonial beliefs, Hinchman's *Trust View* maintains that this feature is *the speaker's invitation to the hearer to trust her*.

There is, however, a central problem afflicting the IVT, which can be cast in terms of a dilemma. The first horn is that if the view in question is genuinely interpersonal, it is epistemologically impotent. To see this, notice that a natural question to ask the proponents of the IVT is what the precise connection is between *a speaker's giving a hearer assurance of the truth of her utterance* or *a speaker's inviting a hearer to trust her* and *the truth itself*. Otherwise put, what is the *epistemic* value of such interpersonal features? By way of answering this question, Moran says, 'the speaker, in presenting his utterance as an *assertion*, one with the force of *telling* the audience something, presents himself as *accountable* for the truth of what he says, and in doing so he offers a kind of guarantee for this truth' (Moran 2006: 283, emphasis in original). But even if a speaker explicitly offers her hearer a guarantee of the truth of her assertion, what does this actually have to do with the *truth itself*? For instance, consider a radically unreliable believer who consistently offers assertions to her hearers that she sincerely believes to be true but which are wholly disconnected from the truth. Since this speaker presents herself as accountable for the truth of what she says, Moran claims that the hearer in question is thereby provided with a guarantee of the truth of what she says. But what does this so-called guarantee amount to? Nearly every time the speaker offers an assertion to a hearer, it turns out to be false. In this way, she is what we might call a reliably unreliable testifier. Moreover, notice that the point brought out by this case is not merely that a speaker can give her assurance that *p* is true but be wrong on a particular occasion; rather, the point is that a speaker can repeatedly give her assurance that various propositions are true and yet consistently offer utterances that fail to be reliably connected with the truth in any way. A 'guarantee' of truth that nearly always turns out to be false, however, is a far cry from anything resembling a genuine guarantee. Thus, as it stands, the Assurance View, though genuinely interpersonal, is epistemologically impotent. For, in the absence of distinctively epistemic conditions placed on the testimonial exchange, a speaker can give assurance and thereby a justified belief to a hearer even when she shouldn't be able to (because, e.g. she is a radically unreliable testifier). If the Assurance View is going to be a genuine contender in the epistemology of testimony, however, it simply cannot float free from all that is epistemic.

Aware of the sort of problem afflicting the Assurance View, Hinchman adds the following crucial amendment to his Trust View:

Trust is a source of epistemic warrant just when it is epistemically reasonable. Trust is epistemically reasonable when the thing trusted is worthy of the trust—as long as there is no evidence available that it is untrustworthy. Assuming satisfaction of this negative evidential condition . . . , when an epistemic faculty is trustworthy *by serving as a reliable guide to the truth*, it makes available an entitlement to believe what it tells you whose basis lies simply in the fact that you trust it.

(Hinchman 2005: 578–9, emphasis added).

In order for the acceptance of an invitation to trust to confer epistemic justification directly on a testimonial belief acquired, then, the following two conditions must be satisfied:

- (1) the speaker's testimony must serve as a reliable guide to the truth, and
- (2) the hearer cannot have any relevant undefeated defeaters (i.e. 'evidence available' that the speaker trusted 'is untrustworthy') for accepting the invitation to trust the speaker.

Now, as should be clear, the addition of these two conditions puts the Trust View of testimony on the epistemological map. In particular, by virtue of placing epistemic conditions on both the speaker and the hearer in a testimonial exchange, the Trust View avoids the debilitating objection that it is simply impotent for the epistemology of testimony.

However, here is where the second horn of the dilemma afflicting the IVT emerges: if the IVT is not epistemologically impotent, then neither is it genuinely interpersonal. In other words, while it is true that the addition of conditions (1) and (2) above renders the Trust View a genuine contender in the epistemology of testimony, it does so at the cost of making trust itself *epistemically superfluous*. For the reason why it is no longer an utter mystery how justification could be conferred through the acceptance of an invitation to trust is because conditions (1) and (2) do all of the epistemic work. When a hearer acquires a justified belief that *p* from a speaker's telling her that *p*, this is explained through both the speaker's reliability as a testifier with respect to *p* and the hearer's rationality as a recipient of the testimony. In providing the *epistemic* explanation of the hearer's newly acquired justified belief, then, trust simply drops out of the picture. Once trust becomes epistemically superfluous, however, the Trust View ceases to even represent a version of the IVT. For the interpersonal relationship between the two parties in a testimonial exchange is not the central focus of the epistemology of testimony on such a view, nor are features of this interpersonal relationship responsible for conferring epistemic value on the testimonial beliefs acquired—the reliability of the speaker's testimony and the rationality of the hearer's acceptance of the testimony are doing all of the epistemic work.

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that there is a general dilemma confronting the proponent of the IVT: either the view of testimony in question is genuinely interpersonal but not epistemological, or it is genuinely epistemological but not interpersonal. Either way, the IVT fails to provide a compelling alternative to existing theories in the epistemology of testimony.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

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Challenges have been raised to the rationality of religious beliefs that specifically focus on their testimonial nature. The first of two such challenges is the Argument from Luck, which calls into question the rationality of many religious beliefs by appealing to the

contingency involved in their formation. Philip Kitcher articulates the problem as follows:

Most Christians have adopted their doctrines much as polytheists and the ancestor-worshippers have acquired theirs: through early teaching and socialization. Had the Christians been born among the aboriginal Australians, they would believe, in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection. The symmetry is complete.... Given that they are all on a par, we should trust none of them.

(Kitcher 2011: 26)

John Greco offers a more detailed version of the argument:

Argument from Luck:

1. When one forms a true religious belief on the basis of testimony from within a tradition, it is just an accident (just a matter of luck) if one forms a true belief on the basis of this testimony rather than a false belief on the basis of different testimony ....
2. Knowledge cannot tolerate that sort of luck or accident. Therefore,
3. True religious belief based on testimony from within a tradition cannot count as knowledge.

(Greco 2012: 28–9)

Premise (1) emphasizes that the focus of the argument is on religious beliefs formed via testimony and that the accidentality of birth highlighted in the passages from Kitcher transmits to whether such beliefs end up being true or false. Premise (2) states the widely accepted view that luck is incompatible with knowledge. And (3) is simply the sceptical conclusion that follows from (1) and (2): true religious beliefs based on testimony cannot amount to knowledge.

This sort of challenge is not new, and various responses have been offered in defence of religious belief. What I want to consider here, however, is a novel defence offered by Greco that is grounded in the epistemology of testimony. He writes:

Regarding premise 1, we may deny that when one receives testimony from within a tradition it is ‘just an accident’ or ‘just a matter of luck’ that one forms a true belief on the basis of that testimony. On the contrary, if the transaction in question constitutes an instance of knowledge transmission, it is underwritten by a reliable transmission of reliable information. That is, the transaction will involve knowledge on the part of the speaker, derived ultimately from some original source of knowledge, and then a reliable transmission of knowledge from speaker to hearer.

(Greco 2012: 42)

According to Greco, then, once the mechanics of the epistemology of testimony are appreciated, it becomes clear that the luck involved in one's birth does not prevent the acquisition of religious knowledge via testimony. In particular, if testimonial knowledge is understood in terms of *a reliable process of transmission* rather than through, say, inductive inference, then all that is needed is that the speaker herself has the knowledge in question and then reliably transmits it to the hearer (see Lackey 2008 for a discussion of different accounts of testimonial knowledge). And this process does not at all depend on it not being an accident that the subject ended up in one environment rather than another. Thus, Greco concludes that the Transmission View provides a quick and easy solution to the problem generated by the Argument from Luck.

However, the mere fact that a process—testimonial or otherwise—is reliable does not mean that it cannot be subject to knowledge-depriving luck. This can happen in two ways: a particular output can be accidentally true, or the acquisition and use of the reliable process can be lucky. The former is the more familiar of the two, and occurs in standard Gettier cases where a belief might be true and justified because it is 'underwritten' by a reliable belief-forming processes, but is nonetheless accidentally true (see Gettier 1963). For instance, I might form the true belief that there is a barn in the field through my reliable faculty of vision, but my belief might be only accidentally true because I just so happened to look at the only real barn surrounded by barn façades (see Goldman 1976).

The latter occurs when an agent ends up with the reliable process that she does purely because of luck. For instance, suppose that whatever news source I choose to rely on is likely to highly influence the beliefs that I form about current events. Suppose further that there are two news sources that offer wildly conflicting reports about current events, and I choose to rely on one of them over the other through flipping a coin. Finally, suppose that on this basis, I come to believe that the political party in office is thwarting attempts at healthcare reform. Even if the particular news source I end up with is itself a reliable one, the broad process by which I have come to rely on it is not. This is evidenced by the fact that there are nearby possible worlds in which the coin came up differently and I relied on another news source, thereby forming false beliefs about healthcare reform (see Reed 2000). Thus, there are good reasons to deny that I know that the party in office is thwarting attempts at healthcare reform, even if my belief is in fact produced by a highly reliable process.

What these considerations reveal is this: that a subject ends up with a reliable faculty might itself be the result of a process that is riddled with knowledge-depriving luck. And indeed, this seems to be precisely what proponents of the Argument from Luck have in mind. For each of us, it is argued, it is just a matter of luck that we ended up in the particular community we ended up in, and thus even if our parents and teachers are in fact reliable in their religious testimony, it is simply an accident that we were put in touch with it. Hence, it is concluded that our religious beliefs are also riddled with knowledge-depriving luck. Thus, the mere fact that a reliable process underwrites testimonial knowledge transmission does not guarantee that the transmitted beliefs are not lucky in an epistemically problematic way.

The second challenge to religious belief is the Argument from Authority. Many religious beliefs are grounded in the testimony of a source that is taken to be authoritative, such as the church or a religious leader. But one obvious concern that arises is how such beliefs are epistemically justified, particularly if deference is required when faced with such authorities.

In recent work, Linda Zagzebski takes up this issue directly, and argues that religious beliefs formed on the basis of the testimony of an authority can be epistemically rational, where '[w]hat is essential to authority is that it is a normative power that generates reasons for others to do or to believe something preemptively'. Modelling her conception of authority on Joseph Raz's view in the political domain (see Raz 1988), Zagzebski holds that a preemptive reason is 'a reason that replaces other reasons the subject has' (Zagzebski 2012: 102). What this means is that a subject should not treat the testimony of an authority as evidence to be weighed against or aggregated with other relevant evidence that she might have. Rather, she should let the authority 'stand in for [her] in [her] attempt to get the truth in that domain, and to adopt his belief' without deliberation (Zagzebski 2012: 105).

According to Zagzebski's view, authority understood in this sense can be justified in one of two different ways: by a subject conscientiously judging either that she is more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief, or that she is more likely to form a belief that survives her conscientious reflection if she believes what an authority believes than if she tries to figure out what to believe herself. Conscientious reflection is '[u]sing our faculties to the best of our ability in order to get the truth' (Zagzebski 2012: 48). This is not an externalist notion, where one can strive to be as conscientious as possible but still fall radically short. It is doing the best that one can epistemically, where this is grounded in natural trust that Zagzebski argues we all have in our own faculties—a trust that cannot be supported with a non-circular defence of the reliability of these faculties.

It is but a small step from here to the justification of beliefs formed on the basis of religious authority. For just as one might conscientiously judge that one is more likely to form a belief that survives conscientious reflection if one believes what an authority believes, one might also judge that this is so if one believes what a community believes. More precisely, Zagzebski accepts the following:

Justification of Religious Authority Thesis: The authority of my religious community is justified for me by my conscientious judgment that if I engage in the community, following its practical directives and believing its teachings, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection upon my total set of psychic states better than if I try to figure out what to do and believe in the relevant domain in a way that is independent of Us.

(Zagzebski 2012: 201)

Thus, if one conscientiously judges that following the teachings of one's religious community is more likely to produce beliefs that will survive one's conscientious reflection than if one tried to determine what to believe alone, then one is justified in accepting the testimony of one's religious community preemptively. Let us call this the *Authority View* (AV) of the rationality of religious beliefs.

There are at least two central problems with the AV. The first and most obvious is that it provides all of the resources for rendering rational the beliefs of paradigmatically irrational communities, such as white supremacists, cults, and terrorists. Otherwise put, there is simply no way to ensure that religious beliefs turn out to be rationally held on the AV without also thereby letting in the rationality of these paradigmatically irrational beliefs. To see this, notice that it is surely possible for a member of a white supremacist group to conscientiously judge that if she believes the teachings of her group, the result will survive her conscientious reflection better than if she tries to figure out what to believe on her own. This is especially clear when the beliefs in one's doxastic framework that are relevant to one's conscientious judging are themselves shaped and guided by one's being part of the community in question. If a person has been raised among white supremacists, for instance, then it is quite natural for her to judge that she is more likely to form beliefs that survive conscientious reflection if she believes what her fellow white supremacists believe since it is the very beliefs of her community that provide the framework through which she is so conscientiously judging. Indeed, the more insular a community is, the more likely it is for beliefs of its members to survive conscientious reflection.

The second problem with the AV is that it fails to provide the resources for rationally rejecting an authority's testimony when what is offered is obviously false or otherwise outrageous. Suppose, for instance, that I conscientiously judge that the pastor of my church is an authority on moral matters and he testifies to me that women are morally inferior to men. According to the AV, this instance of testimony is not one piece of evidence to be weighed against all of the other relevant evidence I have about the moral capacities of men and women; instead, it replaces all of the evidence I have on the topic. It is thus fully rational for me to now believe that women are morally inferior to men, despite the massive amounts of compelling evidence I have to the contrary. But why should one person's testimony—even when it is from a recognized authority—swamp all of my other relevant evidence on the question, especially when the proffered report is clearly false?

These problems thus call into question whether there can be rational beliefs—religious or otherwise—grounded in authority, where authority is understood as grounded in preemptive reasons.

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