Testimonial Knowledge
Testimony

Beliefs received through testimony form an essential part of our knowledge. Modern discussion concentrates (though not exclusively) on two questions:

- Is testimonial knowledge acquired only by being transmitted from speaker to hearer?
- We rely on testimony, but others can also be insincere. Clearly, we leave ourselves epistemically vulnerable by believing the word of others. Should we require that we have some positive reasons to believe the testimony, or is it enough for justification that somebody is willing to give the relevant testimony?

Assumptions:

- We take a broad view of testimony: that of someone telling us something, asserting that something is true.
- The idea is that we believe on the basis of the content of the testimony (cf. someone singing in soprano voice “I have a soprano voice.”)
Testimony

A core case (asking for the time, directions,... from the man/woman on the street):
- A single sentence (no coherence) and a single speaker (no corroboration).
- The norm of truthfulness holds, and the purpose is to inform (not to entertain etc.)
- Testimony sustains the belief (you epistemically depend only on that source).
- The speaker has no expert knowledge and is under no special obligations to speak the truth. “Ordinary contexts.”
- The hearer has no special knowledge about the speaker.
- The speaker has no special reason to deceive.

Three features of our epistemic vulnerability: 1. it is far-reaching; 2. we typically accept what is said; and 3. we are typically not able to check with other means whether the speaker is reliable and sincere.
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Background evidence: though we are not able to check on the speaker, we have plenty of background evidence. Also, we constantly check the speakers for clues about unreliability.

1. The predominance of truthful testimony
If testimony was typically unreliable, we would notice it; there is even reason to believe that unreliability claims are subject to exaggeration.

2. Truthfulness as the norm
Truthfulness is a presupposition of our linguistic communication. Defection must be regulated so as to not undermine the trust required for free-riding.

3. Reputation and sanctions
If we are deceived, we become less trusting, but we still need to rely on testimony. Various sanctions are used for control. In science, reputation is crucial and reliability is checked with various mechanisms.
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4. Impersonal knowledge of our informants
Informants depend on reliable forms of belief-acquisition (perception, memory, reasoning) and standard upbringing aims to instill certain values: honesty, concern for others... We learn about types of speakers, topics, and situations in relation to reliability.

5. Motivation, Social-Moral bonds, Cooperation
Lying is only occasionally motivated.
As speakers, we feel a moral and social bond to the hearers.
Telling the truth, because of its beneficial effects, enables and fortifies cooperation, which has obvious benefits for us all.
Gricean *maxims*: be truthful, relevant, informative, and well mannered. These maxims seem to explain well our communicative actions.
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6. Prior plausibility
To be accepted, the content of the testimony must meet a minimum of prior plausibility. We
gauge the information we receive and if the claim seems “off the charts,” we typically reject it. Speakers know this, so we also tend to hear only preselected claims.

In conclusion, it is typically not the case that we have nothing to go by when we listen to
someone testifying to a claim. Condition 1 states this, conditions 2-6 explain why this seems to be
the case.

So, there is some sort of default rule on testimony. It appears that we accept the following
normative claim:
If the speaker S asserts that p to a hearer H, then under normal conditions, it is correct for H to
accept (believe) S’s assertion, unless H has special reason to object.
- Does not imply that one accepts without justification or warrant.
- Contextual issues: whether one ought to accept seems to depend on importance: contextualism.
- Conversational and philosophical justification: testimony, normally, does not seem to imply
  one able to answer skeptical challenges.
Testimony: Knowledge and Transmission

Necessity:

(TEP)-N: For every speaker, A, and hearer B, B’s belief that p is known (justified, warranted) on the basis of A’s testimony that p only if A’s belief that p is known. (Lackey 2006)

Intuitive principle. Testimony bears resemblance to memory.

Counterexamples:

1. Clarissa, devout Christian and a teacher, teaches evolution.
   - An unreliable believer may be reliable testifier.
   - Variation: Skeptical doubt induced by an Epistemology class (Adler). But how unstable is belief? Does it have a normative dimension that affects entitlement?

2. Bartholomew mislead by a typically reliable optometrist (whom Bart does not believe), witnesses a car accident, and reports it faithfully to Iris.
   - The role of defeaters; it appears that they are not passed on.
Testimony: Knowledge and Transmission

Sufficiency:
(TEP)-S: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, if (1) A’s belief that p is known (justified, warranted), (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’s belief that p is known (justified, warranted)

Counterexamples:
3. Sam believes everything that Pam says. Pam claims to have seen a Blue Heron. Pam is typically reliable about such matters. But Sam would believe her, even if he had massive evidence against the claim.
   - Hearer’s properties may prevent epistemic properties from being transmitted, if the hearer is evidentially insensitive.
Violates the sensitivity condition:
S's belief is sensitive if S would not have believed it if it were false (in nearby worlds)
4. Accidentally picking out a reliable testifier out of a group (as in “Fake Barn”-example) (Adler, SEP).

5. Larry meets Mary, who tells him that she saw an orca on a boating trip. Mary is typically reliable and she did in fact see an orca on that trip. However, Mary would have claimed it anyway, since she is starting a whale watching business.

In 1, we had an unreliable believer as a reliable witness. Here we have a reliable believer as an unreliable witness:

- Assume that it was actually unlikely to see an orca where Mary saw it. As she would have claimed it anyway, her testimony seems unable to create knowledge in Larry as his belief is not counterfactually sensitive.
Testimony: Knowledge and Transmission

Lackey (2006) proposes the following criteria:

RS-N: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B’s belief that p is known (justified, warranted) on the basis of A’s testimony that p only if A’s statement that p is reliable or otherwise truth-conducive.
- Accepts that reliability can be fleshed out in many ways: sensitivity, safety, proper or virtuous formation.
- Central point is that the speaker’s qualities are epistemically relevant only insofar as they bear on her capacity to be a competent testifier.

Statement view of testimony:
(SVT): For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B’s belief that p is known (justified, warranted) 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 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.
Fred Dretske's information theoretic model of knowledge:
If S's assertion that p carries the information that p, and H accepts that p on that basis of S's testimony, then H knows that p.

- Information cannot be carried unless it is factive (p is true), but it also depends on relevant alternatives. For example, if Mary’s lying is a relevant alternative, then the information is not carried through.

Dretske: The case of wine-taster who can distinguish Medoc from Chianti and believes both are from Bordeaux (true for M, not for C). Passes the info about M to a novice. Dretske claims novice will not know but the connoisseur does:
You cannot learn that P from someone who tells you that P if they would say that P whether or not P, and that holds even if the person happens to know P.

- If we accept this, plus the subjunctive theory, the transmission model is in trouble but informational one fares better, since the testimony in question carries the info that the wine was Bordeaux or a Chianti.

- Cases (1) Clarissa, (2) Bart, (3) Pam and Sam, (4) Accidental (5) Larry and Mary...
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

**Preliminaries:** Is entitlement to testimony *a priori* or *a posteriori*?

Reductionism: testimony is not a fundamental source of knowledge, and its acceptance resides in perception, memory, and induction  
- Typically, this is intended to mean that positive reasons are required for accepting testimony.

Anti-reductionism: testimony depends on other sources, but this dependence is only psychological or causal. The epistemic justification need not essentially appeal to these other sources.  
- The fact that someone gives her word is sufficient epistemic justification for the claim.  
- This initial justification may be defeated by further evidence; psychological and normative defeaters, which may themselves be defeated.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

It will be sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived 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. Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: were not these, I say, discovered by experience to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villainy, has no manner of authority with us. [...] 

The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any connexion, which we perceive à priori, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them.

(Hume: “Of Miracles”, In Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, 1748)
The wise and beneficent Author of Nature, who intended that we should be social creatures, and that we should receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others, hath, for these purposes, implanted in our natures two principles that tally with each other. The first of these principles is, a propensity to speak truth, and to use the signs of language, so as to convey our real sentiments. This principle has a powerful operation, even in the greatest liars; for where they lie once, they speak truth a hundred times. Truth is always uppermost, and is the natural issue of the mind. It requires no art or training, no inducement or temptation, but only that we yield to a natural impulse. Lying, on the contrary, is doing violence to our nature; and is never practised, even by the worst men, without some temptation.

Another original principle implanted in us by the Supreme Being, is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us. This is the counterpart to the former; and as that may be called the principle of veracity, we shall, for want of a proper name, call this the principle of credulity. It is unlimited in children, until they meet with instances of deceit and falsehood: and it retains a very considerable degree of strength through life. (Reid: *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* 1764, ch 6, sec. 24)
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Some qualifications:
It is indeed not possible typically to obtain evidence in favor/against a communication. But there still might be evidence, and we might want to require that it is used.

- It should be re-emphasized that the question is not psychological; it is about the structure of our beliefs. So, even if the acceptance seems automatic, this does not favor one account over the other.

- If the testimonial beliefs are inferential (by structure, not phenomenally), however, this might taken to support reductionism. But just exactly how do other beliefs influence testimonial beliefs? Audi (2011; 152) argues that other beliefs act as a “trap door.” Also, an intuitive sense of plausibility might affect the belief, which is not about the justification of testimony itself.

- The role of trust? A general feeling of trust might influence, without there being an evaluation.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

R: For every speaker, A and hearer, B, B believes that p with justification/warrant on the basis of A’s testimony if and only if:
(R1) B believes on the basis of the content of A's testimony; and
(R2) B has sufficiently good non-testimonial positive reasons to accept A's testimony. (Lackey 2008: ch. 5)

Global reductionism: the hearer must have non-testimonials based positive reasons for believing that testimony is generally reliable.

Problems:
1. Problems about sample and the ability to check the sample: a) we have not done the fieldwork required to infer that the testimony is generally reliable and b) we are not even able to check the reliability of many scientific claims. Skepticism threatens.
2. Is there even a fact of the matter that testimony is generally reliable? Testimony is such a heterogeneous class that it might not make sense to speak of it as generally reliable. Lackey notes that non-reductionist gets away with it as no reasons are needed. But is this credible?
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Local Reductionism: The hearer must have positive reasons for believing that this particular report is reliable.

1. Children learn a great deal but it is doubtful that they would possess – or even could possess – the kinds of positive reasons for accepting what they are told.

2. We acquire knowledge from speakers from whom we know very little. If I land in a new city, without knowing anything about its inhabitants, I still receive knowledge about the city from the residents.

On 1): In contrast, non-reductionist only requires absence of defeaters. But: if they could not possess positive reasons, how could they possess defeaters?

On 2): “If they were unreliable, I would’ve heard about by now”? Don’t we know a great deal about other cultures?
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Possible Reductionist positions:

1. Minimal Reductionism; Fricker:
   - Skeptical of global reliability, but denies default-acceptance.
   - You must always monitor the speaker, insincerity and honest error are real possibilities.

But what is monitoring?

i) If only counterfactual sensitivity is required, the difference to AR vanishes.

ii) If active checking is required, the account is vulnerable the infeasibility of checking-claim.

2. Bayesian account:
   If the likelihood of the testimony that x is greater given x than not, then testimony raises the likelihood of x.
   - How are we to estimate the relevant probabilities, how are priors established?
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

- Requires an account of relation of degrees in respect to full belief, if speakers typically enter unqualified assertions and hearers accept them as stated.

3. Inference to the best explanation

If the inductive version of R seems difficult to establish as a justifying inference (size of the sample, settings of the induction...). Instead, hearers infer:

The best explanation of why a person testified x is that she believed it and wanted to inform you. This supports the inference:

“One wouldn’t have asserted that p, unless one believes that one knows p, and one wouldn’t have that belief if p weren’t the case”

- Requires only by and large reliability, which seems feasible.
- The hearer treats the speaker’s testimony as evidence; the rule is not normative as such, yet yields the same pattern of acceptance.
- Works well with defeaters (for example, when I know something the speaker does not, I can still use the same model to explain)
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

PR-N: Appropriate positive reasons are *necessary* for testimonial justification/warrant
PR-N&S: Appropriate positive reasons are *necessary and sufficient* for testimonial justification/warrant. (Lackey 2008)

There is reason to believe that PR-N&S should be required, otherwise, there is an asymmetry between testimonial belief reduced and positive reasons doing the reducing.

Nested speaker: Fred, Helen, and Pauline. Helen is reliable, which Fred has checked over the years (on historical events, incidents, professional recommendations,....) and informs Fred that Pauline is good source about wild birds. She is not. Pauline tells that albatrosses, not condors, have the largest wingspan. Pauline believes this because of wishful thinking but is correct about it.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

- Lackey states that Fred does not have justification. But this seems wrong.
- She infers that since excellent reasons do not necessarily put one in contact with testimony that is reliable, the account is in trouble.

Possible counter1: relies on externalist view of justification.

Lackey: since there is no truth connection, this objection misses the mark, whether internalist or externalist view of justification is assumed. She appropriately cites many internalists, who have argued that justification must make truth more likely, preserve a connection to truth etc...

- But her treatment of nested speaker is just wrong, there is justification, but fallible.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Possible counter2: The example is a Gettier-case, hence it is justified belief but not knowledge.

Lackey: But consider Unnested speaker: Max knows Ethel, who he rightly believes to be reliable source. But Ethel is in a personal crisis, but hides it. The crisis makes her believe her purse was stolen, and, coincidentally, it was. Max comes to believe it was.

- In this case, there are good, generally reliable, reasons to believe Ethel. This case would be a Gettier-case. But in Nested Speaker, reasons and reliability come apart, failing to put the hearer in touch with knowledge. So, positive reasons account is not sufficient.

Possible counter3: the reasons are not appropriate. Only appropriate reasons can render it appropriately likely that the testimony is true.

Lackey: But they are... Lackey has to state in this answer that Fred has objectively good reasons. She cannot really say that!
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Burge ‘s Anti-reductionism:

- Compare the notion of a priori in reasoning. Burge thinks, contra Chisholm, that demonstration can a priori, even if it relies on memory.
- Justification is different from entitlement (we have perceptual entitlement...)
- A belief can have different justifications, and even a priori-justification may be overthrown.
- Not all sources of doubt need to be ruled out.
- Perception in testimony is analogous to memory in demonstration, both only preserve, but do not contribute. Leads to acceptance principle.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

**A priori-entitlement** (Tyler Burge 1993, 1997).

Acceptance principle: A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and 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 for the function of reason.

- This is not a statistical point about people’s tending to speak the truth [...] The principle is about entitlement, not psychological origin. (Burge 1993: 468)
- Distinction between resources (memory, reason) and rational sources (rational beings): rational sources have the capacity to reason, and notwithstanding the possibility of error, they give a priori entitlement.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

- Burge is not interested in skepticism here and waves the deeper questions about entitlement aside: just as we are entitled to rely on memory, reason, etc., we are entitled to believe other rational agents. They are sources that as such give reason to believe. Rational mistakes are possible but do not eradicate entitlement. Intelligibility works the same way.

- The sources of justification are two: prima facie rationality of the source and the intelligibility of the message. (These two seem mixed up in the original text).

- We do not reason: “that looks like a human and if it is, then it rational.” We instinctively rely on intelligibility, because it is a prima facie sign of rationality, which connects to true presentations of the world.
Argument:
We are *a priori* entitled to accept something that is prima facie intelligible and presented as true. For prima facie intelligible propositional contents prima facie presented as true bear an *a priori prima facie* conceptual relation to a rational source of true presentations-as-true: Intelligible propositional expressions presuppose rational abilities and entitlement; so intelligible presentations-as-true come prima facie backed by a rational source or resource of reason; and both the content of intelligible propositional presentations-as-true and the prima facie rationality of their source indicate a prima facie source of truth. Intelligible affirmation is the face of reason; reason is a guide to truth. We are *a priori prima facie* entitled to take intelligible affirmation at face value. (Burge 1993, 472–473.)
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

But why is intelligibility a sign of truth?
1. Reason’s function: it aims at truth, without regard to individual interest (contra Hume). If someone presents something as true, one may think it has some reason going for it.
2. A condition on an individual’s having propositional attitudes is that the content of those attitudes be systematically connected to veridical perceptions as true.

It is still no guarantee. But do we not still rely acceptance principle and infer?
- The acceptance principle is not part of our reasoning, it describes what we are entitled to.
- The role of perception in testimony and in perception general is different: in normal perception, there are causal laws, in testimony, there is a mind, the understanding of which creates the entitlement. Perception is not part of the content that becomes understood.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

- The relevant sort of entitlement is similar to principle of charity (Davidson) and principle of cooperation (Grice).
- The *a priori* justification cannot rely on the specifics of sense experiences for its justificational force; though it depends on perception, the genesis of a belief must be distinguished from its normative force.
- Burge emphasizes that *a priori* justification can unevident, fallible, nondemonstrative, and “not certain.” (1993: 461)
- To be entitled in perceptual belief, one need not rule out all sources of error, the same applies to reasoning, and testimony.
- Truth-telling is the norm that we may start with, when there are no reasons to the contrary; in fact, truth-telling, and *Acceptance* is the basis of language-acquisition.
- If the message is *prima facie* intelligible, that is an *a priori prima facie* reason to believe it, because intelligibility is an *a priori prima facie reason* to believe the source is rational.
Criticism (Adler SEP):

- But mere understanding does not settle the question about entitlement or justification (Burge: it is like understanding the mood (indicative, imperative...), so, not perceptual but conceptual).

- Requires empirical supplementation, otherwise irrelevant properties may interfere with entitlement (Burge). For example “this speaker has similar jeans as the person who lied to me” could override the entitlement, were it not for the extensive background information that bring to bear on the question.

- Depends on the distinction between entitlement and justification. Burge seems to think that justification is too demanding, we cannot defend the background of accepting testimony (we are typically not able to do that). Therefore, only a priori defense can work. But the demandingness can be questioned: one need not assume that justification requires accessibility or the ability to articulate the justificational structure.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

Self-trust (Gibbard, Foley):

We trust ourselves and that trust extends to beliefs of others:

“it is reasonable for me to think that my intellectual faculties and my intellectual environment are broadly similar to theirs.” (Foley 1994, 63).

- But is the trust similar? In my own case, I cannot but trust. But there is no similar compulsion to believe others.
- Maybe self-trust is different. But one could move the emphasis to the conditions that verify that I do correctly believe myself: I correctly verify that my cognitive systems work properly, and then extend to others, who have similar systems.
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Assurance view: (Moran 2005, Hinchman 2005)

The speaker’s assertion is not evidence for the belief in question. Instead, the hearer’s entitlement resides in the speaker takes responsibility of what is said.
- Some see it as akin to promises.
- It is the speaker’s word that does the justifying, whereas in presenting evidence, the epistemic import is independent of the speaker.
- Some support can be gathered from the fact that one may, in testimony “pass the epistemic buck”, as in deflecting the epistemic challenge by saying “Well, that’s what she told me.” But if what you said has been inferred from what was said, the case is different. How could R explain this?
- But is the responsibility preempted? You can be challenged for believing, and if you pass the testimony further, you also assume responsibility.
- The case of overhearing: intuitively, the evidence is the same.
Lackey on Non-Reductionism:
NR: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that p on the basis of A’s testimony if and only if:
(NR1) B believes that p on the basis of the content of A’s testimony,
(NR2) B has no undefeated (psychological or normative) defeaters for A’s testimony, and
(NR3) It is true that p.
Incompetent agent: Margaret regularly forms beliefs based on bad habits. She forms the belief that there is great horned owl nearby and reports this to Eleanor. There actually is one. Eleanor believes it and does not have any reason to believe there could not have been one.
Intuitively, she does not know: We need a criterion of reliability.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

However, the reliability condition cannot be that the speaker knows, this might be too strong (the case of Clarissa). So we should add:

(NR4) A’s testimony is reliable or otherwise truth-conducive.

But Compulsively Good-Natured Stuart:
Stuart is compulsively good-natured epistemic agent. He believes everything that is said to him, even if there is evidence of lying. Gilbert relates to him seeing a cougar, which Stuart believes.

Intuitively, Stuart does not know. AR could reply that Stuart does not substantively fulfill the 'no defeaters'-condition: he has none in the same sense that telephone poles do not have defeaters.
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

But then there is *Paranoid Beatrice*:

Beatrice is paranoid and thinks that everyone in her neighborhood is trying to deceive her, based on very few cases of lying. She also thinks her neighbors know that she is suspicious of them. For this reason, she thinks that she is surrounded by reliable testifiers: she believes her neighbors always tell the truth, expecting her to believe the opposite. A neighbor tells Beatrice that there is a golden eagle nearby and she believes it, through her corky reasoning.

Intuitively, again, Beatrice does not know. She does satisfy the defeater-requirement, but she is overly sensitive to them. Lackey argues that together these cases motivate:

(NR5) B is a reliable or properly functioning recipient of testimony
Testimony: Reductionism and anti-reductionism

The case of *Insular Community*: Marvin is good in receiving testimony, but happens to wonder into an area where strangers are typically cheated. However, he accidentally asks the only one person of the community who reports truly to the hearer that they are in Smithsville.

(NR6) The environment in which B receives A's testimony is suitable for the reception of reliable testimony.

But Lackey thinks that despite all this, AR still succumbs to:

Sam, an average human being is taking a walk through the forest one sunny morning, and he sees someone in the distance. He is able to identify it as a an alien and sees that it drops a book. He loses sight of the alien but picks up the book. It reads in what looks like perfect English: “Tigers have eaten some of the inhabitants of my planet.” Sam forms the corresponding belief without hesitation. It also turn out the alien does communicate in English, tigers have eaten some of the inhabitants of her planet, and she is reliable testifier, both in general and in this particular instance.
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Does he know?
Reductionist: clearly no. Sam knows nothing about the alien; her planet’s communication system could be different, their psyche might be crucially different, they might speak twenglish where positive claims are expressed through negation.

- The essential problem is that even though Sam has no defeaters, he still does not seem justified. The reductionist could point to absence of positive reasons. But couldn’t AR point to the fact that it is an alien. Does this not provide a defeater?
- Lackey: no. Such a move essentially accepts the need for positive reasons.

Another defense: one needs to monitor signs of unreliability.

- First, those who require monitoring end up with the same verdict as those who do not: the hearer comes to know. By the description of the case, there are no defeaters present. If one holds that absence of positive reasons is sufficient as a defeater, AR collapses into reductionism.
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- Second, what would George monitor, if he has no information about what the aliens really are like?

Another response for denying the force of the case: testimonial warrant extends to only our species.

- The case can be so changed that it involves a patient with partial amnesia (all information except the language) finding a diary. Would she know?

- Further, the reason for denying extension beyond our species seems to be that we have all kinds of knowledge about our own species that act as a positive reason.
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Fumerton (2006):
- Assumes the demanding internalist position and examines testimony.
- Holds that it is dubious to connect the reductionism and anti-reductionism to the idea that there are independent principles of reasoning that pertain to testimony. Testimonial beliefs are better described as enthymemematic reasoning.
- The case of burglary and the case of litmus-paper.

It is better to hold that there really aren’t any specific epistemic principles like “a litmus paper dipped in acid will turn red”, i.e. derivative and basic epistemic principles. There are only basic principles of reasoning (deductive, inductive, ?abductive?) and different inferences where other things are prominent, others in the background. Testimonial knowledge is just another instance of this general approach to knowledge-acquisition.
Testimony

1) Jones said that P in conditions C (where C includes a description of Jones, his qualifications as an authority, and circumstances under which he made the assertion.)
2) People who make assertions like P in conditions C are usually saying something true.
3) Therefore, P.

Though we do not actually typically do this kind of reasoning, it lies on the basis of the beliefs. Though we do assume that there are other minds and expect that if there are intelligible marks, there is rational communication, we still need some reasons to believe that the marks (communications) say something true. And the reasoning above is something that does exactly that.
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T*: When S hears someone say “There is a dog outside” and rationally takes that sentence to be a sincere assertion that there is a dog outside, then it is prima facie reasonable for S to believe that there is a dog outside.

Is this a reasonable principle?
- Fumerton likens it to epistemic conservatism, which he thinks is untenable.
- If we need no such separate principles, why assume them?
- Is the acceptability of such principles connected to externalism/internalism debate?
References


