

Contagious Knowledge;  
A Study in the Epistemology of  
Testimony

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at the London School of Economics

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THESIS



## **Contagious Knowledge: A Study in the Epistemology of Testimony**

### **Thesis Abstract:**

Knowledge is contagious, at least in the sense that the testimony of others can, on occasions, be a source of knowledge. Theories of the epistemology of testimony attempt to account for this, and one can discern two broad themes emerging from the currently burgeoning literature. The first is an inferentialist conception, according to which the justification for testimonial-based beliefs is a form of inductive reasoning, involving appeal to the general reliability of testimony established either as a result of past experience or through *a priori* reasoning. The second is a transmission conception, according to which the original, non-testimonial justification for the belief is transmitted to the recipient through the act of learning from testimony.

In the first part of the thesis, I argue that both conceptions are inadequate. The inferentialist conception fails to distinguish, as I argue it must, between the epistemology of testimony, and other instances of learning from others. The transmission conception ignores the central role that the notion of a perspective plays in epistemic practices. Further, both conceptions fail to take seriously the rich epistemic resources provided by an adequate account of the distinct, experiential state that one enters into as a result of understanding an act of testimony.

In the second part of the thesis, I provide just such a rich conception of testimonial experience. Firstly, I defend an account of the epistemic role of perceptual experiential states. Secondly, I defend a parallel between perceptual and testimonial experiential states that allow for a similarity in epistemic role. Thirdly, I develop an account of the act of understanding others that is congenial to the notion of testimonial experience. The 'contagion' metaphor is particularly appropriate in light of the conception that emerges, allowing as it does for an epistemically direct account of acquiring knowledge through testimony.



“Of course a proper account of the epistemology of testimony would need to say more than this. But I do not see how any account could be satisfying without making room for the thought that in communication knowledge rubs off on others like a contagious disease.”

*John McDowell*  
(1998a: 336)

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Towards a Non-Unitary Account of Testimony

#### *1.1 Testimony and common-sense*

We know most of what we think we know about the world because we accept the word of others. To deny that the testimony of others could, on occasions, be a source of knowledge would therefore rule out much of what we could ordinarily be said to know, including knowledge supposedly gained from the reports of historians, scientists, newsreaders, parents and teachers. As such, it seems that there is a *common-sense constraint* on theorising about the epistemology of testimony that *testimony can, on occasions, be a source of knowledge*.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, it may be argued that such an appeal to common-sense merely seduces us towards accepting false conclusions. In a recent review article, responding to the claim that “in normal contexts of communication, knowledge spoken is knowledge handed to one another”, Barnes retorts that:

“No doubt we all pick up such beliefs in second hand fashions and I fear that we often suppose that such scavenging yield knowledge. But that is a sign of our colossal credulity; the method ... describe[d] is a rotten way of acquiring beliefs and no way at all of acquiring knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

Barnes freely concedes that there is indeed a widespread common assumption that testimony can, on occasions, be a source of knowledge, but simply dismisses this from an epistemic point of view in favour of a skeptical position regarding such testimony. Through our everyday interactions we display a propensity towards gullibility, but we ought not to use this as a guide to epistemic matters.

In contrast, this study takes such common-sense reflection seriously, and sees constraints arising from such reflection as a suitable (default) starting point for epistemic theorising. The notion of a common-sense constraint on epistemic theorising is the idea that it is a desirable feature of any account of the epistemology of a particular method of acquiring beliefs (such as testimony) that the account

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<sup>1</sup> Fricker (1995); Insole (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Barnes (1980: 193)

proffered generally coheres with our pre-reflective, everyday practices regarding that method, unless there are specific reasons to reject this.<sup>3</sup>

Reflection on such everyday practices reveals that, as normal, human adults, we seem to share a common-sense conception of the world that includes an understanding that there are certain epistemically justified methods for acquiring beliefs.<sup>4</sup> These methods include perception and memory, such that if asked why one believes some proposition, one is entitled to respond simply by saying that ‘I saw it or ‘I remembered it’- and this suffices as a justification unless challenged. Learning from others seems to be another widely accepted method for acquiring beliefs and one seems entitled to respond: ‘I heard it from so and so’ to a request for justification - and this suffices unless challenged.<sup>5</sup> As Barnes himself concedes, taking a skeptical position with regards testimony contradicts this common-sense conception of the role of testimony as a method of acquiring beliefs. As such, skepticism about testimony is an unsuitable starting point for theorising about the epistemology of testimony.

Further reflection on such everyday practices regarding testimony reveals that this common-sense constraint can be seen as involving two parts. The first is the rejection of general skepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge. Let us call this the *achievability constraint*, so that any account of the epistemology of testimony should not set the epistemic standards too high as to make the acquisition of knowledge through testimony unachievable at all. On the other hand, our everyday practices also suggest that not every instance of learning through testimony yields knowledge. Not every testifier is sincere and competent; accidental mistakes and deliberate manipulation are “the type of things that happen.”<sup>6</sup> As such, any account of the epistemology of testimony should not set the epistemic standards too low as to make the acquisition of knowledge through testimony too easily achievable. Let us call this the *gullibility constraint*. As such, a common-sense conception of the epistemic role

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<sup>3</sup> My own position is actually stronger than this, such that it is the primary task of epistemology in a general sense to provide an account of such common-sense reflection. I am not sure that I am able to justify this here, although reasons in favour of this will emerge in the ensuing discussion. The weaker, default position stated in the text will suffice for current purposes.

<sup>4</sup> Loosely based on Strawson (1959).

<sup>5</sup> See references to Fricker in Chapter 2 for a development of this.

<sup>6</sup> Blackburn (1984:195)

of testimony suggests that theorising about the epistemology of testimony involves achieving a balance between the twin constraints of achievability and gullibility.

Such a common-sense rejection of scepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge is captured by Strawson, in the following, revealing, manner.

“No one disputes that much, probably the greater part, of our knowledge is derived from hearing what others say or reading what others have written. It is also indisputable that much, though not all, of what we thus hear and read we accept without question as true. In brief, a great part of our system of belief rests upon testimony.”<sup>7</sup>

Whilst some may wish to quibble with the implication that these claims are platitudinous, Strawson expresses what is seen by many as a significant advance in recent epistemology.

Reflection on Strawson’s comments here suggests an important distinction that is often glossed over in this extant literature: a distinction between the broader category of ‘*learning from others*’ (as suggested in the first sentence of the quotation) and the specific case of *testimony* (as suggested in the second and third).<sup>8</sup> The category of ‘learning from others’ is a very wide one indeed, and includes at minimum any situation involving a Speaker S, a speaker’s utterance U (verbal or written), a Hearer H (or reader) and an occasion O, such that H learns from S via U on O.<sup>9</sup> This general class (henceforth ‘*learning from others*’) does not make any specifications regarding the intentions of either Speaker or Hearer, the types of possible Utterances or Occasions, and so on.<sup>10</sup> This broad set of ‘learning from others’ includes amongst its members a number of cases that involve wildly differing properties depending on how these various details are spelt out. As I will use it, *testimony* is a distinct sub-class of

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<sup>7</sup> Strawson (1994: 23)

<sup>8</sup> I do not intend this as an attempt at Strawsonian exegesis; indeed, as the term ‘testimony’ is used in this quotation, Strawson seems to use it to refer to all cases of learning from others. Nevertheless, there is a clear transition from general cases (knowledge derived from hearing or reading others) to more specific case (accepting without question what people say). Since one could be said to derive knowledge from others without such uncritical acceptance it seems that these two are not equivalent, leaving room for the type of distinction pursued in the text.

<sup>9</sup> I will persist with the terms Speaker and Hearer to cover all cases of testimony, even though these may not actually involve speaking and/or hearing. Furthermore, for the purposes of exposition, I will refer to S as female and H as male throughout.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as will emerge in the ensuing discussion, I actually consider an even wider class of learning from others, including learning from the non-verbal behaviours of others too.

the broader set of '*learning from others*' that has certain properties not shared by other members of the broader set, so that all cases of learning from testimony are cases of learning from others whilst not all cases of learning from others are cases of testimony.

Theorists engaged in discussions surrounding the epistemology of testimony usually focus on a certain narrow range of cases within the broader class. In other words, their primary focus tends to be on the sub-class of *testimony* and not the broader class of *learning from others*. In accounting for this narrow focus, two obvious possibilities emerge. According to the first, such a narrow focus merely reflects certain pragmatic interests in particular cases, which are then taken as exemplars of the broader category of learning from others. Although such theorists discuss testimony in the narrower sense, their real interest is in the broader category of learning from others and their epistemic conclusions are to be applied to the broader class. According to the second, this focus on a narrow category of cases reflects an underlying assumption that the epistemic issues involved in these testimonial cases are unique and serve to mark these out as different from the broader category of learning from others.

To my knowledge, the closest to an explicit endorsement of the former strategy is found in Lackey's comment that:

"[i]t seems that so far as possible we should offer a unitary account of the knowledge we acquire from others...For explaining how we acquire knowledge via testimony is explaining how we acquire knowledge from the statements of others."<sup>11</sup>

As I understand this, a unitary account of the knowledge we acquire from others is one that proffers the same epistemic account for all members of the broader category of learning from words, including the narrower class of testimony. A proponent of such a unitary account may freely concede that one can divide the category of learning from others into sub-groups. However, from an epistemic perspective, these divisions are insignificant as the method of acquiring knowledge is the same across all cases within the broader category of learning from others. In contrast, a non-unitary account of learning from others claims that the differences between the different sub-

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<sup>11</sup> Lackey (1999: 483). See also Fricker's (1995: 396) reference to the "broader category of tellings" and Audi's (1998: 131) discussion of testimony as "people telling us things".

groups are epistemically significant, so that the processes of acquiring knowledge differ between the differing sub-groups.

Lackey claims that a unitary account is both desirable and feasible. In contrast, this chapter aims to argue that a non-unitary account is desirable, leaving questions of feasibility open for further discussion.

In the broadest terms, the primary aim of this thesis is to articulate a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony that falls within the twin constraints achievability and gullibility. At one level, this introductory chapter aims to expound upon such common-sense constraints in more detail, and thus set the scene for the epistemic discussion to follow. Firstly, an attempt will be made to place such reflections in the context of a broader historical background involving scepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge [1.2]. Secondly, I will make explicit the general epistemic framework governing this essay [1.3]. Thirdly, common-sense reflection on a number of cases will be used in articulating a clear definition of testimony [1.4]. Finally, this definition will be utilised in articulating a general epistemic principle regarding testimony as it features in our everyday practices [1.5]. This ‘t-principle’ states both necessary and sufficient conditions for the process of acquisition of knowledge through testimony; accounting for this principle will form the basic challenge of this essay in the epistemology of testimony.

At another level, this chapter argues that such reflection on everyday epistemic practices reveals the desirability of a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony. I will claim that reflection on discourse regarding learning from others suggests a distinct sub-category that we will term ‘testimony’ sharing a unique combination of properties, and that further reflection on such practices reveals that the t-principle is necessarily involved in this sub-category and not necessarily involved in other cases of learning from others. [1.6] It will be suggested that this motivates the claim that a non-unitary account is desirable. [1.7]



## 1.2 *'In the Words of No One'.*

Despite this widespread use of testimony as a potential source of knowledge, it is only recently that serious attention has been paid by theorists towards the epistemology of testimony. One reason for the long neglect of testimony until recent discussion lies in the near exclusive focus - since the so-called 'rise of Modern Science' - on the autonomous individual as the epistemic hero, actively pursuing knowledge solely through his (sic.) own resources.

As has been well documented, central to the activities and beliefs that could be said to characterise 'the first century of modern science', was the view that tradition and the past authorities were no longer seen as the sole arbiters of knowledge and truth, succinctly captured in the motto of the Royal Society: 'Nullius in Verba' – loosely: 'In the Words of No One'.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to earlier generations, the route to knowledge was no longer to be found solely through reading the book of God, but (also) through reading the Book of Nature.<sup>13</sup> And this was not just a change of source text, but also a change in the very process of reading itself. In reading the Book of God, it was Church and Crown that would provide the authority regarding the correct interpretation. However, when it came to reading the Book of Nature, the idea of an authoritative reading was wholly missing. "Trust nothing I say; I appeal to none but thine eyes".<sup>14</sup> The court was thus no longer able to act as witness to the correct interpretation of readings of the book of nature and tradition no longer acted as ultimate and sole court of appeal. Instead, argued the pioneer in microscopy Robert Hooke, the correct court to establish authoritative readings of the Book of Nature was nothing other than that which anyone could see: "with a faithful eye", namely: "the testimony of the senses".<sup>15</sup>

The result of such a transition towards "seeking truth in truth's own book" is the elevation of the autonomous individual as epistemic hero. This individual, having

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<sup>12</sup> Useful discussions include Eisenstein (1979) and Olson (1994), to which the following account is indebted.

<sup>13</sup> "True knowledge is found in the volume of creation" Francis Bacon, cited in: Eisenstein (1979: 455)

<sup>14</sup> William Harvey, cited in: Frank (1980: 106)

<sup>15</sup> cited in: Olson (1994: 176)

effectively cleared his mind from false opinions, can remark - as Descartes did - that he:

“never contemplated anything other than my own opinions, basing them solely on foundations wholly my own”.<sup>16</sup>

Such epistemic self reliance is often taken to be the defining characteristic of the Enlightenment. As a result, knowledge acquired second-hand through the testimony of others is treated as second class, when compared with first-hand knowledge provided through the testimony of the senses.

Locke, fellow of the Royal Society and inspired by the achievements of scientists such as Galileo, Newton and Boyle, makes precisely this point:

“perhaps we shall make greater progress in the discovery of rational and contemplative knowledge, if we sought it in the fountain, in the consideration of things themselves; and make use of our own thoughts than other men’s to find it...The floating of other men’s opinions in our brains makes us not one jot the more knowing though they happen to be true What in them was science, is in us opinionatery...Such borrowed wealth, like fairy money, though it were gold in the hand from which he received it, will be but leaves and dust when it comes to use.”<sup>17</sup>

On one reading, the denial of the title ‘knowledge’ to testimonial-based beliefs is because it is not accompanied by understanding. On another, stronger reading, such borrowed wealth is but dust since the recipient of testimony no longer has access to the reasons possessed by the testifier.<sup>18</sup> This latter reading takes a generally skeptical position with regards testimony, involving the denial that testimony can ever be a source of knowledge.

For Locke, such skepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge is motivated both by the practical success of scientific procedure and by the radically individualist themes typical of one strand within Enlightenment or Early Modern thought. A common theme of more recent theorising involves a rejection of both these motivating factors: a rejection of the solitary individual as epistemic hero and the widespread

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<sup>16</sup> Descartes (1988:64)

<sup>17</sup> Locke (1961: I 58)

<sup>18</sup> These two interpretations are found in Schmitt (1987: 35-6).

concession that successful science need not be such a individualistic pursuit. At this stage, it will suffice to provide one example of the latter; more substantive reasons for rejecting such extreme individualism will emerge through the course of this study. A simple description of the practice of science suggests that such an individualist conception of the enterprise is highly unrealistic.<sup>19</sup> Many scientific papers are jointly authored by hundreds of scientists, each having added their own highly specialised contribution to the research, such that there is no one individual who could be said to understand or have witnessed first hand all the intricacies of the various sections.

“[E]ven scientific research, in many ways the most questioning and sceptical of human enterprises...is a collegial activity that requires practitioners to trust the integrity of their colleagues ...The trustworthiness of members of epistemic communities is the ultimate foundation of much of our knowledge”.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, following Barnes’s strategy in the opening section, one could concede that is indeed a true description of our practices, but deny this is how they ought to be. According to this, the laziness and credulity reflected in our everyday practices of trusting others should not be used as a reason for rejecting scepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge. However, even if such practices do not prove the sceptical position to be false, it reveals the extent to which our common-sense beliefs and everyday practices regarding testimony conflict with such a sceptical position. As such, whilst these cursory reflections do not refute ‘Lockean scepticism’ regarding testimony, they serve to both undermine some of the factors motivating it and suggest that such a position ought not to act as a starting point for reflection on the epistemology of testimony.

### ***1.3 The epistemic framework: a manifesto***

The overall structure of this essay is divided into two parts: the first critically explores extant accounts of the epistemology of testimony and the second attempts to articulate an alternative. Although it would be fair to describe the theories canvassed and

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<sup>19</sup> Ironically, even our knowledge of the importance of individual autonomy in scientific methodology is usually acquired through testimony, reading and hearing about it in books and lectures. (Quinton 1971:79)

ultimately rejected in the first part of the thesis as the most popular in terms of their dominance in the contemporary literature, no claim is made to the effect that this is an exhaustive survey of all the options available. Choices have been made to ignore some available or possible options, mainly those that do not share any of the basic epistemic assumptions within which our enquiry is to be conducted.<sup>21</sup> Although aspects of these assumptions will be modified in the course of the ensuing discussion, it is useful at the outset to clarify the general epistemic framework within which I shall be working and motivate the reason for this starting point. The aims of such an exercise are limited. Firstly, I state and adopt a position without fully justifying its adoption. Secondly, the position serves as a starting point, not an end-product. cursory reference will be made to ideas that will be further developed, and even altered, in the ensuing discussion. It thus acts more as a manifesto than an argument, revealing certain theoretical and explanatory commitments within a range of possibilities.

To pre-empt, and to provide guiding markers for, the discussion, let me state the position baldly at the outset. The epistemic framework to be pursued in this study involves an exercise in *doxastology*, and thus the focus is on the *justification* of testimonial-based beliefs. This is contrasted with a position loosely termed '*reliabilism*' that, on one version, does not require such beliefs to be justified to count as knowledge. Within this doxastic frame, an individual must be *reflectively aware* of such a justification so that s/he can provide a requisite justification if challenged to do so, or at least recognise a suitable justification if presented with it. Through such reflective awareness, an individual is seen as *responsible* for his/beliefs. As a result, the epistemic hero - and hence primary focus of this study - is the *epistemically responsible individual* who is *answerable to criticism* in the light of rationally relevant considerations.

The term '*doxastology*' is due to Pollock, who notes:

"[e]pistemology is 'the theory of knowledge' and would seem most naturally to have knowledge as its principal focus. But that is not entirely accurate. In

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<sup>20</sup> Hardwig (1991: 695)

asking how a person knows something, we are typically asking for his grounds for believing it. We want to know what justifies him in holding his belief. Thus epistemology has traditionally focused on epistemic justification more than on knowledge. Epistemology might better be called 'doxastology'.<sup>22</sup>

If one takes Pollock's comments here as a description of the current state of epistemological inquiry, and not necessarily as a prescription of what ought to be its central concern, then his comments correctly characterise the starting position for much current theorising.

"Knowledge is not really the proper central concern of epistemologico-skeptical enquiry."<sup>23</sup>

Given the difficulties surrounding tripartite analyses of the concept of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) as a result of so-called Gettier-type cases,<sup>24</sup> one could view such pronouncements as a declaration of retreat.<sup>25</sup> Formulating the task of epistemology in terms of doxastology allows one to continue active research in epistemology whilst remaining agnostic on difficult questions about knowledge.

Although discussions regarding the epistemology of testimony frequently mention the notion of knowledge, these discussions can best be seen as an exercise in doxastology, concerned primarily with the *justification* of testimonial-based beliefs. Since the immediate concern at this stage is to provide an epistemic framework within which to evaluate extant discussion of testimony, I will initially limit myself to such a doxastological exercise, and thus primarily focus on issues of justification, whilst remaining agnostic on the relationship between such justified, true beliefs and the notion of knowledge. The adoption of such an approach should not be treated as a claim to the effect that Gettier-style counterexamples have demonstrated the irrelevance of the notion of knowledge to epistemology.<sup>26</sup> I have used the notion of knowledge in formulating constraints on theories of testimony and will return the

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<sup>21</sup> I have in mind, for example, the Drets kianesque, information-based account recently postulated by Graham (2000, 2001). Such an account will not feature in my discussion directly since it simply falls outside the broad epistemic concerns to be outlined here.

<sup>22</sup> Pollock (1987: 7)

<sup>23</sup> Wright (1991:8)

<sup>24</sup> Gettier (1963)

<sup>25</sup> See Shope (1985) for an overview of attempts to overcome such Gettier -style objections to JTB analyses of knowledge.

<sup>26</sup> See Foley (1993) and esp. Kaplan (1985) for the claim that Gettier-style attacks on the sufficiency of JTB analyses of knowledge have demonstrated the unimportance of knowledge, and that it is justification alone that now matters.

issue of knowledge at a later stage. The temporary agnosticism is therefore to be seen as an short-term expository strategy adopted to facilitate discussion rather than signalling a permanent disinterest in the concept of knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, whilst the undertaking of an exercise in doxastology enables us to remain neutral on some epistemological questions, it is important to note that this focus on justification commits us to certain positions on others. More specifically, whilst it allows us to remain agnostic on the question of the joint *sufficiency* of so-called tripartite analysis of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) in the light of Gettier-inspired challenges, it does endorse a specific claim regarding their individual *necessity*. Endorsing the necessity claim means that true beliefs need to be justified if they are to count as knowledge, and the task of an exercise in doxastology is to give an account of the justification for a particular belief.

By ‘a justification of a belief’, I will mean an abstract object; an argument (in a sense to be specified later) whose conclusion is the proposition believed.<sup>28</sup> It seems therefore that the task of an exercise in doxastology is two-fold: firstly, one needs an account of the justificatory argument for the specific belief in question, and secondly one needs an account of the suitable relationship between the individual knower and that justificatory argument. These two requirements differ in type.<sup>29</sup> The second requirement - regarding as it does the relationship between any individual and any type of justification - is more general in nature, whereas the first is specific to a particular belief under discussion.

Let me state somewhat dogmatically that the appropriate relationship between an individual and the justification of a belief is such that *in order for a individual to be aware of reasons that would justify that belief, that individual must possess a justification so that the justificatory argument must be within that individual’s*

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<sup>27</sup> In what follows, I will not refrain from use of the term ‘knowledge’, and (initially, at least) use it to refer to justified, true belief. I thereby use the term ‘knowledge’ within a doxastological enterprise - ignoring the fact that there may be more to knowledge than this.

<sup>28</sup> Talk of propositions here is not meant to imply any substantive assumptions about the nature of propositions. Propositions can be seen as possible objects of belief and a proposition is, in this minimal sense, whatever it is that serves as the content of a propositional attitude and can also stand as premise/conclusion of an argument. (Modifying the claims made in this sentence is a central theme of chapter 5).

<sup>29</sup> This point is made in Fricker (1994:59-60)

*reflective reach*. On the one hand, this is quite a weak formulation of the relationship required. The individual need not have reflected on the belief prior to being challenged nor be able to explicitly formulate the argument in terms of all the premises etc. The idea of the justification being within the individual's reflective reach is that the individual, when challenged to justify the belief and presented with the formulated argument, could at least recognise the argument as providing the justification for the belief. On the other hand, this is a strong formulation of the relationship needed here, since it rules out one weaker version of the requirement, as seen in the case of an individual whose belief is based on such premises but is unable to cite or recognise such a justificatory argument as relevant to the belief.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst a full defence of these claims would move beyond the immediate scope, some central features of endorsing such a necessity claim can be seen by contrasting this with an alternative position, which can loosely be termed '*reliabilism*', whose: "founding insight...is the claim that true beliefs can...amount to genuine knowledge even when the justification condition is not met."<sup>31</sup> According to this alternative, true beliefs amount to knowledge provided the beliefs result from the exercise of processes that are (generally) reliable producers of true beliefs.<sup>32</sup> The crux of this externalist alternative is that this latter clause can be seen as fulfilled whether or not the individual has any reason for thinking this to be so.<sup>33</sup> Such a position concurs with our own in claiming that the truth of a belief is insufficient for its status as knowledge, since the knower may have acquired it through some fortuitous accident. To rule this

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<sup>30</sup> Consider Mary, who, as the result of some freak accident, is able to correctly and reliably answer some questions on a certain topic without having any idea as to why. Or the infamous chicken-sexers who have a reliable ability to name the sex of a chick without knowing why. (Cases discussed in Greco, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Brandom (2000: 97).

<sup>32</sup> The account in the text focuses on reliable processes (Goldman, 1979), as opposed to reliable indicators (Swain, 1981). There are of course a wide variety of versions of reliabilist accounts, and the main focus in the text is to concentrate on those that cohere with the 'founding insight' noted in the text.

<sup>33</sup> This is made explicit in Goldman (1976: 1). It should be noted that Goldman presents his account as an alternative account of justification, as opposed to an alternative to justification. He thus could be seen as endorsing the necessity claim made here. (This is also related to a distinction sometimes made between reliabilist theories of knowledge and reliabilist theories of justification). However, since Goldman is prepared to call a belief 'justified' even if the individual has no reason for thinking that this is the case, it seems to play a very different role to the notion of justification explicated above, it seems fair – from our perspective – to see him as denying the necessity claim. This will become clearer in the ensuing discussion and it seems that nothing substantial turns on the vocabulary adopted. Our main focus is to be seen in terms of the 'founding insight' cited in the text, even if not all reliabilist theories would themselves endorse this insight.

out, a counterfactual account of knowledge is suggested to the extent that the knower's belief in *p* qualifies as knowledge just in case s/he believes that *p* because of a process that would not yield belief in *p* were *p* not true.<sup>34</sup>

Whether this is a fair characterisation of a reliabilist position is not the point.<sup>35</sup> The current concern is to formulate an alternative to my own position that denies the necessity claim in order to motivate the reasons behind endorsement of such a claim. The key point for the moment is the reliabilist claim, in contrast to our doxastic position, that a belief could sometimes constitute knowledge even in a situation in which the individual is unaware (in the sense outlined above) of the justification for that belief. This way of distinguishing between reliabilism and doxastic approaches is made from the perspective of the latter; this doxastic approach is seen as requiring more than the former whilst reliabilism is little more than the denial of the latter. Accordingly, one way of motivating our interest in doxastology would be to suggest cases which are intuitively not instances to which one would not be inclined to attribute knowledge, and yet these would turn out to warrant the attribution if one were to drop the necessity claim and follow the reliabilist.

Consider a spectrophotometer hooked up to a tape recorder such that it produces the noise: "that's red" in response to being irradiated with light of the proper frequency.<sup>36</sup> Assume that the machine is reliable (the machine would not utter that's red unless this were true and so on). According to the 'rough and ready' reliabilism of the previous paragraph one would want to say that the machine knows that it is red. According to our own position, we would not say that the machine knows that it is red since it is unable to justify such a 'claim'.<sup>37</sup> The point here is not to prove reliabilism false. I

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<sup>34</sup> For this counterfactual account, see Drestke (1971, 1981); Goldman (1976, 1986) and Nozick (1981)

<sup>35</sup> The characterisation here is aimed at what could be seen as a radical, externalist reliabilism, ignoring entirely the popular possibility of what Brewer (1999: 105) terms 'modified reliabilism' whereby the reliability of the process additionally becomes an element in the justification itself. See Peacocke (1986: 127-60) and Blackburn (1984). In terms of the contrast attempted in the text, these theories can be seen as endorsing the necessity claim, although differences will later emerge between our account and such modified reliabilism. See Appendix to Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup> This case is cited in Brandom (1994: 88)

<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, if one were to assume- as will be argued later - that it is a necessary condition on the acquisition of knowledge through testimony such that one can only acquire knowledge that *p* if the Speaker knows that *p*, it seems that someone believing that something is red as the result of hearing such an 'assertion' by the machine would be an instance of acquisition of knowledge through testimony according to the reliabilist, but not the doxastic, model.



freely grant that intuitions on this case differ. I also freely grant that one could formulate a reliabilist alternative that could rule out the attribution of knowledge to such a machine even if this were deemed necessary. However, on the 'rough and ready' reliabilism outlined above, it seems little more than a trivial matter to rule out the attribution of knowledge to the machine, whilst my own intuitions - and thus those underlying the epistemic framework of this study - are that this possibility should be ruled out in a non-trivial manner.<sup>38</sup>

The key notion seems to be one of *responsibility*. Such a notion of responsibility is implicit in our very use of the term 'knowledge' itself. In describing a state as knowledge, we are not just recording facts about such a state but making a judgement to the effect that it merits such a judgement, and we make such a judgement in terms of the state fulfilling certain *norms* regarding application of this predicate.<sup>39</sup> Correctly exercising this capacity to describe a state as one of knowing is thus not just dependent upon the properties of the given state being described, but it is also dependent upon our judgement regarding those properties. Further, this situation is not limited to occasions invoking two differing people, one attributing the title of 'knower' with regards a certain proposition to the other, but includes the perspective of one individual acting as both attributer and attributee. To claim to know that *p* is thus not merely a description of some empirical state of affairs, but a judgement by the individual to the effect that it merits such a judgement.<sup>40</sup> In turn, to say that a particular judgement is rationally justified is to say that a particular judgement fulfils the norms guiding the attribution of such a judgement. In our everyday practices, we hold ourselves and others responsible for their beliefs, and judge the extent to which they have fulfilled such a responsibility. This is the reason that we engage in the practices of requesting and providing justification for such beliefs.

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<sup>38</sup> To use Dretske's terminology, my own intuitions regarding epistemology are 'top-down', and not 'bottom-up'. (Dretske, 1991). It is interesting to note that Dretske picks the case of ascribing knowledge to Fido the dog as a test case of difference: a bottom-upper, but not a top-downer, would claim without hesitation that Fido knows that *p*. In the light of the discussion here it seems that a true bottom-upper should begin further 'down' with machines such as thermometers; cases of dogs and other non-human animals are more complex. Of course, a bottom-upper such as Dretske could deny such a 'low' starting point. My point here is that the rough and ready reliabilism in the text leaves little room upon which to base such a denial.

<sup>39</sup> See the contrast between attributing the predicates 'feline' and 'dangerous' in Guttenplan (2000: 146).

As revealed in these practices, one ought not hold beliefs which one is not able to justify. Since one can only be held responsible for things of which one is (at least reflectively) aware, it seems the requirement is stronger than this, namely one should only hold beliefs for which one possesses a justification in the sense of being (reflectively) aware.<sup>41</sup> This lies at the heart of our interest in doxastology: *the hero of an exercise in doxastology is not the solitary individual but the epistemically responsible individual*. Such an individual must be sensitive to considerations that could rationally defeat the belief, and respond if challenged. In marked contrast, the hero of ‘rough and ready’ reliabilism is one who only forms beliefs from reliable process, whether or not that individual is aware of this reliability. Since the individual is unaware of such reliability, s/he cannot be held responsible for such beliefs. From a doxastic perspective, ‘rough and ready’ reliabilism is irrelevant to epistemic discussion for it simply ignores the role of responsibility in the epistemic enterprise. Although the spectrophotometer may be reliable in its judgements it is not responsible for them and thus cannot take central stage as hero in a discussion of doxastology.

These remarks may be little more than suggestive at this stage but they serve to make explicit a central theme in the decision to undertake an exercise in doxastology, and thus fulfil the limited ‘manifesto’ aspirations stated at the outset of the discussion. My interest in the epistemology of testimony is an interest in the epistemically responsible individual. The common-sense constraints suggest that such an individual can, on some but not all occasions, gain knowledge through relying on testimony. In turn, accounts of the epistemology of testimony aim at explaining why this is so. I will thus not consider in this study accounts (such as rough and ready reliabilism) that do not share an interest in the epistemically responsible individual, for such accounts fall outside the epistemic framework of this discussion.

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<sup>40</sup> This is my interpretation of Sellars’ oft quoted claim that “in describing an episode or state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says”. Sellars (1997:76)

<sup>41</sup> Of course, as with much else in this manifesto, more needs to be said to justify the claims here. Outlining the interrelationship between responsibility and reflective awareness lies at the heart of the task undertaken in this study.

#### 1.4 *What is testimony?*

Thus far, I have considered the reason for the neglect of testimony in epistemological discussion despite the common-sense constraints, and outlined the epistemic assumptions that frame this study. I now turn towards a description of the area under discussion – in three stages. Firstly, I will consider a definition of testimony in epistemically neutral terms through reflection on everyday discourse. Secondly, I will use this definition to formulate a principle that captures the epistemic role of testimony in everyday discourse. Thirdly, I will use these reflections to argue that a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony is desirable.

When turning to the role of testimony in everyday discourse, one immediate difficulty presents itself. In such discourse we usually limit the use of the term ‘testimony’ to that taking place within a legal context, or at least to situations in which there is a formalised structure to the act similar to testimony in the legal context. Discussions of the epistemology of testimony tend to have in mind a broader category of cases for which we would more commonly use terms such as ‘reporting’, ‘telling’, ‘asserting’, ‘claiming’ and so on, depending on the precise circumstances involved. In deference to this extant body of literature, I will persist with the use of the word ‘testimony’ here, even though real object of inquiry is the less formalised form of telling usually associated with the term.<sup>42</sup>

In the cases of the transmission of knowledge through testimony under consideration, there are (at least) two actors involved, and one could further discern two distinct acts. We will refer to the two actors as *Speaker (S)* and *Hearer (H)*, and the two acts as the *act of testifying* and the *act of learning from testimony*. Actor and act are, of course, related: it is S that testifies and H that learns from testimony. Furthermore, it seems that there is a basic imbalance in terms of any interdependence between these two. S can be said to testify whether or not H learns from the testimony, but H cannot learn from testimony unless S has testified. Put differently, the act of learning from

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<sup>42</sup> Alternatives include ‘hearsay’ (McDowell), ‘reporting’ (Vendler) or ‘interlocution’ (Burge). Use of the term ‘testimony’ in this context stems primarily from Coady’s account, where he explicitly extends the case of ‘formal testimony’ to incorporate cases of ‘natural testimony’. As I will argue in Chapter 3, it seems that the legal model has a pervasive and negative influence over Coady’s groundbreaking account. (See also Graham 1997: 231-2).

testimony relies on there being some prior act of testifying, whilst one can testify even if there is no subsequent learning from that testimony. An interest in the epistemology of testimony focuses primarily on the act of learning from testimony. Since this act depends on there being some prior act of testifying, answering the question: ‘what is testimony?’ requires an account of both.

One could define testimony (both the act of testifying and the act of learning from testimony) in a way that builds epistemic success into the very definition of testimony itself.<sup>43</sup> Any instance in which there is a failure to transmit S’s knowledge that p to H is thus not seen as an instance of learning from testimony. As a result, such an approach reduces the epistemological issue (of testimony in general) to a definitional one, namely whether or not a particular assertion was indeed testimony or not.<sup>44</sup> Whilst, as will emerge at a later stage, I may have some sympathies with such an approach, at this stage I wish to hold epistemic issues and definitional ones apart, without reducing one to the other. So the account below is epistemically neutral in this sense.

#### ***1.4.1 What is testifying?***

It is interesting to note that, whilst the distinction between the act of testifying and the act of learning from testimony outlined above seems intuitive, many attempts to answer the ‘what is testimony?’ question fail to adequately separate the two acts. For example, towards the beginning of his seminal discussion of testimony, Coady asks the question ‘What is testimony?’ and suggests the following definition:

“A speaker S testifies by making some statement p iff:

1. His stating that p is evidence that p and offered as evidence that p.
2. S has the relevant competence, authority or credentials to state truly that p.
3. S’s statement that p is relevant to some disputed or unresolved question (which may, or may not, be p?) and is directed to those in need of evidence on the matter.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This seems to be Coady’s position; see discussion below. In addition, see the discussion in Unger (1972: 307) and McDowell (1998: 37).

<sup>44</sup> Fricker (1994: 397); Jones (1999: 57).

<sup>45</sup> Coady (1992:42).

At first glance, it appears that Coady is interested in the former conception of testimony, the act of testifying from the perspective of the speaker. However, the third part of this definition seems to involve the attitudes of the recipients of testimony in defining the very act of testifying itself.

Considering this third condition, Coady suggests that we:

“[t]ake for instance the case where *e* is a muddy footprint and *s* is John having failed to wipe his boots before coming into the house. Even when John has confessed and no one needs evidence, we might still think that *e* is evidence that *s*. I doubt that this intuition is sound...”<sup>46</sup>

The unsound intuition is that evidence is evidence for something irrespective of whether anyone takes it as such. Coady’s point seems to be that in a case of testimony one cannot be said to testify unless there is someone for whom the testimony can be evidence, someone able to *learn* from the testimony.

If one is focussing solely on the act of testifying itself, it seems to me that it is *this* intuition that seems unsound. Whilst it is correct to say that a testifier herself will only bother testifying if she thinks there is a possibility that the testimony will have some effect, the having of the effect is not part of the definition of testimony itself. One can imagine cases in which a sincere, competent speaker asserts that *p* in the full belief that that person is in need of evidence that *p* and yet be mistaken in that the hearer already believes that *p* and is in no need of such evidence. Whilst there may be no act of learning from testimony in this case, one would be hard pushed to say that the speaker in this case is not engaged in the act of testifying. Thus, rather than requiring that the statement is directed at those in need of evidence, a weaker requirement will suffice such that the speaker believes this to be the case.<sup>47</sup> The definition of testifying is thereby independent of the of the act of learning.

Even if we were to modify the third part of Coady’s definition, there are a number of other aspects of the tripartite definition that remain unsatisfactory. Firstly, the other

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<sup>46</sup> Coady (1992:45).

<sup>47</sup> See Graham (1997: 227) for a similar modification of this condition, albeit for different reasons. As will emerge in the ensuing discussion, although the definition suggested below displays certain similarities to the definition postulated by Graham, his suggestions (and examples) remain too close to Coady’s and thus are subject to similar criticism.

two parts of Coady's definition of testimony themselves seem to be too strict, in that they build speaker competence into the very definition of testifying itself. Any instance in which there is a failure to transmit S's knowledge that *p* to *H* is thus not seen as an instance of testimony. As a result, such an approach reduces the epistemological issue (of testimony in general) to a definitional one, namely whether or not a particular assertion was indeed testimony or not.<sup>48</sup> At this stage I wish to hold epistemic issues and definitional ones apart, and a more neutral definition would use the term to irrespective of speaker competence or not.

Thus far, two modifications of Coady's definitions have been suggested. The first claims that one should ignore the Hearer's response in defining the act of testifying since one can be said to testify without there being an actual recipient of the testimony provided that one *thinks* there is such a recipient. The second claims that one should ignore the competence of the speaker in defining the act of testifying, since one can be said to testify even if one is wrong, provided that one *thinks* one is competent. These two modifications are interrelated: both claim that the key to defining an act of testifying depends solely on the intentions of the testifier herself, irrespective of the response of others or the world. Putting things in this manner suggests that there is an important difference between two possible 'speaker-related failings' involved in any unsuccessful instance of transmission of knowledge through testimony, namely speaker incompetence and speaker insincerity. The latter, unlike the former, depends solely on the intentions of the Speaker, and therefore the act of testifying does seem to include a condition ruling out speaker insincerity. An insincere testifier may represent herself as testifying, and may fool *H* into learning from such testimony, yet the act is not one that we would call 'testifying' but one of 'lying' or 'deceiving'. An incompetent testifier, on the other hand, is actually intending to testify and thus is an act that we would call 'testifying'. So, whilst a definition of the act of testifying should not rule out the possibility of speaker incompetence, it ought to rule out speaker insincerity.

Even if one were to remove matters of speaker competence from the definition and focus simply on issues of intention, other concerns remain. For Coady, the intention

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<sup>48</sup> Fricker (1994: 397); Jones (1999: 57).

of the testifier is to provide *evidence* regarding certain matters that the potential recipient is in need of *evidence* about. Although I will later question this suitability of the notion of evidence here from an epistemic perspective, it seems that even as a simple description of speaker intention, the notion of the testifier providing *evidence* fails to adequately capture the act of testifying in the cases under consideration from a descriptive point of view. In a court of law, a testifier may be called upon to provide evidence to the jury or judge regarding a certain matter; artefacts and statements are entered as exhibits, and jury or judge are to use these to decide the facts. In such cases, the testifier may indeed see herself as providing evidence for people in need of evidence. However, in the everyday cases under consideration, talk of evidence seems inappropriate. In these cases, the testifier does not intend her words to be used as evidence regarding some matter, although this may be the role that they end up playing. Rather, in testifying that p, S intends to *share her knowledge* that p with H or let H know that p.

Acts of testifying take place within a social context, and within that social context we are familiar with the notion of testifying and are sensitive to the ways in which it should function.<sup>49</sup> In this social context, H can criticise S's testimony as unwarranted or praise it as well made. This suggests that there are norms and rules governing the speech act of testifying and that participants in such social intercourse display implicit sensitivity to such rules. As with the rules of any game, one may break such rules. However, this only works because there are rules there to be flaunted and people are sensitive to the difference between conforming to, and breaking, a rule. An acceptable response to an assertion is to ask S: 'How do you know that'?<sup>50</sup> H's request implies that he assumes that there is an answer. The very fact that the H seems to assume himself entitled to make the request for S to justify her claim in terms of knowledge, it seems that the appropriate occasion on which one is justified in making an assertion is when the speaker knows that p.<sup>51</sup> If a speaker is unable to answer this, she should withdraw the assertion. Of course, she may not know that p; mistakes and deceit are

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<sup>49</sup> See Williamson (1996) and Brandom (1994: 53).

<sup>50</sup> Unger (1975)

<sup>51</sup> Williamson (1996) has argued similarly that the that social rule governing the speech act of assertion (and from our perspective this should be read as the social rule governing the act of testifying) is that 'S should only assert that p if S knows that p'.

the types of things that happen. However, mistakes and deception succeed because the testifier represents herself as attempting to share knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

In the light of this, our conception of the act of testifying is such that:

*S testifies that p by making some statement p iff*

*(T1) S's stating that p is proffered in order share her knowledge that p with her audience, and thereby let H know that p.*

*(T2) S intends that her audience believe that she has relevant competence to state truly that p [and is prepared to provide reasons for this if challenged].*

*(T3) S's statement that p is directed to those S believes in need of knowledge on this matter.*

This definition seems to capture a specific subclass of the broader category of reporting or tellings of particular interest to discussions of testimony, or so I will claim following consideration of the process of learning through testimony.

#### ***1.4.2 What is learning from testimony?***

In terms of the epistemology of testimony, our main interest is in the act of learning through testimony and I have claimed that one cannot be said to have learnt through testimony unless there was a prior act of testifying to have learnt from. This strikes me as intuitive and although I have argued that theorists tend to conflate the two acts of testifying and learning, their very interest in defining the act of testifying in the context of a discussion of the epistemology of testimony reflects this assumption. A fuller characterisation of the process of learning from testimony would thus specify a particular relationship between H and this prior act of testifying.

Consider the following three cases:

*Case 1:*

Dave knows there are no cookies in the jar because he looked there. Sally walks in and tells Dave that there are cookies in the jar. As a result Dave comes to believe that Sally has poor eyesight.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This is further discussed in 3.3.

<sup>53</sup> Developing an example from Drestke (1971), discussed in Graham (1998).



*Case 2:*

Emma stutters on the word ‘stutter’ whilst telling a friend that she stutters. As a result of hearing her stutter, her friend believes that she stutters.

*Case 3:*

“Consider the case of Jones whom we know to have been hypnotised by a master criminal. The criminal has programmed the unsuspecting Jones to state that the criminal’s arch-rival is hiding out at a certain address...When Jones blurts out the information, it is reasonable for us to take it as evidence for the arch-rival’s hiding place because we know of the hypnotism and of the master’s interest in having the information made available to us”.<sup>54</sup>

All three seem to involve cases of learning from others and yet none of these three are cases of learning from testimony.

In case 1, Dave acquires a belief (that Sally has poor eyesight) as the result of hearing and understanding Sally’s assertion that there are no cookies in the jar, and yet this is not a case of acquiring a belief through testimony. It seems that whilst Sally’s act can be seen as one of testifying (at least according to my definition of testifying above - pace Coady), the process through which Dave have acquired this belief is not the act of learning through testimony.<sup>55</sup> The moral seems to be that *one can only learn through testimony those facts that have been asserted*.<sup>56</sup>

In case 2, Emma’s friend acquires knowledge of the facts that that have been asserted, yet it seems that this is not a case of learning through testimony. Emma’s friend is not relying solely on Emma’s testimony for his knowledge but himself (his own perception). The moral seems to be that *it only counts as a case of learning from testimony when one learns from the content of a particular assertion and not other features of the utterance that may be at H’s disposal*.

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<sup>54</sup> Coady (1992: 45)

<sup>55</sup> I ignore the fact that I also have had to rule out other interpretations of Sally’s behaviour, such as possible insincerity. This will become clearer in the ensuing discussion.

In case 3, Jones makes an assertion with a particular content and we acquire a true belief with that content from hearing and understanding the assertion. Yet this does not seem to be a case of learning through testimony. There seem to be two reasons for this failure. Firstly, H's knowledge of the hypnotism means that H does not believe that an act of testifying has taken place: H's knowledge of the hypnotism means that from his perspective the speaker has not fulfilled (T1) and (T2) and thus cannot be said from H's perspective to have testified to the location. Secondly, even if H didn't know about the hypnotist, it does not seem correct to say that he learnt through the process of testimony: H can't be said to have learnt through testimony if there was no act of testifying to have learnt from! Here there is no act of testifying since the speaker does not intend to share knowledge nor intends his audience to believe that he is competent: he has no knowledge with regards the source of his belief and would not be in any position to defend that assertion if challenged.<sup>57</sup> So, it seems that *one can only be said to learn through testimony if there was a prior act of testimony and one believes that such an act was testimony*.

However, case 3 raises another issue ignored in the discussion thus far, namely that of chains of testimony. Whilst it seems correct to argue that we do not learn from Jones's testimony since Jones does not testify and we do not believe that Jones testifies, it could be said that this is nevertheless a case of learning from testimony, namely the testimony of the master criminal himself.<sup>58</sup> The criminal wants to share knowledge regarding his rival with those he sees in need of such knowledge. We believe that the hearer knows and that he wants to share this knowledge. The hypnotism of Jones ensures that Jones himself passively transmits this knowledge, without alterations and changes that may result from his own rationality; indeed, he is rather like a tape recorder or a blank slate written upon by the criminal. In such a case it seems

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<sup>56</sup> See also Coady (1992: 42-46), Anscombe, (1981: 116)

<sup>57</sup> The situation here is complicated, and I am unsure what to say if the hypnotist would implant the suggestion that Jones actually had reasons for the belief, such that he could offer justificatory reasons in support of his claim regarding the location of the arch enemy. In such a case it does seem that (2) is fulfilled and thus there is indeed an act of testifying. Yet, it does not seem right to say that I learnt from Jones's testimony. One option here is to reformulate (2) so that it excludes this, although it is difficult to see how this is to be done. My hunch is to say that the difficulties here emerge from the peculiar case of hypnosis, and that one would need to add some rationality constraint on an act of testifying, such that the testimony must have a rational source - although more work is needed to formulate this precisely. See Burge (1992; 1998) for some suggestions along these lines. This will be developed in more detail in chapter 4.

<sup>58</sup> This possibility is considered briefly by Coady (1992: 46)

plausible to say that we do learn of the arch-rival's whereabouts through the testimony of the criminal.

Consider in this light the following:

*Case 4:* Freddie is relating a story regarding some event to Rod and Jane. Jane misses the end of the story and asks Rod to repeat the ending. Rod says that Freddie had said such and such happened.

In this case, Rod learns *directly* from Freddie's testimony and Jane learns *directly* from Rod's testimony. As a result of learning from Freddie, Rod comes to believe such and such. As a result of learning from Rod, Jane comes to believe that Freddie said that such and such happened. She also comes to believe that such and such happened. Jane's belief regarding Freddie is learnt through Rod's testimony. It seems plausible to suggest that Jane's belief that such and such happened is learnt *indirectly* from Freddie's testimony, in a similar manner to that which we learn from books and so on. Rod's role in the whole affair is not to act as a testifier that p, but as a link in the chain of Freddie's testimony that p - he functions as an intermediary between testifier and learner. Furthermore, it seems plausible to include such indirect cases of learning through testimony within our definition of learning through testimony - although this raises a number of difficult issues.

One such issue involves the scope of indirectness permissible. On the one hand, we do not want to permit any case of learning that somehow relates to testimony at some stage in a chain as learning through testimony as such a concession would undermine the very point of a narrow conception of testimony itself. On the other hand, ruling out any cases of indirect testimony (including written testimony) seems too austere. Striking the balance is difficult. For example, in both cases 3 and 4, we have an instance of indirect testimony, although there are important differences between the two. In case 4, Rod (the intermediary) is aware that he acts as intermediary and marks this explicitly in his testimony with the preface: 'Freddie said...'. In case 3, although the audience are aware of Jones's role as intermediary, Jones himself is unaware and represents himself as testifier. In case 3, the criminal is testifying in a very indirect manner involving deceit and hypnotism, whilst in case 4, there is no such duplicity. These suggest that case 4 is more direct than case 3. However, it is unclear whether this means we should distinguish between the two such that case 4, but not 3, is an

instance of learning from testimony. Rather than pursue this further, let it suffice to say that our definition of learning from testimony will allow for certain instances of indirect learning, whilst leaving open a precise clarification of scope. In the following discussion, S will refer to the primary source in a chain of testimony, and not any intermediary.

In the light of the preceding discussion it seems that our conception of learning from testimony is such that:

*H learns that p through testimony as a result of hearing (either directly or indirectly) and understanding S's statement that p iff*

*(L1) S testified that p*

*(L2) H believes that S testified that p*

*(L3) H comes to believe that p as a result of accepting as true the content of S's testimony, and not the result of any other information available to H.*

### **1.5 The t-principle**

Thus far, we have succeeded in distinguishing testimony as a distinct sub-class within the broader category of learning from others, based on reflections on our everyday practices in this regard. There is a significant sense in which the definitions arrived are epistemically neutral, since H could learn that p through testimony on this account whether or not H comes to know that p. In this section, such epistemic neutrality will be dropped as we attempt to formulate a principle that captures our practices with regards testimony as a source of knowledge.

When discussing the common-sense constraint on the epistemology of testimony, it was argued that it is a desirable feature of any account of testimony that it generally coheres with our pre-reflective, everyday practices regarding that method, unless there are specific reasons to reject this. These everyday practices include allowing testimony, on some but not all occasions, to be a source of knowledge. In the light of the epistemic framework and definition of testimony outlined above, it seems possible to formulate a principle that reflects the epistemic role allotted to testimony in such practices. Ideally, such a principle (henceforth a t-principle) would take the form of an analytic biconditional stating both necessary and sufficient conditions for the

transmission of knowledge through testimony as reflected in these practices. Any account of the epistemology of testimony should in turn be able to explain why the principle is true in the cases which it is.<sup>59</sup> In my discussion, I will first outline and explain the t-principle [1.5], and then demonstrate its application through a series of examples [1.6].

The beginnings of an outline of just such a principle is suggested by Evans in the context of a discussion of communication and information. Evans suggests that:

“[I]f the speaker *S* has knowledge of *x* to the effect that it is *F*, and in consequence utters a sentence in which he refers to *x* and says of it that it is *F*, and if his audience *A* hears and understands the utterance and accepts it as true (and there are no defeating conditions), then *A* himself thereby comes to know of *x* that it is *F*. ”<sup>60</sup>

Such a suggestion has the generalised form ‘ $\phi \rightarrow t$ ’, where  $\phi$  includes a number of conditions (*C*<sub>1</sub>, *C*<sub>2</sub>...*C*<sub>*n*</sub>) and *t* is the transmission of knowledge through testimony, so that ‘ $\phi \rightarrow t$ ’ should be read as ‘if certain conditions are fulfilled, then *H* knows that *p* through testimony’. As such, it involves stating sufficient conditions for the transmission of knowledge via testimony. Adapting so that it forms a suitable t-principle, one would wish to adapt the form to a biconditional: ‘ $t \leftrightarrow \phi$ ’: read from left to right it states necessary conditions for the transmission of knowledge, read left from right it states sufficient conditions.

Modifying Evans’ suggestion in this manner, and in the light of our previous discussion, it seems the following is an appropriate t-principle:<sup>61</sup>

*t-principle: H knows that p through testimony as a result of hearing (either directly or indirectly) and understanding S’s statement that p iff*

(*C*<sub>1</sub>) *S* knows that *p*

(*C*<sub>2</sub>) *S* testifies that *p*

(*C*<sub>3</sub>) *H* learns that *p* through *S*’s testimony

<sup>59</sup> For the idea of a t-principle, I have drawn on Peacocke’s (1986: 149) ‘transmission principle’, and the discussion of it in Ganeri (1999:22). See also Sosa (1965:8). Reasons for preferring not to call it a transmission principle will emerge in chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> Evans (1982: 310-11)

<sup>61</sup> There seem to be a number of accounts of testimony that endorse something similar. In addition to Evans, these include Welbourne (1979, 1994), Williamson (1996), Peacocke (1986, 1999) and Coady (1992).

*(C4) There are no defeating conditions.*

(C2) and (C3) draw on the descriptions of testifying and learning from testimony argued for above, and a comparison between these and the t-principle serves to highlight the epistemically neutrality of the earlier definitions. In the remainder of this section I will attempt to explicate (C1) and (C4)

(C1) seems to be widely endorsed in extant discussion regarding testimony. Read from left to right, it suggest that in order for H to know that p through S's testimony that p, it is necessary that S know that p. As Welbourne claims:

“I take testimony to be essentially concerned with communicating knowledge, so I hold it is necessary, if there is to be a successful process of testimonial transmission, that the speaker knows that p”<sup>62</sup>

Whilst such a necessity condition seems to me to be correct, it has nevertheless come under recent challenge from cases in which knowledge that p is supposedly gained by H through testimony yet S does not know that p. For example, we are asked to consider the following case.

*Case 5:* <sup>63</sup>

Mrs. Smith - a secondary schoolteacher - teaches evolutionary theory in order to conform to syllabus requirements. She learns about testimony through meticulous research, and conveys it to the students clearly and carefully. Nevertheless, as a devout creationist, Mrs. Smith does not believe that evolutionary theory is true. She does not convey this to her students, partially out of fear for her job, partly out of the belief that she has the moral duty to teach what she is paid for.

So, it is argued, that:

“assuming that evolutionary theory is true, in this case it seems reasonable to assume that Mrs. Smith's student can come to have knowledge via her

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<sup>62</sup>Welbourne (1994: 302). Despite substantive differences, this is also implied/endorsed in Ross, J. (1975), Ross, A. (1986), Burge (1993), Plantinga (1993), Dummett (1994) and Lehrer (1987, 1994).

<sup>63</sup> Due to Lackey (1999: 476-83); Graham (2000)

testimony, despite the fact she does...not have the knowledge in question herself.”<sup>64</sup>

Through cases such as this, it has been argued that (C1) should not be seen as a necessary condition for the transmission of knowledge through testimony.

Now, whilst I do concur that the children may be said to have gained knowledge from Mrs. Smith, it seems that this is not a case of learning *through testimony*. On our narrow definition of testifying above, Mrs. Smith is not testifying for she does not intend to share her knowledge with others (T1). The case is actually somewhat vague: much depends on various factors thus far undefined, including what it is that Mrs. Smith does not believe, the manner in which she derived knowledge regarding evolutionary theory, what precisely she tells the students and so on. Depending on the stipulated answers to these questions, one could even suggest that Mrs. Smith is acting as a passive intermediary for the transmission of evolutionary knowledge from the authors of the books she reads, so that the students actually learn indirectly from the testimony of those authors. As such, either this is not a case of learning from testimony or the students are learning from testimony of those who do know that p. Either way, this case fails to provide a counter-example to the necessity of (C1). I will return to a more detailed discussion of this case below.

(C4) introduces the of defeating conditions (henceforth ‘defeaters’) and stems from our interest in epistemic responsibility. Loosely, in a case in which H acquires a testimonial-based belief with the content that p, a defeater is any true proposition which gives H reason not to believe that p. As before, two questions arise regarding such defeaters: firstly, specifying what types of proposition count as a defeater for testimonial-based beliefs and, secondly, specifying the relationship between an individual and such a defeater.

With regards the first question, one could distinguish between two types of defeaters: rebutting and undercutting.<sup>65</sup> Suppose that I acquire the belief that Maimonides was born in 1135 by consulting the entry on Maimonides in the ‘Oxford Companion to

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<sup>64</sup> Lackey (1999: 477)

<sup>65</sup> Pollock (1999: 194-6); Plantinga (1993: 40-41). They are sometimes referred to as type 1 and type 2 defeaters respectively. See Pollock (1974).

Philosophy'. Later, whilst consulting the chronological table of philosophers at the back of this volume, I discover that it states that Maimonides was born in 1125. In such a case, we will say that the latter proposition acts as a rebutting defeater for the former belief. *As such, if  $X$  is a reason to believe that  $p$ ,  $Y$  is a rebutting defeater for this reason if  $Y$  is a reason to believe that  $\neg p$ .* Suppose further that as a result of reading the preceding example you now have a reason to form the belief that there is a mistake regarding Maimonides in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy, but you also suspect I may be lying in an attempt to discredit the Companion as a result of a grudge against its editor. In this case, this secondary belief acts as an undermining defeater for the former. Unlike the former case of the rebutting defeater, the latter belief does not challenge the concluding belief per se, but challenges the relationship between the reason and the belief. (As Pollock puts it, an undermining defeater challenges the evidence and not the conclusion, whilst a rebutting defeater challenges the conclusion). *As such, if  $X$  is a reason for  $H$  to believe that  $p$ ,  $Y$  is an undermining defeater for this reason if  $Y$  is a reason to doubt that  $X$  is a reason for  $H$  to believe that  $p$ .* Note that in both cases the belief that  $p$  is true (Maimonides was born in 1135 and there is a mistake regarding Maimonides in the Companion); a defeater is simply any true belief that gives  $H$  a reason not to believe that  $p$  even in a situation in which  $p$  is true.

In any instance of learning from testimony, there is a particular piece of testimony with a particular propositional content. Of course, the hearer in any testimonial event may have some prior beliefs regarding this particular piece of testimony that affect whether  $H$  accepts the testimony. Furthermore, testimony also takes place within a specific context and this context itself may have an effect on the process of learning through testimony. Specifically, an instance of testimony involves, at minimum, a *Speaker*, a *Hearer* and an *Occasion* (the specific circumstances of the testimonial event) and *Domain* of utterance (the general category to which the content area of testimony could be said to belong). In addition to any beliefs specifically arising from the testimony itself,  $H$  may have certain beliefs that arise from such contextual factors. So,  $H$  may have prior beliefs about  $S$ 's general trustworthiness on matters in general.  $H$  may have prior beliefs regarding his ( $H$ 's) own gullibility or his own past record of reliability as a recipient of testimony.  $H$  may have certain beliefs about the



reliability of testifiers in certain social contexts (such as a pub discussion or in the context of an academic lecture). H may have certain general beliefs regarding the reliability of testimony in certain matters (such as historical information regarding the holocaust and so on). Any of these beliefs regarding either the testimony itself or arising from such contextual factors may act as a defeater for the proposition testified; those that regard the testimony itself are rebutting defeaters, those that arise from contextual factors are undermining defeaters.

Having clarified the potential defeaters for testimonial-based beliefs, the second question arises, regarding the relationship between an individual and such a defeater. (C4) claims that in a successful instance of the transmission of knowledge through testimony there are no defeating conditions. On one wide reading of this condition, this could be interpreted to suggest that there must be no true propositions that defeat the testimonial-based belief whatsoever, irrespective of whether H believes those propositions.<sup>66</sup> On one narrow reading of this condition, we are only interested in propositions that an individual believes.<sup>67</sup> In between the two, one could say that there must be no true propositions that defeat the testimonial-based belief that H actually believes or ought to believe as an epistemically responsible individual.

The wide reading seems to extend the pool of potential defeaters so wide that knowledge seems to be very difficult to come by - contravening the achievability constraint. The narrow reading seems to favour an epistemic policy of shutting ones eyes and ear to potential evidence and thereby making knowledge too easy to come by - contravening the gullibility constraint. Both seem to ignore the notion of an epistemically responsible individual: the wide definition incorporates factors of which he cannot be aware even potentially, the narrow definition deliberately advocates irresponsibility. As such, it is the third alternative that seems the best reading in the light of our epistemic framework. (C4) could therefore be modified to (C4') there must be no defeating conditions of which H as a responsible subject ought to be aware.

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<sup>66</sup> See Lehrer (1974), Sosa (1974) and Swain (1981) for such a wide conception of defeaters.

<sup>67</sup> See Pollock (1999) and Plantinga (1993) for such a wide conception of defeaters, although they include any proposition regardless of truth or otherwise.

The issue of just what it is that such a subject ought to be aware is not something that one can state outside the context of a particular case, and indeed I would argue that pragmatic factors play a central role in defining what constitutes such a responsible subject. In particular, the issue of the consequences of adopting a particular belief seem in everyday discourse to define what is considered responsible. If the consequences of adopting a particular belief are severe, one would expect a subject to go to greater lengths to rule out possible defeating conditions than situations in which the consequences of adopting a belief are not as severe. So, as a member of a jury weighing testimonial evidence, one would be expected to try and rule out all sorts of possible defeaters; as a participant in some pub conversation regarding a so-called urban myth (where the consequences of falsely adopting the belief are not so high, whilst the possible value of retelling the story is very high) one could still be considered responsible even if few possible defeaters have not been explicitly ruled out. Let me stress: I am not advocating that such pragmatic factors influence the formation of the belief *per se*. Exactly not. Beliefs are not subject to the will and the desirable consequences of believing that *p* play no role in justifying that belief, *contra* certain versions of pragmatism. Pragmatic factors however do determine the scope of responsibility, although the precise nature is necessarily vague. (Aspects of this will be considered further in the particular examples below).

### ***1.6 Defending the t-principle***

In the discussion thus far, I have done little more than state the principles and clarify the scope of the conditions, without providing reasons to suggest that our everyday conception of the epistemic role of testimony involves such a principle.

One way to fill this lacunae is to consider a t-principle that does not have such conditions and see whether it is sufficient to account for everyday intuitions through a series of examples. The major emphasis is on condition (C4') of our t-principle and it is useful to compare it to a weaker t-principle that simply dispenses with this condition.

Dretske considers just such a weaker t-principle, one that simply does not have in place something like (C4).<sup>68</sup> He argues that such a (weaker) t-principle fails to account for a certain case. One way of defending our stronger t-principle is to see how it fares with such a case. (Dretske's actual case raises a number of side difficulties, and I will thus actually consider a simpler alternative).<sup>69</sup>

#### Case 6:

The military of a small country hopes to stage a successful coup, and pays off and threatens the reporters of the country's newspapers to report that President has been assassinated regardless of what happens. All but one of the reporters give in. Andy will report what really happens and not just what the military wants him to report. As it turns out, the assassination attempt is successful and Andy is the only eyewitness. The other reporters do not know or even inquire into what really happened. Andy writes in his by-lined column that the president is assassinated. Jenny reads. When Jenny reads Andy's article, does she know that the president was assassinated?<sup>70</sup>

The Dretskian (in spirit) argument would run as follows. Firstly, the weaker t-principle would return a positive answer to the question: Jenny does know that the president is assassinated. Secondly, the intuitive answer to the question is negative: Jenny does not know that the president is assassinated. Thus, concludes Dretske, the (weaker) t-principle is false. I contrast, I will argue that intuitions on such cases vary greatly and that my stronger t-principle is able to account for such variable intuitions.

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<sup>68</sup> The principle Dretske considers is: "If S knows that p then (given certain conditions relating to S's sincerity, the willingness of S's audience to accept what S says as an honest expression of what he knows, etc.) S can bring his listeners to know that p by telling them that p." (Dretske 1982; 109).

<sup>69</sup> Dretske's actual case is the following: George is a connoisseur of fine wines and reliably identifies a Medoc wine as a Medoc, and a Chianti as a Chianti, when he tastes one. He knows that Medocs are Bordeaux, for he knows that Medoc is a region of Bordeaux. However but falsely identifies Chianti as Bordeaux through believing Tuscany to be a wine growing region in southern Bordeaux. At a dinner party George is served a Medoc and correctly identifies it as such, and thus knows that it was a Bordeaux. The next day, his friend Michael ask what kind of wine was served and George tells him that it was a Bordeaux. Does Michael know it was Bordeaux? Dretske argues that the answer to such a question must be negative: Michael does not know it was a Bordeaux. The weaker t-principle, argues Dretske, that Michael does know and thus is false. (Dretske, 1982). My own intuitions regarding such a case concur that Michael does not know but I also believe that proponents of the weaker transmission principle would agree. This is because the reason for Michael's failure to know that p through testimony does not result from any additional conditions missed by the t-principle, but from the fact that George himself fails to know that it was a Bordeaux as a result of his overall poor geography. (See Coady, 1992:224-30; Graham: 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Case is due to Adler (1996).

Before considering each in turn, let us stipulate that Jenny has no other knowledge regarding the incident and that Jenny has no particular preference which paper she reads: she could just as well have picked up a paper by the corrupt journalist. In such a case, it seems that conditions C1-C3 are fulfilled. As a witness, Andy knows of the assassination and is testifying. Jane is learning from testimony. So, on the weaker version, it does seem that Jane know that the president was being assassinated. Drestkian intuitions return a negative verdict: since Jenny could have equally learnt from the corrupt journalists, these remain relevant possibilities which are therefore not ruled out by Andy's report. In Dretske's terms, one could say that Andy's report carries the information that either the president was assassinated or not

When it comes to considering whether Jane actually does know that the president was assassinated, I find my own intuitions varying depending on how further details are filled out. How available was the alternative press? How likely was the assassination? How reliable have the press been in the past? And so on. My intuitions here seem to vary depending on the precise circumstance. Our stronger version of the t-principle, including (C4'), would explain why such intuitions differ and we feel the need for more information about the case. According to this stronger version, whether Jane knows depends on whether Jane could be considered a responsible individual for having ruled out the possibility of corrupt reports, and these in turn depends on a number of complex situational and pragmatic issues, including the ramifications of Jenny obtaining the correct information. As such, it seems that the stronger version of the transmission principle seems to reflect such intuitions.

To see this further, consider the following:

Case 7:

The little boy is notorious in a village for crying 'Wolf!' were no wolves were present. On one occasion, in which a wolf was present the little boy cries 'Wolf!' but no one in the village believes him. A stranger was walking near the village and hears the boy, and believes there is a Wolf. Does the Stranger know there is a wolf?<sup>71</sup>

Let us stipulate that the little boy here has had a change of heart; he is not crying 'wolf' on this occasion as a joke but intends to transmit knowledge. Again, depending

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<sup>71</sup> Case discussed in McDowell (1998a:436) and Graham (2000)

how this case is filled out, it seems possible to suggest that Stranger does indeed know that a wolf is present as a result of the testimony of the boy.

Both cases 6 and 7 are cases in which there potential undermining defeaters which, if known by H would ensure that H does not know that p through testimony. In case 6, it is the fact that not every paper is trustworthy on this matter; In case 7 it is the fact that the boy has a prior record of unreliability. In both cases, H is unaware of these potential undermining defeaters. Whether H, as a responsible individual, ought to have been aware of such defeaters depends on a variety of factors, including details of the context and pragmatic factors involving the consequences of accepting the belief. The intuitive ambiguity over these cases reflects their complexity and thus it seems that the stronger version of the t-principle accurately reflects every practices regarding the role of testimony as an epistemic source.

In summary, it has been argued that reflection on everyday discourse regarding learning from others reveals a distinct sub-category termed 'testimony' sharing a unique combination of properties. Secondly, it has been suggested that further reflection on such practices reveals a certain epistemic principle is necessarily involved in learning through testimony. This t-principle takes the form of a biconditional, stating both necessary and sufficient conditions for the transmission of knowledge through testimony as reflected in these practices. Through applying this principle to a number of examples (Cases 5-6), it has been suggested that such a principle accurately captures our intuitions regarding the acquisition of knowledge through testimony. With this in place, it now seems possible to formulate a defence of the desirability of a non-unitary account of the epistemology of learning from others.

### ***1.7 The t-principle and non-unitary accounts.***

The proponent of the unitary claim argues that whilst one can distinguish testimony as a distinct sub-category within the broader class of learning from others, the epistemic principles in justifying beliefs acquired through testimony are the same as those involved in justifying any belief acquired from others. In contrast, the non-unitary account argues that not only is testimony a distinct sub-category of the broader class of learning from others, but that the epistemic processes involved in this narrower

sub-group differ from those involved in the broader class. Lackey suggests that a unitary account is desirable. In contrast, I hope to show that a non-unitary account is desirable.

The notion of desirability is indeed a weak one. An account may be desirable, but not forthcoming; as with many of my desires, this is one that may not be fulfilled. Desirability as it features here stems from an overriding theme of this chapter – reflection on everyday practices. To say that a non-unitary account is desirable is thus to say that our epistemic practices with regards testimony imply or reveal such a non-unitary approach.

The preceding discussion suggests a way of settling this question of desirability. In the preceding sections, I have defined a specific sub-category of learning from others, namely that of learning from testimony, and argued that there is a specific principle that captures our everyday epistemic practices with regards this sub-category. If it can be shown that this t-principle is not a characteristic feature of the wider category of learning from others, then it seems that such a non-unitary account is desirable. Since it has been argued above that the t-principle is necessarily involved in acquiring knowledge through testimony, if there are indeed cases of learning from others that do not involve the t-principle it thus motivates against a unitary account, pace Lackey.

Lackey's suggestion of the desirability of a unitary account comes in the context of a discussion of the case of the secondary teacher discussed above, and further reflection on this case is instructive. (Case 5 above). In that case, the devout creationist Mrs. Smith teaches evolutionary theory to her pupils even though she does not believe in the theory. Let us assume that the students come to believe in evolutionary theory through her teaching and that such a theory is true. Lackey claimed that the students can come to know about evolutionary through Smith's testimony. As a result, we seem to have a case of learning through testimony even though S does not know that p. In contrast, I suggested that whilst the children may be said to have gained knowledge from Mrs. Smith, it seems that this is not a case of learning *through testimony*. On the definition of testifying above, Mrs. Smith is not testifying for she does not intend to share her knowledge with others (T1).

Reflection on such a case is instructive. Let us vary the case somewhat and assume that Mrs. Smith used a highly unreliable book regarding evolutionary theory but happened to tell the students one proposition regarding a particular fossil that just happened to be true. Since Mrs. Smith does not believe in the theory, she is not attempting to share her knowledge with regards this fossil and thus is not testifying. Her students form a true belief based on Mrs. Smith, and under certain circumstances this belief can be said to be justified. Of course, one has to assume that there were no defeaters operative in such a case or else the students would simply be irresponsible in acquiring their beliefs. So, for example, prior evidence contradicting evolutionary theory or knowledge of Mrs. Smith's creationist convictions would act as defeaters for the justification, and as before certain pragmatic factors regarding are involved regarding the level of responsibility deemed appropriate. Assuming the students were not epistemically irresponsible, it seems possible to claim that they do know that *p*. Arguably, here we have a case of learning from others and yet the *t*-principle fails to hold: the speaker does not know that *p*, is not testifying that *p* and thus *H* is not learning through testimony.

There are many different ways of justifiably acquiring a belief. One common way involves relying on evidence. I walk through my front door and see my flatmate's coat hanging there and form the belief that my flatmate is in the house. In this instance, my belief that his coat is there is sufficient evidence for me of my flatmate's presence; past experience has taught me that his hanging coat is a reliable indicator of his presence. There are occasions in which the words of others can play a similar role to the hanging coat, as reliable indicators of the obtaining of certain states of affairs. In such a case, the intentions of the speaker, or whether the speaker knows that *p*, play no essential role in the acquisition of knowledge from others. The *t*-principle claims that, for the narrower category of the epistemology of testimony, *S*'s knowledge and intentions is necessarily involved in the epistemic process of acquiring beliefs. This suggests that different epistemic principles are in play in such a case than for the general category of learning from others by treating their words as evidence.

In summary, my argument in favour of the desirability of a non-unitary account is as follows. A unitary account of the epistemology of learning from others claims that the same epistemic principles are involved in all the sub-classes of the category of

acquiring knowledge from others. As such, neither the intentions of the speaker nor her status as knower can play an intrinsic role in the acquisition of knowledge through testimony. In contrast, by separating the testimonial sub-class from the broader category, the non-unitary account allows for the intentions of the speaker and her status as knower to play a distinct epistemic role in the acquisition of knowledge through testimony. Since our everyday epistemic assumptions regarding testimony, as captured in the t-principle, involve the intentions of speaker and her status as knower in the process, a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony is desirable as it reflects such everyday epistemic intuitions.

### **1.8     *Summary and prospectus:***

Through reflection on everyday practices, we have thus far outlined a distinct area of interest under the heading of ‘testimony’ and suggested a number of theoretical constraints on accounts of the epistemology of testimony.

In terms of the area of interest, I have claimed that testimony is a distinct sub-category within the broad category of learning from others, and is comprised of two acts – S testifies and H learns from testimony.

S testifies that *p* by making some statement *p* iff

*(T1) S’s stating that p is proffered in order share her knowledge that p with her audience H, and thereby let H know that p.*

*(T2) S intends that her audience believe that she has relevant competence to state truly that p [and is prepared to provide reasons for this if challenged].*

*(T3) S’s statement that p is directed to those S believes in need of knowledge on this matter.*

H learns that *p* through testimony as a result of hearing (either directly or indirectly) and understanding S’s statement that *p* iff

*(L1) S testified that p*

*(L2) H believes that S testified that p*

*(L3) H comes to believe that p as a result of accepting as true the content of S’s testimony, and not as the result of any other information available to H.*



Other instances of learning from others do not fall within this sub-category.

Further I have argued that there is a distinctive epistemic principle operative with regards this sub-category whilst not in the broader one. According to this t-principle, H knows that p through testimony as a result of hearing (either directly or indirectly) and understanding S's statement that p iff :

*(C1) S knows that p*

*(C2) S testifies that p*

*(C3) H learns that p through S's testimony*

*(C4') There are no defeating conditions of which H as a responsible subject ought be aware.*

As a result of this, such common-sense reflection suggests that this sub-category is epistemically unique, thus supporting a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony.

Such reflection places a number of constraints on accounts of the epistemology of testimony, in the sense that any account that is able to fall within these constraints is to be preferred to those that fall without. (This stems from my basic contention above that constraints arising from common-sense reflection provide a suitable (default) starting point for epistemic theorising, unless there are specific reasons to reject this).

The first constraint stems from the twin requirements of achievability and gullibility, so that any account must be able to allow for testimony to play a role as source of knowledge on certain – but not all – occasions.

The second constraint emerges from our t-principle such that any account of the epistemology of testimony should be able to explain why the principle is true in the cases which it is.

The third constraint emerges from our advocating of a non-unitary account of testimony, so that it should be the case that any account proffered is able to allow for a difference between the epistemic principles used in the sub-category of learning from testimony and the epistemic principles used in the broader category of learning from others.

What follows is a study in the epistemology of testimony. As an exercise in doxastology, it concerns itself with the justification of testimonial-based beliefs, i.e. those beliefs acquired as the result of learning through testimony. The study is divided into two parts. In *part A*, I critically consider some extant theories of the epistemology of testimony in the light of the three constraints suggested above. In *part B*, I outline my own preferred alternative. Part A does not claim to be an exhaustive survey of extant theories nor provide decisive criticisms, although it does cover most of the available options known to me. In a discussion of the role of sceptical reflection in the context of Descartes' *Meditations*, Gellner suggests that the role the sceptic plays is *maieutic*, deriving from the Greek *maieutikos* of midwifery.<sup>72</sup> Whilst the sceptical meditations may be of interest on their own, their role is to give birth to the alternative conception at the end. I think that this term captures well the conceived relationship between parts A and B of this essay. Whilst part A is of interest in its own stead, a main aim is to create the space for an alternative conception of the epistemic task to be outlined in part B.

*Part A* focuses upon three groups of theories of the epistemology of testimony. In *chapter 2*, I consider two versions of the so-called reductive thesis, the first due to Hume and the second due to Fricker, and argue that, whilst Fricker's version overcomes some of the difficulties with the Humean account, both versions of the reductive thesis fail to allow for a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony – one of the three constraints outlined above. In *chapter 3*, I turn towards non-reductive accounts that attempt to account for the epistemology of testimony using *a priori* principles. Whilst such accounts cohere with the three constraints outlined above, it is argued that their inferential structure fails in providing a satisfactory account of testimony. In *chapter 4*, I consider transmission accounts of the epistemology of testimony, such as that proffered by Burge, whereby a testimonial-based belief is justified by S's reasons even if they lie outside H's epistemic reach. Such accounts are enticing as they have a non-inferential structure and fall within the three constraints outlined above. Nevertheless, it is argued that

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<sup>72</sup> Gellner (1992: 34)

such accounts fail to allot a central role to the responsible individual, and thus fall outside the broad epistemic framework of this study.

The main lesson of Part A is that we require an account of testimony that gives a primary role to the responsible individual and that is non-inferential in structure. **Part B** aims to provide just such an account. In **chapter 5**, I develop a central component of such an account, namely the notion of a testimonial experiential state, and explore parallels between such a state and a perceptual experiential state. In **chapter 6**, I turn to the epistemic implications of the notion of such perceptual and testimonial experiential states, and claim that such states provide factive reasons for the beliefs based upon them. In *Chapter 7*, I consider a challenge to this parallel between testimonial and perceptual experiential states, a challenge that stems from what I term ‘a sense-datum’ conception of understanding. It is argued that such a conception of understanding is implicit in one reading of the notion of radical interpretation, and that such a reading should be abandoned in light of various difficulties in favour of an alternative, non-radical version of interpretationism. This parallel in epistemic role between perception and testimony, employing the notion of factive reasons, provides a way of “making room for the thought that in communication knowledge rubs off on others like a contagious disease.” Or so I shall argue.

## Chapter 2

### Reductive Accounts of Testimony

#### 2.1 *Introduction*

In order to remedy an appalling lack of knowledge about the history of the new South Africa, I take a tour of Robben Island. During that tour, my tour guide asserts that Nelson Mandela is tall. Understanding her assertion, and having no reason to doubt this, I come to believe that Nelson Mandela is tall. When asked to justify this belief, I claim to have learnt it from the tour guide. Let us call such a belief a testimonial-based belief.

There are a large number of such testimonial-based beliefs, beliefs whose sole justification rests upon the testimony of others. My primary interest in this study will be beliefs such as the one I formed as a result of my tour of Robben Island. As a result of the guide's assertion, I form a belief with content of the form 'Fa', where 'F' is a monadic predicate phrase and 'a' is a proper name, such that I form a belief that involves predicating something of a unique, mind-independent object in the world. There are other testimonial-based beliefs that do not share content of this form, and there are epistemic similarities between such beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I will concern myself solely with justification of testimonial-based beliefs with content of the form Fa.<sup>2</sup>

Imagine undertaking the following (albeit philosophically naïve) exercise. Focusing only on those beliefs that we are able to articulate at a given time and assuming we have some intuitive way of individuating beliefs such that we could count them, begin by compiling an inventory of the all the beliefs to which one ascribed at a given time. Imagine further one were to divide this list in terms of the justificatory source of the beliefs, such that all beliefs belong in one of two groups: testimonial-based beliefs and

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<sup>1</sup> I do not, for example, consider cases of more general judgements, such as someone claiming that 'cats have four legs'. Reasons for the limitation here will emerge in the discussion in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I have nothing to say about the justification for trusting testimony in areas such as ethics, aesthetics and religion; pursuing the ramification of this essay for these areas is the subject of further work. See Rynhold and Wanderer (in preparation).

non-testimonial-based beliefs. The probable results of comparing the relative length of these two lists are captured by Strawson:

“[M]uch, probably the greater part, of our knowledge is derived from hearing what others say or reading what others have written...In brief, a great part of our systems of belief rests on testimony.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite the probable length of the list of testimonial-based beliefs, sceptics about testimony would deny that any such beliefs could constitute knowledge, dismissing protestations to the contrary as the signs of our ‘colossal credulity’. In contrast, our common-sense (achievability) constraint on theorising about testimony (such that that testimony can, at least on occasions, be a source of knowledge) affirms that such testimonial-based beliefs could indeed be claims to know. A study into the doxastology of testimony focuses on the justification of such (true) testimonial-based beliefs.

It is only recently that serious attention has been paid by theorists towards such testimonial-based beliefs and a number of rival conceptions can now be discerned amongst this burgeoning literature. Much of this recent interest has been fuelled by the publication of the first book length study into the epistemology of testimony, C.A.J. Coady’s Testimony: A Philosophical Study, and extant discussion in the literature often involves a critical analysis of arguments found in this seminal work.<sup>4</sup>

The guiding trope of Coady’s book lies in a distinction between two types of theses that can be given to account for the epistemology of testimony: a reductive thesis and a non-reductive thesis. Broadly speaking, reductivists about testimony hold that our epistemic right to believe what others tell us must be shown to be grounded in epistemic resources and principles familiar from other areas of epistemology, such as those related to perception, memory and inference. In contrast, non-reductivists consider the justificatory basis of such testimonial beliefs to be *sui generis*, and cannot be reduced to principles used elsewhere. Put differently, both positions affirm that such testimonial-based beliefs could be a source of knowledge, but seek to justify them in different ways. For the reductivist, testimonial-based beliefs are justified through non testimonial-based beliefs and the two ‘lists’ of our inventory are

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<sup>3</sup> Strawson (1994: 23)

<sup>4</sup> Coady (1992)

combined into one; for the non-reductivist, the *sui generis* character of testimonial based beliefs maintains the separation between the two lists in terms of their differing justificatory source. Subsequent theorists of the epistemology of testimony tend to define their position with regards this basic distinction.

Given this distinction, Coady aims to demonstrate the insufficiency of reductive attempts to adequately explain the epistemology of testimony, whilst offering arguments in favour of adopting a non-reductive thesis. The primary aim of this chapter is to outline and evaluate attempts at such a reductivist conception of the epistemology of testimony, leaving consideration of attempts at non-reductive theses to the next.

More specifically, the structure of this chapter is as follows. Firstly, I reconstruct the testimonial problematic as conceived by Coady [2.2], and outline in light of this one form of reductive conception of testimony based loosely on Hume's writings on testimony [2.3]. Secondly, I evaluate Coady's primary argument against such a Humean reductive position, an argument from the paucity of evidence, and argue that, whilst this may be successful against this Humean version of reductivism, it does indeed seem possible to formulate an alternative that would not be susceptible to such a challenge [2.4]. In the third part of the chapter, I critically consider a version of a non-Humean reductivism which survives the paucity of evidence argument [2.5]. Finally, I develop an alternate argument that seems to tell against the very notion of reductivism itself. [2.6] As noted, the primary aim here is not destructive but maieutic and thus the aim is to carve out available options in the light of the critique [2.7]. (An appendix to this chapter considers some exegetical issues regarding Hume on testimony: exploring the relationship between the received view of Hume with another, and it will be argued more plausible, reading of the text.)

## **2.2 *The testimonial problematic***

This description of Coady's work on testimony may suggest that there is a clear and precise structure to his writing on this issue. However, whilst his reflections on testimony are magnificently rich in detail and scope, Coady's method of exposition is primarily through exegesis of the writings of a number of historical figures in this

area. This style often makes it difficult to precisely spell out the epistemological framework within which Coady is working and to be clear about the nuances of Coady's own position on issues. Given the fact that much of the subsequent theorising tends to orient their discussion around Coady's distinction, it seems important at the outset to clarify Coady's own conception of the issues. In the light of the difficulties that arise from the style of his work, certain assumptions need to be made regarding his position on issues and I will attempt such a process of construction by placing Coady's pronouncements within the broad epistemic framework that guides this study.

According to the framework outlined in the previous chapter, we are engaged in an exercise in doxastology, concerning the justification of such testimonial-based beliefs. To justify a belief is to provide a justificatory argument moving from premises to conclusion, with the conclusion of the argument being the proposition believed. To say that an individual's belief is justified is to say that such a justificatory argument is within that individual's reflective reach, such that they could recognise the argument if presented with it. As such, the aim of an exercise in doxastology of testimony is to provide a generalised argument suitable for justifying testimonial-based beliefs.

If asked to justify my belief that Nelson Mandela is tall, I cite the fact that I heard the tour guide make an assertion to that effect. This seems to be a useful starting point for constructing a suitable justificatory argument for testimonial-based beliefs. The conclusion of such an argument is the belief that Nelson Mandela is tall (henceforth 'that p') and a suitable premise in such an argument is a claim to the effect that the tour guide (henceforth 'S') asserted that p. However, an argument running from the premise 'S asserted that p' to the conclusion 'that p' is clearly not a valid argument - the truth of the premise does not entail the truth of the conclusion; indeed, it seems strange to even to call this an argument at all. One needs some form of additional premise in order to bridge the critical epistemic gap between believing that S asserted that p and believing that p. It seems that for those theorists inspired by Coady it is the

attempt to bridge this epistemic gap that can be considered as the problem of the epistemology of testimony.<sup>5</sup>

More generally, when a Hearer (H) hears a Speaker (S) make an assertion 'that p' in a language that H understands and using concepts that H can be said to possess, H has knowledge to the effect that: 'S said that p'. This much seems to be agreed upon by most theorists of testimony. Of course, important suppositions are being made here about both the nature of perception, meaning and understanding. However, it is commonly assumed that these concerns should be placed in the background of discussions of testimony, for the critical issue does not lie at this stage.<sup>6</sup> In order for a person to possess a justification for his belief that p when that belief was acquired through testimony, a person must have [within his reflective reach] an argument that begins with the premise: 'S asserted that p' and conclude with 'that p'. The question is what other premise(s) need(s) to be added to these to *yield* this conclusion.

The phrase 'yields' here is somewhat ambiguous and prevaricates regarding whether the inference here need be demonstrative or not, in the sense that a demonstrative inference is one in which the premises logically entail the conclusion. The weaker requirement here would be to say that the inference need not be demonstrative and the missing premise could be filled by some generalisation about testimony that, together with the first premise (S asserts that p), could give the hearer a strong reason to believe that p. The alternative stronger requirement would reject such an enumerative induction and require that the premises entail the conclusion. This latter option does, of course, leave open the possibility of someone mistakenly believing that they have justified their belief but this is only because they have falsely asserted one of the premises. The idea of requiring that the premises deductively entail the conclusion in this case is an idealisation that can be thought to obtain in a successful instance of the acquisition of a justified belief through testimony. At this stage, let us assume a weak reading of 'yield', such that the inference need not be a demonstrative one.

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<sup>5</sup> This conception of the epistemology of testimony as attempting to bridge such an epistemic gap is widely assumed by subsequent theorists. See, for example, Ross (1975) Audi (1998), Insole (2000) and, most clearly, Fricker (1995),

<sup>66</sup> This is made explicit in Fricker (1994: 157), and seems to be assumed by Coady too. (See Coady (1992: chapter 2). I return to this assumption in Chapter 6.



Although Coady does not explicitly formulate the problem in this manner, his writings suggest that he feels there to be one major option as to the additional premise that could fill this epistemic gap, namely a blanket generalisation to the effect that 'testimony is generally reliable' or that 'speakers mainly tell the truth', as set out below:

(Justification 1)

Premise 1: S testified that p

Premise 2: testimony is generally reliable

Conclusion: that p

When set out in this manner, it is clear that this is a non-demonstrative inference. Nevertheless, this broad induction is generally consonant with the weak sense of the term 'yield' discussed earlier.

Premise 1 is known as the result of the process of understanding the assertion of another. How is one to gain knowledge of the descriptive Premise 2? Coady seems to suggest that there are two options available here. The first is that it is verified empirically by generalising from noted instances of correlation between assertions and the facts that form the contents of such assertions. The alternative is that it is some form of a priori truth about the nature of language. The former option uses principles well known (perception and induction) from other areas in epistemology to establish Premise 2, and it is this sense that Coady calls this a reductivist option - it reduces the epistemology of testimony to familiar principles available to the autonomous individual. The latter option - citing as it does a priori principles about testimony - is unique and *sui generis* to testimony, and thus does not reduce the epistemology of testimony to principles familiar from elsewhere.

### 2.3 *Humean Reductivism – The Received View.*

According to Coady, the reductivist view is to be seen as 'the received view' and is embodied in the writings of Hume.<sup>7</sup> It is of interest to note at the outset that, whilst

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<sup>7</sup> Coady (1992: 79).

Hume is explicit in acknowledging our debt to testimony as a source of knowledge and one can find succinct expression of the received reductive position through selective citation from Hume's writings on testimony, there is an important sense in which it is strange to call the reductive position outlined above 'Humean'. This disparity between Hume's own position and Humean reductivism has led some to argue that Hume's own position differs from the received view.<sup>8</sup> To explore the precise relationship between Hume's own position and the so-called 'Humean Reductive Position' described would, of course, require detailed exegesis of Hume's writings, as well as general reflections on the character of Hume's larger philosophical project - both of which are beyond our scope at present. As such, we will be concerned with the received view and continue to use the term 'Humean reductivism' to refer to the received position usually associated with Hume - even if further exploration of Hume reveals otherwise. (In an appendix to this chapter, I have included some discussion regarding the relationship between Hume's writings and the received view outlined here, arguing that there is indeed a wide disparity between the two, and that the former is not susceptible to the challenges that prove fatal to the latter).

There are two major sources in Hume's writings for the received view, namely a reductive version of testimony: Hume's celebrated discussion 'On miracles' and his discussion of our historical beliefs, such as the belief that Caesar was killed in the Senate house on the ides of March. We will focus primarily on the former (- see appendix to chapter for discussion of historical beliefs).

In contrast to Locke, Hume concedes in a number of places, the importance and ubiquity of testimonial based beliefs, telling us:

“[t]here 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, and the reports of eye witnesses and spectators”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This point is made in Traiger (1994) and Faulkner (1999). Whilst both concur that the received view is not Hume's own position, they differ in their alternative reading: for Traiger, Hume actually endorses a non-reductive version, whilst for Faulkner, Hume endorses an alternative, non-inductive reductivism. Both stress the importance of discriminating the normative from the descriptive that is my central concern – See Appendix I to this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Hume (1966: 88)

Opening his discussion regarding our rationality for belief in miracles, Hume appeals to the status of testimony.

“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 other event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other.”<sup>10</sup>

Later he notes that:

“[t]he reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any connexion, which we perceive a priori between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find conformity between them.”<sup>11</sup>

Simply put, the received view is that the reason we can rely upon testimony is not the result of some a priori relation supposed to hold between testimony and facts asserted, but the result of experience of a regular and constant conjunction between them. Such a supposition plays a central role in his argument on miracles. Since the validity of testimony is based on (past and current) sensory experience, testimony becomes a source of evidence, and, as evidence in favour of the proposition, the possibility of collision with strong evidence against the proposition from other sources becomes possible. It is this possibility of collision between the evidence provided by testimony and the evidence provided by other sources such as sense perception that lies at the heart of Hume’s arguments against justified belief in miracles.<sup>12</sup>

The location of the discussion of testimony in the context of a sceptical argument regarding belief in miracles is important and leads to an additional aspect central to the received view of Hume. Suppose, says Hume, that:

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<sup>10</sup> Hume (1966: 111)

<sup>11</sup> Hume (1966: 113)

<sup>12</sup> This starting point seems to me to be neutral between the various competing interpretations of the rest of the argument. For a discussion of Hume’s arguments on miracles, see Gaskin (1988: 135-165) and the articles in Tweyman (1996). The central role played by testimony played in the argument is stressed in Armstrong (1992).

“the fact which the testimony endeavours to establish partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous - in that case the evidence resulting from the testimony admits of a diminution, greater or less in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. . . ‘I should not believe such a story were it told to me by Cato’ was a proverbial saying in Rome... The incredibility of the fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority.<sup>13</sup>”

The probability (or improbability in the case of miracles) of the facts reported and our inductive belief in the reliability of testimony pull in opposite directions.

“In all cases we must balance the opposite experiments where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.<sup>14</sup>”

As such, the evidence provided by a piece of testimony depends not only on the reliability of the testifier but also on the credibility of the attested matter considered apart from this testimony.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, according to Humean reductivism, H’s justification for believing S’s testimony is given by an inference that has three premises.<sup>16</sup> The first is the claim that S asserts that p. The second appeals to the general reliability of testimony based on past experience of correlation between testimony and the facts testified. The third concerns the prior probability that p. According to the Humean reductive position, providing that appropriate versions of these premises are available, H can make an inductive inference to the conclusion that p. This account of Humean reductivism seems to represent the received position regarding Hume and many of those offering an alternative use this version as a foil for their reflections.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.4 *The paucity of evidence argument*

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<sup>13</sup> Hume (1966: 113)

<sup>14</sup> Hume (1966: 119)

<sup>15</sup> This has deliberately been phrased, so that Hume’s discussion of miracles should be seen as: “applying a proto-Bayesian argument to a celebrated eighteenth century controversy”. (Owen, 1987; 187). This is not a historical point regarding Hume’s use or knowledge of Bayes, but it seems to me that this is a good way of understanding Hume here. (See Owen, 1987; Sobel, 1987 for an outline of such a Bayesian analysis of miracles; Merrill, 1991 for a discussion of its relationship to Hume (and Pierce).

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting that Coady’s discussion of Hume never mentions the issue of probability, and thus his version only seems to have (the first) two premises - although he considers the issue of Bayesian probability in a separate discussion of astonishing reports at a later stage. (Coady, 1992: chap 10).

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Coady, see Webb (1993); Schmitt (1987, 1999).

According to the received version of Humean reductivism, testimonial beliefs can be justified in that they are a special case of inductive justification; our current and past perceptual experiences give us inductive evidence for the claim that people are generally reliable in their reports. Coady's main argument against Humean reductivism can be called 'an argument from the paucity of evidence' and claims that the individual simply does not have enough evidence available (that is itself non-testimonial) to justify such an inductive inference.

More formally, the argument from paucity of evidence runs as follows. Firstly, reductivism about testimony attempts to establish the general reliability of testimony by induction from a first-hand, observed correlation between assertions and the truth of the propositions asserted. Secondly, the base upon which such an induction is made cannot contain any testimonial-based beliefs. Thirdly, there are insufficient non-testimonial based beliefs to provide the basis for an induction to the general reliability of testimony. Therefore, reductivism about testimony is unsuccessful.

The first of these points is little more than a summary of the Humean reductive position. The second is necessary if we wish to avoid an obvious circularity: attempting to justify the general reliability of testimony based on beliefs acquired through testimonial-based beliefs. The crux of Coady's argument focuses on the third point. He aims to demonstrate the all-pervasive nature of testimony such that removing all testimony based beliefs from our inductive base leaves us with far too few beliefs to provide an adequate base for the induction.

In order to establish the failure of the reductive programme more is needed however: Coady needs not only to demonstrate the ubiquity of testimonial-based beliefs and thus the small remaining base for the induction, he also needs to demonstrate that the remaining base is insufficient to provide the basis for an induction to the general reliability of testimony. Establishing this further point would presumably require reflection on the notion of induction itself and the issue of induction from small bases; put bluntly, we would want to know just how large a sample must be such that it is sufficient to act as an inductive base. In fact, Coady hardly tackles this additional question. The reason for such a neglect becomes obvious when one considers the

detail of the argument: Coady's demonstration of the all-pervasiveness of testimonial-based beliefs is such that it is literally all-pervasive! It turns out that *no* beliefs are entirely non-testimonial, and thus the issue of whether the remaining non-testimonial beliefs are sufficient to act as an inductive base does not even arise.

It thus seems that there are two versions of the paucity of evidence argument: a *radical* version arguing that there are no non-testimonial-based beliefs, and a *weak* version claiming that whilst there are some non-testimonial beliefs, these are simply insufficient to provide the requisite inductive basis for establishing the general reliability of testimony.

This suggests a possible method for querying the scope of the argument from the paucity of evidence. If critical reflection on Coady's radical argument for the all-pervasive nature of testimony reveals that this does not succeed in establishing that there are no non-testimonial based beliefs, then one can begin to question whether the remaining base is sufficient for an inductive generalisation to the general reliability of testimony (the weaker argument). Indeed, our arguments will take this generalised form; querying firstly the claim that all beliefs are testimonial to some extent, and then considering whether, assuming contra Coady that there are some non-testimonial beliefs, these are sufficient to provide the base for such an inductive generalisation. As such, the discussion of the paucity of evidence argument will move through three stages: firstly, an outline of the radical version of the argument [2.4.1], secondly, a rejoinder to this based on the fore/background distinction [2.4.2], and finally an evaluation of the weaker version of the argument [2.4.3]. Whilst we will conclude that the argument from the paucity of evidence is ultimately successful against Humean reductivism, our discussion of the argument will serve to suggest an alternative form of reductivism immune to such concerns.

#### ***2.4.1 The radical version of the paucity of evidence argument***

Coady's argument begins with an analysis of a basic ambiguity in the Humean programme, encapsulated in the quotations from Hume in the previous section. When Hume makes reference in these quotations to 'our experience' upon which the inductive generalisation is supposed to rely, to what is he referring? Two options

seem available: either the collective experience of the entire community as a whole or the experience of a single individual. If it is the former, then the whole account appears to be entirely circular: how can we see the experience of another as evidence for inductive generalisation that we can rely on the trustworthiness of others, without first establishing the trustworthiness of others upon which to build this inductive generalisation? Such an understanding goes entirely against the post-Cartesian conception of the priority of the autonomous knower, to which Hume seems bound.

However, if we focus upon the individual knowers' experiences regarding the constant conjunction between testimony and the facts testified, s/he seems to be in no position to establish the trustworthiness of the enormous number of facts that would be required to found the inductive base. My personal observational pool is far too small for this:

“Many of us have never seen a baby being born nor have we examined the circulation of blood nor the actual geography of the world nor any fair sample of the laws of the land nor have we made the observations that lie behind our knowledge that the lights in the sky are heavenly bodies immensely distant...Some people of course have made them for us but we are but we are precluded from taking any solace in this fact.”<sup>18</sup>

There is indeed little doubt that a vast number of our beliefs are testimony-based, in the intuitive sense described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Most of the things we would normally claim to believe have, as their justificatory source, the testimony of others - parents, teachers, historians, news readers, scientists and so on.<sup>19</sup> This then is the crux of the *weaker* paucity of evidence argument: given the ubiquity of testimonial-based beliefs, it is not possible to isolate a non-testimonial inductive base from which a justifying induction can be made.

However, granting the ubiquity of testimonial based beliefs is not to claim that there are no non-testimonial based beliefs. In a number of places, Coady gestures towards this more *radical* conclusion. In pointing to a more basic problem for the Humean problem, Coady notes that

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<sup>18</sup> Coady (1994: 230)

<sup>19</sup> See the list in Sosa (1994: 59)

“the reductionist picture is flawed at heart since the existence of a common language in which reports are made, rejected or accepted already carries with it to some degree of unmediated acceptance of testimony.”<sup>20</sup>

The full extent of this claim about language will become apparent in the following chapter when we explore Coady’s non-reductive alternative in the next chapter, but two examples will suffice to demonstrate the more radical conclusion suggested above.

Someone observes the Queen visit a university and then reports this fact to others by asserting: ‘Today the Queen visited’. When questioned how he knows this, he would respond: ‘I was there. I saw her’. Such a belief would seem to be a perfect example of a non-testimonial belief, relying simply on perception. However, his belief here is:

“not merely dependent on certain visual experiences, but also on certain other beliefs which provided the identificatory framework with which he approached the visual experience and rightly interpreted it as that of a monarch”.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these other beliefs themselves depend on testimony, leading Coady to conclude that:

“[i]f there is no perception that is so pure that it is uncontaminated by testimony, memory and/or inference, the idea of making pure perception as some kind of epistemological foundation stone for any or all the other three is absurd.”<sup>22</sup>

Coady concludes that:

“dependence upon others for the very recognition for most of the everyday items I encounter in perceptual experiences...is a profound fact of what I take to be my individual epistemic resources.”<sup>23</sup>

A related argument is found in Stevenson, who considers the traditional epistemic hero, the solitary individual, and argues that such a figure would not be able to

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<sup>20</sup> Coady (1998: 312)

<sup>21</sup> Coady (1992: 147)

<sup>22</sup> Coady (1992: 147)

<sup>23</sup> Coady (1992: 147) Adding to this, Coady uses Putnam’s notion of division of labour (whereby lay folk rely on experts for precise definitions of everyday concepts) to further the notion of our extensive reliance on others for the very concepts we experience in perception. It is worth noting in this regard that Coady’s various arguments in favour of the stronger version are familiar from discussions surrounding the so-called theory dependence of perception. Loosely, such arguments are generally considered to have established that all perceptual beliefs depend on some conceptualising framework. If, as is plausible, such a conceptualising framework is itself socially determined through language acquisition, then Coady is correct to say that all perception is dependent upon social factors.



identify the contents of the assertions of others without having some testimonial-based beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Imagine a Robinson Crusoe with a self-taught idiolect who, on meeting other people, tries to carry out the reductivist project of empirically establishing correlations between the utterances of others and his own observation of the facts asserted.<sup>25</sup> In order to do this, Crusoe would have to know that the sounds or marks of others are meaningful symbols that form assertions.

“How could our lone enquirer know that someone means ‘That is bitter’ by a pattern of sounds they sometimes emit? Only surely, by finding that the noise is (fairly reliably) made only when tasting samples which the enquirer himself recognises as bitter. Thus one cannot justify interpreting certain performances as ...testimony about what someone perceives without already committing oneself to the assumption that such statements are reliable.”<sup>26</sup>

Stevenson’s point runs to the heart of the radical argument: it is simply not possible to undertake the proposed reduction of the justification of testimonial-based beliefs, for there could be no testimony-free base at all to begin from, given the role testimony plays in language acquisition.

The point that emerges from both these examples is similar: our very conceptualising scheme underlying language use is irreducibly dependent upon testimony. Accordingly, this demonstration of the all-pervasive nature of testimonial-based beliefs does not merely ensure that there is a small base of non-testimonial beliefs for an induction to the reliability of testimony. The ‘profound fact’ that perceptual experience itself relies upon testimony ensures that there are no beliefs that are completely non-testimonial. As such, the argument from the paucity of evidence (which is no longer even a suitable title) has demonstrated the failure of Humean reductive accounts of testimony.

To summarise, the radical version of the paucity of evidence argument against Humean reductivism involves three claims. Firstly, Humean reductivism attempts to

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<sup>24</sup> Stevenson (1993)

<sup>25</sup> As will emerge in Chapter 6, I find the notion of thinker with a self taught idiolect to be a figure of dubious coherence. Further, there is a lot to be said about the coherence of this argument, particularly in light of parallels between this and Davidson’s notion of radical interpretation - the central subject of both chapters three and six. Nevertheless, I will suspend critical discussion at this juncture and assume the argument to be broadly correct – so as to illustrate the concerns of the radical argument here.

<sup>26</sup> Stevenson (1993: 442)

establish the general reliability of testimony by induction from a first-hand observed correlation between assertions and the facts. Secondly, the first-hand base upon which such an induction is made must only contain non-testimonial beliefs. Thirdly, there are no non-testimonial beliefs, since every belief is somehow dependent upon testimony. Therefore Humean reductivism is false (assuming, of course, our common-sense, achievability constraint on testimony such that testimony can, on occasions, be a source of knowledge).

#### 2.4.2 *The foreground / background distinction*

An immediate riposte to the radical version of the argument is to claim that we are employing a too strict reading of the second stage in the argument as outlined above, namely the claim that *all* beliefs must be non-testimonial. The reading of this requirement thus far has been such that we rule out any belief that is dependent upon testimony in any manner whatsoever. The examples above then serve to show that all beliefs are somehow dependent upon testimony. However, whilst it may be conceded that all beliefs somehow depend on testimony, it seems possible to isolate a group of beliefs whose dependence is qualitatively different from others. Indeed, this was the very purpose of the example with which we started the chapter. My belief that Nelson Mandela is tall is a testimonial-based belief since my justification for it made explicit reference to the testimony of another. In contrast, in order to justify my belief that the phone rang five minutes ago I would not make explicit reference to any act of testimony (I perceived this myself), even though Coady may be correct to note that the concepts used in such a perceptual experience may have been initially acquired through reliance on others. The riposte to the radical version of the paucity of evidence argument is thus to deny that we need rule out all beliefs based somehow on testimony in the *background*, but just those whose justification depends basically depends on the testimony of another in the *foreground*.

The aim of this section is to develop and defend just such a foreground / background distinction, and thereby undermine the radical version of the paucity of evidence argument. However, it is worth stressing that, even if such a distinction is available, adopting it involves a major modification of the Humean programme. The lure of the Humean programme lay in the fact that it seemed to allow testimony to be a source of

knowledge, whilst retaining the centrality of the autonomous knower who is epistemically self-sufficient. If we are to save such autonomy, the foreground / background distinction is unavailable. If my belief that the telephone rang depends on others in any manner whatsoever – even in the background sense outlined above, I am no longer epistemically self-sufficient. The foreground / background distinction allows us to concede our background debt to social factors in the development of our conceptual framework whilst leaving the possibility of a reductionism in the foreground: attempting to reduce all testimonial based beliefs to non-testimonial beliefs, namely all those that do not explicitly cite the testimony of others as their sole justificatory source. As such, even if the radical version of the paucity of evidence argument may not undermine Humean reductivism, it does show that the very notion of an autonomous knower itself is highly implausible.

One way to develop such a foreground / background distinction is to distinguish between the role social factors play at different stages in our intellectual development, a distinction between the role of testimony for developing and mature learners.

“Each one of us, in becoming an adult master of our common-sense scheme of things, has been through a historical process of development during which her attitudes towards her teachers....was one of simple trust....This phase of simple trust in others, and its input into our resulting world conception, characterises all of us....I suggest that, while trusted past testimony has an ineliminable place in supporting a mature individual’s belief system, this does not imply that uncritical trust is the attitude she...should take to new informants.”<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, the radical ‘paucity of evidence’ argument is correct: there is indeed an ineliminable dependence of all our beliefs upon testimony. However, the dependence is limited to that of the developmental stage; one can still attempt a Humean-like reduction in the mature stage. Of course, the developmental stage affects the mature stage in creating our world conception that forms the background of our beliefs. Nonetheless, reductivism involves a mature knower’s justification of new beliefs; the reductivist claims that one should attempt to justify these empirically, based on factors available to the mature knower herself.

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<sup>27</sup> Fricker (1995: 401). I return to Fricker’s positive claims below.

Some have questioned the coherence of such a foreground / background distinction. For example, in a recent article, Insole claims that one just cannot have a blanket reference to a mature stage in a manner that is topic-independent.

“The developmental and mature phases do not run one after the other, but concurrently and in parallel, depending on subjects’ experiences and abilities and the epistemic practice in which they are engaging...The most mature tourist, in calendar terms, is at the developmental (epistemic) stage in terms of local geography and history...The most immature of people, in calendar terms, can be at an epistemically mature phase in issues of local geography and history...”<sup>28</sup>

Insole seems to have in mind two ways of marking the developmental / mature distinction: either in terms of calendar age, or in terms of intellectual competence with regards a specific area of discourse (‘intellectual subject matter’). He correctly dismisses the former as a viable way of capturing the distinction, and argues that the latter does not allow for the type of distinction required to save reductivism about testimony.

The distinction between developmental and mature stages that I have in mind involves neither reference to calendar age nor competence with a particular subject matter, and is thus a tenable way of reformulating the reductive position in the light of the radical argument. I will term this a Wittgensteinian way of marking the distinction. For example, Wittgenstein tells us that:

“[a]s children we learn facts; e.g. that every human has a brain, and we take them on trust...I believe that I had great grand parents, and the parents who gave themselves out as my parents really were my parents, etc. ... The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief. I learnt an enormous amount by believing the adult and accepted it on human authority, and then I found some things confirmed or disconfirmed by my own experience.”<sup>29</sup>

The first thing to note here is the notion of a developmental sequence; there are certain beliefs that we acquire as children that we accept uncritically as facts. At this stage in our development, it is not that we do not challenge such assertions, but we are

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<sup>28</sup> Insole (2000: 52)

<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein (1969: #159-161)

not even able to raise such doubts until we have a sufficient background of uncritically accepted beliefs. It is only against this background that we can articulate and evaluate further beliefs.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein considers Moore's common-sense examples of indubitable knowledge, such as 'Here is one hand and here is another', and that 'the earth existed long time before my birth'. Wittgenstein argues that Moore conflates two types of knowledge; *grammatical propositions* that establish the standards for description and determine what is acceptable linguistic behaviour within the practice of describing the world and *factual propositions* for which to know something is to have sufficient evidence to justify a claim as true.<sup>30</sup> All those things Moore cites as indubitable, such as 'here is one hand' belong in the first category.

"If I tried I could give a thousand [grounds to justify the claim], yet none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for."<sup>31</sup>

Knowledge of the proposition 'here is one hand' involves mastery of a technique; I cannot deny that I know that proposition. If I did, this would not show that I lacked such knowledge but that I have not mastered the technique of using the word 'hand'.

Wittgenstein refers to the totality of grammatical propositions as 'the world picture'. One point that emerges from Wittgenstein's discussion of the two types of proposition is that the boundary between the two is fuzzy and thus the world picture is changeable. For example, whilst some propositions such as: 'here is a hand' hardly ever changes whatever the external circumstances, other propositions may indeed change status. Compare saying that 'this is a tree' when standing a meter in front of it in normal lighting conditions and standing thirty meters away. It is not clear exactly at what stage as one moves closer to a tree it changes from a factual proposition (a hypothesis) to being a grammatical one.

"It might be imagined that some propositions...were hardened and function as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid...But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river bed of thoughts and the shift of the bed itself; although there is not a sharp division of the one

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<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein actually argues that grammatical propositions do not actually constitute knowledge because they cannot be justified.

<sup>31</sup> Wittgenstein (1969: #307)

from the other”<sup>32</sup>

Grammatical propositions thus form part of a river bed of thought, and stands fast because it is held fast by what lies around it, the world picture.

By way of illustration, consider Anscombe’s remarks in the context of a discussion of Hume’s account of testimony.<sup>33</sup> Regarding certain historical beliefs that we have – such as the belief that Julius Caesar existed – she notes that it is not that we have a belief in such facts as a result of an inference that passes through a chain of other facts leading back to Caesar’s time. Rather, our belief in recorded history is based on a more basic belief that there has been such a chain of such reports or evidence. So, she asks us to consider what document could ever prove that Caesar did not exist? It seems that no such document could be forthcoming. The reason for this is that it was knowledge we have acquired by being told in infancy, it is thus not gained in the normal way.

“If you go to an expert of Julius Caesar, you will find that he is an expert on whether Caesar conducted such and such negotiations with Pompeii...Not on whether Caesar existed. Contrast an expert on King Arthur...We know about Caesar from the testimony of Ancient Historians...And how do you know that those are ancient historians?...You were told it. And how did your teachers know it. They were told it...People in history are not in any case hypotheses that we have arrived at to explain certain phenomena. No more than is the fact of my birth or the existence of my great grandmother...”<sup>34</sup>

To use our Wittgensteinian terminology, knowledge of the existence of Caesar, like that of my date of birth, form grammatical and not factual propositions.

In our thoughts on testimony thus far, we have considered how one can gain knowledge through language in the form of understanding and evaluating the explicit assertions of another.. The Wittgensteinian analysis noted suggests that we get knowledge through language in another manner too. Firstly, when we as children acquire a language, we acquire ‘knowledge’ in the form of propositions we are willing to assert, prior to really understanding them. A child of three (and a parrot for that

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<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein (1969: #96, 97].

<sup>33</sup> Anscombe (1981a). See the Appendix to this chapter for a discussion of her interpretation of Hume here.

matter) can be taught to assert that the world is round, without really understanding what is said. In the developmental stage, we are not yet capable of understanding the various elements of language as we acquire them To use another Wittgensteinian metaphor, light draws gradually over the whole”<sup>35</sup> We therefore need to acquire a large body of interrelated sentences and propositions before any one of them can begin to make sense.<sup>36</sup>

This way of formulating the foreground / background distinction overcomes Insole’s worries above. The distinction is not merely regarding expertise in certain subject areas, but concerns our very development as knowers. The mature knower has a world view and is able to take responsibility for his or her beliefs in the form of reflective control for s/he has a conception of what is a reason for what. As such, one can ascribe the title of ‘knower’ to such an individual, s/he understands what ought to be the case. Whether the change is gradual or not is not the point – the two phases do not and cannot exist side-by-side.

Further, this way of formulating the distinction allows us to formulate a version of reductionism that is not undermined by the radical version of the paucity of evidence argument. Following Fricker, we can distinguish between global and local versions of reductionism about testimony.<sup>37</sup> Global reduction would begin with a Cartesian-like suspension of all beliefs that are somehow derived from testimony and then try to establish trustworthiness from the belief base that remains. Local reduction begins by acknowledging a general debt to a background of information that includes information gained via the testimony of others. Given this background, local reduction attempts to epistemically evaluate new incoming information based on the testimony of others by evaluating and assessing the speakers trustworthiness without invoking *sui generis* principles involved in the epistemology of testimony. Using this distinction, Coady’s strong paucity of evidence argument seems to establish the

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<sup>34</sup> Anscombe (1981a: 90-91)

<sup>35</sup> Wittgenstein (1969: #141]

<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 6, I will extend this metaphor further, so that it is through socialization into a language that we acquire a conception of the world itself: something as articulated in facts and can be thought about.

<sup>37</sup> Even though I adopt the global / local distinction here for reasons of popularity in the literature, I prefer the foreground / background terminology in which the Wittgensteinian version of the distinction is developed. Such a version captures the relationship in a manner that makes it less susceptible to misinterpretation such as that cited in the text.

impossibility of global reduction of testimony, but not the impossibility of local reduction.

On the one hand, such ‘Humean local reductivism’ preserves all features of Humean reductivism, such that testimonial beliefs can be justified in that they are a case of inductive justification: our current and past perceptual experiences give us inductive evidence for the claim that people are generally reliable in their reports. On the other hand, such local reductionism involves a firm rejection of the solitary individual as epistemic hero: the Crusoe figure trying to understand the world on his own ceases to be ideal.

#### **2.4.3    *The weaker ‘paucity of evidence’ argument.***

According to the *radical ‘paucity of evidence’ argument*, there is no such thing as non-testimonial based beliefs given the fact that testimony is central to the very use of language and concepts that are an integral parts of having beliefs. Such an argument does not have force against Humean local reductivism, as such a position concedes our extensive reliance on social factors as a necessary part of our development whilst maintaining that there can be some non-testimonial based beliefs for the mature adult knower. According to the *weaker ‘paucity of evidence’ argument*, whilst there are non-testimonial based beliefs, the ubiquity of testimonial based beliefs means that there is an insufficient non-testimonial base for the induction from experience required to establish the general reliability of testimony. This section aims to evaluate the success of this weaker version of the argument against Humean local reductivism.

The crux of this weaker version of the paucity of evidence argument is the claim that an individual has witnessed insufficient instances of correlation between testimony and the facts asserted to inductively determine the general reliability of testimony. In evaluating the success of such an argument, one needs first to make explicit the type of evidence available for the induction, and the type of induction required. It seems, however, once this is done, the weak ‘paucity of evidence’ argument against local reductivism turns out to be very weak indeed!



Firstly, let us consider a suggestion made, and immediately dismissed, by Coady himself in a more recent restatement of the paucity of evidence argument. Coady considers the following possible response to the (weak versions of) the paucity of evidence argument.

“This rejoinder might run as follows: You are ignoring the very important provision, made by Hume, and already noticed by you, that the conjunction in individual experience is between kinds of report and kinds of object. This cuts down the amount of observing that has to be done and makes the project a manageable one for an individual.”<sup>38</sup>

The response seems to be that we have treated testimony here as a single unitary category. However reports can come in different kinds and whilst we may not have enough evidence to establish an inductive generalisation about testimony per se, one could have enough evidence to establish an inductive generalisation about types of reports.

What could be meant here by talk of types of reports? Intuitively, the following example could serve to illustrate the point. I watch the television on a given night and I hear the newscaster assert that there was a train strike today. I watch this newscaster nightly and have in the past observed a perfect correlation between her reports and the facts that I have subsequently observed. (It should be noted that in reality much of my checking will itself involve testimony of others, for I rarely come across the actual experiences myself. But let us assume a hypothetical case in which this occurs). Whilst such a fact-checking exercise may hardly suffice to ground a generalisation such that ‘most assertions are true’ or that ‘testimony is generally reliable’, it does seem to give me inductive evidence as regards this particular *type* of testimony.

How is one to understand the idea of type here? The idea does seem very loose for a key reason, namely there is an important sense in which any particular object or event falls under indefinitely many types. Should I consider it as an example of reports given by a certain type of reporter (e.g. ‘most assertions made by newscasters are true’ or ‘most assertions made by this newscaster are true’) or should I consider it as a

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<sup>38</sup> Coady (1994: 230). For the reference to Hume, consider as an example the following: “And as the evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, so it varies with

type of report with a certain content (e.g. 'most assertions about train strikes' or perhaps 'most assertions made about matters of observable facts'?). The choice here seems potentially unlimited and bewildering. Indeed, Coady uses such bewilderment to dismiss the very possibility or utility of such talk of types or kinds of testimony.

However, it is important to realise that this is not just a problem that is limited to talk of testimony - but relates to any attempt at induction in general. To see this, it is important to note that any inductive inference of the type we are interested in involves two stages: an inductive generalisation and then an inference with regards the typicality of the particular case in question. Grant for the moment the inductive generalisation based on the experience of conformity between testimony and the facts that the reductive theorist hopes to show, namely the generalisation that most testimony is reliable. The reason that the reductivist wishes to arrive at such a conclusion is that such a proposition can serve as a premise in an inference that can justify the testimonial based belief 'that p'. In other words, we are interested in a particular case and we need to infer that this particular case is somehow related to the generalisation in question. The point is not that it may be that this particular case does not follow from the generalisation. This is an induction after all and we have noted that the premises do not logically entail the conclusions. The point is that we need somehow to apply the generalised belief that we have arrived at in the generalisation to this particular case - we need to make a direct inference and the issue regards what is the appropriate reference class for the direct inference.

Formulating the problem in this manner makes it clear that this problem of type (or typicality) is not just a problem for an inductive generalisation in the testimonial case but raises a general problem for inductive inferences per se. Furthermore, the question of the reference class is one that has long bothered those involved in explaining inductive generalisation and a variety of solutions have been proposed. A common assumption underlying many of these is that one need not consider every reference class under which any event could fall. In a situation in which I have the belief that most assertions made by a newscaster are true and the belief that the newscaster asserts that p, I can see this particular assertion as a typical instance of the reference

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experience and is regarded as either a proof or probability, according as the conjunction between any particular *kind* of report and any *kind* of object has been found to be variable." Hume I 120.

class in question (the testimony of newscasters) unless I have some reason to place it under another sub-category or reference class concerning which I have alternative information. To deny that this is a possibility is to undermine the very idea of induction in general. Even if working out the details would involve us in many intricacies that lie at the heart of the notion of induction in general, it seems that - *pace* Coady - it is not possible to rule out outright the possibility of dividing the category of testimony into sub-classes.

If the Humean local reductivist is aiming to establish the general reliability of testimony as a whole from observed instances of correlation, then it does seem plausible to deny that there is a sufficient non-testimonial base from which to inductively arrive at such a generalisation. (I say 'plausible' as more is needed to make such an argument convincing, including an exploration of small-sample inductions, and the issue of whether some form of abduction - such as inference to the best explanation - may suffice).<sup>39</sup> As such, the weak paucity of evidence argument has some success against this version of Humean local reductivism.

However, the discussion of induction in this section presents an alternate possibility, that I will (unimaginatively) call *local reductivism*. Rather than attempt to generalise about testimony as a whole, such reductivism considers each situation separately. When faced with a particular assertion, the hearer attempts to justify belief in that particular assertion through establishing the trustworthiness of the speaker *on this occasion*. Whilst one could do this through appeal to the general reliability of testimony, one could achieve this by simply focussing on the *context* of that particular assertion, namely any evidence of trustworthiness that arises from that particular speaker, that particular hearer, the subject matter of the particular utterance and the particular circumstances in which it is uttered. The following section aims to consider such (non-Humean) local reductivism.

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<sup>39</sup> There is some discussion of cases in which it has been argued that small sample inductions are sometimes justified, even relating to induction from single cases. See Kornblith (1993; chapter 4) regarding the reliability of small sample inductions when the properties involve natural kinds, and the discussion of this with regards testimony in Schmitt (1999). Furthermore, it could be argued that whilst such an inductive inference is indeed justified, some form of abduction may suffice in this case. In particular, the possibility of inference to the best explanation seems particularly promising. Coady

## 2.5 *Local reductivism*

The discussion of reductionist theories of testimony thus far has considered one possible way of providing the missing premise(s) required to bridge the epistemic gap between believing that 's asserted that p' and believing 'that p', namely the inductive generalisation: 'testimony is generally reliable'. Our lengthy, but ultimately inconclusive, discussion of the argument from the paucity of evidence questions the ability of an individual to justifiably believe such a generalisation on the basis of past experiences alone. Local reductivism provides a justification for testimonial-based beliefs without relying on such an inductive generalisation, and thus is not subject to the paucity of evidence argument. To my knowledge, the clearest version of such a local reductivism is Fricker's account of testimony, and we will begin with a brief exposition.<sup>40</sup>

Since this a local form of reductionism, it draws on a large background of beliefs that form part of a worldview, which may originally have been acquired through testimony prior to our becoming mature adult knowers. Part of this common-sense scheme involves a conception of the world, including a folk physics, a folk psychology and a folk linguistics. Such a common-sense linguistics (CSL) includes a conception of the social role of language, including the characteristic role of speaker and hearer. For Fricker, this CSL plays a central part in our understanding the epistemology of testimony: firstly, it tells us that there is an epistemic gap to be bridged through empirical means, secondly it tells us what is required to bridge this gap, and finally it provides us with the resources to so do.

Within our common-sense world picture, there are a number of informational processes that we see as providing us with information about the world ('epistemic links'), and for each of these processes there are validity conditions, such that the information delivered by the link is true when these conditions are fulfilled. For some epistemic links (such as perception) one is entitled to assume that these validity conditions (e.g. normal lighting conditions etc.) are fulfilled and thus a justification

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raises this (1993; 119) and dismisses it, although the dismissal fails to distinguish between local and global reduction.

<sup>40</sup> See Fricker (1987; 1994; 1995)

for a belief acquired through such an informational process simply requires one to simply cite the epistemic link as a source. ('I know because I saw it'). The justification for these beliefs is thus direct and non-inferential. The validity conditions for the case of testimony involve the claim that the speaker is both sincere and competent. However, our CSL suggests that whilst testimony is indeed such an epistemic link, one is not able to presume that such validity conditions are fulfilled without some form of empirical reflection. This requirement distinguishes testimony from other epistemic links (where one has a presumptive right to assume that these validity conditions have been fulfilled) and it is this assumption that ensures that this is a reductive account.<sup>41</sup> It is thus part of our CSL that one needs to establish empirically that the validity conditions for the epistemic link of testimony are fulfilled, before one can be said that one has acquired a justified belief through testimony *on any occasion*.

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<sup>41</sup> A non-reductive account would affirm the following presumptive right regarding testimony: "An arbitrary hearer H has the epistemic right on occasion of testimony O to assume, without any investigation or assessment, of the speaker S who on O asserts that P by making an utterance U, that S is trustworthy with respect to U, unless H is aware of condition C which defeats this assumption of trustworthiness - that is C constitutes strong evidence that S is not trustworthy with respect to U; in which case, H should not form the belief that p, and should believe, at least implicitly, that S is not trustworthy with regards to U." Fricker (1994: 144)

It is this last, italicised clause that distinguishes this account from Humean reductive accounts. One does not establish that the validity conditions have been fulfilled on this occasion through any generalisation to the effect that testimony is generally reliable. For Fricker, the form of justification that H must possess involves the premise: ‘S asserted that P’ and the conclusion that P.<sup>42</sup> In order to bridge the logical gap in the argument when formulated on this local level, one need not make reference to any inductive generalisation about testimony as a whole. Instead, Fricker suggests that we need to include a premise that identifies a particular property (trustworthiness) of S, in the form of a subjunctive conditional such that if S were to assert that p (on occasion O) then it would be the case that p. This property of trustworthiness applies not to all speakers and not with regards all utterances, but to a specific speaker S, regarding utterance U on occasion O. Trustworthiness involves both an attribution of sincerity and competence, so:

“[a] speaker S is trustworthy with respect to an assertoric utterance by her U, which is made on occasion O, and by which she asserts that p, iff:

- (i) U is sincere
- (ii) S is competent with respect to ‘p’ on O, where this notion is defined as follows: if S were to sincerely assert that p on O, then it would be the case that p.”<sup>43</sup>

Our CSL dictates that any justification of a testimonial based belief must focus primarily on trusting a particular utterance of S and that this subjunctive conditional combines with the first premise ‘S asserts that p’ to entail ‘p’

However, our mastery of CSL not only tells us what is required in order to justify any particular testimonial-based belief, it also provides us with resources to do this. Since trustworthiness is a property of a speaker, assessment of trustworthiness is part of common-sense psychological theory of the speaker.<sup>44</sup> In assessing such competence:

“she must engage in a piece of psychological interpretation of her informant, constructing an explanation of her utterance as an intentional speech act.

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<sup>42</sup> Since these notions are part of our common-sense world picture, simply citing such a process as the source of a belief suffices to justify it, as these shows sensitivity to the common-sense picture. Only those in possession of such a world picture are able to justify their beliefs.

<sup>43</sup> Fricker (1994: 147)

<sup>44</sup> Fricker (1994: 148)

Estimates of her sincerity and her competence, or their lack, are part of this explanatory mini theory”.

H is faced with a particular utterance which he understands. H want to know why this particular utterance was made on this particular occasion. In order to do this, H uses his knowledge of the available data (the utterance in this context etc.) together with a common-sense theory regarding people, to explain this occurrence.

“A psychological interpretation of an individual being an explanatory theory of her, psychological concepts are theoretical in character...and their application to a subject is constrained by the ‘data’ to be explained, the subject’s actions.”<sup>45</sup>

In practice, such interpretation is achieved through the fact that our CSL contains certain norms of interpretation that govern our interpretation of behaviour. These norms are “practical epistemic precepts”: our CSL suggests that when interpreting an individual, there are certain starting points that are likely in certain contexts.<sup>46</sup> Amongst these starting point are default assumptions of sincerity and competence, although these differ in scope. Whilst our CSL states that one should begin interpretation by assuming that people are generally sincere (or: ‘make no unforced attributions of insincerity’), attributions of competence differ depending upon subject matter. For testimony involving subjects that are based on everyday observational judgements, one can have adopt a similar norm (‘make no unforced attributions of error’). With regards assertions involving judgements that do not fall under this heading (possibly moral and/or aesthetic judgements, for example), there are no such norms of ascription and one would need positive evidence prior to any ascription of competence in these matters.

Even in situations in which there are such norms, it is important to stress that they are the beginning point in an interpretation, not the end. Other norms or evidence to the contrary would mean departure from these norms, and one thus needs evidence that such alternative norms/ evidence do not apply to this situation. As such, whether a given norm applies in a situation is a matter of contingent, epistemic fact and not assumed through some constitutive role involved in attribution of psychological

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<sup>45</sup> Fricker (1994: 149)

<sup>46</sup> Fricker (1994: 152)

concepts. This non-Humean alternative is still a reductive thesis, and one needs evidence of trustworthiness that cannot simply be assumed. One is epistemically obligated to constantly check for contrary evidence, and these norms operate as a default position until such checking reveals otherwise. However, the CSL relaxes the standards required on the obtaining of such evidence in some cases, namely regarding the sincerity of the individual and her competence in ordinary areas of observation. One need not have positive evidence of trustworthiness, but one needs to have checked and ruled out any signs of untrustworthiness.

By way of summary, it could be said that although Humean reductivists, local reductivists and non-reductivist have certain norms regarding the general reliability of testimony, they differ in source, epistemic status and scope. For the Humean reductivist, these norms are the result of empirical generalisations, and can be used to justify testimony in any case. For the non-reductivist, such norms are based on a priori reasoning and should be seen as epistemic rights to assume that these are correct unless there is evidence to the contrary. For the local reductivist, such norms are practical starting points of interpretation that form part of our common sense conception of the world. In contrast to the non-reductivist's 'innocence until proven guilty' strategy, the reductivist requires actual evidence of innocence - although the level of evidence required differs depending upon the type of reductivism in question. For the Humean reductivist, positive evidence of innocence is required on all occasions, whilst the local reductivist allows that the demonstration of no evidence of guilt suffices on some occasions.

Local reductivism has a number of advantages over its Humean local alternative. One obvious advantage lies in the fact that it does not just consider simple correlation between reporting and the facts reported, but takes into account reasons for any law-like uniformities. As elsewhere, predictions from a theory of the subject matter are of more use than extrapolation from observed correlations.

“...the folk, whose testimonial beliefs are in question here, are not behaviourists; in explaining and predicting human behaviour, the folk do not only appeal to law-like uniformities that obtain between a people's



environment and their behaviour (between facts and reports) but also people's internal mental states."<sup>47</sup>

As such, the local reductive alternative seems not only to overcome problems that arise from the issue of paucity of evidence, but also seems able to account for a number of central features of testimony that simply do not feature in Humean reductive accounts. Secondly, this model involves a radical departure from the Humean model which considers the category of testimony as a single category to which generalisations can be made. However, this departure would account for the fact that peoples' own intuitions regarding whether one ought to trust testimony uncritically vary wildly. In the light of such widespread variance of opinion, it makes sense to argue that: "[t]he key to the epistemology of testimony is: disaggregate".<sup>48</sup>

The central argument considered thus far against reductivism is the paucity of evidence argument. It has been shown that the radical version works against global reductionism; the weaker version works against Humean local reductivism. Fricker's subtle, local reductivism successfully overcomes both versions of the paucity of evidence argument. For Coady's overall analysis of testimony, such a conclusion is troublesome. One major thrust of his argument in favour of non-reductivism about testimony depends upon the failure of reductivism as a result of the paucity of evidence argument. He sees (Humean) reductivism or non-reductivism as the only alternatives to scepticism about testimony, a scepticism he dismisses as contrary to common-sense. As such, the success of the paucity of evidence argument against reductivism provides a positive argument in favour of non-reductivism. In contrast, the failure of the paucity of evidence argument against local reductivism undermines his argument in favour of such non-reductivism. Nonetheless, all is not lost for the non-reductivist, since it seems possible to mount an alternative argument against all versions of reductivism, an argument considered in the following section.

## 2.6 Non-unitary accounts revisited

The alternative argument against reductivism can be stated as follows. (1) A thesis that delivers a non-unitary account of the epistemology of testimony is a desirable

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<sup>47</sup> Fricker (1994: 171)

<sup>48</sup> Fricker (1995: 407)

thesis; whilst a thesis that delivers a unitary account is an undesirable thesis. (2) Any reductivist thesis delivers a unitary account of the epistemology of testimony. (3) So, a reductivist theses is undesirable.

Premise (1) was argued for in the preceding chapter. There it was claimed that it was desirable to have an account that cohered with our everyday epistemic practices regarding testimony. Such practices involved the application of a particular epistemic principle (the t-principle) to the sub-class of learning from testimony, whilst such a t-principle was not applicable in the broader class of learning from others. A non-unitary account of testimony, where the epistemology of the sub-class of learning from testimony differs from the epistemology of the broader class of learning from others, therefore reflects such everyday epistemic practices and is thus more desirable than a non-unitary account that does not reflect such practices. The crux of this section is to argue for premise (2).

The t-principle stipulated a number of necessary features that must play a role in the case of learning from testimony, such that S must know that p and testify that p, H must learn that p from this testimony, and there must be no defeating conditions of which H as a responsible subject ought be aware. It is possible to suggest a number of cases where these conditions are not fulfilled but yet one could justifiably acquire knowledge through testimony according to the reductivist.

This is easiest to see for the Humean reductivist, where one learns from any particular instance of testimony through an empirically established generalisations regarding the reliability of particular types of testimony. Such a generalisation has established that assertions of particular types are reliable indicators of the facts reported, and thus when faced with an assertion of a particular type one is entitled to believe the facts reported. The words become evidence for facts much as clouds in the sky are evidence for rain and yellow skin is evidence for jaundice. In all these cases, H uses background experience of correlation between evidence and that which it is evidence for to see certain things as reliable indicators of something else. One needn't even talk of contents of assertions or acts of testifying at all - all one needs is experience of constant correlation between any two events under any description, in order establish the general reliability.

A teacher in a school discovers based on hard earned experience that student excuses regarding their failure to produce their homework are poorly correlated with the facts. Upon hearing a student state that the dog ate her homework, the teacher forms the belief that the student has not done her homework. The teacher forms her belief as a result of inductive experience regarding the relationship between words and certain facts. It seems a trivial matter as such from the perspective of Humean reductionism to deny that the teacher acquired the belief through the testimony of the student.

One may feel that the local reductive account fares much better on this account. After all, such an account does not just consider simple correlation between reporting and the facts reported, but takes into account reasons for any law-like uniformities. Furthermore, the reasons postulated are derived from a common-sense theory regarding the psychology of the testifiers, derived from our socially acquired world view. Whilst it is certainly correct that such an account seems to be on the right lines to accounting for the unique features of learning from testimony, it seems to me that the way Fricker formulates her alternative ultimately fails to capture this. To see this it is important to consider the basic similarities between Humean and non-Humean reductionism.

In both Humean and local reductive theses one aims to bridge a certain epistemic gap, based on evidence available to that individual. The primary evidence available to H is S's assertion that p; such evidence directly yields the belief that S asserted that p (- henceforth 'the primary belief'), that then functions as the minor premise in a justificatory argument to the conclusion that p. Both theses agree that this evidence falls short of justifying the belief in the proposition asserted and that one needs to supplement the evidence with other background beliefs, including those based on past experience (- henceforth 'secondary evidence'). For both theses, such secondary evidence includes experience of correlation between types of evidence and fact. Both use the secondary evidence through some form of inductive inference to form a belief (- the secondary belief) that stands as the missing premise in the justificatory argument for testimonial based beliefs.

There are three primary differences between the two theses: differences that regard the secondary evidence available, the secondary belief formed and the relationship between these. Firstly, the local reductivist includes a background collection of beliefs regarding persons in the world (the worldview, including the CSL) as an additional and necessary part of the secondary evidence, whilst this does not play a central role for the Humean. Secondly, for the local reductivist the secondary belief formed is (basically) the belief that S is trustworthy on this occasion, whilst for the Humean it is the belief in the general reliability of testimony. Thirdly, for the local reductivist, the belief is acquired through some form of inference to the best explanation whilst for the non-Humean the secondary belief is an inductive generalisation from the secondary evidence. By focussing on a particular occasion, the non-Humean widens the secondary evidence available, softens the required target and employs a wider range of processes that makes the goal easier to achieve.

It is important to note that the local reductivist under consideration does not deny that the relevance of any empirical generalisations, such as those noted by the Humean. *Any* secondary beliefs acquired through such a process of interpretation are matters of contingent empirical fact that can be supported, or come into collision with, other available empirical evidence. As part of our worldview, we postulate a number of theoretical entities to explain behaviour. To say that these explain behaviour is to say that they make the behaviour fall into a picture governed by certain regularities. So, according to the local reductivist, H learns from the tour guide since he is able to explain her behaviour by citing regularities derived from her CSL. Our schoolteacher of a few paragraphs back explains behaviour by citing regularities based on her experience. It thus seems arbitrary to say that only one of these can be said to be learning through testimony. As such, both reductive theses fail the non-unitary constraint, such that on any account of testimony it should be more than an arbitrary matter of definition that testimony has the unique features outlined.

Imagine a situation in which one learns the time by overhearing someone else tell a passer-by the time. One engages in a piece of psychological interpretation of the speaker, constructing an explanation of her utterance as an intentional speech act in a manner that is constrained by the her actions in accordance with ones CSL. As part of that explanation, one estimates the trustworthiness of the speaker, including an

attribution of sincerity (a practical epistemic precept) and competence (based on prior evidence of competence in time-telling, plus noticing that there is a lack of evidence with regards incompetence). As a result, H attributes the individual the property of trustworthiness on this occasion. As a result, the hearer justifiably believe that it is three o' clock. In such a situation, it is clear that no t-principle is involved: S is not testifying to H, and thus H does not learn by testimony. Yet, this is the same epistemic procedure that the local reductivist tells us we justify our testimonial-based beliefs.

The point is *not* that the local reductivist is wrong in the above scenario. Far from it; this seems to me to be a plausible and persuasive account of how we do learn from others in cases such as that above. The point of the argument in the preceding chapter was to argue that the epistemic principles used in the specific case of learning from testimony differ from such processes in that they uniquely explore the t-principle. The reductivist fails to mark the uniqueness of the epistemology of testimony.

The crux of either reductive position is this distinction between primary and secondary evidence, whereby such secondary background beliefs are used to bridge the epistemic gap. The primary beliefs stand as evidence for testimony only in the light of such secondary beliefs, much the same as the fact that my belief that this is yellow skin is linked to the belief that this is jaundice. Any secondary beliefs could link the primary belief to another belief and it thus becomes arbitrary to say that one can only learn through testimony iff S must know that p and testify that p, H must learn that p from this testimony, and there must be no defeating conditions of which H as a responsible subject ought be aware.

It seems therefore that any reductivist thesis delivers a unitary account of the epistemology of testimony (premise (2) above), whilst a non-unitary account is desirable (premise (1) above). Therefore a reductivist theses is undesirable (conclusion (3) above). Once again, the notion of desirability in the conclusion (3) is a weak one, and thus can be overridden if no other account is forthcoming. At this stage it is thus necessary to turn towards a consideration of the alternative non-reductive these regarding the epistemology of testimony that form the subject of the next chapter.

## Appendix to Chapter 2

### Hume in context: Hume versus Humean Reductivism.

Earlier we floated the possibility of a significant disparity between this Humean reductivism and Hume's own position. Whilst I will not be able to firmly establish this here, this section aims to provide initial support for such a possibility in order to raise themes (particularly Hume's naturalism and individualism) that will prove to be important in subsequent discussion. Furthermore, this clarification of Hume's own position will be used to justify the fact that the discussion of Hume thus far has largely omitted any reference to the issue of historical based beliefs, despite the fact that this is the first and central reference to testimony in the Treatise.

Commentaries on Hume often discuss the appropriateness of three broad labels usually applied to Hume, that of empiricist, naturalist and sceptic. The first of these would seem to support the reading of Hume as offering a reductive account of testimony as outlined above. Hume's celebrated comments regarding our knowledge of causation capture the spirit of the entire programme:

“What is the foundation of all our reasoning and conclusions regarding that relation? The answer may be captured in one word: Experience.”<sup>49</sup>

The point is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive. The sciences must not:

“go beyond experience, or to establish any principles not founded on that authority.”<sup>50</sup>

These passages set the methodological tone for the entire enquiry, and Hume's sceptical censure of many traditional philosophical notions seems to stem from such a starting point.<sup>51</sup> Adherence to empiricism, where what justifies beliefs can depend only on impressions of sense and memory, obviously reinforces our reductive reading of Hume's account of testimony.

However the claims that we do not have any ideas that are not suitably related to experience and that all knowledge of facts can only come through experience alone are - as they stand - insufficient to fully motivate such a reductive account of

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<sup>49</sup> Hume (1966: 32)

<sup>50</sup> Hume (1967: 8)

<sup>51</sup> Passmore (1980: 67)

testimony. Something more needs to be stressed, namely that the experience in question needs to be one's own. In a letter to the Rev. Hugh Blair, Hume writes:

“No man can have any other experience but his own. The experience of others becomes his only by the credit which he gives to their testimony; which proceeds from his own experience of human nature.”<sup>52</sup>

Without such *individualism*, the possibility would remain alive that all knowledge could be the result of experience even if the experience in question may not be mine!

<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is Hume's individualist empiricism, with an implicit concern with the idealised autonomous knower that lies at the heart of the Humean reductive position on testimony. The fact that S intelligibly expresses a proposition provides H with no reason to endorse the proposition himself: H must possess his own reasons for accepting it. (I will return to the coherence of a non-individualist empiricism at a later stage).<sup>54</sup>

In addition to his individualist empiricism, consideration of Hume's so-called 'disenchanted naturalism' is important in the context of any discussion of his epistemology.<sup>55</sup> Hume as naturalist is most clearly evident in his comparison of human and animal beliefs, where, in contrast to Descartes, Hume claims that there is no great divide between humans and animals and we are part of a continuum with the rest of the natural world.<sup>56</sup> Hume tells us that our admiration for:

“the extraordinary dispositions of human nature...will perhaps cease or diminish when we consider that experimental reasoning itself, which we possess in common with beasts, and on which the whole of conduct of life depends, is nothing but a species of instinct or mechanical power, that acts in us and unknown to ourselves.”<sup>57</sup>

Beliefs are indeed governed by laws, and we may like to call these 'laws of reasons' and thus claim that beliefs are subject to reasons. But these laws are laws we share with all animals; “beasts are endowed with thought and reason, as well as men”. Human activities are thus part of the natural world and can be explained in the same

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<sup>52</sup> Hume (1932) Vol 1; page 349. [cited in Traiger op. cit.]

<sup>53</sup> This point is made by Schmitt (1987:53).

<sup>54</sup> This will be the major concern of chapter 4.

<sup>55</sup> The phrase is McDowell's (1994: 97). According to Kemp-Smith, it is his naturalism, derived from Hutcheson, that was to be the main theme in the Treatise. See Kemp-Smith (1941: 40-3).

<sup>56</sup> Craig (1987: 36)

<sup>57</sup> Hume (1975:108).

way as any other activity; “belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures.”<sup>58</sup> In these comments, there seems to be a basic rejection of the underlying assumptions of our own study captured in our interest in conducting an exercise in doxastology, namely the notion that belief is subject to reason in terms of a justification of which the individual is aware and thus is something for which s/he can be seen as responsible.

With regards testimony in particular, Hume tells us that:

“No weakness of human nature is more universal and conspicuous than what we commonly call CREDULITY, or too easy faith in the testimony of others, and this weakness is also very naturally accounted for from the influence of resemblance...The words or discourses of others have . . . a connexion with the facts or objects, which they represent. This . . . connexion is generally much over-rated, and commands our assent beyond what our 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>59</sup>

Humans are *naturally* gullible. As a result of resemblance between the assertion and the fact that would make such an assertion true, we move too easily from understanding an assertion to believing it. We tend to see the assertion as an image, instead of seeing the fact that would make some proposition true as a cause to be inferred from the assertion as effect. Such gullible beliefs are acquired as the result of unreflective acts of the sensitive, not cognitive, parts of our nature.

The relationship between such natural processes of belief formation and rational reflection is a matter of some controversy, resulting mainly from some ambivalence in Hume's own pronouncements on the matter.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, Hume suggests that reason can play a corrective role for such naturally acquired credulous beliefs.

“In every judgement which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we might always to correct the first judgement, deriv'd

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<sup>58</sup> Hume (1967: 183)

<sup>59</sup> Hume (1967: 112-3)

<sup>60</sup> See Noonan (1999: 43-7)



from the nature of the object, by another judgement, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding."<sup>61</sup>

Thus whilst gullible beliefs are formed from natural processes are the first judgement, it seems that the nature of understanding that forms the second judgement is able to act as a corrective. However, it seems that for Hume the ultimate role of reason in this is greatly limited to merely that of regulating our habits on occasions but does not play the role as arbiter and justifier of all beliefs.

"Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breath or feel."<sup>62</sup>

In this we are lucky, for it is our reason that is the source of our scepticism which, if followed, would lead us to solitude and despair. Whilst reason can offer us no assurances against scepticism, we have an inescapable natural commitment towards belief through principles of the imagination - psychological mechanisms by which beliefs are produced such as that described for testimony above. Thus, despite our reason-inspired scepticism, our habitual modes of belief acquisition ensure that we are in contact with practically relevant facts of the world.<sup>63</sup> Such a reading of the relationship between scepticism and naturalism in Hume's philosophy seems well captured in Strawson's comment that:

"[o]ne might speak of two Humes: Hume the skeptic and Hume the naturalist, where Hume's naturalism... appears as a refuge from his skepticism."<sup>64</sup>

These comments are particularly apt in that they both suggest that the existence of tension ('two Humes'), as well as some practical resolution, which echoes the emotional and uncertain tone of sections of Hume's writings.<sup>65</sup>

It seems that it is in the light of this that one ought to consider Hume's discussion of historical-based beliefs. Towards the beginning of the Treatise, Hume develops the idea that even in situations in which there are seemingly no impressions before the mind, beliefs are still based on some mixture of impressions (or memories). The example he brings of such beliefs are testimonial-based beliefs, such as the belief that

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<sup>61</sup> Hume (1967: 181-2)

<sup>62</sup> Hume (1966: 48)

<sup>63</sup> Based on Craig (1987: Chapter 2)

<sup>64</sup> Strawson (1985: 11)

<sup>65</sup> The personal and inconclusive nature of the Treatise is discussed in Noonan (1999: 33-48)

Caesar was killed on the ides of March, as this is a situation in which the mind: “carries its view beyond those objects which it sees or remembers.”<sup>66</sup> Hume explains that:

“[W]e believe that Caesar was kill'd in the senate-house an the Ides of March; and that because this fact is establish'd on the unanimous testimony of historians...Here are certain characters and letters present either to our memory or senses; which characters we likewise remember to have been us'd as the signs of certain ideas ; and these Ideas were either in the minds of such as were immediately present at that action....; or they were deriv'd from the testimony of others, ... 'till we arrive at those who were eye-witnesses and spectators of the event.”<sup>67</sup>

Which of Strawson's two Hume's are speaking here? Is the chain of testimony cited designed to explain the psychological, naturalistic cause of our belief that Caesar was killed then or is it something to be cited as a justification of our belief by reason in clarifying out habits? According to Anscombe it is the latter.<sup>68</sup> On her interpretation of Hume, (justified) belief in an historical fact is the result of an inference based on the fact that there is a chain of other historical facts (such as documents etc.) leading back to the original event. Anscombe criticises such a position for getting things the wrong way around. After all, she argues, our belief in the killing of Caesar is stronger than our belief that there has been such a chain of such reports or evidence.

Whilst I have much sympathy for Anscombe's latter point here (defended in 2.4.2 above), it seems that it is based on an unnecessary reading of Hume's intentions regarding historical based beliefs. Its position in the Treatise is revealing: it falls within a section entitled: 'Of the component parts of our reasoning concerning cause and effect' that notes the causal origin of our beliefs in impressions. Rather than prescribing what ought to be our justification for historical based beliefs, Hume here seems to be describing the natural causal process through which we acquire such beliefs through testimony. To use our earlier terminology, such beliefs refer to the

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<sup>66</sup> Hume (1967: 82)

<sup>67</sup> Hume (1967: 82-3)

<sup>68</sup> Anscombe (1981)

first judgement based on our credulous nature; the result of the sensitive, and not the cognitive, parts of our nature.

Hume's description of the causal process through which we acquire historical beliefs therefore appears to run along the following lines. H's current belief that Caesar was killed begins with his impressions (or memory of) characters or letters. Such characters cause H's belief. In order for this to happen H must take these characters or letters as testimony, otherwise these beliefs can be traced back no further than the sense impressions of those characters. H takes these letters to be testimony because he is caused to do so by a chain of events running back from those characters to eye-witness impressions and thus ultimately the death of Caesar himself. The point is not that we cite our belief in the existence of such a causal chain to justify our belief that these characters are testimony, but that the chain itself causes our beliefs that our sense impressions of the characters are testimony. Testimony is the effect and the state of affairs testified to (the killing of Caesar) is the cause. Thus, of course, Anscombe is correct to note that we are more certain of the killing than of the chain of testimony. This however does nothing to undermine this description of the causal origins of H's current testimonial-based belief. Focusing on the relationship between naturalism and scepticism in Hume's writings suggests that the discussion of historical beliefs is primarily a descriptive issue, and thus not of direct relevance to an enquiry in the epistemology of testimony.

To summarise, consideration of Hume's own position has centred around the relationship between his empiricism, naturalism and scepticism. Whilst Hume's individualist empiricism may motivate the received version of Humean reductivism, this relationship between naturalism and scepticism suggest that Hume has different concerns than those of the received version. According to the received version of Humean reductivism, our testimonial based beliefs are justified through inductive inference based on empirical generalisations about the reliability of testimony. To rely on others for our beliefs without any reason whatsoever would seem to be intellectually irresponsible. So, the popularity of the received view of Humean testimony is that it affords us the opportunity of relying on testimonial-based beliefs whilst maintaining individual responsibility through our own ability to personally justify such reliance. However, in the light of Hume's naturalism, where beliefs are

seen as the product of instinctual or mechanical processes of which we have no awareness and reason affords us no control, the motivation of preserving individual responsibility would not seem to drive the Humean programme. As such, the epistemic concerns that are supposed to be answered by Humean reductivism do not seem to be Humean concerns.

Humean reductivism thus seems to be a position inspired by Hume's acknowledgement that testimony can, on occasions, be a source of knowledge, combined with his individualistic empiricism and a process of selective citation. Nevertheless, given our epistemic framework, the Humean reductive position discussed above is of more interest than pursuing the issue of Hume's own position.

## Chapter 3

### Testimonial Fundamentalism

#### **3.1 Introduction**

After outlining a large number of examples designed to demonstrate the extent of our dependence upon the testimony of others, H.H. Price claims that the main problem for theorists of the epistemology of testimony involves resolving:

“a conflict between two kinds of precepts, those of what is called ‘The Ethics of Belief’... [which demands that] one must never believe a proposition more firmly than the evidence warrants...and the precepts of charity...[such as accepting] what we are told unless or until we see reason to doubt it.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Price, this conflict arises from a tension familiar from the preceding discussion. On the one hand, our extensive dependence upon the testimony of others implies a common-sense rejection of a sceptical position regarding testimonial-based beliefs. On the other hand, the extent of testimonial-based beliefs rules out the possibility of justifying these beliefs through some form of inductive generalisation based upon personal experience.<sup>2</sup> In practice therefore we seem to adopt a posture of charity towards the testimony of others in accepting assertions as true unless we have contradictory evidence, even though such a charitable stance involves believing propositions that are not warranted by the evidence.

The crux of Price’s claim is that this is not merely a description of our everyday practices, but rather such charitable policies are pragmatically justifiable and to be commended. Price’s justification for this lies in the claim that following the precept of charity is: “socially expedient and even socially indispensable.”<sup>3</sup> For Price, the simple way to resolve the conflict between the ‘precept of ethics of belief’ and the ‘precept of charity’ is to proclaim the latter as victor.

“Each of us would like to know what happened before he was born and what is happening now on the other side of the wall. His own first-hand observations and his own first-hand memory will not enable him to answer these questions. If

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<sup>1</sup> Price (1969: 113-116)

<sup>2</sup> “Indeed the habit of accepting testimony is so deep-rooted in all of us that we fail to realise how very limited the range of each person’s first hand observations and memory is.” Price (1969: 119).

he cannot know the answers to them, he would still like to be able to hold the most reasonable beliefs that he can, on the best evidence he can get. And very often indeed the only evidence he can get is the evidence of testimony. He must either accept what others tell him for what it may be worth; or else he must remain in a state of suspended judgement, unable to find any answer at all to many of the questions which he desires to answer.”<sup>4</sup>

As it stands, this is not really an argument, presenting a choice between an unsatisfied desire for knowledge or charitably accepting the testimony of others. However, Price presents us with a number of economic reasons for finding the former option unsatisfactory, thereby forcing us to adopt the latter strategy. The pragmatic justification for the precept of charity seems to run along the following lines. Firstly, it is argued that in practice I need to know what is going on beyond my current or past perceptual experiences. Secondly, it seems that the only way to do that is to rely charitably on the testimony of others. Therefore I must rely on the precepts of charity, even if it conflicts with the precepts of the ethics of belief.

From the perspective of the epistemic assumptions that frame this exercise in doxastology, such pragmatic arguments are unpersuasive. Whilst one may sympathise with the motivation for such a conclusion, such a pragmatic argument implies that believing that *p* can be justified by reference to the desirable consequence in having such a belief. There may be occasions in which desirable consequences make it rational for us to try and induce a particular belief within us.<sup>5</sup> There may also be pragmatic factors that help determine the level of investigation a person has to undertake in ruling out potential defeaters. However, an exercise in doxastology – in the rational justification of beliefs by ensuring that beliefs are responsive to the demands of reason – precludes the type of pragmatic justification made here, whereby believing in *p* is justified solely by reference to the desirable consequences of believing that *p*. This somewhat dogmatic reassertion of the epistemic framework of this current study does not suffice to refute Price’s pragmatism regarding testimony, but simply serves to place Price’s considerations outside the purview of our own interests.

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<sup>3</sup> Price (1969: 114)

<sup>4</sup> Price (1969: 125)

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the hypnosis case in Williams (1973: 149)

Nevertheless, taken outside the pragmatic framework, Price's principle of charity suggests a possible starting point for formulating an alternative to the reductive accounts of the epistemology of testimony considered thus far. As presented in the previous chapter, the challenge such accounts face involves bridging the epistemic gap between H understanding S's assertion that p (i.e. H's believing that S asserted that p) and H believing that p himself. The reductive accounts canvassed suggest that one needs to add a premise with regards trustworthiness to bridge the gap, a premise derived through empirical means so that that our epistemic right to believe what others tell us is grounded in epistemic resources and principles familiar from other areas of epistemology. In contrast, non-reductive accounts seek to affirm the *sui generis* epistemic status of testimony, citing a priori principles regarding the reliability of testimony to bridge this epistemic gap. Indeed, such a position could be seen as asserting a form of fundamentalism about testimony; testimonial fundamentalism suggests that testimony, like perception and inference, play a unique and non-reducible role in our doxastological enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

Price's precept of charity ('accepting what we are told unless or until we see reason to doubt it') seems to be just such a fundamentalist principal that we need to bridge the epistemic gap, albeit that his pragmatic justification of the principle is unsatisfactory from our perspective. This chapter considers two arguments that attempt to provide an epistemic justification for such a charitable policy: The first, 'The Martian Argument', stems from Coady's discussion of the Humean reductive position discussed in the previous chapter [3.2, 3.3] and the second draws on Davidson's much discussed principle of charity [3.4, 3.5]. It will be argued that neither suggestions are successful in providing an epistemic justification for such a pragmatic policy. In the final section, we will attempt to learn lessons from the failure of such a non-reductive alternative, focussing on the role played by the testimonial problematic in these accounts [3.6].

### ***3.2 The Martian argument***

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'testimonial fundamentalism' is due to Rysiew (1999)

Coady's Martian argument begins with a critique of the Humean position, according to which our reliance on testimony is not due to any a priori connection between instances of testimony and the state of affairs reported, but rather "because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them." This implies, suggests Coady, that it ought to have been possible for there to be a situation in which there was no conformity at all between all instances of testimony and the state of affairs reported, a possibility then ruled out a posteriori after observations of correlation between the two. The argument takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*, in which a situation is imagined in which there is a world where no correlation is indeed found between reports and the facts reported. The argument purports to show that in such a situation: "there could be no such thing as reports."<sup>7</sup>

Imagine, suggests Coady, a community of Martians who have:

"[...] a language which we can translate (there are difficulties in this supposition as we shall see shortly) with names for distinguishable things in their environment and suitable predicative equipment. We find however, to our astonishment, that whenever they construct sentences addressed to each other in the absence (from their vicinity) of the things designated by the names, but when they are, as we should think, in a position to report, then they seem to say what we (more synoptically placed) can observe to be false."<sup>8</sup>

In such a situation, Coady argues that

"...any Martian has four powerful reasons for not relying upon what others appear to be telling him: (i) he finds their "reports" false whenever he checks personally on them, (ii) he finds reliance upon them consistently leads him astray in practice, (iii) he finds himself utterly unreliable in what he tells others and it is at least possible that he is not atypical, (iv) others often give chaotically divergent reports on these matters beyond his checking.

From this he concludes that it would be:

"very hard to imagine the activity of reporting in anything like its usual setting with the Martians, for there would surely be no reliance upon the 'reportive'

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<sup>7</sup> Coady (1994: 242)

<sup>8</sup> Coady (1994: 233)



utterances of others; the Martian community cannot reasonably be held to have the practice of reporting.<sup>9</sup>

More specifically, the argument runs as follows. The practice of reporting involves at minimum a reporter and an audience. (Let us follow our previous usage and consider a Speaker (S) and Hearer (H)). In asserting that *p*, S does so with the intention that her utterance will have an effect on H, in that the assertion or report will be taken by H as evidence that *p*. A successful act of reporting from S's point of view is thus one in which, as a result of the assertion that *p*, H comes to believe that *p*. If S knew in advance that there could be no possibility whatsoever of such a success, then there would be no point in asserting. If all Speakers in the Martian community were to always utter falsehoods (regarding observational reports about properties of objects not in their immediate surrounds), then Hearers will cease to rely on such reports. If Hearers cease to rely on such reports, Speakers - in turn - will cease to report, for there would be no point in so doing. (More precisely, the argument need not consider a situation in which all reports are false, but one in which there was no correlation between reports and facts reported, such that reports are randomly and hence unpredictably true. Indeed, if **all** reports were false, there could be a reliable counter-induction for testimony, such that is S testifies that *p*, that could be a reliable indicator for  $\neg p$ !) The conclusion of this argument is that if all reports in a community were such that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported then there would be no practice of reporting; "there could be no such thing as reports".

This is little more than an *interim* conclusion - one would need to extend the argument further in order to specifically undermine the Humean position. It is possible to distinguish between two further conclusions that Coady claims stem from such an interim conclusion. One is a *negative* conclusion that seeks to undermine the Humean position. Alternatively, one could develop this interim position into a more *positive* argument, seeing it as a way of providing an a priori demonstration of the overall reliability of testimony.

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<sup>9</sup> Coady (1992: 87)

The *negative* development of Coady's Martian argument begins with the interim conclusion above, that if all reports in a community were such that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported then there would be no practice of reporting. In contrast, the Humean reductive position implies that there could be the possibility of a community in which there is a practice of reporting and yet there would be no correlation between the reports and the facts reported. Since the Martian argument shows this not to be a possibility, it seems that the reductive position is false.

The more *positive* development of Coady's Martian argument also begins with the interim conclusion above: that if all reports in a community were such that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported then there would be no practice of reporting. One way of phrasing the conclusion would be to say that *for there to be a practice of reporting, there must be some positive correlation between reporting and the facts reported.*

Indeed, although Coady does not make this explicit, it appears that the actual positive conclusion warranted from the Martian argument is stronger than this, namely that *for there to be a practice of reporting, a significant percentage of all reports must be true.* Firstly, note that if H notices that a small percentage of S's assertions were false, this would not mean that S's acts of reporting will have no effect on her beliefs. The exact breakdown point (i.e. the point at which S's assertion has no effect upon H's beliefs) depends both on the context and content of the assertion, and there will be a great degree of vagueness involved. If S was aware that H considered her testimony to be generally reliable - even though she was aware that the hearer was dubious of the veracity of some of the speakers' pronouncements - the speaker would not necessarily desist in the practice of reporting, for her words are having an effect on H who does take them as evidence. The overall cut off point beyond which the practice of reporting would cease is the situation in which H is aware that S is uttering falsehoods more often than not - for then it is clear that there reports provide no evidence for the facts reported.<sup>10</sup> As such, the conclusion of the argument is not simply that the

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<sup>10</sup> The actual situation need not even be as strong as this, for Coady fails to take into consideration issues surrounding the content of what is reported. Consider, for example, the spread of so called 'urban myths' through a population. The social value gained from retelling such reports ensures that

existence of the practice of reporting guarantees that not all reports are false, but it guarantees that a significant number of reports must be true.

Coady's Martian argument can therefore be seen as involving three stages. The first uses the case of a community of Martians to demonstrate that for there to be a practice of reporting within a specific community, it could not be the case that all the reports in that community could be such that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported (the interim conclusion). The second is to argue that the Humean position as regards the epistemology of testimony would involve a denial of this interim conclusion. As such, the Humean position as regards the epistemology of testimony is untenable (the negative conclusion). Finally, it could be used to provide an a priori argument for the general reliability of testimony (the positive conclusion).

If all three stages of the Martian argument are correct, its conclusions are significant for it provides us with a positive argument in favour of a non-reductionist version of testimony. If H hears S assert that p on occasion O, H could now possess a justification that justifies H's subsequent belief that p. It seems that one is justified a priori in believing that testimony is generally reliable. Given the significance of the argument, we will therefore evaluate it in detail, considering each of the three stages of the argument in turn.

### 3.3 *Evaluating the Martian argument*

Does Coady's argument successfully achieve the interim conclusion, that for there to be a practice of reporting to be within a specific community it could not be the case that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported within that community? In order for Coady's arguments to be successful, it must not be possible for there to be a community in which there is anything recognisable as a practice of reporting and yet the practice of reporting in such a community is such that there is no correlation between reports and facts reported within that community. It will be argued that Coady's description of the community of Martians makes two key

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the practice will continue even if it turns out that such reports are false, as speaker and hearer are highly motivated to believe such reports. However, for the purposes of our discussion here, let us

assumptions (an assumption regarding the *transparency of interactions* involved and an assumption *ruling out massive error*) that are pivotal in establishing this interim conclusion. Furthermore, it will be argued that neither of these assumptions are warranted.

Coady's interim conclusion invokes the notion of the practice of reporting; his aim is to show that the existence of such a practice guarantees that not all reports could be such that there was no correlation between reports and facts reported within that community. The crux of the argument for the interim conclusion is that the existence of the practice of reporting means that S will only deem it worth making assertions if she thinks the assertion will indeed have an effect on H. The scenario assumes, and depends upon, the fact that S is aware of H's beliefs. It is not just enough for the H to ignore all the reports, S herself must be aware of this. In short, the case relies on the fact that the *interactions here are transparent*. If the interactions between S and H were not transparent, the argument would break down - for S would make reports irrespective of whether the Hearer believes them.

Now, whilst such transparency may indeed be a feature of the type of interactive situation that Coady considers, a situation in which S and H are in close contact with each other and the facts that are being reported ( - think of Quine's radical translators or Wittgenstein's builders), it is indeed possible to imagine many scenarios of reporting where such transparency is not the case. Imagine a guru who is out of touch with her followers and continues to engage in the practice of reporting even though none of her followers still take everything she says at face value. ('Out of touch' here could be read physically - she is a leader in exile away from her flock making pronouncements over the Internet. Her pronouncements are false and her former followers are aware of this). Now imagine an individual who, for whatever reason, only has contact with a number of gurus who all have this feature - they make false reports to H but remain blissfully unaware that he considers such reports to be suspect (He does not have the heart to inform them of her loss of faith in their teachings). Whatever the example, in this less transparent situation, the practice of reporting will

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consider cases in which the report is significant in the sense that the truth of the report has practical significance for speaker and hearer.

still continue even though H is aware that all assertions are false - since S is unaware that H is aware of this falsity.<sup>11</sup>

However, in order to use such reflections to undermine Coady's argument, it is insufficient to simply posit alternate possibilities in which testimony is generally unreliable. Rather, one needs to demonstrate that in these alternate possibilities there is something like the practice of reporting. Intuitions may differ here, but it is open to Coady to reply that in our community of gurus, the very unreliability we have highlighted shows that there is simply no practice of reporting taking place. Further discussion would have to consider the difficult issue of the relationship between an act of reporting according to Coady, and the definitions of testifying I proffered in chapter 1. Since I am convinced that the Martian argument fails even if we are to stick to transparent cases alone, I will not pursue such definitional matters here.

It seems that even if we focus on situations that are transparent in the sense noted above, there still remain difficulties in Coady's interim conclusion that the existence of a practice of reporting guarantees that it could be not be the case that there is no correlation between reports and facts reported within that community. When H comes into contact with the Martian community, Coady tell us that he becomes aware that they always make false reports for four reasons: the reports are false when checked, they lead H astray in practice, he finds them unreliable when telling others and others give divergent reports on such matters. Why do the Martians make such false reports? Two options seem available - H could either question the competence of the reporters or H could question the sincerity of the reporters. If the false reports are the result of the former, we have a situation in which there is *massive error* in the community. If it is the result of the latter, we have a situation in which there is *massive deceit* in the community.

It is important however to notice a basic difference between the case of massive deceit and the case of massive error. Coady is right to assert that in a community in which there is indeed *massive deceit*, the practice of reporting will cease - since people will

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it may be argued, that one does not even need anything so far-fetched. Simple eavesdropping on conversations in infant school playgrounds will reveal a practice of reporting in which most testimony is not reliable.

soon realise there is little point on relying upon the testimony of others (providing of course that interactions are transparent). As such, massive deceit is incompatible with the practice of reporting. On the other hand, it does not seem that *massive error* is similarly incompatible with the practice of reporting. Consider the following community of Martians where, for example, the community seem to have a specific lack of competence with regards their perceptual judgements, where all members of such a community share this same incompetence. Here, Martian Speakers indeed report what they believe and Martian Hearers acquire beliefs on the basis of such reports, even if such reports and beliefs are false. The key point is that our interim conclusion is too strong. Coady's Martian argument has not demonstrated that the existence of a practice of reporting guarantees that it could be not be the case that there is no correlation between reports and facts reported within that community. Rather, the existence of a practice of reporting guarantees that speakers will generally say what they and their hearers believe to be true. Reporting rules out massive insincerity but not massive incompetence.

Coady's considerations of the community of Martians seem not to consider this possibility of systematic massive error. Consider the following argument Coady provides against the possibility of massive error. He argues that in such a community of incompetence (where massive error is the rule), the practice of reporting cannot exist:

“What do they think of their fellow Martians' cognitive capacities, for instance, given that they must know that the fellow Martians are from time to time in a position to observe or infer the falsity of their testimony but never contradict the false reports.”<sup>12</sup>

Coady here seems to have in mind a different type of situation in which massive error is the rule. His situation is a case of non-systematic incompetence: there are no competent reporters (or believers) in the community, but yet they do not all ‘suffer’ from the same type of incompetence. The case we are considering is a situation of systematic incompetence, in which all members of the community ‘suffer’ from the same incompetence - they all have the same false beliefs. Coady is correct to note that non-systematic incompetence is indeed incompatible with the practice of reporting -

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<sup>12</sup> Coady (1992: 89).

hearers will be able to detect disparity between their own beliefs and those reported, and thus cease to accept reports if these fail to conform with other evidence available regarding the facts reported. However, in the case of systematic incompetence - the hearer will not be able to detect a disparity between the report and facts reported; they will both have the same false beliefs. Systematic incompetence is thus compatible with the practice of reporting.

One reason that could account for Coady's focus on the problems raised by massive insincerity as opposed to the problems raised by massive incompetence may be due to his overall conception of the rules governing the speech act of assertion.<sup>13</sup> Coady's argument from the community of Martians suggests a Gricean-like understanding of the rules governing the speech act of assertion. As expressed in another context, this involves an understanding of assertion such that:

"the intention, constitutive of the speech act of assertion [is] providing one's audience with information through their recognition that this is one's intention."<sup>14</sup>

Since assertion is seen as involving the manipulation of the beliefs of the Hearer by the Speaker, it is unsurprising that Coady should focus more on the problems raised by insincerity rather than incompetence. A successful instance of assertion involves H acquiring S's beliefs. This involves H recognizing S's intentions, including sincerity. Competence is thus not essential to the account, even if incompetence - if detected - would prevent a successful act of assertion.

One worry regarding such an account of assertion is that, according to the account under consideration, the intention of one who asserts is to manipulate the beliefs of the audience; S attempts to induce a belief in H about S's belief. This seems to suggest that there is a certain sense of duplicity involved in the basic act of assertion. Whether or not S believes that p seems to be irrelevant to the proceedings. As McDowell notes, whether or not assertion is in the interest of the audience seems to be an accidental fact, depending on the good will of S.<sup>15</sup> There does seem to be something unsavoury about this situation - whilst a person may indeed be engaged in

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the notion of rules of assertion.

<sup>14</sup> Baldwin (1990:228).

<sup>15</sup> See McDowell (1998a: 38-39)

manipulating other beliefs, the usual cases of assertion seem to be one in which it is generally assumed that such acts of communication are generally beneficial to the audience. An alternative to this Gricean-like conception of assertion thus stresses the role knowledge plays in our conception of the rules governing assertion, such that 'S should only assert that p if S knows that p.' A focus on assertion as involving the communication of knowledge rather than manipulation of beliefs ensures that one needs to rule out both massive insincerity and massive incompetence.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not such speculations about Coady's own intentions are correct, this suggestion highlights the problems posed for Coady as a result of this failure to rule out the possibility of systematic incompetence. The positive part of Coady's 'Martian Argument' intends to demonstrate that *the very existence of the practice of reporting shows that a significant percentage of all reports must be true*. Unless this were so, runs the argument, hearers would cease to accept reports and speakers would cease to make them. In contrast, I have suggested that, even if we allow a level of transparency of interaction, the positive conclusion is more circumspect: *the very existence of a practice of reporting shows that there must be a significant level of correlation between reporting and the beliefs of both speaker and hearer*.

In the context of an account of the epistemology of testimony, this limitation on the scope of the positive Martian argument is significant. If one aims to bridge the epistemic gap between believing that S asserted that p and believing that p with a premise regarding the general reliability of testimony derived from such non-empirical speculation, it is not possible to do this by adding the claim the very existence of a practice of reporting shows that there must be a significant level of correlation between reporting and the beliefs of both speaker and hearer. The conclusion that p does not follow in an abductive manner from the premises: S asserted that p and that there must be a significant level of correlation between reports and beliefs. We are interested in the transmission of knowledge, not the manipulation of beliefs. As such, the Martian argument alone fails as an account of the epistemology of testimony, as it fails to bridge the critical epistemic gap.

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<sup>16</sup> This is similar to my criticisms of Coady's definition of testimony in Chapter 1.



### 3.4 *The Omniscient Interpreter*

The last section of the discussion regarding the compatibility of the practice of reporting within a community and the notion of massive error in the community will seem familiar to anyone with knowledge of the writings of Davidson on 'Radical Interpretation'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the limitation of the positive conclusion just suggested has obvious echoes with the following claim:

"It may seem that the argument so far shows only that good interpretation breeds concurrence, while leaving quite open the question whether what is agreed upon is true. And certainly agreement, no matter how widespread, does not guarantee truth."<sup>18</sup>

This seems to be just the sort of distinction we were urging - the practice of reporting seems to require sincerity but not competence. However, Davidson continues to argue that:

"This observation misses the point of the argument, however. The basic claim is that much community of belief is needed to provide a basis for communication or understanding; the extended claim should then be that objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false."<sup>19</sup>

Davidson provides a much discussed argument to support this conclusion, an argument which, if correct, would indeed demonstrate the a priori unintelligibility of massive error.<sup>20</sup> This argument has attracted a great deal of attention and criticism.<sup>21</sup> I will argue that whilst it is possible to formulate a version of the argument that overcomes many of these criticisms, the argument is of no use in the context of a non-reductive account of the epistemology of testimony.

The argument suggested by Davidson is as follows:

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, essays 9-14 in Davidson (1984).

<sup>18</sup> Davidson (1984: 200)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> The argument is found in a number of different essays, albeit with differences in nuance and presentation. See Davidson (1982, 1983, 1990) and essays 13 and 14 in Davidson (1984).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, McGinn (1977, 1986), Bruekner (1986, 1991), Vermazen (1983), Craig (1990); as well as the references cited below.

“We do not need to be omniscient to interpret but there is nothing absurd in the idea of an omniscient interpreter; he attributes beliefs to others, and interprets their speech on the basis of his own beliefs, just as the rest of us do. Since he does this as the rest of us do, he perforce finds as much agreement as is needed to make sense of his attributions and interpretations; and in this case, of course, what is agreed is by hypothesis true. But now it is plain why massive error about the world is simple unintelligible, (or to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible).”<sup>22</sup>

Let us first try and set out the argument in a series of stages, and then consider each in turn.

- (1) Assume it to be intelligible that there could be an omniscient interpreter (OI) who believes all and only true propositions.
- (2) The OI is also bound by Davidson’s principles of interpretation, such that the OI must interpret the subject’s beliefs so that they largely match the interpreter’s own (maximise agreement).
- (3) Since the OI’s beliefs are all true (1), the beliefs of the person interpreted must be largely true (2).
- (4) Thus, the possibility of massive error is ruled out.

Stage (1) in the argument makes reference to the notion of intelligibility, without clarifying what exactly this means. Presumably Davidson does not mean to base everything on the assumption that there actually is an OI, but rather the assumption that there could be one. This however leads to the following objection.<sup>23</sup> Let us grant that there is a possible world in which an OI interprets someone’s beliefs. It follows that in such a possible world that anyone so interpreted may have mostly true beliefs - but this says nothing about the beliefs of anyone in this actual world. So, argues the objector, the argument only shows that in any possible world sharing us and an OI we cannot be massively mistaken as regards our beliefs about the world.

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson (1984: 201).

<sup>23</sup> See Foley and Fulmerton (1985). For a list of other objections to the OI argument, see Feldman (1998)

“Davidson, like Descartes before him, requires the help of God to defeat the skeptic.”<sup>24</sup>

I will call this ‘*the theistic objection*’ to the OI argument.

Another influential, and related, objection begins by noticing an unjustified assumption that underlies stage (3) in the argument above. The argument assumes that it is indeed possible that an OI can interpret the subject. But, suggests the objection, maybe its very omniscience rules out the possibility of interpretation, for the very reason identified by Davidson’s OI argument. This objector and Davidson both agree that when faced with a subject with mostly false beliefs, the OI could not share enough background beliefs to interpret the subject. Davidson proceeds to argue that, since the OI must be able to interpret the subject, such a possibility of massively false beliefs must be ruled out. Alternatively, goes the objection, one could proceed by confirming the possibility of massively false beliefs but ruling out the fact that the OI could interpret such an individual.

“...a mostly false corpus of beliefs might be understood, on the basis of a complete agreement, [only] by an interpreter whose own beliefs are mostly false.”<sup>25</sup>

I will call this ‘*the uninterpretability objection*’ to the OI argument.

It seems to me that these two arguments invoke a particular understanding of the omniscience of the interpreter (I will call it *a strong version of omniscience*) that is neither necessary nor involved in the OI argument, and by replacing it with an alternative version (*a weak version of omniscience*) the argument can overcome both objections. However, the effect of making explicit the notion of omniscience involved in the argument reveals an important limitation in the scope of the argument. This limitation in scope is of particular significance in our context, for it means that the OI argument cannot be used to support Coady’s non-reductive version of the epistemology of testimony.

At first glance, the very talk of weak omniscience sounds like an oxymoron. However, let us note that the OI invoked in the argument is not an omnipotent

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson (1984: 85-6)

<sup>25</sup> Bennett (1985: 10)

interpreter; there are a variety of constraints on the OI. Without such constraints, the argument fails from the start. If the idea of an OI is the idea of an interpreter who know everything, then presumably one of the things that this interpreter knows is that the beliefs of the person interpreted are massively false if they are indeed false. If so, then the argument clearly fails to rule out the possibility of massive false beliefs. As Vermazen correctly points out, the omniscience of the interpreter invoked here is limited, limited to the information relevant for interpretation, not including knowledge of S's beliefs.<sup>26</sup> One way to put this is to note that the OI is not an interpreter who is omniscient, but - distinguishing between attributive and predicative use of the adjective - one who is omniscient in terms of interpretation. This lies at the core of the weaker version of omniscience noted above.

According to this weaker version, the OI becomes little more than another 'character' that Davidson introduces elsewhere, the fully informed interpreter (FII). Davidson tells us that:

"what a fully informed interpreter could learn about what a speaker means is all there is to learn; the same goes for what a speaker believes".<sup>27</sup>

My central contention in this section is that the OI to whom Davidson appeals is just such an FII, and therefore the structure of the OI argument is as follows:

- (1') Assume a constitutive interpretationism, such that interpretability is essential to the very notion of thought (in this case belief), so that what an FII could not interpret is not thought .
- (2') An FII could not interpret a system of belief as massively false.
- (3') No system of belief can be massively false.

The phrase 'constitutive interpretationism' is derived from Child, although its use here is weaker than the version specified by Child. As used here, constitutive interpretationism involves a necessity claim, such that interpretability is a necessary condition for thought.<sup>28</sup> The relationship between interpretability and mindedness here therefore does not use one of these to explicate the other, but involves the claim we

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<sup>26</sup> Vermazen (1982)

<sup>27</sup> Davidson (1983: 315)

<sup>28</sup> Child's notion of constitutive interpretationism says that: "a statement of what it is for S to believe that p must make essential reference to S's being interpretable as believing that p" (Child, 1984: 48).

have no notion of mindedness without that of interpretability and no notion of interpretability without that of mindedness.<sup>29</sup> Rather than argue for this, let's follow Child in taking this as a datum:

"It is out of place to ask for a justification of the idea that thought is essentially interpretable; it is just a datum that we do generally know what others believe and desire ...[W]e take the epistemological facts as our starting point and then discuss how the metaphysics must be to make the epistemology intelligible."<sup>30</sup>

So there is an essential link between thought and interpretability. As Davidson put this:

"thoughts, desires and other attitudes are in their nature states we are equipped to interpret; that we could not interpret, could not be thought."<sup>31</sup>

This does not mean to say that the interpreter is infallible, that whatever the interpreter concludes is the truth about the mind; as Davidson put it: "anyway of telling will be fallible". The claim is not that whatever an interpreter actually does conclude is the truth about the mind. Rather, the claim is that what an interpreter could learn is all there is to learn; what we could not interpret is not thought. There is thus no substance to the claim that what we actually interpret another as believing or meaning will by and large be true, but the claim is that one could know such attitudes under favourable conditions. This is the reason for Davidson's introduction of the FII. Such an FII is all-knowing (omniscient) as regards interpretation, having available the totality of possible evidence available for ascription of content to beliefs and utterances. An FII should therefore be capable of interpreting any belief system. Put differently, if a belief system could not be interpreted by an FII, it would not be intelligible as being a system of beliefs. So much for an explication of (1').

Until now, we have said little about the actual notion of interpretability, as it features in (1'). A full discussion of the issues involved is obviously beyond our scope here; nevertheless the argument for (2') depends on two prominent features of Davidson's celebrated account of interpretation: the first is the claim that *there can be no non-*

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The account of Davidson to be developed here has sympathies with such a contention. Nevertheless, the account here just requires the necessity claim discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> The term 'mindedness' here is due to Lear (1984) and is developed in Ch. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Child (1994: 38)

<sup>31</sup> Davidson (1990:14)

*committal act of interpretation* and the second is the use of *the principle of charity* in interpretation.

By the rejection of a non-committal act of interpretation, I mean that one consequence of Davidson's account of interpretation is that an interpreter cannot ascribe beliefs to a speaker without that interpreter him/herself having some opinion as regards the truth of those beliefs. Davidson argues that in order for a person to have thoughts such as beliefs, they must have some idea what beliefs are.<sup>32</sup> This, in turn, involves having the capacity to ascribe, under appropriate conditions, beliefs with determinate mental content. One condition for having and ascribing beliefs involves:

"command of the subjective-objective contrast...Someone cannot have a belief unless he understands the possibility of being mistaken, and this involves grasping the contrast between truth and error."<sup>33</sup>

Davidson's account of interpretation requires that one has an opinion as regards the truth of those beliefs ascribed in interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

Another constraint on interpretation is captured in the much discussed *principle of charity*. As has been well documented, it is possible to distinguish between a number of roles such a principle takes in radical interpretation. One useful distinction is between allotting the principle a role as a starting point in interpretation and allotting the principle a role in constraining the end point of interpretation.<sup>35</sup> I will refer to this as the contrast between methodological and constitutive roles of the principle of charity respectively.

A basic problem facing the radical interpreter is that one cannot assign meanings to the individual without knowing what the speaker believes; yet, one cannot identify what the speaker believes without knowing the meaning of her utterances. A good place to start is to attribute to her the beliefs that we ourselves have (or at least those that we would have had we had the experiences she has had over the course of her

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<sup>32</sup> This is made explicit in Davidson (1982: 314) Although we will accept this for the purposes of our discussion, it should be noted that Davidson provides no argument for this pivotal claim, and it is far from straightforward.

<sup>33</sup> Davidson (1984: 170)

<sup>34</sup> I return to a discussion of related aspects of Davidson's writings, such as his more recent work on the notion of triangulation, in Chapter 6.

life).<sup>36</sup> Making this assumption allows interpretation to get going and fix both belief and meaning. One begins with assumptions as to that which people hold true and, with the introduction of a theory of meaning, we fix our ascription of attitudes. Here, the principle of charity is to be seen as a useful, methodological device for starting the process of interpretation, involving assumptions that may turn out to be false and removed in the light of subsequent theorising.

Whilst this may be a plausible role for the principle of charity to play in the context of the problems facing the radical interpreter, Davidson's latter writings tend to stress a very different role.

“The methodological advise to interpret in a way that optimises agreement should not be conceived as a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or saying anything.”<sup>37</sup>

As an interpretationist, one assumes that all the facts about linguistic and mental content are precisely and completely captured by the judgements of a fully informed interpreter. Such an assumption places constraints on the end point of such an interpretation - it must be something that has a plausible epistemology. As Davidson puts this:

“The methodology of interpretation is, in this respect, nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

According to this, the principle of charity - poorly named on this conception - is seen as providing a central constraint on the whole process of interpretation, a constitutive and not methodological role.

According to the constitutive understanding, a fully informed interpreter is unable make sense of an individual who does not have a set of beliefs that he considers to be largely true. The central reason for this stems from the holism of meaning, of the

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<sup>35</sup> This distinction is made in Malpas (1988) & Heal (1997: 187) to which the following discussion is indebted.

<sup>36</sup> The plausible variant offered in the bracket is the so-called principle of humanity. (See Grandy, 1973, Lewis, 1983).

<sup>37</sup> Davidson (1984: 137).

thinkable content of mental states, according to which one cannot attribute such contentful states in isolation but only against the background of other contentful mental states.<sup>39</sup> Given such holism, it is claimed that the fully informed interpreter can only make sense of disagreement against a background of massive agreement. As such, the principle of charity - the idea that there should be massive agreement between the beliefs of interpreter and interpretee - is indeed more than a methodological advice for the opening stages of interpretation, but a constraint on any successful attempt at achieving a rationalising interpretation of an individual.

In the constitutive form, the principle of charity involve two parts: a directive to interpret others so that they emerge holding beliefs that logically cohere, and a directive to interpret others so that they emerge holding, by and large, beliefs that we consider to be true.<sup>40</sup> More broadly, if one accepts the 'holism of meaning' claim above, the attribution of beliefs and meanings to the interpretee must give her a point of view: there must be coherence to the whole set of beliefs such that they represent a view of one world.<sup>41</sup> We aim, through interpretation, to capture this point of view. This is the first part of the principle of charity: the interpretee must have a logically coherent set of beliefs if she is to be seen as having a rationally structured point of view. We also have to be able to see this set of beliefs as rational, something that is the outcome of a rational confrontation with the world. In ascribing attitudes to the interpretee we aim to make the subjects dealing with the world appear rational. As a result, any attribution of a set of thoughts to a subject must be, in some sense, a coherent point of view of the one world that we both share. This is the second part of the principle of charity: our ascription of attitudes to the interpretee is constrained by the facts as we see them.

Both of these two features of Davidsonian thought highlighted here, namely the fact that there cannot be a non-committal interpretation and the principle of charity, are

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<sup>38</sup> Davidson (1984: 169).

<sup>39</sup> The relationship between charity and holism is brought out in Heal (1989).

<sup>40</sup> Davidson tends to formulate the principle using quantitative notions: there is talk of a set of beliefs that are 'largely true', 'massive agreement' and so on. Such quantitative talk is, however, unsatisfactory, particularly once it is noted that we are talking not just of a finite number of utterances, but infinite possible utterances and belief sets. The formulation here formulate removes such quantitative claims. I return to the principle of charity in more detail in 6.4

<sup>41</sup> This is developed in Chapter 6 under the heading of 'the constraint constraint': to attribute a point of view involves some attitude-independent constraint.



controversial. If they are correct however, they jointly suffice to justify (2') above. As a result of the first point, H cannot interpret S as having beliefs unless H himself has certain beliefs regarding the truth and falsity of those beliefs. As a result of the second point, the principle of charity ensures that H must attribute to S most of the beliefs that H would have in the circumstance. This is one way of understanding Davidson's claim that belief is veridical in its nature: belief attribution is generally (mainly) truth ascribing. Could an FII interpret a system of massively false beliefs? In order to interpret a system of beliefs, the FII has to have opinions about the veracity of the beliefs, such that there is broad agreement between the beliefs attributed to S and those beliefs held true by the FII. As such, an FII could not interpret a system as being in massive error. As a result of constitutive interpretationism, whatever an FII could not interpret could not be thought. Thus, no system of belief could be massively erroneous.

I have thus reinterpreted Davidson's argument from the omniscient interpreter, according to which the claim that no system of belief can be massively false stems from the idea of constitutive interpretationism – the claim that interpretability is essential to the very notion of belief.<sup>42</sup>

This formulation of the OI argument helps overcome the two objections to the argument noted earlier. In contrast to the first objection to the argument, *the theistic objection*, this construal of the OI argument does not involve complex issues regarding the possibility of the existence of an OI in actual and possible worlds. The arguments, stemming as it does from what we termed constitutive interpretationism, is one that applies in any possible world. Put bluntly, in any possible world a system of massively false beliefs would be uninterpretable. In contrast to the second objection, *the uninterpretability objection*, the argument explicitly rules out the possibility the objector would want us to countenance, namely that there is indeed a system of massively false beliefs that could not be interpreted by an OI as a result of his omniscience. Both objections seem to understand the argument as involving positing

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<sup>42</sup> This way of formulating the OI argument has an important echo in Davidson's thought, the idea of a radically different conceptual scheme. Such a scheme is supposed to be non-interpretable, much the same as a system of massively erroneous beliefs. The discussion with regards alternative conceptual schemes relates to the question of whether there could be truth independent of interpretability; here we

the existence of an OI, instead of seeing the OI as a feature of constitutive interpretationism in the manner outlined above.

### 3.5 *Testimony and the OI argument.*

Whilst this reconstruction of the OI argument may save it from the two objections voiced above, construing the OI argument in this manner reveals a number of limitations. In our context, the most significant is that the argument is unlikely to be of use in terms of providing a non-reductive account of the epistemology of testimony.

I hear the tour guide assert that Mandela is tall and form the belief that the tour guide asserted that Mandela is tall. According to the non-reductivist, in order for me to form the belief that Mandela is tall, I need to bridge the epistemic gap between these by inserting a missing premise, such as: ‘necessarily, most assertions are true’. On a generous reading, the Martian argument establishes that the very existence of an act of asserting guarantees that a significant percentage of assertions are sincere (assuming some form of transparency of interactions). However, being justified in believing that my tour guide is sincere when she asserts Mandela is tall is not the same as justifiably believing that Mandela is tall. Mistakes are the types of things that happen. It is difficult to see how reflection on the nature of a constitutive interpretationism can help here in moving from ‘necessarily, most assertions are sincere’ to ‘necessarily, most assertions are true’.

Let us grant for the moment the results of constitutive interpretationism above. In interpreting the tour guide, in trying to make sense of her speech behaviours in the context of her overall behaviours, I ascribe to her certain beliefs regarding the world we share and regarding the meaning of her terms. In doing so, I make her seem rational by my own lights. In arriving at an interpretation that makes sense of my tour guide, I thus assume her beliefs to be broadly correct. Were she in massive error, I would not be able to make sense of her behaviour.

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have a question of falsity independent of interpretability. In both cases, Davidson’s answer is to deny that this possibility.

If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or saying anything.”<sup>43</sup>

Further, since an FII could not make sense of such massive error, one concludes with Davidson, that belief is by its nature mainly veridical. However, there are two reasons why such an account of belief ascription in interpretation fall short of bridging the epistemic gap, ensuring the general competence of the Speaker in the context of testimony.

Firstly, note that the formulations above are replete with quantitative notions: there is talk of a set of beliefs that are ‘largely consistent’, ‘largely true’, ‘massive agreement’ and so on. Such quantitative talk is, however, unsatisfactory, particularly once it is noted that we are talking not just of a finite number of utterances, but infinite possible utterances and belief sets.<sup>44</sup> Talk of belief being ‘mainly veridical’ is thus a picturesque way of referring to a shared background of beliefs that are necessary for interpretation to be possible, since beliefs as such are not the type of things that can easily be counted, measured and quantified. When one moves beyond such quantitative claims and considers this in practice, the point becomes clear: there does indeed seem to be many beliefs that we share that are so uninteresting we hardly ever remark upon them due to their very familiarity and common-place, and are required in the background to make interpretation possible. Playing a role in the background of our conceptual scheme, they are type of things we take for granted and rarely make explicit in the form of assertions.<sup>45</sup> However, once this is made explicit, the relevance to the testimonial case falls. Such reflections on interpretation was meant to ground the claim that ‘necessarily, most assertions are true’. The Davidsonian point is that it is a constitutive fact about thought that beliefs are generally veridical (at best: ‘necessarily, most beliefs are true’). Even if one grants the interpretationist point regarding the interdependence of belief and meaning, this is a point about the mass of background, and generally unasserted because trivial, beliefs we share and take as true. It thus has little bearing on the veridicality of actual assertions.

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<sup>43</sup> Davidson (1984: 137)

<sup>44</sup> For some worries, see Davidson (1984: 136)

<sup>45</sup> Davidson (1984: 200)

Secondly, it is difficult to see how reflections on a fully informed, idealised interpreter could have any bearing on my own epistemic justification in accepting the tour guide's assertion. In interpreting her, I may indeed ascribe to her beliefs that are, by my own lights, true by and large. Further, it may be the case that reflection of a FII shows that beliefs are, in their nature, veridical. I however am not fully informed. Their may indeed be potentially available evidence about the interpretee's (and my own) beliefs of which I am unaware. I am fully aware of my fallibility as an interpreter; I make frequent mistakes in the past, as is the usual case of such a non-idealised interpreter. In such a testimonial scenario, the very fact that 'necessarily, most beliefs are true' has little epistemic impact in justifying this particular belief.

To stress, the point is not that Davidson's OI argument is wrong. Indeed, I have defended it in the preceding section, and allot the notion of interpretationism a central role in the positive account of the epistemology of testimony argued for in Part B of this essay. Rather, my objection is to the harnessing of such reflections within the problematic of the epistemology of testimony considered thus far; seeing the OI argument as a way of bridging the epistemic gap in H's justificatory argument. The arguments do not fit easily within such a framework, reducing their scope and relevance.

### *3.6 Testimony and Evidence*

Where does this leave us with regards the epistemology of testimony? Thus far we have considered both reductive and non-reductive versions and it seems that neither of these provide adequate accounts. Despite differences, one thing all these accounts share is there formulation of the problem of testimony as that of bridging an epistemic gap between believing that S asserted that p and believing that p. Given our reticence to reject the common-sense constraints, it seems that instead the difficulty must lie somehow in the way that we have conceived the problem of testimony itself.

Following recent convention in this area, we have used the term 'testimony' in labelling our area of investigation, and have considered under this label cases that conform to the following generalised schema: Hearer H hears a Speaker S asserting

that p and as a result comes to believe that p - an event that can be described as one in which an individual tells another individual some fact that is presented as true. In everyday parlance, we would refer to such an event using a variety of different terms, including 'reporting', 'telling', 'asserting', 'claiming' and so on, depending on the precise circumstances involved. One term conspicuously absent from this list is the term 'testimony' or 'testifying' itself. Whilst one could consider all of these to be acts of testimony, it is usual to reserve the term 'testimony' for assertions that take place within a legal context. Indeed, outside such legal practices, it would be rare for H to make reference to S 'testifying' at all. If H was asked for the source of a particular piece of information that he had initially acquired through S's testimony that p, he may make reference to S 'having said that p', or having 'heard her report that p'. It is unlikely that H would make reference to S's having testified that p, unless, of course, this inquiry was taking place within the context of courtroom proceedings or some similar formalised framework.

Coady's discussion of the epistemology of testimony begins with a discussion of the legal case (he terms it 'formal testimony'), and then generalises from this discussion to include the wider category captured in our generalised schema above (he terms it 'natural testimony'). Justification for this strategy is made explicit; the topic of formal testimony is much discussed and thus:

"provides a relatively firm footing for our initial steps...Consequently, these rules and requirements shaping the particular notion of formal testimony...are of value in defining a concept of formal testimony which can in its turn, by highlighting similarities and differences, help reveal the shape of natural testimony even when such strict legal notions as admissibility have no direct application."<sup>46</sup>

This choice of strategy and the use of the term 'testimony' - as opposed to 'hearsay' (McDowell), 'reporting' (Vendler) or 'interlocution' (Burge) for example - to refer to the topic under discussion reveals the extent to which the legal model exercises an influence over Coady and subsequent theorists in this area.

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<sup>46</sup> Coady (1992: 26-7)

Reflection on everyday discourse regarding use of the term ‘testimony’ highlights the fact that an act of assertion taking place within a legal framework differs somewhat from other cases of reporting or asserting; a difference arising from both the formalised framework and the perceived social importance of accepting S’s testimony in a legal context. For obvious reasons, courts have adopted a formalised procedure surrounding the giving of testimony. There are laws governing who can testify (for example, in regards expert testimony) and there are laws governing what can be testified about (for example, in regards hearsay testimony). Testifiers are aware of the consequences of perjury and undertake to tell the truth through means of swearing an oath. Testifiers are open to cross examination, and are aware of this possibility prior to their assertion. Most critically, given the injunction to ensure innocence until proven guilty, H is instructed to take a critical attitude towards that testimony. Although we do not reserve the term ‘testimony’ solely to refer to assertions made from a witness box in the presence of a judge, we do tend in everyday discourse to reserve the term for instances in which features of this formalised concept accompany the act of assertion.

Of course, the reason for the existence of such a procedure itself reflects a crucial point we have highlighted earlier; that H will adopt different epistemic standards towards S’s assertion that *p* depending on both the content and context of the particular assertion. It is obvious that H is less likely to take an assertion at face value if uttered by a key prosecution witness in a murder trial in which H is a member of the jury than H would when considering an amusing anecdote (a so-called ‘urban myth’) told by a stranger in a bar. This depends on a variety of factors, including the perceived social importance and consequences of accepting the testimony as true. In short, in everyday discourse we tend to reserve the term ‘testimony’ for occasions in which the consequences of accepting the assertion as true are seen relatively important from H’s point of view, and are accompanied by some of the formal procedures that we associate with giving testimony in a court of law.

Further, the legal model imports a certain degree of additional ambiguity in this area, requiring us to distinguish between testimony as an action and testimony as a product. In a court of law, one presents testimony much as one would any other exhibit: as a

piece of evidence for some fact. Testimony is thus a product, much like a smoking gun, that can be placed on a stand and inspected, criticised and examined.

Viewing testimony as a piece of evidence in this manner, combined with the injunction to take a critical stance towards such evidence serves to emphasise the critical gap between testimony and that which it is evidence for that lies at the heart of the formulation of the problem of testimony in chapter 2. Once the critical gap between believing that S asserted that p and believing that p is opened, it seems that the only way of closing such a gap is through some form of inference. In this sense, both the versions of reductivism and non-reductivism explored thus far are inferential accounts. Our discussions of attempts at closing the gap through an inference suggest that once such a gap is open it becomes difficult to close, using either a priori or empirical reasoning. In contrast, non-inferential accounts refuse to allow such a gap to open to start with, and it is to these that we now turn.

## Chapter 4

### The Transmission Model

#### 4.1 *introduction*

Our rejection of a sceptical position regarding testimony as a source of knowledge serves to place testimony in a category together with other possible sources of knowledge, most notably instances of perception and memory. However, a straightforward description of the defining characteristics of these three sources of knowledge reveals a feature central to instances of perception that is not shared by instances of either memory and testimony, and can thus serve to place perception in a separate sub-category to the other two.

Put crudely, perception, unlike testimony and memory, may involve the generation of a novel belief. This does not mean that perceptual-based beliefs are necessarily new to that individual. That individual may have had such a belief with identical content on a prior occasion. Rather, saying that perception involves the generation of novel beliefs is to say that, in perception, the belief could *potentially* be new to that individual. Through perception, a person may acquire a novel belief with a certain content that s/he had never previously entertained.

This is not true of either memory or testimony. Whilst it may be granted that, in the case of memory, the memorial-based belief is novel in the sense that that it is new to that individual at the present time, it is nevertheless a constitutive feature of memory as a source of knowledge that that individual had previously entertained that belief at an earlier occasion.<sup>1</sup> If not, this would not be a case of memory.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, whilst it may be granted in the case of testimony that the belief is novel in the sense that it is new to that individual, it is a constitutive feature of such a source that the belief had

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<sup>1</sup> At this stage, I will not enter into the issue of individuating beliefs so that it makes sense to say that the individual held the *same* belief at a prior occasion. Loosely, I mean that the individual held a belief with the same content, suitable altered to account for any indexical phrases leading to differences in the passing of time and spatial location (in the case of memory) and person (in the case of testimony).

<sup>2</sup> The issue of memory is used here as a foil for the discussion of testimony, and is thus not of primary concern. Further work incorporating memory into such a model would have to introduce distinctions regarding different types of memory. In the text here I have in mind something akin to factual memory.



been previously entertained by someone else. If not, this would not be a case of testimony.

This way of distinguishing between perception on the one hand, and memory/testimony on the other, stems from a description of the features that serve to characterise these sources themselves and thus seems somewhat platitudinous. The matter becomes more interesting when we consider the question of the epistemological significance of such a distinction. Is there a basic difference between perception on the one hand, and memory/testimony on the other, in terms of the justification of beliefs acquired through these processes resulting from this descriptive difference? For example, in returning a positive answer to this question, it may be argued that the prior belief plays an essential role in the justification of testimonial/memorial-based beliefs. Alternatively, in returning a negative answer to this question, one might argue that, although it is a constitutive feature of memory and testimony that the current belief is not novel in the sense mentioned above, the prior belief plays no essential role in justifying the current memorial/testimonial-based belief.

Focussing on the testimonial case, the dominant approach to the epistemology of testimony, the inferentialist approach considered thus far, would seem to return a negative answer to this question. According to this, the aim of an account of the epistemology of testimony is to bridge the epistemic gap between believing that a speaker, S, asserted that p and believing that p via an inductive inference. In construing the epistemology of testimony as a species of inductive reasoning, such an approach considers only H's own justification of the belief that p. Whether S knew that p is not of direct relevance to the epistemology of testimony, and thus the testifier's prior belief plays no essential role in justifying the current testimonial-based belief. An inferential approach therefore returns a *negative* response to the question above.

Following our rejection of inferentialist approaches, the reflections above suggest a suitably different starting point for an alternative. Contra the inferentialist, one should return a *positive* answer to the question above and claim that the epistemology of memory/testimony is fundamentally different to the epistemology of perception. In

the latter, the onus of justificatory responsibility is the individual in the present. In the former, the onus of justificatory responsibility is shifted from the individual in the present, to the individual in the past or another individual. In the testimonial case, an appropriate metaphor seems to be the notion of *transmission*. In a successful case of the acquisition of second-hand knowledge, a justified belief that *p* is transmitted from *S* to *H*, such that provided *S* knows that *p* and nothing untoward has happened in the transmission process, *H* knows that *p*. This could be called the basic insight of the transmission model (TM) of testimony, conceived as a major alternative to the inferential model (IM).<sup>3</sup>

To my knowledge, the most detailed version of the transmission model of testimony has been articulated by Tyler Burge, and a narrow aim of this current chapter is to explicate and critically evaluate Burge's account. However, the primary focus is broader than this. Firstly, my interest is in a wider transmission approach to testimony, of which Burge's account is an example. Secondly, my aim here is to suggest some lessons to be learnt from reflection on such transmission approaches. In particular, I will consider what seems to many as a basic difficulty that undermines the development of any transmission approach to the epistemology of testimony, stemming from the incompatibility of such a model with a broadly internalist approach to epistemology that forms the core of my interest in doxastology. Through consideration of a number of arguments against the viability of the transmission approach to testimony, I will argue that such an approach is incompatible with the theoretical commitments of epistemic internalism, although not for the reasons often expressed. Such a conclusion is interesting in two directions: firstly, it clarifies a central feature of epistemic internalism often glossed over, and, secondly, it suggests an alternative direction for a positive account of the epistemology of testimony.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. I will firstly outline a provisional version of the transmission model and highlight a possible tension between such a model and epistemic internalism [4.2]. Secondly, an internalist version of the transmission model will be defended in the light of some puzzling cases suggested by Peacocke [4.3].

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<sup>3</sup> This way of characterising the alternative positions available for the epistemology of testimony as a choice between an inferential and testimonial model is found in Hopkins (2000) and Owens (2000: chap. 10).

Thirdly, I will outline Burge's notion of content preservation [4.4] and consider two challenges to such an approach: the problem of responsibility [4.5] and the problem of perspectivity [4.6]. It will be claimed that whilst the transmission model can be defended from the former problem, it is the problem of perspectivity that ultimately leads to the incompatibility between epistemic internalism and the transmission model. In the final section, I will suggest that rather than use such a conclusion to motivate an externalist version of the epistemology of testimony, reflections on the challenges above can be used to carve out the theoretical space for an alternative to both inferentialist and transmission-based models that is compatible with epistemic internalism [4.7]. (An appendix to this chapter contrasts Peacocke's version of the distinction between the transmission and inferential model, with the distinction proffered here).

## 4.2 *The transmission metaphor*

One central characteristic of the transmission model (TM) emerges from the comments above. Proponents of such an account not only affirm that in the cases of the acquisition of a propositional belief through testimony or memory there must necessarily have been a prior act of belief acquisition that is separated in time (and person) from the current act of belief acquisition, but claim that this prior belief has epistemic significance for the epistemology of memorial/testimonial-based beliefs.

The introduction of some terminology will help. In the case of memory, it is the same person involved in the two acts of belief 'acquisition'. For example, an individual perceives that *p* at *T*<sub>1</sub>, and remembers that belief at *T*<sub>2</sub>. The memorial-based belief that *p* formed at *T*<sub>2</sub> must be suitably related to the perceptual-based belief that *p* at *T*<sub>1</sub> for that belief to possibly count as a justified, memorial-based belief. In the case of testimony, it is different people involved in the two acts of belief acquisition. *S* perceives (for example) that *p* at *T*<sub>1</sub>, and *H* acquires that belief at *T*<sub>2</sub>. The testimonial-based belief that *p* formed by *H* at *T*<sub>2</sub> must be suitably related to *S*'s perceptual based belief that *p* at *T*<sub>1</sub> for that belief to possibly count as a justified, testimonial-based belief. In both cases, we are interested in the belief formed at *T*<sub>2</sub> (which will be referred to as the 'T<sub>2</sub> belief') and the relationship between this and the earlier belief at *T*<sub>1</sub> (which will be referred to as the 'T<sub>1</sub> belief').

Using this terminology, one initial way of capturing the difference between the inferentialist (IM) and TM approaches is as follows. According to the former, the T1 and T2 beliefs are *separate beliefs* and the justification of the T2 belief is independent of the justification for the T1 belief. According to the latter, the T1 and T2 beliefs are the *same belief*, and thus the justification of T2 is dependent upon the justification of T1.

What would it mean to say, on the TM, that the T1 and T2 beliefs are the same belief? At minimum, we would want to say that it involves the adoption of the same attitude to the same content.<sup>4</sup> However, this fails to distinguish the two accounts from each other, since even a proponent of IM would want to say that, in successful cases of memory and testimony, the T2 belief involves taking the same attitude to the same content as the T1 belief. Instead, it seems plausible that the difference between IM and TM turns on the issue of justification. On the IM, every time one adopts that attitude to that content, one needs to ‘possess’ a current justification for so doing. It is in this sense that the T1 and T2 are different beliefs; if one ‘possessed’ such a justification (for a T1 belief) and then ceased to ‘possess’ it, one needs to ‘possess’ a new justification for the T2 belief. On the TM, it suffices that the belief was once justified (by someone). Provided that nothing has intervened to remove the justification (a defeater), one is still seen as justified for that belief even though the individual in question no longer ‘possesses’ (in the sense of reflectively aware of) that justification.

In the case of memory, according to the TM, memory does not *generate* new beliefs but *preserves* beliefs from one time to the next. It is therefore sufficient that the T1 belief was initially a justified belief when acquired and that there have been no reasons to suggest that the subsequent storage of the belief has not preserved this belief. In the case of testimony, *transmission* rather than storage seems a more appropriate term, but the core idea is the same. The process of testimony is not a generative process (a process generating new beliefs) even though that belief may be

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<sup>4</sup> Or at least similar content once suitable modifications have been made for differences in time, spatial orientation and person, as above

new for that individual, but a process by which beliefs are transmitted between individuals.

It is worth pausing at this early stage to note that the TM seems to have two immediate advantages over the IM as an account of the epistemology of testimony. Firstly, in maintaining - at an epistemic level - the distinction between perception and memory/testimony, it has a certain intuitive appeal. Indeed, reflection on this point has led some philosophers to deny that memory should even be considered a source of knowledge at all.<sup>5</sup> The difference between a source generating new beliefs and one that serves merely to transmit them seems to have epistemic significance which is blurred by a proponent of the IM.

Secondly, and more importantly, the TM seems to offer the possibility of an account of the epistemology of testimony that conforms to the t-principle and thereby affirms the possibility of a non-unitary account of learning from others. As I have argued earlier, a non-unitary account of learning from others is one that maintains the epistemic uniqueness of the sub-class of learning from testimony within the broader class of learning from others. The uniqueness is captured in the t-principle that had as its first condition (C1) the claim that in order for H to know that p through S's testimony, S must know that p. Based on the TM, but not the IM, one can see why this is true in the cases that it is true. According to the TM, the justification for the T2 belief is drawn straight from the justification of the T1 belief; thus if S did not know that p at T1 then H does not know that p at T2. On the IM, the T1 belief plays no role in justifying the T2 belief, and thus cannot explain why the t-principle holds for the narrower category of learning from testimony. As such, the TM - but not the IM - can account for the t-principle and thereby maintain a non-unitary account of learning from others. Since I have argued that these two are desirable features of any account of the epistemology of testimony, it seems to point in favour of the TM over the IM.

Thus far we have sketched a generalised version of the TM. The term 'sketch' is appropriate for our efforts thus far, since the account developed is far from complete. Lying at the heart of this generalised sketch of the TM are a number of interrelated

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the comments of Bernecker and Dretske (2000: 434)

and highly suggestive metaphors, involving the notion of storage, transmission and preservation of content. A central challenge faced by an proponent of TM of the epistemology of testimony involves an attempt to go beyond the mere wholesale adoption of such metaphoric talk.

There is little doubt that talk of storage, preservation and transmission of content through testimony and memory is reflected in the metaphors we use in everyday discourse to talk about such processes. For example, Michael Reddy has amply demonstrated that our language about language is structured around what he terms 'the conduit metaphor', which sees ideas as objects, contained in linguistic expressions, that are sent through communication.<sup>6</sup> So, for example, one tries 'to get ideas across'; one 'puts ideas into words'; a paragraph is 'stuffed with ideas or content'.

In addition, psychological discourse surrounding the underlying mechanisms involved in the processes of testimony and memory are replete with use of similar metaphors. For example, a standard definition of memory given in psychology texts is such that memory involves three stages: encoding, storage and retrieval.<sup>7</sup> Although structural models of memory have been attacked in recent years, certain features of these accounts still pervade psychological discourse regarding memory. Memory is encoded in some form of physical medium ('a memory trace') that is moved from store to store, unless recalled.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, although so-called 'code models of communication' have come under much recent attack, certain features of these models still pervade psychological discourse regarding communication. On one dominant conception, a signal is a modification of the external environment of an information processor that can be produced by one such processor and recognised by another, whilst a message is a representation internal to an information processor. A code is a system that pairs messages with signals allowing for communication between two processors such that a message is transmitted from one to the other.<sup>9</sup> In both, the code or trace is conceived

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<sup>6</sup> Reddy (1979). The examples are based on Lackoff and Johnson (1980: 10-12).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Baddeley, (1990: 11)

<sup>8</sup> Even models of forgetting tend focus on what happens to this entity: it may decay or be displaced or be irretrievable. A useful overview and critique of such models is Watkins (1990), a doctrine he terms 'mediationism'. Most prominent amongst recent moves away from mediationism is Neisser, (1978).

<sup>9</sup> The dominant conception I have drawn on is Shannon and Weaver (1949). See Sperber and Wilson (1985) for an influential critique and alternative.

as a physical entity transmitted over time and place. In both, testimony and memory are conceived as acting as a conduit for such transmission.

Proponents of TM seem to extend use of this conduit metaphor further to incorporate epistemic discourse involving memory and testimony. Consider the following parody, due to Lackey, of a certain account of testimony that could be seen as conforming to the generalised TM above. Lackey compares it to a chain of people passing buckets of water to put out a fire:

“Each person must have a bucket of water in order to pass it to the next person, and moreover there must be ultimately one person who is acquiring the water from the other source.”<sup>10</sup>

The water is generated via one process and transmitted via the others. It is the same water that is passed from the bucket of one to the bucket of the other. At one level, this image does seem to capture the core of the TM. The T2 belief does not just result from some T1 belief, it is the same belief transmitted from the source. Although Lackey intends this as a parody, and argues against the viability of such an account of the epistemology of testimony, her comments serve to show the underlying influence of the conduit metaphor in such accounts.

Bringing such a metaphor into focus is, of course, not to challenge the TM. Indeed, it may be argued that the very fact that the TM coheres with such a prominent metaphor adds plausibility to such an account. However, bringing the conduit metaphor to the fore does raise a certain worry for the TM that can be seen by returning to Lackey’s parody. Whilst water may be a physical entity that can be preserved over time and transmitted through space from bucket to bucket, the same cannot be said of a justified belief, whatever one wants to say regarding the metaphysics of belief states. Although we may say elliptically that a belief is justified, it makes more sense to say that a belief is justified for a given individual at a given time. A justification is thus not just some label attached to a belief that can be transmitted with the belief so that, providing nothing has been done to remove the justification in the transition, it is still there attached to the belief at a later stage. Accordingly, whilst it makes sense to say that water can be transmitted from receptacle to receptacle, it is more difficult to

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<sup>10</sup> Lackey (1999: 471)

apply this to justified beliefs. In short, the worry is that in adopting the conduit metaphor in an epistemic context, the TM simply works by reifying justified beliefs.

I do not mean this as a refutation of the TM, but as a challenge incumbent upon proponents of the TM to cash in such a conduit metaphor in a suitable manner. Of course, one could respond to such a challenge quite simply by denying that that justification itself is just not relevant for knowledge. However, whilst such a response may save the TM from the conduit challenge, it does so by moving outside an epistemic internalism that frames this study, according to which the individual's awareness of a potential justification plays a central role in an analysis of knowledge.. This is the very tension alluded to above, according to which it seems difficult to formulate a TM within an internalist perspective.

In the context of this essay, my interest here is to see whether it is possible to formulate a response to the challenge of the conduit metaphor without embracing epistemic externalism. In pursuing such a challenge, I will consider a series of problems that would face such an internalist version of the TM; through responding to such problems a clearer sense of both the transmission model and epistemic internalism will emerge. The first set of problems for the TM are found in the writings of Christopher Peacocke, to which we now turn.

#### **4.3 *Peacocke's Problems.***

In his cursory discussion of both testimony and memory towards the end of Thought: An Essay on Content, Peacocke highlights two cases that he claims to favour the IM over the TM; the first concerns memory and the second concerns testimony.<sup>11</sup> I find neither compelling.

Case 1:<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Whilst Peacocke offers these examples to distinguish between two accounts of memory/testimony, the two accounts he considers differ significantly from the TM and the IM. Nevertheless, the arguments work against the latter, as well as the former, contrast, and I thus ignore the differences in the text. In an Appendix II (to this chapter - see end), I spell out the differences between Peacocke's contrast and my own.

<sup>12</sup> Peacocke (1986: 165)



Someone is asked to name the year in which Hume died and responds by saying that he died in 1776. This person has had no contact with philosophy for a number of years since his undergraduate studies and this had been the only occasion in which he learnt that belief. Furthermore, other beliefs that he had from those bygone days are unreliable in that they do not match the content of the beliefs absorbed then. Indeed, when questioned, he responds with the false belief that Voltaire died in 1779. It nevertheless strikes the individual as being true that Hume died in 1776 and he responds thus when questioned.

#### Case 2:<sup>13</sup>

An archaeologist finds an isolated sentence making a certain claim (that p) inscribed in a language one understands on a slab of stone dated as being 1000 years old. The archaeologist knows nothing else about the history of that site. Let us assume that the claim is true and that the ancient inscribers indeed knew that p when they chiselled out that stone. As a result of this find, the archaeologist claims to know that p.

In both cases, Peacocke's argumentative strategy is to claim that intuition tells us that the individual in question does not know that which s/he claims to know, and that this can only be explained by the IM and not the TM. So, regarding Case 1, Peacocke argues that when the subject in question:

“...is asked, it strikes this subject as true that Hume died in 1776. But does he know it? There is an intuition that he does not and this is what the [IM] predicts. But it is hard for the [TM] to explain why it is not knowledge; the storage of the information may be as reliable as human memory ever is.”<sup>14</sup>

This is a case in which a person had a justified belief at T1 and takes the same attitude to the same content at T2. The question at stake regards whether the subject can be said to know at T2 that Hume died in 1776. Peacocke's point is that this person does not have within his reach a sound abductive argument to the truth of the T2 belief, and thus - on the IM - the T2 belief is not justified: the individual does not know that Hume died in 1776. However, s/he did know this at T1 and there is no reason to assume that anything has changed regarding his knowledge of this particular belief at T2. Thus, on the TM, the T2 belief is justified and one should claim that the

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<sup>13</sup> Peacocke (1986: 164)

<sup>14</sup> Peacocke (1986: 165)

individual does know that Hume died in 1776. Since Peacocke's intuitions suggest that this individual does not know that Hume died in 1776, the IM is preferred to the TM. A similar point is made regarding case 2.

With regards case 1, I find that my own intuitions regarding whether this individual knows that Hume died in 1776 vary depending on how certain further details of the case are told. Further, it seems that by clarifying one aspect of the TM alluded to, but glossed over, in our account above, one is able to explain why such intuitions vary.

The clarification involves bringing the TM into line with the doxastic manifesto made in chapter 1. According to this, *a responsible individual should not persist with a belief in the light of any defeaters of which an individual is, or should be, aware*. Incorporating this assumption within the TM model will allow the TM to account for my own intuitions regarding these cases.

In the sketch of the TM, it was suggested that for a testimonial/memorial-based belief to be justified, it is not enough for that T1 belief to have been justified but that nothing untoward happened in the process of preservation or transmission. This was not meant to be merely some point about the psychological mechanisms of underpinning memory/testimony, but a point about rationality. If the proponent of the TM is to work within the broad internalist framework, the individual in question is an epistemically responsible one, and thus should not persist with the T2 belief if there are potential defeaters of that belief of which s/he is, or should be, aware. According to this, these potential defeaters play a role in the background: they do not serve to justify the belief but they serve to remove the justification if the subject is, or should be, aware of such defeaters. Accordingly, on the TM, the T2 belief is warranted if the T1 belief is warranted, provided that there are no defeaters of which H is, or should be, aware of which would remove the warrant.

[One could imagine a hard-headed proponent of the TM objecting that this clarification makes the account no longer a 'pure' transmission account. This purist notes that on this version the content is not simply transmitted from one to the other, but now depends on the actions of H; whilst - claims the purist - that the whole point of the TM was to say that content was simply transmitted (stored) without any

epistemic dependence on H's actions. However, I do not see how such a purist stance can be made to cohere with the guiding notion of the epistemically responsible individual. As such, even if we were to concede that this additional requirement (namely sensitivity to defeaters) to the TM may make it slightly less 'pure', it still maintains a significant difference between this TM and IM. On the TM, the condition such that there must be no defeaters of which the individual should be aware functions solely in the background and only serves to remove a justification. For the IM, other beliefs are used by H to justify the T2 belief. I will return to the issue of the purity of this storage account below].

Adding this responsibility requirement to the TM serves to undermine Peacocke's claims against the account. On this (albeit less pure) version of the TM, pragmatic factors are involved in determining the level of responsibility required in this particular case, and thus explain why intuitions vary depending on further aspects of Case 1 that remain unspecified. What are the ramifications of believing that Hume dies in 1776? What are the potential defeaters available? Indeed, it seems highly plausible that, depending on how the case is spelt out, the proponent of the TM, like the proponent of the IM, would deny that the individual knows that Hume died in 1776. For example, if it were the case that the individual was aware, from previous experience, of the unreliability of his memory, it does indeed seem intuitive to say that he does not know the year of Hume's death. However, since this belief acts as an undermining defeater, both the IM and TM proponents (on our version) would agree.

Peacocke's argument makes three assumptions regarding both of these cases: the *first* involves what a proponent of the TM would say in such cases (namely, that the T2 belief is justified), the *second* involves what a proponent of the IM would say in such cases (namely, that the T2 belief is not justified), and the *third* involves his intuitions regarding these cases (namely, that the T2 belief is not justified). For Case 1, I have argued, in contrast to the *third*, that intuitions vary depending on how various details of the case are spelt out, and, in contrast to the *second*, that, on some versions of the case, even a proponent of the TM would concur that the T2 belief is not justified. However, for case 1, I concur with Peacocke that the individual has no abductive argument available to him/her, and thus agree with Peacocke's *first* assumption, such

that the proponent of the IM would claim that the belief is not justified. Regarding case 2 however, it seems that even this level of concurrence dissipates.

In case 2, although Peacocke stipulates that we know nothing of the history of the site, that does not mean to say that we know nothing regarding this particular piece of testimony apart from that which is written on the piece of stone. As above, testimony takes place within a particular context involving, at minimum, a *Speaker*, a *Hearer* and an *Occasion* and *Domain* of utterance. In addition to any beliefs specifically arising from the testimony itself, H may have certain prior beliefs regarding such contextual factors. Even if we follow Peacocke in saying that he knows nothing else about the source, there is other information available to him even in this most minimal case that could be of use. For example, he may have prior knowledge regarding the general status of such inscriptions or prior experiences with testimony, or testimony of this type, or his own past success as a recipient of testimony and so on. Any of this knowledge could be used in a possible abduction to the truth of the written statement. My point is not that that such an abduction is available, but, firstly, the resources available for the abduction are not as sparse as Peacocke claims (even in this minimal case), and, secondly, it seems possible that in this case an abductive argument could be available. As such, my intuitions regarding this case vary depending on how further details are spelt out, and both proponents of TM and IM could account for these varying intuitions.

In the light of this it seems that neither case 1 nor case 2 support the IM over the TM. As such, Peacocke's dismissal of the TM as an account of the epistemology of testimony is insufficiently motivated. Of course, this is not yet to provide an account of the TM. The account thus far explains how H can take some responsibility for the belief that p by ensuring that there are no defeaters available of which he ought to be aware, but it still fails to cash in the transmission metaphor: i.e. to explain how S's justification for believing that p can be transmitted to H. To my knowledge, the fullest formulation of a TM that attempts to go beyond such metaphoric talk is due to Tyler Burge; the following section an attempt will be made to describe and evaluate his proposal. It should be noted that although Burge could be fairly seen as a proponent of the TM, this is not his primary concern, and he makes no explicit use of such terminology. Furthermore, although he displays sensitivity to the need to cash in the

conduit metaphor for reasons outlined above, he makes no reference to the metaphor and these worries. As such, I propose to briefly outline Burge's account in his own terms first, and then use this to address our own concerns.

#### 4.4 *Burge and Content Preservation.*

In a number of recent papers, Burge has argued that the function of memory processes underlying deductive reasoning and the psychological processes underlying verbal communication is to preserve the propositional content of beliefs between people and over time.<sup>15</sup> It is possible to separate his account into two distinct but interdependent strands: a discussion regarding beliefs acquired through these processes (centring around the so-called 'Acceptance Principle') and an additional discussion regarding knowledge claims in this regard (centring around the notion of an 'extended body of justification').<sup>16</sup> Both are relevant to a discussion of the epistemology of testimony, although it is the latter that is most relevant to the TM. I will consider each in turn.

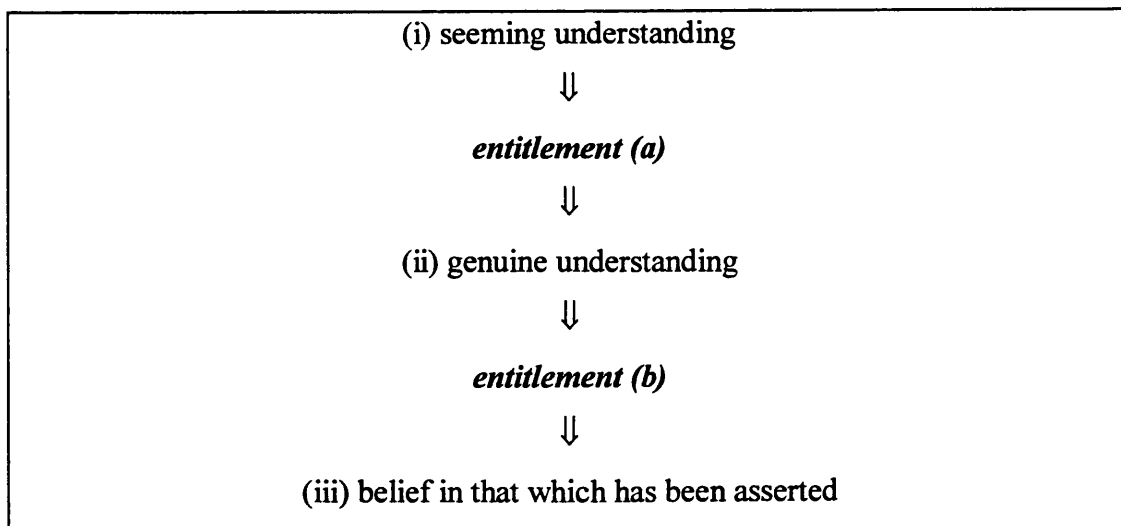
##### 4.4.1 *The Acceptance Principle*

According to Burge, we have (a) *a general, a priori, prima facie entitlement to rely upon seeming understanding as genuine understanding, and (b) we have a general, a priori, prima facie entitlement to believe putative assertions that we seem to understand.* Let us call these two together *the Acceptance Principle*.<sup>17</sup> In other words, when faced with an assertion regarding some matter that one seems to understand; one is *a priori* entitled to move from (i) seeming understanding to (ii) genuine understanding to (iii) belief in that which has been asserted, assuming normal conditions. The first part of the acceptance principle (a) outlines our epistemic entitlement to 'move' from (i) to (ii), whilst the second part of the acceptance principle (b) outlines our epistemic entitlement to 'move' from (ii) to (iii).

<sup>15</sup> Burge (1993; 1997; 1999)

<sup>16</sup> The distinctness of these two parts of Burge's notion of content preservation is implied in Kornblith and Christensen (1998: 20 - fn. 11).

<sup>17</sup> This way of expressing the principle is due to Burge (1998: 21). The principle is first introduced in Burge (1993: 467).



When stated baldly like this, two opposing, knee-jerk, reactions to such an Acceptance Principle seem to present themselves: either to dismiss it as uninteresting or to reject it as untrue. On the former reaction, it seems little more than a version of a priori arguments for the general reliability of testimony – claims I have discussed and rejected earlier as part of the IM. On the latter reaction, it seems little more than an ungrounded charter for gullibility.<sup>18</sup> The principle uses three central terms (*a priori*, *prima facie* and *entitlement*) in a highly idiosyncratic manner, and both these knee-jerk responses stem from a failure to appreciate this usage.

Considering each of these in turn, Burge uses what could be termed ‘a relatively moderate conception of *a priority*’, that includes the following three features.<sup>19</sup> Firstly, the *a priori-a posteriori* distinction is an epistemological distinction that pertains to the way a claim or proposition is epistemically justified.<sup>20</sup> The main interest is thus *in a priori* justification; *a priori* knowledge is conceived as related to such *a priori* justification. Secondly, such an *a priori* justification is characterised in a negative manner, such that a proposition is justified *a priori* if it is justified *independent* of any appeal to sense experience.<sup>21</sup> The moderate conception of *a priority* involves a weak reading of the term *independence* here: it may well be

<sup>18</sup> Phrase due to Fricker (1994) in her characterisation of the non-reductive position.

<sup>19</sup> See Bonjour, (1998: Chap. 4), who defends a similar position to Burge.

<sup>20</sup> Following Kripke, we thus see the necessary-contingent distinction as a metaphysical issue about the status of propositions in relation to the way the world might have been. The relationship between the epistemological and metaphysical issues is beyond us here. (See Kripke 1980: 34-9; 122-3).

established that experience is necessarily involved in concept acquisition and thus sense experience may be a necessary precondition of such *a priori* justification. On this weak reading, to say that a proposition is independent of experience is to say that is justified independent to any positive appeal to experience, whether or not that proposition can be understood independent of experience whatsoever. Thirdly, such a priori justified propositions can be overthrown by experience.

“A belief being a priori justified, for a person at a time, does not entail that it is true....a priori justification may be unevident, fallible, non-demonstrative and not ‘certain’. Beliefs thought to be a priori, and even actually justified a priori, are subject to revision.”<sup>22</sup>

A priori justification is thus a justification that makes no positive appeal to experience and is fallible; an a priori belief in one that has such an a priori justification.

Given this fallibilist conception of the a priori, one can have principles such as the acceptance principle that are both *a priori* and *prima facie*. The point is not that testimony furnishes one with prima facie evidence, but that one has a prima facie entitlement to the acceptance principle. Although Burge does not put it this way, the point can be made in terms of defeaters introduced earlier. In the situation in which H acquires the belief that P as a result of S’s testimony, a defeater in this sense would be some proposition believed by H to be true that indicates either that the belief that p is false (i.e. that it defeats the proposition itself) or that raises doubts regarding the appropriateness of the acceptance principle in this matter (i.e. defeats the entitlement). This would mean that any other belief regarding the four aspects of any given testimonial scenario (knowledge regarding Speaker, Hearer, Utterance, Domain) could act to defeat the Acceptance Principle. The principle is thus a rational starting point, but can be overthrown by contrary experience.

Finally, it is significant that the acceptance principle makes no mention of justification but *entitlement*. Both of these (entitlement and justification) are sources of warrant for beliefs. However, a belief can be warranted through an entitlement even though the individual is unable to articulate the entitlement. As Burge puts it:

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<sup>21</sup> It is actually not an easy manner to define the term ‘experience’ in this context. See Bonjour (1998: 7-8).

<sup>22</sup> Burge (1993: 461).

“Entitlement is an epistemic warrant that need not be fully available to the warranted individual. The individual need not even have the concepts to explain the warrant. Entitlement contrasts with justification...the kind of warrant that involves evidence or reasons accessible to the individual on reflection.”<sup>23</sup>

The Acceptance Principle is an articulation of just such an entitlement. As an entitlement, the individual in question may not and need not be able to articulate – let alone justify – this entitlement.<sup>24</sup>

Burge himself offers a reflective philosophical account of such an entitlement “that comes along with being a rational agent” in terms of the relationship between content, propositional attitude and rationality.<sup>25</sup> By way of summary, Burge tells us that:

“intelligible affirmations 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.”<sup>26</sup>

There are three claims made here. Firstly, since rationality involves grasp of reasons and reasons are constitutively tied to the truth, we can therefore take other beings that we recognise as rational as guides to the truth. Secondly, this is extended to seemingly intelligible messages: given constitutive relationship between content and rationality,

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<sup>23</sup> Burge (1999: 233)

<sup>24</sup> It is worth stressing that employment of the notion of an entitlement should not be taken to imply that Burge’s account is externalist in an epistemic sense, like the ‘rough and ready’ reliabilist who simply dispenses with the notion of justification altogether. Burge is broadly concerned with doxastic issues and sometimes uses the term justification and/warrant as a general term to cover both justification (in the narrow sense) and entitlement. (For example, see Burge, 1993:459). He tells us that both entitlement and justification “have positive force in rationally supporting a propositional attitude.” and admits that the border between the two is fuzzy. (Burge 1993: 458) The introduction of the notion ‘entitlement’ stems more from a concern with the directness of belief acquisition than externalist concerns. With regards the notion of entitlement in the context of the Acceptance Principle, Burge notes that:

“[w]hen communication runs smoothly, the question of justifying one’s understanding does not seem to arise. It is no more place to ask someone who is a perfectly competent language user to support his or her presumed understanding of someone who says “push button telephones are more common than rotary one” than it is to ask a normal perceiver how he or she justifies the perceptual belief that that is a brown lectern, when he or she is looking at one in good light. These questions are philosophers’ questions. Addressing them well requires giving weight to the fact that they do not arise in that form in everyday life.” (Burge (1999: 241)

In normal communication, there is a directness to the process of belief acquisition, parallel to that of perception; questions of justificatory arguments and so forth do not arise in everyday life. Matters here are, however, difficult. In contrast to my comments, Burge himself sees ‘entitlement’ as: “the externalist analog of the internalist notion of ‘justification’, such an entitlement does not depend on awareness and is perceptible from a God’s-eye-view. (Burge 1998: 28). Part of the issue regards an understanding of the label ‘internalism’ to be discussed and it is clear that his position differs from the rough and ready reliabilist of Chapter 1. As such, I will continue with an ‘internalist’ reading of Burge developed further in the following discussion.

<sup>25</sup> Burge (1993: 467)

<sup>26</sup> Burge (1993: 473)



we can take an intelligible message as a guide to the truth. Thirdly, one is *prima facie* entitled to presume that “the source of a message is a rational source”.<sup>27</sup> Such an appeal to conceptual relations holding between intelligibility, rationality and truth explains why the Acceptance Principle is *a priori*: it involves no positive appeal to experience, although experience may have been involved in developing an appreciation of the conceptual relations themselves. As an entitlement, the individual need have no appreciation of such a reflective, philosophical account of these conceptual relations.<sup>28</sup>

Earlier, we noted two knee-jerk responses to such an Acceptance Principle: dismissal as uninteresting due to similarity with the *a priori*, inferentialist discussed and rejected elsewhere or rejection as a charter for gullibility. Whilst such an appeal to conceptual relations brings the Acceptance Principle close to the *a priori* inferential approach, there is a basic difference. For Burge, this principle does not play a role within in a justificatory argument bridging an epistemic gap between the premise that S asserted that p and the conclusion that p. Rather, one is *prima facie* entitled to assume *that there is no gap that needs to be bridged at all, unless there is evidence to the contrary*. It is not that the assertion of someone else provides *prima-facie* evidence for the proposition asserted; *the whole notion of evidence is just inappropriate on this account*. H does not treat S’s assertion as evidence for the facts asserted: the Acceptance Principle claims that H is entitled to accept this as true.

Whilst these comments may serve to distance the Acceptance Principle from the first knee-jerk response, they seem to draw it closer to the second: the Acceptance Principle now seems little more than an epistemic charter for gullibility. One way of seeing this is to note that on occasions it may be rational to lie, so appealing to conceptual relations between intelligibility rationality and truth does not seem to matter. To respond by saying that instances of truth-telling are in the majority if the practice of reporting is to continue is of no use on this account, since the reliability of testimony is not meant to function as a premise in a justificatory argument. Such an attempted defence involves a return to the first knee-jerk response. In order to rule out

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<sup>27</sup> Burge (1993: 471)

this second knee-jerk response, it is essential to turn to the second part of Burge's account - the extended notion of justification.

#### ***4.4.2 the extended notion of justification.***

One way of appreciating the need for the extended notion of justification is to consider the following deficiency if one were to use the Acceptance Principle alone as an account of the epistemology of testimony. The Acceptance Principle warrants H's acceptance as of S's assertion ('presentation as true'), provided there are no defeaters available to the subject to override this a priori entitlement. In addition to such an entitlement, H may have a number of reasons to believe S's utterance on this occasion - prior beliefs about Speaker, Hearer, Domain and Content to use the terminology developed above. The entitlement captured in the Acceptance Principle, together with these additional reasons, forms what Burge terms the 'hearer's own proprietary justification'.<sup>29</sup> However, even if one were to take into account all aspects of the hearer's own proprietary justification, these alone do not ensure that the belief that H acquires is knowledge. On the account thus far, it is possible for H to acquire a true belief, and be entitled to do so through the Acceptance Principle, and yet that belief not be knowledge due to the fact that S does not know that p.

For example:

Case 3:<sup>30</sup>

Henry is watching television on a June afternoon, where he sees McEnroe beat Connors in the Wimbledon men's final. He tells June, who is next door, that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion and she believes him. However, unbeknownst to Henry, the cameras at Wimbledon have stopped working and this is a recording of the preceding year's final. However, it also just so happens that McEnroe is this year's champion.

In such a case, June has acquired a true belief through Henry's testimony, and she is entitled (based on the Acceptance Principle) to believe that that McEnroe is the

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<sup>28</sup> This linking of interpretability ('intelligible affirmation') to assumptions about rationality is, in many ways, similar to the discussion of interpretability in the writings of Davidson discussed in the previous chapter. This is acknowledged by Burge in a footnote. Burge (1993: 472 - fn. 12).

<sup>29</sup> Burge (1993: 485).

<sup>30</sup> Adapted from Dancy (1985:25)

champion. Yet, since it seems highly plausible that Henry does not know that McEnroe is the champion, one would want to likewise deny that June knows that McEnroe is the champion. In such a case, H has a justified true belief but fails to know because S fails to know.<sup>31</sup>

Conceding that such proprietary justification is insufficient to underwrite the knowledge, Burge adds that:

“...the recipient depends on the source’s proprietary justifications and entitlements (through a chain of possible sources)....The recipient’s own justification is incomplete and implicitly refers back, anaphorically, to fuller justification or entitlement. ...the recipient depends on the source’s proprietary justifications and entitlements (through a chain of possible sources)....Call the combination of recipient’s own proprietary justification with the proprietary justification in his sources on which the recipient’s knowledge depends...*the extended body of justification* that underwrites the recipient’s knowledge.”<sup>32</sup>

It is thus S’s knowledge that serves to supplement H’s proprietary justification to ensure knowledge.

“If the recipient depends on interlocution for knowledge, the recipient’s knowledge depends on the source having knowledge as well. For if the source does not believe the proposition, or if the proposition is not true, or if the source is not justified, then the recipient cannot know the proposition.”

Thus, through testimony, S’s proprietary justifications are transmitted to H, such that H’s extended body of justification for the belief includes S’s reasons, even though H cannot articulate those reasons himself. Through testimony, content is preserved through time and between people.

A radical ramification of this notion of content preservation is the claim that if S’s belief that p was itself justified a priori, then H’s belief is also justified a priori. Of course, that is not to deny that perception plays a role in the genesis of a testimonial belief. The individual hears or sees that which is asserted and that which is seemingly understood. However, Burge draws on a distinction between the processes involved in

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<sup>31</sup> This is, of course, little more than a standard Gettier counterexample, applied to the case of testimony. As Burge tells us, his introduction of the notion of an extended justification is: “itself an instance of the Gettier point” (1993: 486 - fn. 24)

the genesis of a belief and the justification of that belief: whilst perception plays a central role in the genesis, it plays no role in the justification and thus if the belief is one known to S a priori, then H can be said to know that p a priori too.<sup>33</sup> Burge appeals to two analogies in this regard. The first is the role memory plays in preserving thoughts over time in a deductive proof; the second regards the role of perception of symbols in triggering belief in a mathematical truth. In both, Burge argues that, even though such processes (perception and memory) are involved in generating the belief and even though the unreliability of such processes would ensure the beliefs would not be justified, nevertheless they play no contributory role in the justification of the belief or proof. So too with testimony: perception may be involved in the genesis of the testimonial-based belief, it plays no role in the justification of the belief.

Earlier, we summarised the challenge facing the TM in cashing in the conduit metaphor by saying that *the proponent of such an account needs to carve out an account of the epistemology of testimony such that H has some reason for possessing S's justification, which is not in the form of evidence available to H that could form the basis of an inference to the truth of p*. On Burge's account, H's reason takes the form of an entitlement to believe that which has been asserted, combined with an extended justification, including S's own reasons. This reason does not take the form of an inference to the truth of p, for H's own proprietary justification is insufficient for H to know that p. On a metaphoric level, one may indeed say that testimony is a process in which justified beliefs are transmitted. Cashing in the metaphor, we can say that, on the TM, H is entitled to accept the belief even though he is unaware of the justification; he is responsibly entitled to defer to S's own reasons that justify H's belief. Through the processes of memory and testimony, justified beliefs are preserved through time and transmitted between people. It therefore seems that in Burge's account of content preservation, we have a detailed working out of the challenges faced by any proponent of the TM.

#### 4.5 *the argument from responsibility*

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<sup>32</sup> 1993:486

<sup>33</sup> Discussion of other aspects of Burge's rich account especially regarding both matters of force and regarding indexical expressions, have been omitted here as they are not of direct concern to the PSA.

My attempts thus far have been, by and large, aiming at providing a version of the transmission model of testimony that coheres with the guiding concerns of epistemic internalism. In contrast to Peacocke, I have defended a version of a generalised TM that allows for a central role for the epistemically responsible individual and, my outline of Burge has provided a detailed account that falls within such a TM. Nevertheless, I will argue that there remains an irresolvable tension between internalism and the TM.

If we are to take the extended notion of justification seriously, it seems possible for an individual's beliefs to be justified by someone else's reasons. Let us call any reason that is able to justify someone else's belief (even though they are unaware of the reason itself) a *transindividual reason*.<sup>34</sup> The TM implies the coherence of the notion of transindividual reasons. In contrast, it seems to me that there are sound reasons for denying the coherence of the notion of transindividual reasons. In what follows, I will consider two different lines of thought that can be employed against the notion of transindividual reasons. In this section I will consider issues stemming from the notion of responsibility, in the next section I will consider issues stemming from the notion of perspectivity. I will argue that it is the latter that ensures the incoherence of the notion of transindividual reasons.

The first line of thought suggests that the attribution of beliefs involves taking responsibility for beliefs, and this cannot accommodate the notion of transindividual reasons. Since a transindividual reason is one that can justify my belief even though I remain unaware of it, it is something I am unable to appeal to if challenged. As such, I am unable to discharge my justificatory responsibilities regarding that particular belief. If one wants to maintain the connection between justification and responsibility, runs this line of thought, one must embrace internalism. Since the notion of a transindividual reason goes against such an internalism, one must reject the notion of a transindividual reason.

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<sup>34</sup> The term is found in Schmitt (1999: 369), albeit within an externalist framework.

However, a proponent of the TM will argue that this misreads its claims, and that one can have transindividual reasons without breaking the relationship between justification and responsibility. To see this, it is important to stress that the introduction of the extended notion of justification does not dispense with the acceptance principle; rather, for Burge, one needs both. Why? In the exposition above, the extended notion of justification was introduced in order to overcome a deficiency in the Acceptance Principle as an account of the epistemology of testimony, according to which H may have warrant to believe a true proposition and not yet have knowledge since S does not know that p. The extended notion of justification overcomes this deficiency: if we allow H to include S's reasons for believing that p then H knows that p only if S knows that p. However, the extended notion of justification without the Acceptance Principle too is insufficient. A conception of the epistemology of testimony involving the extended notion of justification without the acceptance principle is one that dispenses entirely with the concept of the epistemically responsible individual. H is aware of no reasons for his belief, cannot justify the belief and thus is not responsible for the belief. S is aware of reasons for her belief, can justify the belief and is thus responsible for the belief. To simply say that S's reasons are H's reasons does not help H justify his belief; he becomes no more responsible as an individual knower.

The introduction of the acceptance principle, together with the extended notion of justification, is designed to help reintroduce responsibility. According to the principle, H is entitled to defer responsibility for justification towards S. In such an instance, H may not be aware of the justificatory argument but he knows where to look. In making an assertion on this account, S not only makes a claim but undertakes justificatory responsibility for that claim. In understanding an assertion, one is entitled to hold S responsible to undertake such justificatory responsibility.<sup>35</sup> Whilst H is not in a position to undertake such an epistemic task himself, he 'knows someone who can'. The Acceptance Principle does not provide H with a reason to trust S's testimony, but entitles him *prima facie* to defer justificatory responsibility to S. So, through the acceptance principle, the notion of the epistemically responsible

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<sup>35</sup> See Brandom (1994: chapter 4) for development of this idea.

individual is reintroduced, even though H is unaware of the reasons justifying his belief.

According to the TM, there is an epistemic division of labour between S and H. Through the acceptance principle, H is seen as responsible for his actions. Although H is unable to justify those beliefs himself, he is able to defer justification to S and entitled to do so. S, in turn, take responsibility for justifying those beliefs. According to the acceptance principle, H is entitled to defer responsibility: he would be irresponsible if there was no one to defer responsibility to or if H was aware that S cannot take such responsibility for the belief (if H was aware of undercutting or rebutting defeaters). Accordingly, H can act in a fully responsible manner and yet the not end with a rational belief since the person to whom he is deferring responsibility herself is irresponsible. As long as everyone involved in the testimonial chain acts responsibly, then knowledge will be transmitted through testimony.

The first line of thought against the coherence of the notion of transindividual reasons suggested that the attribution of beliefs involves taking responsibility for beliefs, and this cannot accommodate the notion of transindividual reasons. In response, the proponent of the TM questions the need for our insistence on the epistemically responsible *individual*. Whilst H as an individual may not be able to assume full justificatory responsibility, one can envisage a division of epistemic responsibility such that S and H together are jointly responsible for justifying that belief. As such, it seems possible to defend the coherence of the notion of transindividual reasons from this first line of thought. The second line of thought to which we now turn argues against the TM by providing a different reason for our insistence on the centrality of the epistemically responsible *individual*.

#### 4.6 *The argument from perspectivity*

This second line of thought begins with the claim that the notion of a perspective plays a central role in belief attribution and justification (indeed any rational explanation), and this notion of perspectivity precludes the idea of transindividual reasons. A full articulation of the argument would require a defence of the claim that *any* account of justification *requires* recognition of the perspectival nature of

intentional explanation. Even if I were clear as to how such a defence should be constructed, such a defence would take us too far beyond our immediate concerns here.<sup>36</sup> The essential role played by the notion of perspectivity in these matters has been a theme in a number of recent accounts of rational explanation, and will be developed in Part B of this essay. At this juncture, I will instead simply draw on such accounts in what follows, whilst developing such reflections into the epistemic sphere.<sup>37</sup> As such, in the ensuing discussion here I aim to show the relevance of the notion of perspectivity to justification, and argue that this rules out the possibility of transindividual reasons.

It is sometimes suggested that a justification of a belief should be seen as an abstract argument running from premises to conclusion with the conclusion being the proposition believed. The attribution of such an argument to an individual involve reference to various intentional states that stand in rationalising relations to each other in terms of their content. It is commonplace to note that attributing such mental states to oneself and others involves attributing a network of other beliefs and other attitudes so that they cohere together to form some rational whole, ruling out, for example, the attribution of contradictory beliefs and so on. There are thus certain norms surrounding the attribution of such beliefs - sometimes referred to as 'rationality constraints' - that govern our attribution of mental states.

For some, this notion of constraints of rationality suggest that a particular attribution of beliefs conforms to some objective standard or norm. This, for examples, lies behind calculative accounts of rationality, whereby rationalising relations are seen as calculations based on logical relations between propositions. If one conceives of such rationality constraints as a set of idealised norms, then one has rationally explained any particular instance by showing how they conform to this set of norms. However, it has been argued by proponents of the notion of perspectivity that simply pointing out such rationalising relations is insufficient to capture the so-called normativity of

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<sup>36</sup> Whilst a fuller defence of the central role of perspectivity is indeed required, it is hoped that the comments below both motivate an interest in developing the fuller argument and provide some suggestions of the direction such an argument may go. Further the notion of a perspective is developed in Chapter 6.

<sup>37</sup> In particular, see McDowell (1998b: Essay 15) which allots perspectivity a central role in discussion of rationality. This theme is prominent - albeit in radically differing ways - in a number of recent



the mental: that such a belief is one that an individual *ought* to have given certain other mental states.<sup>38</sup> In order to account for this one needs to bring in the individual's pre-theoretical grasp of these norms, and so doing necessarily involves adopting the perspective of an individual. In terms of a justification of a belief, grasping reasons for a belief involves the recognition that the conclusion *ought* to be adopted given the premises, and that can only be achieved by adopting the standpoint of the individual agent. Here we have two differing conceptions of rationality constraints: the former denies, whilst the latter highlights, the central role played by the notion of a perspective in such constraints.

The difference between these two conceptions of rational constraints can be illustrated with a return to Burge's account. In explaining what makes the process of memory in a lengthy mathematical calculation 'purely preservative', Burge tells us that:

“[p]urely preservative memory introduces no subject matter, constitutes no element in a justification, and adds no force to a justification or entitlement. It simply maintains in justificational space a cognitive content with its judgmental force. Like inference, it makes transitions of reasons possible, but contributes no propositional content. Unlike inference it is not a transition or a move so it is not an element in a justification.” (1993: 465)

Let us take the spatial metaphor seriously, and imagine a space involving specific nodes linked together to form a network. In this picture, the propositional content of mental states are nodes in a network, linked together by rational relations between propositional contents. According to this, memory is a preservative process since it involves no change to the overall rational structure of the network; it introduces no new nodes (propositional content) nor involves making transitions between existing nodes (inferences). If one were, as Burge does, to apply this account to the case of testimony, one would have to say that testimony too is a preservative process, involving the introduction of no new nodes, nor making any transition between nodes, in this justificational space.

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works, including Mulhall (1990), McCulloch (1995), Burwood, Gilbert and Lennon (1999) and Guttenplan (2000).

<sup>38</sup> McDowell: (1995b: 330-31)

On the first conception of rationality constraints, one could conceive of such talk of justificational space as simply a way of mapping out logical relations between content to represent the idealised norms constituting possible rational transitions within such a space, so that each node is characterised by the relationships to other nodes and so on. On such a conception, talk of rationality constraints on attitude attribution is such that any instance of attitude attribution is explained by showing that it conforms to such an idealised structure. Indeed, Burge comes close to explicitly acknowledging this when he makes reference to the notion of a “God’s-eye view of a cognitive practice”.<sup>39</sup> On the alternative conception of rationality constraints requires an individual to grasp such a normative structure more or less, including what belief follows from what in cases of deductive reasoning and so on. Such justificational space thus describes the perspective attributed to a given individual who, having grasped such a normative structure, has rational constraints on his/her beliefs allowing him/her to grasp what justifies what and thereby assume responsibility for their beliefs.

If one were to look at our practices regarding the attribution of such attitudes, it is clear that such rationality constraints only apply within our attribution of attitudes to a single individual. For example, one is able to attribute contradictory attitudes to two different people, but not to the same person. One way of explaining this would be to say that this stems from the centrality of perspectivity in attitude attribution. If, for example, the rationality constraints were just such that one had to ascribe a certain coherent set of attitudes to rationalise a belief with a particular propositional content, then it does not seem so important that the same person has the specific set. On such a conception, one could say that as long as someone had those propositional attitudes so that they conform to the rational pattern, one could say that the belief was justified. However, the very requirement of coherence - and hence the notion of such constraints - stems from the need to have a perspective, a particular point of view. The notion of a perspective accounts for our practice of trying to ensure coherence in with regards our attribution of attitudes to a single, rational agent. Within such an account, the very notion of transindividual reasons is incoherent for it involves attributions not constrained by the notion of a perspective.

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<sup>39</sup> Burge (1998: 28) :

There are of course other ways of explaining why no one considers the inconsistency of two beliefs to be problematic if they are held by different people, yet it is if they are held by one and the same subject. Perhaps this is only true of the negative obligations, to avoid inconsistency and the like, whilst perhaps positive justificational relations precisely can be (though of course they need not be) transindividualist. These options are compatible, provided they won't yield conflicting demands on thinkers. So, for the TM model outlined above, H's epistemic responsibility is to ensure that his general, *prima facie*, *a priori* right to believe S is not undermined by any defeaters, and the further observation that these defeaters include any reasons H has not to believe S's claim. One such reason, obviously, is that the claim is inconsistent with other things H believes. So H's has two, non-conflicting, duties: not to believe what is false, and hence not to believe inconsistencies; and to believe what is within his justificational reach.<sup>40</sup>

I do not deny that such responses are able explain our various patterns of belief attribution, though they seem to have a somewhat *ad hoc* feel to them, explaining each feature in a different manner rather than pointing to some common, underlying feature. From the point of view (!) of the notion of a perspective, such *ad hoc* responses miss the key insight of the notion of perspectivity. The realm of reasons on this view is within a person's own cognitive reach. It thus needs to be a point of 'view', something that can be 'seen'. A common metaphor is that of light: in having a point of view, things 'cease to be dark', 'light dawns'. Our patterns of belief attribution are such that the person has a rational view, thereby both precluding negative justificational relations and requiring positive justificational relations. On this view, the reason why contradictory belief attribution cannot be made is that such contradictory attributions cannot form a coherent viewpoint.

In the case of perceptual experience, one has such a rationally-structured point of view.<sup>41</sup> The starting point is not with *duties* at all but with actually having a point of view. The duties then come in afterwards: a person is responsible for reflecting on that point of view to ensure it remains rational. The normativity of attitude attribution comes from the sense that on this perspectival way of conceiving justificational space,

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<sup>40</sup> This response is due to Rob Hopkins in correspondence.

<sup>41</sup> This is the central theme of the next chapter.

one is not simply describing a web of relations but one is judging that the person in question has a coherent point of view. On this conception, the individual places actual constraints on the attribution of attitude clusters, constraints that stem from the need to make sense of his/her point of view. The same is simply not true of groups of individuals: they do not have a point of view, and thus this does not place requirements or constraints on the notion of justificational space. As such, the notion a transindividual reason misses the point.

To summarise this second line of thought, I have claimed that rational explanations - incorporating epistemic justification - necessarily involve reference to the point of view of an agent. Only through reference to a perspective can such explanations account for the normativity involved in such explanations, making a belief intelligible by showing that it is an attitude that ought to be adopted. According to Burge, testimony introduces no new content into, and involves no transitions within, justificational space. This suggests adherence to a non-perspectival conception of justificational space, such that that a justificational space transcends the grasp of any one individual, and one can therefore make sense of the notion of a transindividual reason. My insistence on the role of perspectivity however, suggests that the very idea of such normative relations requires an individual to grasp such a structure. The notion of a justificational space transcending the perspective of an individual such that it allows for the possibility of transindividual reasons is incoherent. In sum, the notion of a perspective precludes the very notion of transindividual reasons. Since transindividual reasons lie at the core of the transmission model; as such, taking the notion of perspectivity undermines the TM.

#### **4.7 *Summary and prospectus***

It is sometimes assumed that the division between TM and IM are the only available options for providing an understanding of the epistemology of testimony.<sup>42</sup> Our reflections above suggest both the possibility of an attractive alternative.

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<sup>42</sup> This is implied in Owens (2000: chapter 10) and Hopkins (2000)

Let us call any account of testimony that is prepared to accept the coherence of the notion of transindividual reasons a *transindividualist* conception of the epistemology of testimony.<sup>43</sup> Let us call any account that is not prepared to accept the coherence of such a notion an *individualist* conception of the epistemology of testimony. In this chapter, I have argued in favour of an individualist conception, for it alone takes into consideration the centrality of perspectivity to justification.

Let us call any account of testimony that conceives an act of testifying as playing the role of evidence for the proposition testified, and therefore used by H to bridge an epistemic gap between believing that the person asserted that p and believing that p, an *inferentialist* conception of the epistemology of testimony. In contrast, let us call any account that does not see testimony as playing the role of evidence for the proposition testified a *non-inferentialist* conception of the epistemology of testimony. I have argued earlier that an inferentialist account is both implausible and undesirable as it fails to provide a non-unitary account of learning from others.

In these terms, the IM can be classified as an individualist, inferentialist account of the epistemology of testimony. In these terms, the TM can be classified as a transindividual, non-inferential account of the epistemology of testimony. Our arguments thus far suggest that the strength of the IM lies in its individualism and its weakness in its inferentialism, whilst the strength of the TM lies in its non-inferentialism and its weakness in its transindividualism. The way of carving up the issues above suggests an alternate possibility, namely an account that is non-inferentialist and individualist.

	<i>Inferentialist</i>	<i>non-inferentialist</i>
<i>transindividualist</i>	X	TM
<i>individualist</i>	IM	Part B

<sup>43</sup> An alternative would be to use the term socialist. See Schmitt (1999: 356). I have avoided this so that it is realised the extent to which this account depends on the social in terms of the background discussed in the text.

In order to provide some initial indication of the direction that this alternative will take, it is useful, prior to leaving behind proponents of both the IM and the TM, to consider their reasons for not considering this third alternative. Why, given the difficulties surrounding the plausibility of the IM and given the radical nature of the TM, do proponents of such accounts seem to act as if these are the only two available options? It seems that, despite basic differences, proponents of both the IM and the TM share a common assumption that accounts for this blindness to an alternative.

The assumption regards the nature of testimonial experience, such that proponents of both IM and the TM share what could be termed an evidentialist conception of testimonial experience. Both sides concur that when H perceives S asserting that p (in a case in which S is sincere and competent), the maximum S can acquire through such an experience is the justified, true belief that S asserted that p - a belief that falls short of the fact that p. The experience of 'S asserting that p' provides at most evidence for p. Proponents of the IM think that such evidence for p can be combined with other beliefs regarding the reliability of testimony, to justify the belief that p. Proponents of TM deny that sufficient inductive evidence is available, and argue in turn that the experience itself is irrelevant to the justification of the testimonial-based belief, turning instead to the experiences of others.

As such, despite differences both proponents of the IM and TM share this common evidentialist conception of testimonial experience. With this common assumption, the very notion of an individualist, non-inferentialist conception of testimony seems a non-starter. After all, all that H has in these cases is some form of perceptual experience which, on an evidentialist conception, falls short of the facts. As such, either one must appeal to either some form of inference or the experiences of others to supplement one's weak evidential base. It seems therefore that developing an alternative to either the TM and IM involves developing a non-evidentialist conception of testimonial experience - a task I hope to undertake in Part B of this essay.

***Appendix: Peacocke's version of the Transmission Model:***

In section III of this paper, I argue against Peacocke's analysis of two cases that he suggests presents a problem to the TM. This is not to suggest that Peacocke explicitly considers an internalist version of the TM, and in this appendix I spell out the difference between Peacocke's distinction and my own.

Towards the end of his discussion of knowledge in 'Thoughts: An Essay on Content', Peacocke considers the epistemic role of memory and testimony. Focussing primarily on the case of memory, Peacocke suggests that:

“[w]e can distinguish two accounts of what makes such [memorial-based] beliefs knowledge. We can call them the Pure Storage Account and the Model of Virtual Inference...The leading claim of the Pure Storage Account is that it is sufficient for a belief served up by memory to be knowledge that it was knowledge when initially acquired, together with the fact that it has been reliably stored in a suitably content-preserving fashion...The rival Model of Virtual Inference says that a [memorial-based] belief...is knowledge only if a sound, and in the circumstances knowledge-yielding, inference...*could* be made from the evidence available to the believer to the truth of his belief.”<sup>44</sup>

In the ensuing, but brief, discussion of these rival accounts, Peacocke argues against the plausibility of the Pure Storage Account (PSA) as applied to both memory and testimony, and, in turn, affirms the Model of Virtual Inference (MVI) for both cases.

Despite appearances, the debate between the PSA and the MVI is not the same as the debate between what I have termed the TM and IM. In Peacocke's characterisation, the PSA contains a *sufficiency* claim, whilst the MVI a claim about *necessity*. According to the PSA, it is *sufficient* for a current memorial or testimonial-based belief to be knowledge if it was knowledge at the time of storage/testimony, providing nothing untoward has happened in the transmission process. As I read it, the MVI adds to this PSA, it is a kind of PSA-plus. Not only must it have been knowledge at the time of storage/testimony, in addition there is a rationality requirement to the effect that the individual must, in addition, have available a virtual inference to the

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<sup>44</sup> Peacocke (1986: 161-164)

best explanation of the subject's apparent memory or of the testifiers' utterance. The availability of a virtual inference alone is *necessary but not sufficient* for the belief to count as knowledge; in addition there it must have been knowledge at the time of storage/testimony.

In the context of Peacocke's discussion of knowledge, it seems that the PSA is a version of epistemic externalism. In the account, Peacocke more or less endorses Nozick's truth-tracking analysis of knowledge, with some modifications. Such an account is externalist in an epistemic sense, in that it dispenses with a justificatory requirement in favour of the truth-tracking conditions. Following the discussion, Peacocke suggests that one might want to add some rationality requirement to such an account, thereby giving such a justificatory processes some role. Such a modified reliabilism is a kind of hybrid between internalism and externalism. The PSA is simply the truth-tracking account as applied to the cases of memory/testimony, whilst the MVI, as a kind of PSA-plus, adds on a rationality requirement to form the int/externalist hybrid. In contrast, my versions of both TM and IM are, or aspire to be, internalist accounts of the epistemology of testimony.

Nevertheless, despite this difference, Peacocke's argument against the PSA in favour of the MVI, would if his argumentative strategy is correct, argue in favour of the IM over the TM. Further, whether they are construed as arguments against the PSA or TM, I do not find them persuasive and for the same reason in both cases. I therefore propose to consider these simply as arguments against the TM.



## Part B

### Testimony of the Senses and Testimony of Others

#### *An Overview:*

Earlier in this study we encountered the metaphor of perception as ‘testimony of the senses’ in the context of a discussion regarding the rise of modern science. A key feature of this rise was an emphasis on the central role played by an individual’s experience as a source of knowledge: the testimony of the senses is seen as more basic than the testimony of ecclesiastic authorities. However, taking the ‘testimony of the senses’ metaphor more seriously than intended here is revealing.

Towards the beginning of his seminal essay ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, Sellars makes use of the image of perceptual experience as: “so to speak, making an assertion or a claim”.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere he talks of experience as: “containing claims”.<sup>2</sup> Sellars’ imagery here suggests the possibility of taking the metaphor seriously as an account of the content of perceptual experience.

McDowell, on a number of occasions, is more explicit in his use of the testimony metaphor in discussing perception. So, in motivating the rejection of ‘scheme-content’ dualism, we are warned that continued adherence to the dualism leads to an unsatisfactory position of experiences: “being mute”.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, in his formulation of the notion of minimal empiricism, he tells us that:

“in the very idea of world-directedness, the world to which thinking must be answerable to if it is to be thinking at all is delivered by way of a *pronouncement* from...the tribunal of experience”.<sup>4</sup>

Even more explicitly, we are told in his explication and development of the Sellarsian claims about experience that:

“[t]he image of voice fits more easily. A seen object...speaks to one... ‘See me as I am’ it so to speak says to one; ‘namely as characterised by *these* properties’ - and it displays them”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars (1997: 40)

<sup>2</sup> Sellars (1997: 68)

<sup>3</sup> McDowell (1999: 90)

Such images are highly suggestive; exploiting them to provide a parallel between testimony and perception is the central theme of Part B of this study.

The suggestion that there is a certain parallel between perception and testimony is not new. Indeed, we have already encountered such a suggestion earlier in the discussion of non-reductive accounts of testimony in Chapter 3, to the effect that both testimony and perception should be seen as basic sources of knowledge. However, taking ‘the testimony of the senses’ metaphor seriously implies a different, and stronger, parallel.

The first thing to note is that, rather than using perception as a model for testimony, the metaphor attempts to model an account of perceptual experience on the testimonial case, such that one should view perceptual experiential states as states in which one receives testimony from the world.<sup>6</sup> One way to put this is that taking the metaphor seriously suggests a parallel in terms of the content of certain experiential states: perceptual experiential states (PES) and testimonial experiential states (TES). In contrast, the parallel drawn by proponents of a non-reductive thesis about testimony involves no discussion of the nature of such experiential states, but focuses on a parallel in epistemic status between the processes of perception and testimony.

Of course, if it is claimed that there is a parallel between these experiential states, it is plausible that this has epistemic ramifications; indeed, exploring such epistemic ramifications is a prominent feature of the remainder of this study. However, the epistemic parallel to be drawn differs in type from that encountered in the discussions of non-reductivism in Chapter 3. Proponents of a non-reductive thesis claim that the

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<sup>4</sup> McDowell (1995: 231-2) [*italics added*]

<sup>5</sup> McDowell (1998a:468)

<sup>6</sup> In talking of the world as testifier, as opposed to the senses, I focus on the metaphor as useful in terms of developing an account of the content of experiential states, as opposed to revealing the identity of the testifier. I agree with Austin who, in the context of his attack on sense data, notes that the ‘testimony of the senses’ metaphor can mislead if taken too seriously, for it has the: “... implication that whenever we perceive there is an intermediate entity always present and informing us of something else – the question is can we trust what it says.” (Austin, 1962: 36). It is interesting that in a recent discussion of the notion of non-conceptual content, Stalnaker makes the following remark: “Consider the analogy between testimony and the senses...The senses are like witnesses who tell us things that we may accept or reject. (Stalnaker, 1998: 343). Here we have the testimonial image in the perceptual case. However, on this way of understanding the metaphor, we are encouraged to see perceptual experience as some type of evidential intermediary between mind and world. Our senses testify, we perceive the testimony of the senses and use that testimony as evidence for our beliefs about the world. It is just this reading of the testimony of the sense metaphor that Austin warns us against.

epistemic principles involved in the justification of testimonial-based beliefs are on a par with those of perception in terms of its status as a basic source of knowledge. However, the claim to be developed here goes further than just noting a parallel basic status. It involves a parallel between perceptual and testimonial experience of in terms of both phenomenology and epistemic role.

The difference can be illustrated through an analogy. In debates between theologians responding to the challenge that feminist thinking poses for a traditional view of the role of women within a socio-religious context, two opposing positions are sometimes characterised by two slogans. The more conservative theologian is characterised as claiming that the role of woman when compared to men is ‘different but equal’: different in terms of role and function, equal in terms of status. The less conservative discussant is characterised as responding with the slogan: ‘equal because the same’ – at least in terms of aspects that matter to certain societal roles and so on. The non-reductivist position regarding testimony too claims ‘different but equal’: testimony is different in role and function from perception but equally ‘basic’ in status. In contrast, the claim to be advanced here is that they are ‘equal because they are the same’ – at least in terms of aspects that matter to epistemology.

Defending such a claim is central to developing an adequate account of the epistemology of testimony in the light of lessons learnt from the discussion of extant theories in Part A of this essay. The main upshot of that discussion is captured by the following programmatic suggestion: *in order to provide an adequate account of the epistemology of testimony, one needs to develop a non-inferential conception of the doxastic role played by testimonial experience in justifying testimonial-based beliefs.* Developing such an account involves two interrelated tasks. Firstly, one needs an adequate conception of testimonial experience. Secondly, one needs an account of its epistemic role in justifying testimonial-based beliefs. The central claim to be defended in Part B is that testimonial experiences are phenomenologically similar to perceptual experiences and play a similar epistemic role. By ‘phenomenological’ I do not mean to introduce talk of ‘sensations’, ‘qualia’, ‘phenomenal properties’ and such like, but

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(Stalnaker is here characterising a position he rejects, but nevertheless the characterisation is revealing).

to simply make reference to the way things strike us in everyday life.<sup>7</sup> By ‘epistemic role’, I mean the role (if any) that such experiences play in doxastic practices. As part of this parallel, it will be argued that the epistemic role such experiences play is non-inferential - thereby fulfilling the requirements of an adequate epistemology of testimony set out in Part A. The task ahead is thus (a) to argue that epistemic role of perceptual experience is non-inferential and (b) to establish a parallel between perception and testimony so that the epistemic role played by the former is the same in relevant respects to that played by the latter.

Establishing these claims will be achieved in three stages. In *Chapter 5*, I provide an account of the nature of experiential states, including both PES and TES. In order to do this, I firstly outline and develop a prominent conception of such states in the perceptual case, and, secondly, consider both parallels and similarities between this and the testimonial case. (The primary task here is descriptive, outlining claims to be defended in subsequent chapters). In *Chapter 6*, I turn to epistemic matters and argue (a) that experiential states do play an epistemic role, (b) that the epistemic role played by such experiential states in justifying beliefs based upon them is non-inferential role and (c) only the account of experiential states developed in chapters 5 of this study can account for this. In *Chapter 7*, I turn to matters in the philosophy of language to counter a central challenge to this conception: a claim that, in understanding, meaning is not perceived directly and, as a result, there is a breakdown in the parallel between TES and PES. I argue that such a conception of understanding is untenable and develop an alternative reading of the notion of interpretationism that is sympathetic to the account of TES developed.

As was mentioned at the end of the preceding chapter, my intention is to carve out a space for a conception of testimonial experience that many consider unavailable. In order to demonstrate the space to be available, it is necessary to undermine a number of assumptions that seem to govern this widespread opinion. In the chapters that follow, I present a series of contrasting positions. In terms of *experiential states*, the contrast is between conjunctive and disjunctive conceptions, and then between object-based and fact-based conceptions of disjunctivism. In terms of *epistemology*, the

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<sup>7</sup> See McCulloch (1993) for an insightful discussion of the phenomenological in this regard – to be developed further in 5.6.

contrast is between evidential and factive models of knowledge. In terms of *understanding*, the contrast is between radical and non-radical interpretationism. For each of these contrasting positions, I will demonstrate that the widespread opinion stems from adherence to the former, whilst it is the latter option alone that provides a viable account of the epistemology of testimony.

## Chapter 5

### Experiential States

#### 5.1 *Introduction*

Whilst it may be clear what is meant by ‘perceptual experience’, the term ‘testimonial experience’ is far less familiar and requires explication. Although the notion seems to have suffered some neglect in recent philosophical literature, it seems obvious to me that in an act of understanding an utterance made in a language which we understand, one enters into a distinctive state of awareness that has a number of analogies with perceptual states of awareness. I call such a state a *testimonial experiential state* [TES], parallel to a *perceptual experiential state* [PES] entered into when perceiving something. I will offer a blunt characterisation of this claim at the outset in order to indicate the type of states under consideration. Explicating the claims will be the primary undertaking of this chapter; justifying them the aim of the next.

Put bluntly, it seems to me that there is a basic difference in the experience of ‘hearing with understanding’ an utterance made in a familiar language, as opposed to simply hearing a sequence of noises made by someone in an unfamiliar language. Likewise, there is a basic difference in the experience of ‘reading with understanding’ a text written in a familiar language, as opposed to simply reading a sequence of ‘lifeless’ marks in an unfamiliar language. There may be some level at which someone familiar with language and someone unfamiliar with the language are able to perceive the same marks or sounds. There is another level at which someone familiar with the language experiences something difference, or, to put it stronger, enters into a different experiential state.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Whilst one may be able to account for such differences through talk of certain abilities or (tacit) knowledge by the hearer, this does not mean that such a TES should be ignored. Indeed, it seems possible to imagine a scenario in which the person has the requisite knowledge or abilities through some form of implanted translation device needed for understanding, and yet not be said to understand in a significant sense since they lack this distinctive TES.

Such a TES shares many similarities with a PES.<sup>9</sup> First, the content of both states can be captured by ‘that-clauses’, such as: seeing ‘that Nelson Mandela is tall’. Secondly, such states enter into rational relations with other mental states such as beliefs. So, as a result of hearing someone assert that *p*, I may come to believe that *p*. However, such TES are not belief states – indeed, they seem to have the same belief-independence characteristic of PES.<sup>10</sup> So, it seems possible to be subject to illusions of understanding much the same as there are perceptual illusions such as the Müller-Lyer case. For example, my hearing on a number of recent occasions has proved faulty: I have heard people assert things that they, and others, later claim they never said. I have gone to the doctor who confirms my hearing is deteriorating to the point of utter unreliability. *S* asserts that *p* and I hear her. I may not form the belief that *S* asserted that *p* in the light of this medical prognosis. Nevertheless, I do not deny that my TES is such that I understand *S* to have asserted that *p*. So, whilst such TES’s enter into rational relations with belief states, they display the belief-independence characteristic of perceptual states.

However, I do not mean to deny that there are obvious differences between TES’s and PES’s. It seems not possible to deny that the experience of seeing that Nelson Mandela is tall is not the same as hearing someone assert that Mandela is tall. In acquiring knowledge as a result of testimony, it is simply not the case that one experiences things to be the way that they know they are.<sup>11</sup> Such a concession may sound fatal to the parallel explored thus far in this essay. The aim of this chapter is to develop an account of TES’s that allows for this difference, whilst maintaining a significant phenomenological parallel between the PES’s and TES’s.

Making sense of these bold claims is a large undertaking, and the first stage involves clarifying the nature of such experiential states. Focussing initially on the more familiar perceptual case, I will firstly contrast two accounts of the nature of such experiential states: the more familiar conjunctive account and a disjunctive alternative that has gained recent popularity [5.2]. Further, it seems possible to distinguish

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, as to be expected from a bold characterisation, each of these claims are controversial and will be defended in the ensuing discussion.

<sup>10</sup> This point is made in Hunter (1999), although the epistemic role of such states developed here differs.

<sup>11</sup> Fricker (1986: 74)

between two versions of the disjunctive account: an object-based conception and a fact-based conception [5.3], and it will be argued that it is the latter that alone can provide a version of the parallel between PES and TES [5.4]. The key to the fact-based conception is a distinct reading of the Fregean sense / reference distinction [5.5], and this reading will be used to account for the phenomenological difference between TES's and PES's in a manner that does not undermine the parallel drawn in the preceding discussion [5.6, 5.7].

To stress, the primary aim of this chapter is clarificatory: it aims to provide the vocabulary for developing the bold claims made above regarding such experiential states, rather than providing a sustained argument in favour of adopting this account. Such an argument will be largely left to the discussion of epistemology in chapter 6, where it will be claimed that experiential states do play an epistemic role and the account described here alone allows for such experiential states to so do.

## ***5.2 Curing Conjunctivitis***

When it comes to thinking about such experiential states, it seems that one can distinguish between two basic attitudes one can adopt towards them: a 'conjunctive conception' of such states and a 'disjunctive conception'. Whilst the conjunctive conception is still dominant, this study adopts a disjunctive conception for reasons to be discussed.<sup>12</sup> It is possible to characterise the latter in a negative manner (as a rejection of the inevitability of a conjunctive way of thinking) or in a positive manner (involving an account of the positive claims that should be made as a result of a rejection of conjunctivism). I will begin with the former characterisation and initially consider only PES's.

Discussions of con/disjunctivism often take place within the context of discussions about perception, especially regarding the so called 'argument from illusion'. (I will

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<sup>12</sup> Arguments in favour of the disjunctive turn often motivate their claims by appeal to the 'dreary history of epistemology' including unsuccessful attempts at dealing with scepticism, and thus proffer the disjunctive turn as a radical alternative to be preferred. In the light of the discussion of Part A of this essay, a similar motivation could be adopted here: the failure to provide an adequate epistemology of testimony that accords with a common-sense rejection of scepticism about testimony as a source of knowledge motivates the disjunctive alternative. Other stronger reasons for adopting the disjunctive turn will emerge.



actually consider a case of hallucination, as it will later transpire that the case of illusion is more controversial). Typically, the argument begins from the seemingly uncontroversial claim that it may not be possible, from the point of view of the subject, to distinguish a hallucinatory experience from a veridical one: a state which is indeed a genuine awareness of the world (henceforth 'the veridical state') and a mere appearance (henceforth 'the hallucinatory state'). Let us call this the indistinguishability claim. Reflections on this seemingly correct claim have led to two very different conclusions.

The conjunctive conception assumes that since these two states (the veridical and hallucinatory) are indistinguishable, one must give a similar account of both of them. As such, the problem that must be addressed by a theory of perception becomes two fold. Firstly, it needs to explain what a perceptual experiential state is - something that is common to veridical and non-veridical cases of perception. Secondly, it needs to explain what it for an experience to be veridical, as opposed to hallucinatory. The veridical case is thus the conjunction of two elements: that which veridical and hallucinatory cases both share and something only present in the veridical case.

The disjunctive conception does not deny the indistinguishability claim. There is a sense in which it looks to one as if there is an object in front of him or her, irrespective of whether one is perceiving (veridically) that object or hallucinating the object. However, claims the disjunctivist, it does not follow from the fact that these two states are indistinguishable in this manner that one need give a similar account of both. Rather, any case of it looking to the subject S that p is made true by either one of the following disjuncts: either it is a case of some thing looking F to S or it is merely a case of for S as if some thing looked F to S.<sup>13</sup> The formulation in the preceding sentence suggests that, in a sense, the basic case is the veridical case, whilst the hallucinatory is merely derivative - it is like the basic veridical case.

On a conjunctive conception, the veridical case is seen as a 'hallucinatory state *plus*' - a state that shares the features of a non-veridical one *plus* something independent. Such a conception is supposed to be an inevitable consequence of the argument from

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Snowdon (1980/1)

illusion; a claim about indistinguishability leads to a claim about constitution.<sup>14</sup> The availability of a disjunctive conception shows that such a consequence is not inevitable. On this alternative, the indistinguishability claim does not lead to a claim about the constitution of the phenomenologically indistinguishable states, and the veridical case is not constituted out of the common factor shared by all indistinguishable cases *plus* something independent.<sup>15</sup>

In order to appreciate the limited claims made by this negative version of the disjunctive position, it is useful to consider its relationship to the ‘argument from illusion’. This argument has, of course, had a long history in philosophical discussion of this sort. On the one hand, it has been employed in some form or other by various philosophers over a period of time including Hume, Russell and Ayer.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, it has also come under repeated challenge: some have questioned whether there is indeed an explicit statement of the argument, whilst others have argued that once formulated explicitly the argument is simply false.<sup>17</sup> However, such discussion has little relationship with the negative conception of disjunctivism outlined here. Even if one were to reject the argument from illusion, this does not mean that one embraces such a negative conception of disjunctivism. For example, Jackson explicitly denies the validity of the argument from illusion, but yet embraces a form of conjunctivism.<sup>18</sup> Disjunctivism, even on this negative conception, is more than the claim that the argument from illusion is not compelling, but the refusal to let the argument subvert our thinking about experience.

This distinction lies behind Dummett’s reflection on the ‘argument from illusion’:

“We commonly employ a distinction between how things appear and how they really are; and it is therefore natural to push this distinction to its limit. This seems to me the best way to view the so-called ‘argument from illusion’. If this is regarded as an argument properly so called, with premises and a conclusion, it

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<sup>14</sup> Dancy (1995)

<sup>15</sup> I mean this to phrase to be reminiscent of Guttenplan’s (1994) account of belief as knowledge minus, as opposed to knowledge as belief plus.

<sup>16</sup> Hume (1966; sec XII); Russell (1912: chap 1), Ayer (1940: chapter 1).

<sup>17</sup> In particular, there seems to be a widespread assumption that the argument turns on what has been called ‘the intentional fallacy’. (Eg. Anscombe 1962: 11; Martin, 1998: 289). See further below.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson (1977).

is difficult to make out what are the premises and what the conclusion. Rather it is a starting point.”<sup>19</sup>

Whilst we have here the concession that the argument is not really an argument, it is accompanied by the claim that the argument should have some effect on the starting point of our thinking in the area. The argument, whilst not compelling, places an onus on any philosopher proffering an account of perceptual experience such that it ought to explain the intuitive attractiveness of the argument. In these terms, the (negative conception of) disjunctivism suggested here simply refuses to accept that the onus of explanatory responsibility lies where Dummett suggests.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.3 Two varieties of disjunctivism

Whilst there has been some recent discussion of this disjunctive conception of perceptual experience, there has been little that moves beyond the negative characterisation above.<sup>21</sup> When turning towards a more substantive account, it seems to me that one can distinguish between two different varieties of the disjunctive turn. For want of some terminology, I will call one variety ‘an object-based conception’ [OBC], of disjunctivism and the alternative positive development ‘a fact-based conception’ [FBC] of disjunctivism.<sup>22</sup> The distinction is important as it is only the latter that can allow for a parallel between PES and TES.

Let us begin with the common-ground between the two, namely the negative conception of disjunctivism described above. For the disjunctivist:

“...an appearance that such and such is the case can be either an appearance or a *fact* made manifest to someone...[T]he *object* of experience in the deceptive case is a mere appearance. But we are not to accept that in the non-deceptive

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<sup>19</sup> Dummett (1979:2)

<sup>20</sup>To my mind, Sturgeon’s (1999) argument against the disjunctive conception, to which I will return below, seems little more than a version of this Dummettian claim, to the effect that the onus of explanation lies with the disjunctivist. I do not see how this refutes disjunctivism anymore than kicking a stone refutes Idealism. See below.

<sup>21</sup>It is interesting that Child (1994) talks of disjunctive *conceptions* of perception, in contrast to disjunctive *theories*; possibly reflecting the centrality played by what I have termed negative accounts of disjunctivism.

<sup>22</sup>I have serious reservations with regards these headings that will emerge later on, but they should suffice for short-term rhetorical purposes.

cases too the *object* of experience is a mere appearance, and hence something that falls short of the *fact* itself.”<sup>23</sup>

Both versions of disjunctivism propose that one ought not to see veridical cases of perceptual experience (for example) as a conjunction of a common factor with hallucinatory cases and something else. In treating theorising with regards the veridical case as distinct from (unconstrained by concerns with) the hallucinatory case, both the OBC and FBC invoke a number of related images involving ‘openness to x’ or ‘directness acquaintance with x’. As these images suggest, both share something else in common: the veridical case involves some sort of a relation - for both, a veridical experience involves a direct acquaintance between some relata.

On the OBC, the veridical case is characterised as a situation in which one is directly acquainted with things, ‘mind-independent objects in the world’ as it is sometimes put. In (veridical) perceptual experience, our mind is directly acquainted with such objects. In these cases, we are directly open to *things* in the world, denizens of what one could call ‘the realm of reference’. Such a realm of reference contains objects and properties as constituents - including Nelson Mandela and the property of tallness. In the veridical case, our minds reach out as it were and directly gets hold of such objects, located in a world of dated, particular events and things in specific spatial and temporal orderings.

Although my concern is not with specific disjunctive accounts, it is useful to consider Sturgeon’s outline of disjunctivism to clarify the OBC. Sturgeon first clarifies the features of the veridical case:

“Suppose that you see a cloud pass by. The cloud is a publicly-available object (a ‘POP’ as I shall say). Everyone can see it. Suppose the cloud looks white to you; and suppose it does because it is white. In the event, an instance of (I): it looks to you as if something is F is made true by an instance of (v): an F-POP looks F to you. It looks to you as if something is white because a white-POP looks white to you...You enjoy the first type of visual experience: *veridical perception*”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> McDowell (1998a: 386) – italics added.

<sup>24</sup> Sturgeon (1999: 179)

He then characterises the account of the veridical case on a disjunctive conception ('the direct acquaintance treatment') as the following two claims:

- (i) Veridical perception consists in brute acquaintance between recipient, POP and POP-feature. This relation is object- and feature- involving, and cognitively primitive. It does not decompose into more elementary mental ingredients.
- (ii) Instances of direct acquaintance are phenomenally typed by their POP-feature relata. Two veridical experiences are phenomenally type-identical iff they spring from instances of identical POP features"<sup>25</sup>.

Although Sturgeon argues against such a disjunctive conception, the characterisation captures clearly the OBC: in the veridical case, one is directly acquainted with a POP and POP-feature, mind-independent objects and properties in the world.<sup>26</sup>

The FBC is more difficult to describe, partly because it uses the difficult term 'facts'. Indeed, on standard readings of the term, facts are seen as little more than occupants of the realm of reference too; entities with objects and properties as constituents, whose totality make up the world. On this understanding of the notion of 'facts', there is indeed no difference between the FBC and OBC. The real crux of the difference lies in an alternative conception of facts, proposed by the proponent of the FBC and ignored by the proponent of the OBC. On such a conception, facts belong not in the realm of reference but in the realm of sense. (As will emerge in the next section, these should not be conceived as two ontologically disparate realms). According to the FBC, in the veridical case one is directly acquainted with facts and not things.

An understanding of facts as belonging in the realm of sense can be found in the writings of McDowell. One may think that placing facts in the realm of sense and not reference seems suspiciously like a version of idealism, for: 'it does not genuinely

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<sup>25</sup> Sturgeon (1999: 183)

<sup>26</sup> Sturgeon's own argument against the disjunctive conception is something along the following lines if there are two account of perceptual experience available, we should prefer the one that is able to explain the indistinguishability between the various veridical/illusory/hallucinatory cases. I find this objection to be besides the point. If the sole aim of the disjunctive is to give an account of the phenomenology of perceptual experiences, Sturgeon would have a point – although there is more room for the disjunctivist to manoeuvre than he allows. However, as emerges from my discussion here, this is not the explanatory goal of proponents of the disjunctive turn – especially on the FBC - but to give an overall account of the epistemic role of perceptual experiences that coheres with the phenomenology.

acknowledge how reality is independent of our thinking.’<sup>27</sup> McDowell’s formulation of this position overcomes such fears. He claims that:

“there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case...[T]o say there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world is just to dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance *the spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case.”<sup>28</sup>

Maybe because of the high flown language, the supposed truism in this is difficult to see, and has been subject to a number of (to my mind) erroneous interpretations. Let me offer one and contrast it with an alternative; the contrast will allow for the development of FBC as an alternative to the OBC above.

First, my account. Here we seem to have two relata, and a relationship between them. I will refer to the two relata as (true) thinkable and fact, and the relationship as being one of identity.<sup>29</sup>

A thinkable is the content of an act of thinking (or utterance), such as the content of the thought *that Nelson Mandela is tall*. Such a thinkable is conceptually structured; it is “a complex of the exercise of several distinct conceptual abilities”.<sup>30</sup> No thinker could entertain such a thinkable without the ability to recombine the elements of the structure to form other thoughts.<sup>31</sup> Such thinkables belong in the realm of Fregean sense; thinkables are individuated to whatever degree of fineness is required for the attribution of sense, such that is not possible for one to entertain the same thinkable

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<sup>27</sup> McDowell (1994:26)

<sup>28</sup> McDowell (1994: 27)

<sup>29</sup> My use of the term ‘thinkable’, rather than proposition, Thought or content say, stems initially from discussions with Sam Guttenplan, although the term does appear in the McDowell text. Recently, Hornsby (1997) too uses the term in developing her identity theory of truth, with explicit reference to McDowell here; as will emerge below, her reading is similar to my own - although a theory of truth per se is not my primary concern here.

<sup>30</sup> Evans (1982:46) This is an aspect of what Evans terms ‘the generality constraint’

<sup>31</sup> “If a subject can be credited with the thought that a is F, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that a is G, for every property of being G for which he has a conception. This is the condition that I call the Generality Constraint.” Evans (1982:46)

and take rationally differing attitudes towards it at any one given time.<sup>32</sup> (Thoughts T1 and T2 [or sentences S1 and S2] involve different thinkables if it is possible for a subject to entertain both and assent to one while dissenting from the other).<sup>33</sup> This links up the notion of sense with notion of rationality, thereby placing attributions of sense within ‘the game of giving and asking for reasons’.<sup>34</sup>

In saying that there is no ontological gap between what is thought and what is the case, McDowell is not asserting an identity between true thoughts and the world, but between the contents of thoughts (‘thinkables’) and the world. “Thought”, he tells us,

“can mean the act of thinking; but it can also mean the content of a piece of thinking: what someone thinks...It would indeed slight the independent of reality if we acquainted facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities - acts of thinking...But it is not idealistic...to say that perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers...; and that facts are essentially capable of being embraced in thought in exercises of spontaneity”.<sup>35</sup>

Here we have acts of thinking, thinkables and facts. There are more thinkables than acts of thinking: not everything that could be thought is actually thought. There are also more thinkables than facts: not everything that could be thought is the case. The crux is that whilst not all thinkables are true, true thinkables are the same as facts. Here we have the two relata, true thinkables and facts, standing in a relationship of identity. On such a reading, facts as true thinkables belong in the realm of sense and not reference.

Contrast this with the reading of McDowell offered, and then rejected due to incoherence, by Dodds.<sup>36</sup> According to this interpretation, the relata here are indeed thinkables and facts, and the relationship between them is identity. On the one hand,

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<sup>32</sup> The indexing to a time needs to be taken loosely, to allow for the possibility of the same thought persisting (-so called dynamic thoughts).

<sup>33</sup> See Evans (1982: 18-19); McDowell (1994: 180)

<sup>34</sup> Sellars (1997: 76)

<sup>35</sup> McDowell (1994: 28)

<sup>36</sup> Dodds direct critique of McDowell is found in his (1995). In addition, he attacks Hornsby’s version of the identity theory for similar reasons. (Dodd, 1999). Since Hornsby’s interpretation of McDowell is similar to my own, I will consider both critiques to be directed against McDowell, and quote from both papers interchangeably.

we have the contents of acts of thinking (thinkables) and belong 'in the realm of sense'.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, there are facts. Facts:

"are as a correspondence theorist sees them, entities (with objects and properties as constituents, presumably) whose totality makes up the world. They are occupants of what Frege calls 'the realm of reference': the reality which contains the entities relevant for the truth of what we say".<sup>38</sup>

In the veridical case, we then are supposed to have an identity between true thinkables and facts. Dodds uses such an interpretation to level a charge of incoherence against McDowell, which McDowell "never properly appreciates".<sup>39</sup> The problem is that

"[f]acts (if worldly) and Thoughts are in quite different categories, and so the identification cannot be made good".<sup>40</sup>

The problem for Dodds seems to be the following. Facts belong in the realm of reference, thinkables in the realm of sense. If so, how can there be an identity between facts and true thinkables?

The contrast between my reading and Dodds' lies in the placement of facts: on my reading they belong in the realm of sense; on his, they belong in the realm of reference. Indeed, it seems that the very charge of incoherence in his reading provides a good reason for embracing my alternative! Dodds is correct to note that his interpretation of facts, placing them in the realm of reference, leads to a charge of incoherence. The more charitable reading of McDowell places them as true thinkables, denizens of the realm of sense; on such an account it is no longer incoherent to assert an identity between facts and true thinkables.<sup>41</sup>

It is this difference in the placing of the notion of facts that lies at the heart of the contrast between the FBC and the OBC. The basic claim of the FBC is that in the veridical case, one is directly acquainted with facts - as true thinkables in the realm of

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<sup>37</sup> Dodds (1999:226)

<sup>38</sup> Dodds (1999: 226).

<sup>39</sup> Dodds (1995: 163)

<sup>40</sup> Dodds (1995: 163)

<sup>41</sup> Dodds seems oblivious to this alternative. He rejects the following defence on behalf of McDowell:

"[I]t is no use saying that senses just are objects and properties. Senses are modes of presentations of objects and properties; they cannot be identified with them"

The solution Dodds considers in this quotation is to blur the distinction between sense and reference, such that thinkables can belong in the realm of reference too. He seems blind to the obvious alternative highlighted in my reading above: facts - even 'if worldly' - belong in the realm of sense.



sense. In contrast, a proponent of the OBC claims that in the veridical case one is acquainted with publicly-available object and properties.

I confess a certain uneasiness with the formulation of the distinction as it stands, an uneasiness that stems from the terminology I have employed. A contrast between facts and objects may seem to imply that a proponent of the OBC is unconcerned with facts and a proponent of the FBC is unconcerned with objects. This is not strictly true; both would claim an interest in both facts and objects. The issue turns on how they interpret those terms, and the order of priority they give to them. On the OBC, both objects and facts are placed in the realm of reference: facts thus become the totality of objects and properties and so on. In contrast, the proponent of the FBC places facts in the realm of sense; objects are derivatively conceived in terms of their contributions to such facts - in a sense developed below. Nevertheless, for ease of exposition, I will henceforth limit my use of the term 'facts' as the FBC conceives them and leave the terminology as it stands.

#### ***5.4 Distinguishing the two varieties***

In moving from the negative to positive conception of the disjunctive turn, I identified two varieties of disjunctivism, the OBC and the FBC. The difference between them becomes clearer if one considers their differing responses to a number of issues. I will consider (1) the identification of the disjuncts, (2) their response to the 'neurological challenge' and (3) the parallel between perception and testimony.

##### ***5.4.1 the disjuncts***

There is, of course, a basic difference between illusions and hallucinations. In an illusory case, such as seeing a straight stick look bent, there is a particular object present. However, although there is an object present, its appearance (bent) differs from the way it is (straight). Contrast this with a case of hallucination: under the effect of some hallucinogenic drugs, one has a vivid image of pink elephants dancing in front of one. Here there are no objects present that look false. There are no elephants (or any other object) present, with any other perceptible properties.

From the perspective of both the OBC and the FBC, there would be a certain consensus with regards both the veridical and hallucinatory cases. On the OBC, the veridical case involves direct acquaintance with an object, the hallucinatory case - as there is no object available- does not. On the FBC, the veridical case involves a true thinkable, whilst the hallucinatory case does not. It is possible however that the two conceptions would differ with regards the illusory case. A proponent of the FBC would place the illusory case in the same disjunct as the hallucinatory one, since both do not involve facts. Things are not as clear for a proponent of the OBC; since there is indeed direct acquaintance with an object even in the illusory case, one could imagine such an illusory case being placed in the same disjunct as the veridical one.

Compare, in this regard, the disjunctive accounts due to Snowdon and McDowell. The initiator of the disjunctive thesis seems to be Hinton, who presents an analysis of 'looks statements' intended to undermine causal arguments for sense data.<sup>42</sup> Snowdon's account is an extension of this approach, developing Hinton's account into a general critique of causal theories of perception.<sup>43</sup> Put simply, a causal relation requires two separate events (or states) to act as cause and effect. However, in a disjunctive conception of the veridical case there are no two separate states to act thus and thus it seen as absurd to: "regard the looks-state as something causally produced by the seen object."<sup>44</sup> Snowdon's concern is thus with the objects of perception and is bothered by the idea of an 'inner experience' being caused by an 'external object'.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the way Snowdon divides the disjuncts reflects this concern with objects in the world. Here the disjuncts contrast illusions and the veridical perceptual case on the one hand (i.e. cases where there is an object) with cases of hallucination on the other (i.e. cases where there is no object).

McDowell too suggests a disjunctive account of appearances, although his concerns are not specifically to oppose a causal theory of perception, but, as we have seen, a broader concern with facts. Since McDowell's overall concern is facts, he is interested in separating veridical from non veridical cases, cases of facts being made manifest on

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<sup>42</sup> See Hinton (1973)

<sup>43</sup> See Snowdon (1980-1; 1990)

<sup>44</sup> Snowdon (1980-1: 200)

the one hand and mere appearances on the other. As such, the contrast is between veridical perception on the one hand, and both hallucination and illusion on the other.

#### 5.4.2 *The neurological challenge*

Another distinction between the FBC and OBC emerges when one considers their possible attitude towards the following empirical observation: studies of brain activity reveals that the same brain activity that brings about perception can bring about hallucination.

It has been argued that the disjunctive conception would be undermined if this is indeed correct, if that is:

“the very same process as produces a veridical perception would, if artificially stimulated, produce a veridical-seeming hallucination.”<sup>46</sup>

The objection here stems from the following additional reflections. Let us compare someone who veridically perceives a dog charging towards one and hallucinates a dog charging towards one. In both, one would respond by moving out of the way, and - the neurological observation - in both the experience is caused by same activity. So here we have an event - a perceptual experience - that does not seem to differ in terms of causal powers and yet, for the disjunctivist, they are different events.

Snowdon considers such a challenge to be critical for the disjunctivist and he makes a major concession in the scope of his theory to account for it, moving from the provocative assertion that the disjunctive conception is a correct understanding of experience to the more minimal claim that: “[i]t is not a conceptual truth that [the disjunctive conception] is false.”<sup>47</sup> However, such an objection only has force against the OBC and not the FBC. The centrepiece of the argument seems to turn on the assumption that we cannot individuate such events finer than is deemed necessary by an account of their causal powers. However, the very notion of ‘causal powers’ belongs in the realm of reference and not sense. In the realm of sense, our criterion for

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<sup>45</sup> Snowdon himself seems to use the terms in an intuitive sense, such that experiences counts as ‘inner’ if: “the intrinsic natures of which are independent of anything outside the subject.” Snowdon (1990: 123)

<sup>46</sup> Robinson (1990: 151)

<sup>47</sup> Snowdon (1990:131)

individuation is that of Frege's intuitive criterion of difference, such that that thoughts differ if one can simultaneously take rationally conflicting stances towards them. As such, the neurological observation is only challenging for the proponent of the OBC.

#### 5.4.3 *perception and testimony*

Of central concern to this study, a basic difference between the FBC and the OBC regards the possibility of maintaining a parallel in epistemic role between testimonial and perceptual experience.

On the OBC, in the veridical, perceptual case one is directly acquainted with objects and things located in the realm of reference, a world of dated particulars located in specific spatial and temporal orderings. In the veridical case the object itself comes into view, within ones 'direct grasp' as it were. In testimony, the object simply does not. Compare: 'My tour guide tells me that Nelson Mandela is tall' and 'I see that Nelson Mandela is tall'. In the perceptual case, the unmediated object itself just lies there and thus acts as a given in experience. In such a veridical case, one judges that Nelson Mandela is tall and what makes this true is that object with that property lying directly before you. Through perceptual experience there is thus a direct relationship between subject and object.<sup>48</sup> This does not take place in the testimonial case. Such particular objects are not present and therefore the such experiences must differ: the object in question does not come into view.

The proponent of the FBC does not deny that there is a directness in the case of veridical, perceptual experience. However, the FBC will find it difficult to understand the account of directness proffered by the OBC, especially if such directness is used in an epistemic sense. On the OBC, objects are conceived as denizens of the realm of reference; thoughts within the realm of sense. Talk of an epistemic role involves an interrelationship between the world and beliefs. How, wonders the proponent of the FBC, is it possible to speak of a direct relationship between such different realms? From the point of view of the FBC, such an OBC looks like a case of double vision.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Another difference between the FBC and the OBC involves the interpretation of the term direct here. This is discussed in 6.5.1

<sup>49</sup> Phrase due to Blackburn and Simmons (2000). This is further developed in 7.4

It suggests that there are two things here separated from each other: judgement and object, truth-bearer and truth maker. However, from the perspective of the subject themselves there are no two elements here but one. When s/he judges that p and then checks the judgement, what s/he checks is whether p. There is no viewpoint for the subject in which one can have both a judgement and fact lying before them such s/he can compare and contrast the two.<sup>50</sup>

Given the identity between true thinkable and fact, there is no parallel double vision for the proponent of the FBC. In the veridical, perceptual case, one is presented with a fact, conceived as a denizen of the realm of sense. As such, such experiential states can seem to play an epistemic role. Further, this seems to be the same in the testimonial case too. On the FBC, it seems possible to claim that in both the testimonial and perceptual case one is presented with facts. In both, such facts provide reasons for subsequent perceptual/testimonial-based beliefs. The aim of the remainder of this chapter is to develop such a claim.

### 5.5 *The phenomenology of experiential states*

Thus far, I have distinguished between two approaches towards explaining the nature of experiential states, a conjunctive and a disjunctive conception. In addition, I have distinguished between two varieties of the disjunctive turn: an object and fact-based conception, and suggested that only the latter can provide the basis for an account of experiential states that allows for a parallel between to be drawn between PES and TES. As the first stage in providing a fuller account of the FBC, it is central to clarify my idiosyncratic use of two terms used in the outline thus far: the notion of phenomenology and the sense-reference distinction. I will consider each in turn.

As McCulloch has noted, dictionary definitions of the term ‘phenomenology’ talk of ‘what the mind notices’ and ‘the objects of a person’s perception’. I intend to use the term ‘phenomenological’ in a similar vein to refer to whatever it is that the mind

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<sup>50</sup> A proponent of the OBC could simply deny that such experiential states play an epistemic role – I return to this in Chapter 6. The point here is to accentuate the differences between the two, not mount a challenge.

directly notices.<sup>51</sup> Such talk of the mind noticing something in the experiential states under consideration here seems to suggest that these mental states have a content that is noticed.<sup>52</sup> In the light of the discussion thus far, one could say that whatever the mind notices is a thinkable so that such experiential states have thinkable content that is noticed by the mind, and, in this sense, a thinkable has a distinctive phenomenology. Some may find such a content-based conception of the phenomenological puzzling, and I admit that it goes against the standard talk surrounding the notion of phenomenology, including appeal to sensational properties, raw feels or other terms favoured by so-called ‘qualia freaks’. Nevertheless, I will persist with such an understanding of phenomenology in the following discussion.

Introduction of thinkables as whatever it is that the mind notices introduces a certain tension between the two parts of the dictionary account of phenomenology. On the one hand, talk of thinkables necessarily involves reference to complete thoughts or sentences. (Despite difficulties, I will use the term ‘sentence’ here for reasons of familiarity of expression). It is sentences that can be used to make moves in the game of giving and asking for reasons, and play a central role in the notions of inference and truth. On the other hand, talk of objects directly noticed by the mind focuses upon sub-sentential entities, thereby giving such sub-sentential entities a primary role. It seems therefore that talk of the direct objects of perception seems to come into conflict with an account of phenomenology that stresses the role of thinkables.

Such conflict however is merely apparent. Talk of objects here place them firmly in the realm of sense, not reference. Objects are seen as constituents of thinkables. The idea of a sub-sentential component, an object for example, is secondary to the idea of the thought or sentence in which it figures; sentences, or thinkables, are primary. Primacy here is not to be conceived in terms of temporal priority of the grasping of sentences over the grasping of sub-sentential units. The central point is that the very notion of an object cannot be seen as a self-standing entity that one could think about on its own as it were, outside the context of whole thoughts. Whilst we may “derive our knowledge of the sense of a sentence from our prior knowledge of the senses of

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<sup>51</sup> See the definition of phenomena in Concise Oxford Dictionary, cited by McCulloch (1993: 93).

<sup>52</sup> For this intentionalist understanding of phenomenology, see McCulloch (1993; 1995: 157).

the words that compose it”, it is the sense of the sentence that takes priority.<sup>53</sup> Sub-sentential semantic notions, such as reference, thus come out as derived in terms of their contribution to whole sentences, and talk of objects here should be seen in terms of their potential contribution to whole thoughts. The notion of an object here is that which corresponds to a singular term, and is thus that which can play a certain role in the constitution of a thinkable.<sup>54</sup>

To stress, this not to deny the central role played by such sub-sentential units in the rational control of our thoughts. The generality constraint discussed above, according to which the understanding or entertaining of a thought is a structured ability that presupposes connections to other thoughts, gives such sub-sentential units a central role in the rational systematicity of thought. Nevertheless, a sub-sentential unit, such as a name (or object) is only such in the light of its appropriate pattern of use within the context of such sentences or thinkables.

Talk of the phenomenology of a PES therefore refers to whatever is directly noticed by the mind in an instance of perceptual experience. In the light of the discussion above, one thus can talk about perceptually-articulated content of such an experiential state, such as perceiving *that Mandela is tall*. What follows the ‘that-clause’ captures the phenomenology of such an experiential state. In perceptually experiencing a whole thought, something truth-evaluable, the mind notices something – a ‘this-such’ as Sellars would put it.<sup>55</sup> The ‘this’ derivable from the ‘this-such’ is what I here term the phenomenological object of such a perceptual experience.

Talk of the phenomenology of a TES refers to whatever is directly noticed by the mind in an instance of testimonial experience.

“It is usual to say...that the phenomenological objects of hearing are sounds, even though one might, say, hear that the concert is about to begin. But another thing that can be directly open to the sense of hearing is what someone means, that is the content of their utterances. Listening to someone speak on a

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<sup>53</sup> “[I]t is only by means of a sentence that we may perform a linguistic act...the possession of sense by a word cannot consist in anything else but it being governed by a rule which specifies the senses of sentences containing it.” Dummett (1973: 4)

<sup>54</sup> This is developed further in Sect. 5.6.1

<sup>55</sup> Sellars (1997: 24)

subject you know in a language you understand is quite a different kind of experience from hearing someone say the same thing in a language you do not understand. In the second case you just hear sounds. In the first case, one of the things you notice, i.e. what is available to you as the object of your experience, is the content of the speakers utterance. You hear what they mean.”<sup>56</sup>

When I see that Nelson Mandela is tall, the thinkable content of that experience (‘that Nelson Mandela is tall’) is directly before my mind.

“In ordinary communication in our own language...it seems that the transmission is direct; your words load their significance directly into my consciousness, and are in themselves transparent.”<sup>57</sup>

When I hear someone assert that Nelson Mandela is tall, the thinkable content of that experience (‘that Nelson Mandela is tall’) is directly before my mind. Indeed, in the testimonial case, it is a more familiar claim to say that talk of object here is derivative; sentences (or the thinkable content of an utterance) is primary.

It is in this sense that I claim there is a phenomenological parallel between perception and testimony. Despite some differences explored below, in both one experiences thinkable content such that Mandela is tall. On the FBC, in a veridical instance of either perception or testimony, one thus perceives a fact.

## 5.6 *The Realms of Sense and Reference*

A central claim of the FBC lies in its placement of facts in the realm of sense and not of reference. Such talk of the realm of sense and the realm of reference needs to be taken carefully, for it may be seen to imply that these are two distinct realms. On such an understanding, the distinction between sense and reference is an ontological one: the realm of sense is mind-dependent, a realm of thought that is entirely independent of objects in the world, denizens of the ontologically-distinct realm of reference. This, of course, cannot be the type of sense-reference distinction employed by a proponent of the FBC, for it then makes little sense to talk of true thinkables (denizens of the realm of sense) as identical with facts (denizens of the realm of reference). In contrast,

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<sup>56</sup> McCulloch (1993: 46)

<sup>57</sup> McCulloch (1995: 125)



the notion of the sense-reference distinction I have in mind is a *grammatical* and not an *ontological* one.

In response to the difficulty of explaining the informativeness of (true) identity statements, Frege famously claimed that co-referring terms may nonetheless express different senses.<sup>58</sup> So, although the names 'George Orwell' and 'Eric Blair' may refer to the same person, to understand one of these names is not the same as understanding another for they differ in sense. Of course, the notion of sense is not restricted to proper names, but includes (at minimum) any sentence-constituent, such that one can see the thinkable expressed by a sentence as an amalgam of the various senses of the sentence's constituent expressions.

Frege introduced a metaphor for understanding the notion of sense: co-referring names may involve different *modes of presentation* of the same referent.<sup>59</sup> This may seem to suggest that such modes of presentation are specifiable by means of definite descriptions; indeed, Frege himself seems, on occasions, to suggest just this.<sup>60</sup> It is not the place to enter into a discussion of the well-known problems that emerge as a result of descriptive theory of sense.<sup>61</sup> However, the point that is relevant here is that such a descriptive theory of sense leads to the ontological understanding of the distinction referred to above. If the sense of a proper name is identified with a definite description, it can – as Russell has famously shown – be fully specified using universals (predicates and quantifiers and so on), and thus can be fully understood independent of any particular, worldly objects.<sup>62</sup> The notion of sense is seen as a mind-dependent entity (such as a complete, definite description), whilst the reference is an mind-independent object in the world.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, the distinction between sense and reference I am drawing on is a grammatical, and not an ontological, one: a distinction between knowledge of truths

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<sup>58</sup> Frege (1892)

<sup>59</sup> Frege (1892: 23–4)

<sup>60</sup> See the discussion of the sense of Aristotle in Frege (1892: 23–4), and Evans (1982: Chap 1).

<sup>61</sup> For example Kripke (1982).

<sup>62</sup> Russell (1905). See also Neale (1982)

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the conception of the distinction undermined in Kripke (1982) and defended in Searle (1983).

(‘savoir’, ‘wissen’) and knowledge of things (‘connaitre’, ‘kennen’).<sup>64</sup> McDowell puts the point as follows:

“A phrase of the form ‘the reference of X’ can be understood as equivalent to the corresponding phrase of the form ‘what x refers to’, either (I) in the sense in which ‘what’ amounts to ‘that which’ ...or (II) in the sense in which ‘what’ is an interrogative pronoun. In this second sense, ‘what x refers to’ gives the form of an indirect question, something suitable to follow know where knowledge of truths is what is meant.”<sup>65</sup>

In the former sense, talk of the reference of X involves knowledge of things, a distinct acquaintance with an object. Talk of reference in this sense involves discriminating knowledge of the reference, such as that which one can perceive directly in a perceptual experiential state. (See below). In the latter sense, talk of the reference of X involves, when combined with other knowledge not involving the name (such as something being predicated of the object), knowledge of truths involving such an object – just that which is need for understanding an utterance containing that name. The latter is the notion associates with the term ‘sense’, the former with the term ‘reference’.

On this grammatical conception of the difference, to give the sense of a name is to give what must be known by someone who understands that name: namely, that ‘George Orwell’ denotes George Orwell. This is not just to know how to drop the quotation marks - for someone could know how to drop such quotation marks, without knowing how to use the name properly for they do not know which object the name refers to. Such an account of the sense of a name ensures that it expresses the mode of presentation of its referent: ‘George Orwell’ presents the referent as George Orwell, whilst ‘Eric Blair’ presents the referent as Eric Blair. As a result, one can thus explain the informativeness of identity statements, despite the identity of referents: the referents are referred to differently. This really is an ‘austere theory of sense’: all it does is state the ability that someone has when s/he understands that name, but not how the person has that ability.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Evans (1982), McDowell (1998a).

<sup>65</sup> McDowell (1998a: 175)

<sup>66</sup> The phrase ‘austere theory of sense’ is used in the context of a debate between the Evans and McDowell approach pursued here, and Dummett’s development of the distinction which does not allow

Such a grammatical account of the sense-reference distinction explains Frege's puzzle without introducing senses as ontologically distinct entities from the referents, with talk of sense referring not to knowledge of things but knowledge of truths. My talk of thinkable content in the domain of sense was designed to reflect just this latter type of knowledge. In perceiving that Mandela is tall, one enters into an experiential state with thinkable content that is structured in such a way that it is appropriate to say that one knows a certain truth; one knows that Mandela is tall. Likewise, in understanding an utterance, one understands something that is structured in such a way that it is appropriate to say that one knows a certain truth; one knows that Mandela is tall. The notion of the object in such a type of knowledge is that which can play the role of an object in such a thinkable, the counterpart of the singular term playing a role in the context of a whole sentence.

In chapter 3, I took as a datum the claims of a 'constitutive interpretationism', involving a necessity claim, such that interpretability is a necessary condition for thought. The notions of sense and reference have their place within such an interpretationist framework. Whilst I will leave the main development of this theme for discussion in Chapter 7, I will make explicit at this stage one aspect of this notion in order to further clarify the grammatical conception of the sense-reference distinction. In interpreting the behaviours of others we ascribe to them content-laden mental states in order to make best rational sense of their behaviour. In the cases under consideration, as a result of understanding the testimony of senses or the testimony of others, we attribute to ourselves and others experiential states with content of the form  $Fa$ , that includes grasping the sense of a singular term. The sense of such a singular term is distinguished from the senses of other singular terms with the same reference by explaining how it is that the person is thinking about that particular thing, the discriminating knowledge of the object that the individual has as a result of such an experience.<sup>67</sup> So, in interpreting someone as being in an experiential state with thinkable content, we attribute to them knowledge of a truth, such that they come out as having direct knowledge of a thing – the object in

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for a systematic theory of senses. I freely concede that there is much more that needs to be said about the distinction than the cursory comments in the text.

<sup>67</sup> Evans (1982: 23)

question. As such, grasping the sense of a singular term (knowledge of truths) involves a capacity for the knowledge of the term's referent (knowledge of things) simply as a result of being in such a state.<sup>68</sup> To stress, the notion of the object here is still the notion of an object as it features in a thinkable – this is guaranteed by the fact that it takes place within an interpretational stance attempting to make rational sense of the individual as a result of such attribution of thinkable content. However, in the context of an experiential state one is able to have discriminating knowledge of the object.

The distinction between sense and reference becomes a grammatical distinction between knowledge of truths and knowledge of things. The central claim of is therefore that, in a perceptual and testimonial case, one enters into a distinct experiential state containing thinkable content, in a manner that one has discriminating knowledge of the referent, a unique, mind-independent object. This lies at the heart of the FBC of the disjunctive turn.

### 5.6 *Discriminating knowledge of the object.*

Thus far, I have used the FBC of the disjunctive turn to draw a parallel between the phenomenology of perceptual and testimonial experiential states. In both, one enters into a state with thinkable content, such that in the veridical instance the contents of one's experience is nothing short of a fact. As an experiential state, one has discriminating knowledge of the reference as a result of being in such a state.

Nevertheless, it seems that the account thus far ignores an obvious differences between the two states. Contrary to the thrust of the discussion thus far, it seems not possible to deny that the experience of seeing that Nelson Mandela is tall is not the same as hearing someone assert that Mandela is tall. In acquiring knowledge as a result of testimony, it is simply not the case that one experiences things to be the way that they know they are.<sup>69</sup> Such a concession may sound fatal to the parallel explored thus far in this essay. The aim of this section is to develop an account of TES's that

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<sup>68</sup> See Brewer (1999: 261)

<sup>69</sup> This loose formulation of the intuitive difference will be clarified in the ensuing discussion.

allows for this difference, whilst maintaining the phenomenological parallel between PES and TES outlined thus far.

Doing so involves making explicit a central aspect of experiential states hitherto ignored in the discussion thus far, namely the subject's self-conscious presence in the world. A central feature of some recent theorising about perceptual experiential states is the claim that the distinctness of such experiential states lies in the fact that it allows an individual to refer directly to a unique mind-independent object (or property) as a result of the subject's self-conscious presence in the world.<sup>70</sup> The general point is that in entertaining a singular proposition one must know which object is represented and how it is represented as being.<sup>71</sup> ( I will call this 'discriminating knowledge' of the object). In an experiential state, the object is presented in a distinct way so that one can know directly which object is in question.

The central claim of this section is that whilst both TES's and PES's both provide someone with discriminating knowledge of which object is in question in a manner that exploits the very existence of the object in question, they do so in different ways. This allows for the differences between perceptual and testimonial experiences without undermining the parallel in epistemic role. In what follows I will outline one influential account of discriminating knowledge in perceptual case largely due to Evans, and consider in this light the testimonial case.

### *5.7.1 Discriminating knowledge and the testimony of the senses*

A visual experience of Nelson Mandela, say, locates the object of that experience for the perceiver, in egocentric space as it were. However, the individual is able to locate himself and such experiences in a non-egocentric ('public') space, and thus the experience alone enables him to refer to just that object.<sup>72</sup> Without such an experience, an individual would not be able to uniquely refer to such objects. An individual who thought of everything by description, for example, would fail to pick

<sup>70</sup> Such a conception is found in both Strawson (1959) and Evans (1982), as well more recently in Brewer (1999). The account in this section is indebted to Brewer, though epistemic import of the account differs as a result of his failure to take seriously the notion of factive reasons discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>71</sup> This is sometimes called Russell's requirement - See Evans (1982:89)

out such a unique object or set of objects, since such a thought leaves open the possibility of massive reduplication - the possibility, that is, of the entire scene as described being reduplicated somewhere in the universe. In such a case, the thought would not pick out a unique mind-independent object.<sup>73</sup> Reference to unique, mind-independent particulars thus essentially depends on such experiences.

Talk of egocentric and public space seems to imply that these are separate conceptions. However, this is not the case. In thinking about Nelson Mandela, I do so from my point of view, and the object plays a role in my system of attitudes that forms my perspective. In the perceptual case, I think that Mandela is there. However, in order for Mandela to feature in such a perspective, I must be potentially able to think others things about Mandela, other than that he is there. So, I have a conception of an object that is independent of my own perspective. This is a conception of the object that is distinct from, yet related to, my egocentric conception; it is a conception of the object that allows me to apply other predicates to the object, and it is through this that my thought is subject to assessments of truth or falsity. The two perspectives are thus not seen as independent of each other. The egocentric conception is a way of thinking about an object that is constrained by the objective conception.

Evans marks this dependence by distinguishing, in the case of a perceptual demonstrative, between the egocentric location of an object and fundamental Idea of an object. According to Evans, for a subject to have a thought of the form Fa (involving the ascription of a property F to object a) the subject must have an Idea of an a and an Idea of F, as well as an Idea of an object and an Idea of a property. (I will focus on objects here). Appreciating the fact that there are objects involves knowing that such objects are distinct from one another in virtue of their possessing an individuating property, a fundamental ground of difference - typically the spatio-temporal location of an object (and the sort of object it is). If the subject has a grasp of the fundamental ground of difference for an object, and the person is able to think of the object as satisfying an indefinite number of other predicates, s/he has the fundamental Idea of the object.

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<sup>72</sup> Evans (1982: chapter 6)

<sup>73</sup> Strawson (1959), Evans (1982: 45) and Brewer (1999: chap 2).

Such talk of experience should not be seen as independent of the world: it involves a particular kind of relationship or orientation to the world. This is what is meant by an egocentric conception of the object. However, in order to have a contentful experience, one must be able to have the fundamental Idea of that object. In thinking about the object, I must be able to appreciate how such an object can feature in other thoughts. So, in order for my egocentric location of an object to be a location of an object, it must be possible to impose an objective conception (the fundamental ground of difference) onto that egocentric location.

“A thought about a position in egocentric space...concerns a point or region of public space in virtue of the existence of certain indissolubly connected dispositions on the part of the subject ...to treat perceptions of that place as germane to the evaluation and appreciation of the consequences of thought...[T]he subject may be said to have an adequate idea of a point in public space in virtue of his capacity to impose a conception of public space upon egocentric space.”<sup>74</sup>

On its own, the egocentric conception of an object could not be a conception of an object that features in a thinkable for it is not the type of thing that could be assessed as true or false, for it is not the type of thing that has the potential generality through which it can stand in rational relations to other thoughts. On its own, the objective conception of an object could not be a conception of an object that features in a thinkable for it is not a perspective, an individual's relational orientation to the world.

In having a demonstrative thought about an object, the way I think of the object in question is determined by my perceptual experience. Consider the case of visually experiencing something, entering into a PES with the thinkable content ‘this-such’. In the visual case, for example, the perceptual experience displays the spatial location of the object relative to the subject. Such a perceptual experience displays the spatial location of an object in egocentric space. The egocentric conception of the object is grounded in a conception of a world as extending in time and space, such that each object has a unique spatial pathway through such time. In having such a conception of a pathway, one can thus understand what it would be for objects to satisfy other predicates than the current one. So in thinking about an particular (token) object is to

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<sup>74</sup> Evans (1982: 168)

have the thought constrained by the a conception of public space, a conception of what it is for that object to have a unique spatio-temporal pathway. A (visual) perceptual experience allows the subject to know which particular object is in question, to have a 'discriminating conception' of such an object as Evans would say.

In perceiving the testimony of the senses, the testimony normally involves more "detached linguistic categories" such as claiming 'that Mandela is tall', as opposed to 'this-such'. For some such detached expressions, it seems clear that the judgement is arrived at through some sort of inference. I perceive this-such, and, given my additional knowledge relating this to Mandela, I come to believe that Mandela is tall. Such a judgement differs from the an experiential state, whereby the content 'this-such' is perceived directly. However, it has plausibly been argued by Brewer, that it is possible to treat some examples of judgements containing such detached linguistic expressions ('categorical judgements') as being closer to the non-inferential, perceptual experiences. Over time and with practice, one develops a skill for directly applying such categories to the judgement, without the need for any inferences - the acquisition of such a categorising skill is an extension of the range of things regarding which one can make such direct, non-categorical judgements of the form this-such.<sup>75</sup>

By way of summary, it seems that in an act of visually perceiving that p, one enters into a distinctive experiential state. The state has conceptually-articulated, thinkable content, such as that of the form 'this-such', composed of a monadic predicate and an object. The object is presented as being at a particular spatio-temporal location relative to the perceiver, constrained by the objective conception which provides the fundamental ground of difference for the object. In short, one enters into a distinct perceptual experiential state containing thinkable content, in a manner that one has discriminating knowledge of the reference, a unique, mind-independent object, as a result of the subject's self-conscious presence in the world. As a result of such an experience, the subject knows which object it is about, s/he has a discriminating conception of such an object.

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<sup>75</sup> Much more needs to be said about the notion of skill here and its relationship to experience, but I will simply assume it to be broadly correct for our purposes here. See Brewer (1999: 241-251). I develop this issue of directness further in the next chapter.



### 5.7.2 *Discriminating knowledge and the testimony of others*

There are a number of parallels between acquiring knowledge through the testimony of the senses and the testimony of others. In the latter, we too we enter into an experiential state with thinkable content, and we grasp a proper name in a manner such that one has discriminating knowledge of the object. Simply in virtue of being in such an experiential state, it seems to me that one is potentially able to know which object is represented. It is true that such discriminating knowledge is not the result of exploiting one's self awareness of the visual context within which perception takes place. Nonetheless, testimony does take place within a social context and it seems that one can use such a context to provide discriminating knowledge of the object in virtue of that testimonial experience. This accounts for the different but parallel roles of perceptual and testimonial experience.

It is often assumed that linguistic communication such as that under consideration is the very paradigm of context-free interaction. However, this is not always the case, and it is important to note the role played by the social context of communication in providing discriminating knowledge of the referent of proper names for example.

Consider an example of H who knows nothing at all about Nelson Mandela, save for the fact that he joins in a pub conversation of people talking about a certain Nelson Mandela of whom H has never heard before.<sup>76</sup> H hears S assert that Mandela is tall, and asks S about Mandela. It does seem that S is able to refer to Mandela, even though the few descriptive facts that he has been able to glean from the conversation may better fit someone other than Mandela.<sup>77</sup>

In explaining how this is possible, one could of course appeal to some causal story linking my use of the term 'Mandela' to Mandela, via a series of causal intermediaries. This would be used to explain how it is that I am able to refer to Mandela as a result of hearing the name in the conversation, despite the descriptive vagueness. However, imagine a later stage in which H has no recollection of the conversation (or any other discriminating knowledge regarding Mandela), so that H

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<sup>76</sup> Based on Evans (1985: 5-8).

<sup>77</sup> Such thoughts are supposed to motivate against a purely descriptive theory of reference.

asserts that Mandela is tall. At this later stage, it does not seem that he refers to Mandela. Here the causal story cannot help; for it cannot explain why is H able to refer to Mandela in the context of the conversation, but not later.<sup>78</sup>

How is such reference achieved? In explaining this phenomenon, a useful distinction is that between producers and consumers of a name-using practice.<sup>79</sup> Producers with regards a particular name-using practice are those who come into demonstrative contact with the bearer of that name. Such producers may have been present at the particular baptism of the object, or have been introduced to the bearer in demonstrative encounters with the object. The former introduce the name-using practice, the other maintain it in a core sense to be elucidated. Consumers are those who have had no demonstrative contact with the object but form part of a conversation involving the name in virtue of their contact with the producers.

In the preceding example, H, having had no contact with Mandela, is a consumer, dependent upon the producers in such a conversation for the reference. H is indeed able to have a thought about Mandela, he has discriminating knowledge of the subject via his attachment to the conversation. He knows which object the claims are about, and not just in a descriptive sense. Once this conversation ceases, or at least once his recollection of the conversation ceases, his attachment ceases and he is thus unable to refer to Mandela. In the terminology introduced above, H has discriminating knowledge of which object is referred to in virtue of having an egocentric conception of the object in terms of his conception of the conversational context: he can identify the participants, those he treats as the producers. However, such a conception of an object is controlled by an objective conception: the conception of the object of the producers to whom H will gladly defer in the instance of debate. The producers in this instance are those group of individuals to whom a participant in a conversation will defer as experts as regards the reference of the term. These two perspectives of the object combine to give him a discriminating conception of the object as a result of the testimonial experience.

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<sup>78</sup> This point is made in Evans (1985: 6)

<sup>79</sup> The distinction is due to both Evans (1982) and Kripke (1982), though developed here in a non-causal vein. (See McCulloch 1989)

This point can be clarified through contrasting it with a causal account of reference, where there is also a producer / consumer distinction. Consider Kripke's celebrated case in which H picks up the name 'Cicero' from S, who use it to refer to the famous Roman orator. H forgets this, and believes he has the name from Jones who uses it to refer to a contemporary of theirs. Kripke's claim is that when H now asserts that 'Cicero is tall' he is referring to the Roman Orator and not the contemporary - even though H may think otherwise. The reasoning behind this appears to be the fact that there is a causal chain of communication running from the initial baptism of Cicero the orator all the way to H's use. The chain gets started via the perception of those present at the initial baptism, an event that can be explained in purely causal terms; those present are the producers of the name using practice, everyone else becomes a consumer. The central claim of such an account is that H refers to Cicero the orator in such a case, irrespective of any egocentric conception of the object he may have that he may have.

I have already indicated that I find such a claim implausible. Causal connections just too crude to provide an account of reference, in that they dispense with the need for such discriminating conception of the object in question. More specifically, the notion of the object I am interested in here, the notion of an object as it features in the context of a thinkable, just cannot stand in such causal relations. Nevertheless, the above account of reference, stripped of the causal linkages, seems to be correct. My use of the name 'Cicero' is dependent upon a particular context in which I learnt to use the name, which in turn is controlled by the producers of such a name using practice.

In both the cases discussed thus far, we have been using examples of famous proper names, such as Cicero and Mandela. Such examples seem to be different from other uses of proper names; after all, we all know to whom the name refers even though we are not in conversation with primary consumers nor have any recollection of such a conversational context. However, I would argue that such public names seem to be different; it is as if we are all part of an extended conversation that relates us to the producers, and such a shared conversation acts as a kind of default position with

regards the referent.<sup>80</sup> Imagine that, in a fit of admiration for Mandela, a person names his son after him. His friends all converse about Nelson Mandela, and we overhear this conversation in a pub. The friends assert that Nelson Mandela is tall and H comes to believe that Mandela is tall. To whom is H referring? Let us say that he has never heard of Nelson Mandela prior to the pub conversation, and simply relies on those he considers to be primary producers: he then refers to whosoever these producers refer. Let us say that he erroneously assumes them to be referring to Mandela, the former president. He does seem to be referring to the former president in his subsequent thoughts. Here too there is a distinction between egocentric and objective conceptions of the objects that provides discriminating knowledge of which object is in question. One simply defers to imagined primary consumers (such as Mandela's current wife) who are seen as producers as regards this widespread name-using practice. In such a case, it seems to be assumed that one is referring to the famous individual.

The discussion here is complicated, and different cases invite specific problems that will not be discussed here. The problems can be divided into two groups: the first involves accounting for the manner in which one can acquire such discriminating knowledge for differing names, especially those that do not appear to have been introduced via such a conversational context. The second involves potential conflicts between such a manner of acquiring discriminating knowledge of the object and other methods, including the more basic perceptual case. A great deal of further work is required to explore these issues; work that I will not undertake here.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, I think enough has been said to suggest the following picture. The central claim is that such a conversational context allows one for to master a communal name using practice in a manner that allows for one to have discriminating knowledge of the object in virtue of just such a context. In a testimonial experiential state with the content that Nelson Mandela is tall one is able to have discriminating knowledge of the object in virtue of standing within a particular conversational context. Our conception of the way we fit into the conversation is the egocentric

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<sup>80</sup> It seems to me that such a phenomenon lies behind Kripke's analysis of the Cicero example – in assuming that it is the Roman Orator to whom Jones refers.

<sup>81</sup> I also confess that the restriction made at the beginning of chapter 2, such that I am only interested in cases of testimony of the form Fa, makes the attempt at a parallel here easier. Issues of reference and

conception, a conception that cannot be separated from the objective conception provided by the primary producers. Our thoughts are subject to evaluation in virtue of constraint via such an egocentric conception. As such, in both a TES and PES one enters into a distinct experiential state in which one has discriminating knowledge regarding which object is in question. Nevertheless, one knows which object is in question in differing ways: in the former this is as the result of knowledge of the spatial location of the object at a given time, whilst in the latter, it is the result of one's conception of a shared conversation involving the name.

Thus far, I have done little more than describe the FBC account of experiential state in a way that allows for a phenomenological parallel between TES and PES, whilst acknowledging certain differences. Little has been done to justify adoption of the FBC over the OBC, nor has the implications for the epistemology of testimony been made explicit. These issues are taken up in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Factive Reasons**

#### **6.1    *Introduction***

At this stage, I turn towards the epistemic implications of the preceding discussion of experiential states, and wish to lift a restriction imposed at the outset of this study. The restriction involved adopting an attitude of agnosticism regarding the nature of 'knowledge'. The discussion of epistemic issues in Part A of this study has been an exercise in doxastology, involving consideration of the justification of testimonial-based beliefs, and little mention has been made of the relationship between such justified beliefs and knowledge. The adoption of agnosticism regarding the nature of knowledge echoes the stance implicit in much recent theorising in epistemology, albeit one adopted for differing reasons. For some, this is a pragmatic strategy adopted in face of the difficulties surrounding the concept of knowledge as the result of Gettier problems: much discussion can be continued without too much loss at the level of justification alone, and we can thereby remain agnostic on the thorny issue of knowledge whilst continuing research in epistemology.<sup>1</sup> For others, such agnosticism is not just a short-term, expository device, but a statement of faith. Knowledge simply does not matter; justification is all that is important.<sup>2</sup>

My own sympathies lie with the former group, and I stressed at the outset that the agnosticism underlying this exercise in doxastology was to be a temporary one adopted for the purposes of evaluating extant accounts of testimony alone. The term 'knowledge' features in both the title of this essay and in formulating the common-sense constraint on theories of the epistemology of testimony, and this is not just for terminological convenience but in the conviction that knowledge matters. In this section, I wish to reintroduce knowledge into the discussion and will argue that doing so alters significantly the thrust of the discussion thus far.

In a recent book, Owens makes a basic distinction between two broad models of knowledge. Consider, he suggests, someone coming to know that there is snow on the

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Pollock (1986) and Foley (1993: 56), and implicit in: Fricker (1994: 158 – fn. 2).

ground by observing that there is snow on the ground. If asked how she knows this, she responds by saying that she saw the snow, and such a response supports her claim to knowledge. The two models differ in explaining how such answers support her knowledge claim.

“According to one model of knowledge, these answers cite the inconclusive evidence upon which I base my claim to know... I can never have conclusive grounds for such a belief; nevertheless some level of evidence entitles me to claim to know. But there is another picture of knowledge which requires that my reasons be conclusive. On this view, to say how I know that p is not to note something which makes it more or less likely that p is true, but to describe how the truth of p manifested itself to me...I could neither perceive nor learn of snow unless snow was indeed present; neither is mere evidence of snow. Indeed, according to this picture of knowledge, no knowledge claim could be based on evidence of snow because mere evidence could not ground the certainty required for knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>

Both models agree that she knows that there is snow on the ground. Both models agree that she has reasons upon which such a knowledge claim is based. Both agree that the reasons upon which this knowledge claim is based is her perceptual experience of snow. They differ on the way in which her knowledge claim is based on such reasons.

On the former model, such an experience provides evidence that supports her belief. Such evidence comes in different levels, running from highly improbable to highly probable. At some stage, the evidence, though inconclusive, is sufficient to support her claim to know. Following Owens, let us call this an *evidential model of knowledge*. On the latter model, when she cites a reason for believing that p, she is not defending the claim through arguing why she thinks it highly likely that p is the case, but describing how she comes to know that p. The states she points to, seeing that p for example, are dependent on there being snow: one cannot be said to have seen snow unless there was snow to have been seen. In citing reasons, she is defending her claim to know by describing how the truth manifested itself to her. I will call such

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<sup>2</sup> For example: Kaplan (1985); Wright (1991: 88)

<sup>3</sup> Owens (2000: 38-9)

reasons *factive reasons*, and the model of knowledge that emerges a *factive model of knowledge*.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I develop such a notion of factive reasons and argue that TES provide factive reasons for beliefs based upon them. In citing testimonial experience as a reason for believing that *p*, *H* is defending his claim to know by describing how the truth manifested itself to him. Defending this claim involves two tasks. Firstly, one needs to develop the notion of factive reasons, defend it from objections and orient it with regards traditional epistemic debates [6.2, 6.5]. Secondly, one needs to argue that TES's can provide such factive reasons. This involves both building on, and filling in lacuna, in the preceding account of TES. [6.3, 6.4].

## 6.2 *Factive Reasons and the Disjunctive Turn*

At first blush, it may be thought that the two models of knowledge in question here reflects the difference between epistemic internalism and externalism, with the factive conception representing the latter. Consider the 'rough and ready' reliabilism rejected in the first part of this essay. On such an account, a true belief that *p* is knowledge only if it is acquired by a method reliable for such matters. If we are to gloss the notion of reliabilism in terms of 'truth-tracking', it seems that here we have the type of relationship between truth and beliefs that seems to conform with the notion of factivity: a belief is only knowledge if it tracks the truth.

However, whilst the notion of factive reasons does indeed share a certain similarity with such a reliabilist position, the basic thrust of the suggestion here differs significantly. The issue here regards the type of *reasons* available for knowledge claims. The factive model claims, whilst the evidential model denies, that such reasons must be factive. As such, it concerns the relationship between the justificatory

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<sup>4</sup> This phrase is used by Peacocke (1999: 51) to describe certain accounts of knowledge to be discussed below. I should stress that even though I have used Owen's account to make the distinction, my subsequent analysis of the factive account differs greatly from his. For this reason I have chosen to call it the factive model, as opposed to his notion of conclusive reasons; it seems to me that his version is still in the grip of the conjunctivism. I should add that upon completion of this chapter, I came across Williamson's recent book (2000) that offers an account that bears striking similarities to that developed here. Although I had read an earlier paper of Williamson's (1995), the position here was developed independently of his work. Further work I hope to undertake would be to explore the relationship between the two accounts.



requirement in the JTB account and the truth requirement. The central point of the 'rough and ready' reliabilism discussed in the first part of the essay involved a rejection of the necessity of the justification condition in an analysis of knowledge. "[A]ny subjective requirement is gratuitous".<sup>5</sup> In a slogan, what we are offered in such a reliabilist account are not factive reasons, but factivity in place of reason.

At the risk of belabouring the point, it is worth distinguishing this position from another that claims to respect the insight of reliabilism, whilst incorporating a notion of reasons. I have in mind certain so-called 'hybrid conceptions' of knowledge, whereby a rationality requirement is added as an extra requirement to a reliabilist account.<sup>6</sup> The core idea is that it is not sufficient for a true belief to be knowledge if it is acquired by a method reliable for such matters, but – additionally – the method constitutes the subject's ground for the belief in question in that it comprises a component *cognitively accessible* to the subject and the subject thus believes that the grounds of his beliefs are reliable indicators of the truth.

Here one may indeed have 'factivity' and 'reasons', but the hybrid nature of the account ensures that these are not factive reasons. The notion of factive reasons involves a claim regarding what is cognitively accessible to a subject – what lies within his/her cognitive reach. The hybrid account places factivity outside the cognitive reach of the individual, so that it is possible for two people to be fully justified and thus have reasons for their beliefs, and yet one of these people cannot be said to know since their beliefs are not truth-tracking in a sense that is beyond their cognitive reach. In contrast, the notion of factive reasons is such that factivity, in a case of knowledge, is indeed cognitively accessible.

The difference between these evidential and factive models can be illustrated through consideration of the following argument made by Peacocke in rejecting a non-reductive approach to testimony, such as that considered in Chapter 3.

"[I]t may be thought that...it is a priori impossible that most assertions are mistaken. Suppose we grant for the sake of argument that it is impossible.

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<sup>5</sup> Papineau (1993:144)

<sup>6</sup> This is Peacocke's position described in the Appendix to chapter 4. See also Alston (1988). and Blackburn (1984).

From the fact, even the fact known to you, that most F's are G's, it does not follow that any F you encounter and believe to be G, you also know to be G provided that it is G. Otherwise knowing you are in a country in which the president is elected by an absolute majority and in which voting is compulsory, you will be counted as knowing of anyone with whom you are presented that he voted for the elected president, provided only that you believe it and that it is true. Knowledge requires more, and the same applies to testimony..."<sup>7</sup>

If I am in a country in which I know the President was elected by an overwhelming majority of over 99%, I do indeed have a pretty good reason for believing it likely that anyone I meet voted for the president, assuming that I know nothing else about them. On the evidential model of knowledge, I have highly probable evidence supporting my belief and I can thus be said to know that he voted for the president. On the factual model, such highly probable evidence does not provide a factive reason for knowing that he voted for the president, and thus I cannot be said to know that he voted for the president.

As an aside, it is worth noting that, although Peacocke's intuitions support the factive model in that he does claim, like the proponent of the factive model, that I could not be said to know that the person voted for the president, he should not be seen as a proponent of the factive model. Peacocke's position is the hybrid one outlined above, and the way he phrases the problem with this case reveals a difference between this and the factive model.<sup>8</sup> Peacocke says the problem with such a non-reductive approach to testimony, as with the voting case, is that 'knowledge requires more' than such highly probable but inconclusive evidence. However, the central point of the factive model is not that knowledge requires more, but the very notion of a reason is different. No additional amount of evidence will suffice as the proponent of the evidentialist model suggests, nor will adding an externalist element in a hybrid account as Peacocke claims. What one needs are factive reasons.

When it comes to the debate between evidentialist and factive models, it seems that intuitions vary. What is of interest is that it is the evidentialist model that dominates in

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<sup>7</sup> Peacocke (1986: 167, n. 9)

<sup>8</sup> I defend this reading of Peacocke in the Appendix to Ch. 4

the literature, often without justification or even acknowledgement of an alternative. Reflection on cases where a defence of the evidentialist model is made explicit is instructive and will help reveal some reasons as to why it is the evidentialist, and not the factive, model that dominates. This of interest to us in the context of this essay, as a core claim to be made here is that, in contrast to the extant accounts of the epistemology of testimony that largely work within an evidentialist model, it is the factive model alone that can provide a satisfactory epistemology of testimony.

One such argument against the factive model found in a recent introductory textbook is of particular interest, involving as it does an appeal to the epistemology of testimony. The argument runs as follows:

“One of the most striking features about human knowledge...is that we learn most of what we know by being told it by someone else....But ... in all cases, when we are told something by someone else, it is possible that person is mistaken...Now, if our justification for believing something consists solely in the fact that we have been told it by a reliable authority...it is nevertheless possible that the what they are telling us is wrong. [D]oes this mean that our justification is less than complete and that we never acquire knowledge of what they are telling us?”<sup>9</sup>

A positive answer to the question (‘yes, we do not therefore acquire knowledge through testimony’) would involve an affirmation of something like the factive model. In a case of testimony, there is always the possibility of a mistake – so the reasons in such a case are non-factive: the reason (the belief that S asserted that p) could be true even if the testimonial-based belief (that p) is false. A positive answer would then say that since the reasons are less than conclusive, we never acquire knowledge in such a case. However, continue the authors, such a line of thought cannot be correct since it will rule out the possibility of gaining knowledge through testimony.

“...If the answer...is yes, then we will have defined knowledge in such a way that we will know very much less than we thought we did.”<sup>10</sup>

In rejecting such a positive response to the question, the authors appeal to common-sense; as they put it, ‘standard usage’ of the concept ‘knowledge’ implies that knowledge does not require “complete justification”.

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<sup>9</sup> Fisher & Everitt (1995: 34)

<sup>10</sup> Fisher & Everitt (ibid.)

This example is of particular interest as the assumptions made here reveal two things. Firstly, the authors assume common-sense implies that an insistence on factive reasons is too strong and rules out many ordinary instances of knowledge. Secondly, they simply assume that the case of testimony is one in which the individual has non-factive reasons. Indeed, they use this second assumption to ground their first: since instances of acquiring beliefs based on testimony necessarily involve non-factive reasons and it is common-sense that testimony can be a source of knowledge, therefore common-sense implies that non-factive reasons suffice for knowledge.

The structure of the argument is as follows:

- (1) in a case where H believes that p as a result of hearing and understanding S assert that p, it is possible for H to be misled.
- (2) Whenever there is the possibility of being misled, ones reasons must be non-factive.
- (3) H's reasons for believing that p are thus non-factive.
- (4) If a conception of knowledge is such that it requires H to have factive reasons, then H does not know that p
- (5) It is common-sense that H does know that p
- (6) Therefore it cannot be the case that a conception of knowledge is such that it requires H to have factive reasons.

Premise (1) stems from the case itself and is undeniable; (4) follows from (3) which follows from (2); (5) is our common-sense constraint defended in part A, and (6) follows from the rest. The crux is thus premise (2). For the moment, let us grant it to be true, and that this argument succeeds in undermining the first intuition such that knowledge require factive reasons. Setting out the argument in these stages is instructive for it allows a similar argument to be applied to any case in which appearances can be deceptive. If one has a particular perceptual experience and forms a belief based on that, it is always possible that one can be misled. On a factive model of knowledge, it would thus seem that such a perceptual-based belief is not knowledge. Such scepticism goes against common-sense and thus a factive model is false.

It should however be obvious that lying behind assumption (2) is a conjunctive way of thinking highlighted in Chapter 5. Assumption (2) above moves from a claim about indistinguishability to a claim about constitution. In the case under consideration, we form certain beliefs based on perceptual/testimonial experiences - such experiential states provide the reasons for our beliefs. Since our experiences could mislead us, such experiential states must share a common factor between veridical and non-veridical cases. It therefore follows that such experiential states fall short of the facts, and, crucially, even in the veridical case ones reasons are non-factive. The availability of a disjunctive alternative reveals firstly that such a move from claims about indistinguishability to claims about constitution is not inevitable, and secondly undermines the overall argument against the very notion of factive reasons.

Taking the disjunctive turn thus opens up the possibility of a factive model of knowledge, according to which, in a veridical instance of experience, one is directly acquainted with facts. However, in order to develop such an account, I must fill a lacunae left over from that discussion of disjunctivism. There, I distinguished between two ways of conceiving the disjunctive turn, an OBC and a FBC. On the OBC, in the veridical case one is directly acquainted with objects located in the realm of reference, particulars located in specific spatial and temporal orderings. On the FBC, in the veridical case one is directly acquainted with facts located within the realm of sense, conceived as true thinkables. Although I adopted the latter, no formal argument was provided for so doing. Providing such an argument is important as the distinction had critical bearing on the extension of the disjunctive turn to incorporate TES's, for the parallel only works on the FBC and not the OBC. Such a lacuna is filled in the next section.

### 6.3 *The epistemic role of perceptual experience*

In this section I aim to develop an argument in favour of the FBC over the OBC. The argument involves reflections on the epistemic role of perceptual experiences. More specifically, I will argue that:

[R1] perceptual experience plays a rational role in justifying beliefs

[R2] Only an FBC can support such a claim.

This section aims to argue in favour of [R1] through reflections upon the lessons of the Müller-Lyer illusion. [R2] will be explored in the following section, focussing initially on the perceptual case.

Consider so-called ‘belief theories’ of perception, theories that attempt to analyse perceiving in terms of acquiring beliefs so that perceptual experiences are seen as beliefs or inclinations to believe.<sup>11</sup> Even though it is now commonplace to refute such theories as the result of the ‘belief-independence’ of perceptual experience, it is important to realise why such belief theories were enticing to start of with.

In our everyday discourse involving such experiences, we allow these experiences to play a rationalising role in justifying our beliefs: one can cite one’s perceptual experience as the reason that for one’s perceptual-based belief, much as we have argued elsewhere in this essay that one can cite testimonial experience as the reason for a testimonial-based belief. Now, if - following the ‘belief theory of perception’ - perceptual experiential states were indeed just belief states, it is easy to see how such experiential states could stand in such rationalising explanations to other beliefs; pretty much in the same as any other belief states do. One generally accepted feature of beliefs is that they stand in such rationalising relations to other beliefs. So, if perceptual experiences were indeed belief states, it would be easy (or at least easier) to account for them seeming to play such a rationalising role in terms of justifying other beliefs.

So much for the plausible motivation behind such ‘belief theories of perception’. However, as we have remarked, perceptual experiences are not beliefs – such experiences are belief independent. Consider the oft-discussed case of the Müller-Lyer illusion, in which two lines of equal length appear unequal. Even when an individual is aware that this is indeed an illusion and that, despite appearances, the two lines are of equal length, the illusory experience does not suddenly disappear. Although one may use this additional information to judge that the lines are not of equal length, the lines still appear to be unequal in length. The example of the Müller-Lyer illusion shows the ‘belief-independence’ of experience, since the perceptual

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. Armstrong (1968); Pitcher (1971)

experience can persist even though it is not believed.<sup>12</sup> So it seems that there is a difference between perceptual states on the one hand and cognitive states such as beliefs on the other.

One response to such a rejection of ‘belief theories of perception’ would be to claim that the motivation behind such a theory is false too: the intuition that experiential states stand in rationalising relations to belief states. As a result:

“[t]he relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer, I think, is obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified.”<sup>13</sup>

Davidson’s remarks are not made in direct response to the failure of such belief theories, but they capture one possible response: a denial of [R1] - the claim that perceptual experience plays an epistemic role in justifying beliefs. On this reading, not only do we have here a rejection of a belief theory of perception but a rejection of the underlying motivation too, namely the thought that perceptual experiences themselves stand in rationalising relations to beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

However, this seems too much of an extreme response to the claim that experiences are belief independent. One can maintain the motivating intuition that experiences play such a rational role whilst respecting the claim that there is a difference between perceptual states on the one hand and cognitive states such as beliefs on the other. Indeed, it seems to me that further reflections on the Müller-Lyer case itself shows our intuitions regarding the rational role of experiences are indeed sound.<sup>15</sup>

I believe two lines to be of equal length because that is the way they appear to me. I watch two fins being drawn on to one of these lines (to create the Müller-Lyer

<sup>12</sup> This objection is found, amongst others, in: Jackson (1977: 37-42)

<sup>13</sup> Davidson (1986: 311).

<sup>14</sup> This lies behind Brandom’s bold statement that “Experience is not one of my words...I do not see that we require any intermediary between perceptible facts and reports of them that are non-inferentially elicited by reliable differential responsive dispositions. There are of course many causal intermediaries...[b]ut I do not see that any of these has any conceptual or therefore cognitive significance.” Brandom (2000: 173)

illusion) and now the lines appear to be of different lengths. Despite this appearance however, I do not now believe the lines to be of different lengths. This was the basis of the claim for the belief independence of experience. Why do I not believe the lines to be of different length despite my perceptual experiences?

The answer seems to run as follows. I have a prior belief that the lines are of equal lengths and (believing that the world is not in constant flux) find the current appearance of the two lines to be inconsistent with these prior beliefs. I also have a prior belief in the possibility that experience is fallible. Given the fact that my current experience that the two lines are unequal in length is inconsistent with my prior belief that they are the same length, I do not now acquire the belief that they are different lengths. Rather, I assume my experiences to be fallacious in some way. So, on occasions, my failure to acquire a particular belief lies in the fact that the contents of a perceptual experience are inconsistent with my prior beliefs.

Inconsistency is a logical relation between propositions, suggesting therefore that the relationship between perceptual states and beliefs is a logical one. Granted that we have been considering cases in which I do not acquire a belief as the result of a particular experience. However, the fact that a relationship of inconsistency between the content of a current experience and the contents of prior beliefs is cited to explain this instance of 'belief suspension' suggests that ordinary cases of belief acquisition based on perceptual experiences can be explained by citing the consistency between experiences and beliefs. It seems therefore that there is some rational relation between experiences and beliefs.

It seems to me that reflection on the Müller-Lyer case suggests that experiential states are both similar and different to belief states - similar in that they play a rationalising role, yet different in that they are belief-independent. Others, as we have seen, seem to take the difference to undermine the similarity. Since perceptual experiences are not beliefs, they cannot play such a rationalising role that only beliefs play. "[N]othing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief".<sup>16</sup> If it plays a rational role, it is a belief; if it is not a belief, it cannot play such a rational role. Such

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<sup>15</sup> The following argument is due to Martin (1992)

<sup>16</sup> Davidson (1986: 310). Quotation is taken somewhat out of context. See below



a response seems to throw the baby out with the bath water, as it were. Why not simply note that perceptual experiences are unique in that they are able to play this rationalising role since they share certain basic similarities to beliefs, even if they are not beliefs? Some register a simple puzzlement regarding the coherence of such a unique mental state, complaining that if such a state is not a belief: “then it is a propositional attitude for which we have no word”.<sup>17</sup> I find such puzzlement puzzling! We do indeed have a word for such unique propositional attitudes – they are called experiential states.<sup>18</sup>

According to this, such unique mental states have a dual status – they stand in justificatory relationships to beliefs even if they are not beliefs. The Müller-Lyer case, the source of our thinking about the belief-independence of perceptual experience, shows at that there is a certain passivity in the case of perceptual experiences that is not the case for belief acquisition. We receive something in a perceptual experience; there is a certain degree of passivity apparent in perceptual cases that is not the case in other types of judgement. It is something that happens to us, over which we are passive. This does not mean to say that we cannot think about such experiences or criticise them. As the Müller-Lyer case shows, we can reflect rationally upon such experiences and fail to endorse them in our beliefs if they are inconsistent. In the normal course of things, we just perceive things, passively as it were. Having such experiences are not subject to acts of will and so on. Such experiences, in a manner discussed below, play a rational role in justifying other beliefs in virtue of their thinkable content. Normally one just accepts such belief. However, one is able to reflect upon such reasons, and through such reflection assume responsibility for them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Davidson (1998: 107)

<sup>18</sup> Some have argued that perceptual states differ from beliefs states in terms of content as well as attitude. On such accounts, perceptual states have non-conceptual content. In what follows I provide a general argument against such a contention, namely that such non-conceptual states cannot play a rationalising role in justifying perceptual-based beliefs. I freely admit that a fuller discussion is required of these controversial themes beyond that which appears below. In defence of such omission, it should be noted that my overall concern is the case of testimonial experience, where even those who are generally sympathetic to the notion of non-conceptual content do not apply it. [See Evans (1982: 124)].

<sup>19</sup> I am aware that more needs to be said regarding the passivity of such states. As Brewer puts it, one needs to distinguish such states from the other thoughts I entertain in such a passive manner. (Brewer (1999: 185). Further, I am sympathetic to Brewer’s claim that an account of experiential states such as that proffered at the end of the preceding chapter, involving a description of the manner through which one knows which the unique mind-independent reference as a result of being in such states. However,

In short, reflection on the Müller-Lyer case reveal perceptual states to have a unique status, similar and yet different to beliefs. As a result of the similarity, such experience play a rational role in justifying beliefs – the first stage [R1] in our argument against the OBC.

#### 6.4 *Justification and conceptual structure*

The Muller-Lyer case is one of illusion. If we are to distinguish between the FBC and OBC, we need to turn our attention towards a veridical case. As a result of the discussion thus far, we can now highlight two key features in such a veridical case. Firstly, as a result of the negative conception of the disjunctive turn, in such a veridical instance one is directly acquainted with the facts. Secondly, as a result of our argument in favour of [R1], such an experiential state stands in rational relations to other beliefs. [R2] is the claim that only the OBC cannot, whilst the FBC can, allow for [R1].

On the FBC, in the veridical case one is acquainted with facts conceived as denizens of the realm of sense. Facts just are identical with true thinkables, and are individuated to whatever degree of fineness is required for the attribution of sense, such that is not possible for one to entertain the same thinkable and take rationally differing attitudes towards it at any one given time. This places the content of such veridical experiential states on a par with contents of other propositional attitudes such as belief states. (This is not to equate such states with belief states). As denizens of the realm of sense, the thinkable content of such experiential states, in much the same way as the thinkable content of belief states, can enter into rationalising relations with each other.

Whilst the notion of sense is sometimes seen as a technical feature of language, I have here allotted it a central role in the very notion of thought: “the link between the

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the matter is not as urgent on my account, involving as it does the notion of factive reasons. For Brewer, the issue regards why such experiences are endorsed in beliefs, and thus one needs an account of how such states provide motivation for an endorsement in belief. On my account, such perceptual states can simply be states of knowledge unless there are reasons not to endorse such thinkable content.

notion of sense and propositional attitude psychology [is] extremely direct.”<sup>20</sup> The content of a thought - a thinkable - is individuated by sense and not reference; reference alone is too coarse as a subject could be thinking about the same referent whilst coherently taking different rational attitudes towards such an object. The content of such thoughts - thinkables - are thus to be individuated to whatever degree of fineness is required to allow it to play a rationalising role in explaining human action. The content of such mental states is generally specified using ‘that-clauses’, and is rationally structured. Thinkables can potentially take the part of premise or conclusion in an argument, and thus such mental states can stand in rationalising relations to each other.

[R1] claims that perceptual experiences play a rational role in justifying perceptual-based beliefs. For something to play such a rational role it must be capable of entering into rational relations, such as inferences and other forms of reasoning. As such it must be conceptually structured.<sup>21</sup> On the FBC, the contents of veridical perceptual experiences are true thinkables, facts located in the realm of sense. Such thinkables can, by their very role in propositional attitude psychology, enter into these rational relations. As such, the FBC can account for [R1]

On an OBC, in the veridical case one is acquainted with objects located in the realm of reference. Objects in the world can stand in causal relationships with other objects, and such relationships can be described in non-rational terms. Objects themselves can neither stand as premise nor conclusion in some piece of reasoning. As such, these denizens of the realm of reference cannot play the rational role required by [R1].

The argument above turns on the following claim: *only that which is conceptually structured can play a justificatory role in relation to beliefs*. On the FBC, the content of veridical perceptual experiences are facts which are conceptually structured and can thus justify perceptual-based beliefs. On the OBC, the content of veridical perceptual experiences are not conceptually structured and thus cannot justify

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<sup>20</sup> Evans (1982: 18).

<sup>21</sup> It is important to separate the bearer of conceptual content from the conceptual content itself. So, the English sentence (sign) ‘Mandela is tall’ and the French sentence ‘Mandela ‘ share the same conceptual content, so that the term ‘concept’ refers to a component of the content itself and not the

perceptual-based beliefs. I think that this claim is true and one way of seeing this is to make explicit the relationship between conceptual structure and justificatory role. Making explicit this relationship will not provide a conclusive argument in favour of the claim, but it is important in revealing a basic problem with the OBC.

In saying that the content of a mental state is conceptually structured, I mean to say that to be in that state requires one to grasp certain concepts. Earlier this was related to what has been called the Generality Constraint such that no thinker could entertain a thought without the ability to recombine the elements of the structure to form other thoughts. According to the Generality Constraint, the thought that 'John is happy' has something in common with the thought that 'Harry is happy': if someone can understand that 'John is happy' and 'Harry is sad', then we are committed to the view that the subject will understand the sentences: 'John is sad' and 'Harry is happy'. The elements of this structured thought are concepts, and - in this sense - such thoughts are conceptually articulated.

The term 'generality constraint' reflects that there is a generality to the notion of judging or asserting. In asserting  $Fa$ , one is saying that *this* object 'a' has things in common with other objects about which it can be said of them *such*: '...is f'. Of course, in asserting  $Fa$  the speaker may not actually think that there is any other *this* or any other *such*. However, the point of the generality constraint is to say that the ability to entertain or understand the thought  $Fa$  presupposes the ability to understand other such thoughts, for they are composed of the same abilities. There is thus a relationship between the judgements  $Fa$  and  $Fb$ . If 'a' does not have this thing in common with 'b' one would have to retract the assertion. Asserting 'that  $Fa$ ' and 'that  $b=a$ ', I can infer 'that  $Fb$ '. Thus, the rational structure within thoughts is important in terms of the rational relationship between thoughts.. On such an account, it seems correct to assert that only that which is conceptually structured can play a justificatory role in relation to beliefs.

According to the FBC, the content of perceptual experience is a thinkable, a denizen of the realm of sense. As such, it is conceptually articulated and capable of playing a

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bearer, even if some writers (e.g. Burge, 1977) use the term concept for both bearer and the content itself.

rationalising role. It seems therefore that [R1] perceptual experience plays a rational role in justifying beliefs and [R2] only an FBC can support such a claim. As such, the FBC is to be preferred to the OBC as a positive account of the disjunctive turn

### 6.5 *Some epistemic cartography:*

Such a conclusion is significant for a number of reasons, not least in that it allows for a positive account of the central notion of this chapter – the notion of factive reasons. The negative conception of the disjunctive turn made the space available for the notion of factive reasons, and the FBC provides a positive account of such a notion. In a veridical case, we experience facts, true thinkables. Such facts are able to play a rationalising role: they can justify other beliefs and are themselves open for rational scrutiny. This means that in the veridical case one's reasons are indeed factive. In order to use such insight to develop a positive factive model of knowledge it is useful to orient the picture propounded here with regards some traditional epistemic issues. I will consider four: (1) internalism versus externalism, (2) foundationalism versus coherence and (3) Gettier challenges and (4) direct versus indirect theories of perception.

#### 6.5.1 *internalism versus externalism*

There are a number of different ways of understanding the internalism/externalism divide in contemporary epistemology, such that some have cast doubt on whether there is indeed even a single debate under discussion.<sup>22</sup> I will consider two separate ways of understanding the divide: one that turns on the issue of awareness and one that turns on the issue of truth. It seems that when the debate is conceived in terms of the former, an account using the notion of factive reasons comes down strongly on the side of internalism. When the debate is conceived in terms of the latter, the issue is more complex, and the notion of factive reasons suggest that it is possible to transcend the very dichotomy under discussion.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kim (1993) distinguishes between three varieties of the debate and argues that they should be treated as separate.

On the former understanding of the internalism/externalism divide, the difference regards the requirement that one is aware of the reasons for his/her beliefs. According to this conception of epistemic internalism, a person's beliefs are justified by reasons of which an individual is aware, so that:

“all the factors required for a belief to be justified must be cognitively accessible to...the subject.”<sup>24</sup>.

This notion of cognitive accessibility is related to the term ‘internal’; all that is cognitively accessible is deemed to be internal, so that the internalist requires that all factors related to epistemic justification are internal to that individual.

“Internalism is the view that the justification making properties of any justified belief must be (epistemically) internal to the mind of the subject who holds that belief, that he could always know such properties by reflection.”<sup>25</sup>

Or:

“What confers justification must be ‘internal’ to the subject in that she has a special, direct cognitive access to it”.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, externalism allows external factors, factors beyond an individual's (reflective) cognitive reach, to play a justificatory role.

On such a conception of the debate, an account that employs the notion of *factive* reasons is strongly internalist. I have claimed that in order for something to have an epistemic role, to play a role in justification, it must be conceptually articulated and within an individual's reflective reach. Such *factive* reasons are located within the realm of sense, as grasped by an individual such that it falls within his/her perspective. Factors that lie beyond an individual's reflective reach simply cannot play such a justificatory role for that individual. The point stems not just from the notion of conceptual articulation stressed in this chapter, but that of *perspectivity* featuring in chapter 4.<sup>27</sup> Even if one were to conceive of some justificational space existing separately from the individual, we need to distinguish between any reasons there may be for holding a particular belief and the reasons that a subject actually has for holding a belief - from his/her own perspective as it were. *Factive* reasons are

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<sup>23</sup> In this discussion I deliberately blur the distinction between externalism as an alternative account of knowledge and externalism as an account of justification for purposes of exposition.

<sup>24</sup> Bernecker and Drestke (2000: 65).

<sup>25</sup> Sosa (1991: 193)

<sup>26</sup> Alston (1989:4-5)

grasped by an individual, they form part of the structure of his/her viewpoint. They are thus within his/her cognitive reach and can indeed play a justificatory role. As such, it is not possible to allow factors outside the individual's reflective reach to play a justificatory role – contra externalism on this account.

On the other understanding of the internalism/externalism debate, the divide turns on the relationship between belief states and that which makes the belief true, the truthmaker. On such an account, externalism is the view that what makes a true belief knowledge is some relation that holds between the belief state and the situation that makes the belief true, whilst:

“according to the traditional version of internal ‘epistemic’ justification, there is no logical connection between epistemic justification and truth”.<sup>28</sup>

The term ‘internal’ here is not simply a term distinguishing those features which are within a given individual's cognitive reach, but refer to those features – mental states – that can feature within any individual's cognitive reach. Externalists, on this conception, maintain a connection between justification and truth and thus are prepared to allow a role for factors that do not feature as the content of mental states as playing a justificatory role. Internalists, on this conception, argue that only a belief can justify a belief, and thus are prepared to break the relationship between justification (related to belief states and seen as internal) and truth (related to the ‘external’ world and seen as external).

Whilst there are similarities between the two versions of the external/internal debate, they are not the same. For example, the proponent of the notion of transindividual reasons discussed in the chapter 4 – whereby someone else's belief can justify one's own belief under certain circumstances - would feature as an externalist on the first version (since the belief lies outside his cognitive reach), but an internalist on the second version since it only allows conceptually articulated mental states to stand in justificatory relations to other mental states.

From the point of view of our discussion of the notion of factive reasons, this second way of setting up the dichotomy seems fundamentally misconceived. Despite their

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<sup>27</sup> The notion of a perspective is developed in Chapter 7.

<sup>28</sup> Chisholm (1988: 286).

differences, both sides are portrayed as accepting a placing of truthmakers as external to any individual's cognitive reach. The externalist then allows these truthmakers to play a justificatory role, whilst the internalist denies that such truthmakers could play a justificatory role, and thus is seen as divorcing the logical connection between justification and truth. Our discussion has suggested that one can, and should, reject the common supposition. The notion of factive reasons is distinctive in the sense that it allows for facts, conceived as true thinkables, to feature within one's cognitive reach. There is thus no need to divorce justification from truth, nor allow non-conceptually articulated objects to play a doxastic role at all. The very notion that there is such an either-or choice to be made here stems from a common, underlying assumption, that truth itself lies outside one's cognitive reach. The notion of factive reasons undermines such an assumption, thereby denying that one must choose between a reason affirming internalism or a truth involving externalism.

### **6.5.2 *foundationalism versus coherence***

A similar strategy, denying that there is such an 'either-or choice' to be made can be said with regards the relationship between the notion of factive reasons and the so-called 'raft and pyramid' distinction, the debate between foundationalism and coherence within justification. Once again here it would be possible to distinguish between different ways of conceiving the divide. However, the following raw distinction will suffice for our purposes here. As the metaphor of foundations suggests, there is a division of beliefs into two categories, those that are basic and those that are non basic, such that the latter depend upon the former for justification but not the latter. These basic beliefs, the "unmoved movers" of the epistemic realm, are somehow self-justified and act as the foundation for all other beliefs. Furthermore, each basic belief is conceived atomistically, acquired on its own and standing independent of anything else. For our purposes, it will suffice to consider coherence theories of justification as the denial of these two points: coherentism denies that there is a basic division of beliefs into non/foundational and denies that any units can be conceived atomistically.

The notion of factive reasons clearly has certain foundationalist affinities. There are a group of mental states that play a different role and basic role in justifying other



beliefs. Factive reasons have a certain basic status in a hierarchy of justification. There is thus a clear sense in which our beliefs can be divided into base and superstructure, with factive reasons have a foundational role in the base.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider the notion of factive reasons to support a classical version of foundationalism. Our discussion of epistemic justification above denies that any belief can be conceived in the atomistic manner suggested by foundationalism. I have argued that a central feature of justification – the rational relationship between thoughts – stems from the rational structure of thought. This stemmed from an application of the generality constraint according to which the ability to think a thought presupposes the ability to think other thoughts employing constituents found in the first. Such repeatable units are thus defined in terms of its rational role in whole thoughts; the content of mental states (including experiential states) are thinkables, and thus plays a rational role in the context of whole thoughts. On this, reference itself is elucidated through some holistic web of thoughts about object. The proponent of the notion of factive reasons thus denies that such base units can be conceived atomistically.

So, the notion of factive reasons involves a base-superstructure distinction, allotting a foundational role to certain factive mental states – like the foundationalist. However, the notion of factive reasons denies that such elements of the foundation can be conceived atomistically, and are dependent on other content-laden mental states. The reason that the foundationalist thinks we need to conceive of the base atomistically is that otherwise we are led into a regress of justification, whereby the base itself is dependent upon the superstructure and we therefore move from pyramid to raft. The coherentist concurs, but then affirms that we should not conceive the base atomistically and thus proposes the move from pyramid to raft. The notion of factive reasons denies that we have to make such a choice, allowing for the relationship between base and superstructure to go both ways. There is one sense in which perceptual states are basic, and justify other content-laden mental states that depend upon these. There is another sense, in which the very possibility of having such content-laden ‘basic’ mental states relies upon the very web of beliefs that forms the superstructure.

### 6.5.3 Gettier Challenges

One of the strongest reasons adopting the notion of factive model over the evidential model is that it allows us to overcome so-called Gettier challenges to JTB accounts of knowledge. Indeed, my claim here is stronger: any attempt to define knowledge that allows for a rejection of factive reasons leaves such a definition exposed to Gettier-style counterexamples.<sup>29</sup>

Let us begin with so-called JTB analysis of knowledge. A JTB analysis is compelling because it does seem that this captures how we ordinarily use knowledge – if I am *justified in believing a true* belief that does seem to suffice for a claim to know. The aspect of the JTB analysis that Gettier exploits is the fact that, on such an analysis, there is a logical gap between having justified beliefs and those beliefs being true: one can have justified beliefs which are false. In such a case, an individual could be said to be unlucky as this justification would normally be correlated with the truth, but in this unlucky case it is not. Gettier then creates cases in which one has such justified beliefs which are true, but the truth of the belief is independent of the justification; they are only true by chance. There is an aspect of double luck in all Gettier-style cases: the person is unlucky that the belief is false given the justification, and then lucky that the belief is subsequently true.<sup>30</sup>

Remaining at this level of generality, it seems that the conclusion of the Gettier-style challenges is not just that the JTB analysis is an insufficient account of knowledge, but that any account in which the truth condition is separated from the other conditions (be they justified belief, or any additional conditions added) is unsatisfactory. The other conditions must somehow entail the truth condition.

As Zagzebski puts this:

“...Gettier cases arise whenever there is a gap between the truth and the other conditions for knowledge. That means that knowledge is not merely a summation of the component of truth and other components...we want a

<sup>29</sup> Gettier (1963). The claim that endorsing such an intuition can overcome Gettier-inspired difficulties is similar to that found in Drestke (op. cit.) See also below

<sup>30</sup> The notion of ‘double-luck’ is due to Zagzebski (1999: 100-103). See also her (1994; 1996: chap. 3) – to which my understanding of the moral of Gettier cases here is heavily indebted even though the

definition that makes a conceptual connection between truth and the sense in which knowledge is good.”<sup>31</sup>

To see the level of generality involved in this case, let us follow her example. Imagine any analysis of knowledge such that knowledge is true belief plus some condition Q. Q can be anything (undefeated justification, a reliable epistemic process, properly functioning capacities and so on), provided it does not entail the truth condition. It is thus possible for a belief to be false but Q fulfilled due to some element of luck. (This must be possible since Q does not entail the truth of p). Now, we must be able to add another element of luck to this case, such that now the belief is luckily true, and have generated another Gettier-style objection. Zagzebski’s point is that such a recipe for generating Gettier counterexamples is always available on any account of knowledge which involves a truth component and another component that are somewhat independent of one another. “No definition of knowledge as true belief plus Q will succeed.”<sup>32</sup>

If one endorses an evidentialist model of knowledge, one can be said to know something and be wrong; one can have knowledge even if one’s reasons were non-factive. On such an account of knowledge, one can use Zagzebski’s recipe to create Gettier counterexamples, since one’s reasons falls short of p. The very notion of non-factive reasons as part of a definition of knowledge is an analysis of knowledge as true belief plus Q, where Q is independent of the truth. In order to avoid Gettier counterexamples, one thus needs to endorse the notion of factive reasons. .

It seems therefore that Gettier-style considerations imply that the other conditions in an analysis of knowledge must somehow entail the truth condition. On a JTB analysis of knowledge, this means that the justificatory condition must entail the truth condition.<sup>33</sup> In short, the moral of such Gettier cases is that knowledge claims must be based on factive reasons.

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positive proposal below differs from hers. (Owens (2000) too discusses Zagzebski in this regard, although he too moves in a different direction from her positive suggestions – as well as my own!)

<sup>31</sup> Zagzebski (1999 101)

<sup>32</sup> Zagzebski (1999 102)

<sup>33</sup> This should not be taken to suggest an endorsement of such JTB analysis of knowledge, for reasons to emerge later on. At this stage, it should nevertheless be clear that the notion of conclusive reasons could indeed be employed to rescue JTB claims as a sufficient analysis of knowledge.

#### 6.5.4 *direct versus indirect accounts.*

The term 'direct' perception has been subject to a number of differing, and confusing, interpretations.<sup>34</sup> It seems to me that the factive model of knowledge deserves the direct title in a more basic way than most models.

In an attempt to clarify extant debates regarding direct and indirect accounts of testimony, Snowdon has recently distinguished between two senses in which we are to interpret the phrase 'direct perception'. The first is an epistemic sense according to which the difference between direct and indirect perception regard the issue of what one can perceive prior to inferring and what one can perceive only as the result of engaging in an inference. The second is a non-epistemic sense, according to which a subject *x* directly perceives object *y* iff:

“*x* stands, in virtue of *x*'s perceptual experience, in such a relation to *y* that, if *x* could make non-dependent, demonstrative judgements, then it would be possible for *x* to make a true demonstrative judgement 'That is *y*'” Snowdon (1992: 56)

So, in seeing a cat in a picture, I directly perceive the picture and not the cat, since any judgement I make about the cat depends on being able to make a demonstrative judgement as regards the picture. With regards direct perception in the epistemic sense, Snowdon sees it as a relation between an individual and a propositional style object, whilst the non-epistemic sense of directness involves a direct relationship between an individual and a worldly object conceived extensionally. Snowdon argues that these two issues should be seen as distinct and that it is the non-epistemic sense that is more important, so that the variety of debates surrounding the object of direct perception involve this non-epistemic sense. For Snowdon, seeing the two as distinct stems from the OBC conception of the disjunctive turn, such that in the veridical case of perceiving that *p*, one stands in a direct, non-epistemic, relationship between subject and object, such that one can make direct, demonstrative judgements that are made true by the object. Indeed, he makes this explicit by claiming that any account of direct perception must be extensional.

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<sup>34</sup> Austin (1962: 159)

The notion of directness applies on the FBC to both of Snowdon's senses, in a manner that differs greatly from Snowdon's characterisation. With regards the epistemic role of the distinction, it is correct to say that the account of experience it provides is non-inferential. The contrast is made between those things that one can tell to be the case straight of without engaging in inference, as opposed to those that one can only tell by inferring.<sup>35</sup> The former are said to be known in a direct manner; the latter in an indirect manner. The notion of factive reasons, involving as it does the fact-based conception of the disjunctive turn, involves a rich conception of the notion of experience, and thus allows for one to perceive facts directly in the sense of non-inferentially.

However, the factive account involves a notion of epistemic directness in a more basic sense than simply allowing for a wide range of things that one can tell non-inferentially. To continue with the construction-based metaphors of the preceding sections, I wish to contrast two broad accounts of the epistemic role of perceptual experiences under the headings of '*build-up*' accounts as opposed to '*knock-down*' accounts. A build-up account starts with some particular experience that falls short of knowledge and then asks what has to be added to build this up to achieve the full status of knowledge. The additional materials for building up are provided through some form of second-order reflection. In contrast, a knock-down account starts with knowledge. In a veridical perceptual experience, one simply experiences a fact, a true thinkable. Nothing more needs to be added for knowledge. Of course, not all experiences are veridical, and through second-order checking a person assumes rational responsibility for that belief. Assuming the person remains responsible, and it is a veridical case, then it retains that status as knowledge. Reasons that challenge that perceptual state thus can knock it down from the status of knowledge achieved without such second-order reflection. In such term, knock-down accounts are more direct than build-up accounts of the epistemic role of experience. To use a phrase of Guttenplan's: on the build-up account, knowledge is seen as belief-plus, whereas on the knock-down account, belief is seen as knowledge-minus.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Snowdon (1992: 54)

<sup>36</sup> Gutenplan (1994)

The following claim, due to Austin, captures the knock-down approach in the perceptual case.

“The situation in which I would properly be said to have evidence for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that’s a bit more evidence, and the noises and smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal emerges and stands there in plain view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; it’s coming into view does not provide me with any more *evidence* that it is a pig, I can now just *see* that it is, the question is settled.”<sup>37</sup>

Austin here contrasts coming to believe something through evidence, and coming to believe something in a perceptual case.<sup>38</sup> When one sees pig-like markings, one could eventually form a belief regarding porcine presence, provided of course one has prior knowledge of the relationship between such markings and pigs. What one perceives directly as it were are pig-marks, one arrives at the belief in porcine presence as the result of some form of inference. One might have the very same experience without coming to form the belief because of a lack of knowledge of the relationship between pig-like marks and pigs. Seeing a pig and forming the belief that pig is a non-evidential relationship. You perceive that *p* and form the belief that *p*. There is no inference going on here; you see it and the question is settled – provided of course there is no evidence to the contrary.<sup>39</sup>

The factive model of knowledge is more direct not just in the sense that it allows for a non-inferential account of experience, but in the more basic sense that nothing needs

<sup>37</sup> Austin (1962: 115). Italics in original.

<sup>38</sup> Austin actually contrasts this situation with a case of testimony: “Again, if I actually see one man shoot another, I may *give* evidence, as an eye-witness, to those less favourably placed; but I don’t *have* evidence for my own belief that the shooting took place, I actually *saw* it.” (1962: 116). This could be taken to imply that Austin suggests a version of the OBC as opposed to the FBC, rejecting a contrast between the instances of perception and testimony. (A suspicion furthered in the light of his account of truth – see below). Nevertheless, this could simply be read in the light of the non-unitary account of testimony argued for in chapter 1, whereby testimony could indeed play an evidential role on occasions.

<sup>39</sup> I do not mean to imply that Austin would endorse such a factive model of knowledge as presented here, even though he does share a number of themes that endorsed in this essay, including a denial of epistemic intermediaries in the perceptual case, a denial that one should let the argument from illusion structure thinking about reason, and a basic separation of belief and knowledge - albeit in a different manner to that suggested here. (See the discussion of Austin in Putnam (2000: Chapter 2). Nevertheless, Austin’s version of a correspondence theory of truth, despite its novelty, still involves a

to be added to the non-inferential base for such beliefs to be knowledge. In a veridical instance of an experiential state, one directly perceives that *p* and such a state is a knowledge state unless there are reasons to think otherwise.

The relationship between Strawson's non-epistemic notion of directness and the factive model is more complex. At one level, the very distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic is not something that the proponent of the FBC would endorse, involving as it does the conception of extensional demonstrative judgement. Nevertheless, even if one remains with a notion of directness that stays firmly within the realm of sense, it seems that there is a parallel sense of directness that is relevant here, emerging from the version of the sense-reference distinction discussed in the preceding chapter.

Given my commitment to a constitutive interpretationism (to be explored in detail in the next chapter), the notion of content as it features in such experiential states is part of an attempt by an interpreter to make rational sense of an individual. In the cases under consideration, a person will attribute a particular experiential attitude to the individual, with thinkable content so as to make sense of that person. The attribution of content in such an experiential state is constrained by the types of objects that the individual can be said to have discriminating knowledge of in virtue of that experience. One attributes to the individual thinkable content including a singular term, such that the individual is able to grasp the sense of the singular term and thereby knows which is the referent. There are thus certain things that one can now directly in an experiential case, those things regarding which one is in a position to make a demonstrative judgement as a result of that experience. However, such a direct relationship between subject and object should not be conceived extensionally. Rather, grasping the sense of such a singular term is the ability to express direct, discriminating knowledge about its reference.

## 6.6 *Summary*

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basic separation in kind between truth bearer and fact, ensuring that he could not embrace the fact-based conception of the disjunctive turn, and hence the notion of factive reasons, proffered here

In this chapter, I have argued that perceptual experiential states play a rational role in justifying perceptual-based beliefs in virtue of their conceptually articulated content. As a result, one ought to prefer the fact-based conception of the disjunctive turn described in the previous chapter, such that in a veridical case of perceiving that *p*, the subject is directly acquainted with the fact that *p*. This in turn allows for the notion of a factive reason that plays a role in the factive model of knowledge, whereby citing a factive reason for believing that *p*, one is not defending the claim by arguing why she thinks it highly likely that *p* is the case, but describing how one comes to know that *p*.

If one accepts such an account of PES, it leaves room open for a direct parallel between the epistemic role of such states and TES. Even if the way in which one has discriminating knowledge differs in the cases, in a veridical instance of both one is directly presented with facts involving thinkable content of the form *Fa*, in a manner that one has discriminating knowledge of the reference in grasping the sense of a singular name. Further, there is a parallel in epistemic role, in that such experiential states provide factive reasons for testimonial based beliefs.

Of course, there are also epistemic differences between the two. In a recent article, Faulkner uses such differences to undermine the epistemic parallel between perception and testimony.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, in the light of my account here it seems that such differences do not undermine the thrust of the epistemic parallel.

Faulkner tells us that:

“[m]ost would deny that perceptual knowledge is mediated. The acquisition of knowledge through communication is mediated in one obvious sense. In a case of successful perception, one knows that the world is a certain way because one is aware of the world being that way. But if we come to know that the world is a certain way through communication, we have no comparable awareness of how the world is. We know that the world is a certain way only because another has represented the world as being that way. As such, our acquisition of knowledge can depend on why the speaker represented the world to be that and

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<sup>40</sup> Faulkner (2000). I focus here on the negative claims made; Faulkner’s own alternative, whilst more plausible than that of Burge, prove unsatisfactory as a result of the argument from perspectivity made against Burge’s account in Chapter 4.



whether or not the speaker knows that the world is how he represented it to be. Thus, testimony is mediated in the sense that the intentions of another, and the justification possessed by another are relevant to the audience's acquisition of knowledge. These considerations have no parallel in...perception.<sup>41</sup>

In the ensuing discussion, he distinguishes between dependability (as in a case where the speaker believes that *p* and asserts that *p*) and artfulness (as in a case where the speaker does not believe that *p* and asserts that *p*), and uses this to develop the uniqueness of testimony vis-à-vis perception and memory.

"It might be argued that considerations of artfulness and dependability are comparable to considerations of illusions and hallucinations in perception...This parallel only holds for a speaker's dependability. The parallel does not hold in the case of artfulness, because the expression of something thought to be false is quite intentional. It is the relevance of another's intention that renders testimony fundamentally distinct from perception..."<sup>42</sup>

Finally, as a result of the above,

"the problem that testimony poses...is that our psychological attitude is to be much more sceptical of what others tell us than what we seem to see or remember".<sup>43</sup>

Of course, as in the first quotation, Faulkner is correct that there is a difference between perception and testimony, a difference that turns on the intervention of another individual. Further, as in the second quotation, there is little doubt that considerations regarding this individual are epistemically relevant to the acquisition of knowledge via testimony. Finally, as in the third quotation, he is correct that we are more critical in our acceptance of testimony as a source of knowledge. However, none of these serve to undermine the parallel.

The central claim articulated here is that the epistemic role of testimonial experience is similar in that it provides factive reasons for testimonial-based beliefs. On the account proffered here, as a result of understanding *S*'s testifying that *p*, *H* enters into a distinct experiential state with the content that *p*, such that if *S* knows that *p*, and

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<sup>41</sup> Faulkner (2000: 581)

<sup>42</sup> Faulkner (2000: 586)

<sup>43</sup> Faulkner (2000: 593)

there are no defeating conditions of which H as a responsible subject ought to be aware, such a state is a state of knowing: H knows that p. We do thus have knowledge of the world in a manner comparable to that of perception: we know that p. If asked to justify how he knows that p, H will cite the testimonial experience and thereby indicate how the truth that p manifested itself to him.

There are a number of defeating conditions that serve to undermine this attribution of knowledge, including potential rebutting and undermining defeaters. The latter includes factors regarding the intentions of the speaker, as well as issues regarding her competence, matters of dependability and artfulness, as Faulkner would put this. Depending on a variety of pragmatic factors, there are a whole host of such potential defeaters of which an epistemically responsible individual should be aware, such that their presence removes any entitlement to a knowledge claim in such an instance. However, as befits a knock-down account of knowledge, the term 'defeater' captures their role perfectly: as epistemically responsible individuals, one must search for certain defeaters, but in the absence of such defeaters one knows that p.

We can sometimes be deceived by the testimony of the senses, much as we can sometimes be deceived by the testimony of others. As Faulkner is correct to note, the possibility of deceit is far more prevalent in the testimonial case, involving as it does issues of the intention of the testifier. As such, there are more potential defeaters in the testimonial case and it is precisely for this reason, that one tends to be 'much more sceptical of what others tell us than what we seem to see'. Nonetheless, this does not undermine the parallel: in a veridical instance of both one directly perceives facts.

There is a certain sense in which I could end this study in the epistemology of testimony with the claims made in the preceding chapter. Combining the fact-based conception of the disjunctive turn together with the factive model of knowledge provides an account of the epistemology of testimony that coheres with the common-sense constraints made at the outset. In particular, it provides an account of the t-principle, such that if S knows that p and testifies that p, and H learns from S's testimony, H knows that p. Further, in providing a knock-down, as opposed to a build-up, conception of knowledge, such an account gives a distinct meaning to the contagion metaphor in the title of the essay. Nevertheless, in next chapter, I wish to

consider one further element of the account, making explicit the notion of understanding that plays a central role in our acquisition of knowledge through testimony. Although I present matters as responding to a particular objection, the real aim is to use such an objection to reveal the underlying conception of understanding implicit in the objection, whilst providing an alternative framework for understanding understanding within which one should read the account of testimony in the preceding chapters.

## Chapter 7

### Towards a Non-Radical Interpretationism

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The claims made in the preceding chapter involve a certain conception of the act of understanding, such that in understanding an assertion made by someone in a language that they understand, one enters into a distinct experiential state with thinkable content – a TES. In a slogan, we simply see (or, more generally, perceive) meaning. This lies at the heart of the parallel between TES's and PES's. In the latter, in seeing that *p*, one enters into a distinct experiential state with the content that *p*, so that in the veridical case, one directly perceives the fact that *p*. Similarly, in the former, when one understands an utterance with the content that *p*, one enters into a distinct experiential state with the content that *p*; in the veridical case, one thus directly perceives the fact that *p*. In neither case are the facts inferred from something that falls short of the them.

This account of understanding seems to run contrary to a dominant strand in contemporary theorising about meaning, according to which the supposed 'theoreticity of meaning' means that it cannot be directly perceived. As Bilgrami claims forcefully:

“[m]eaning and content are not a matter of direct perception. They are theoretical notions...I take meaning to be a theoretical notion... constructed... partly out of relations in which their possessors' sounds and bodily motions stand to their environments. (I contrast theoretical posit not with common sense posit, but with the idea that there is something directly perceived and which is not to be viewed as a construction out of a theoretical procedure which involves an essential appeal to an external element in the constitution of what is constructed).”<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the account proffered thus far, Bilgrami claims that one does not perceive meaning but sounds and bodily movements in relation to certain contextual

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<sup>1</sup> Bilgrami (1992: 202-3)

matters out of which meaning is constructed. Meaning is perceived indirectly and thus the phenomenological (and epistemic) parallel between TES and PES breaks down.<sup>2</sup>

As portrayed by Bilgrami, the theoreticity of meaning claim involves two aspects. One is the claim that meaning involves some form of relationship between speakers and their environment. The second involves what could be referred to as a 'sense-datum' conception of understanding, loosely analogous to sense-datum theories in the perceptual case. According to such a conception, meaning is constructed out of meaningless items (such as sounds and behaviours). The major focus for the moment is on the second of these claims; indeed I will argue later that the former claim - that meaning is constructed out of a relationship between speaker and environment - is a central feature of such TES's. The issue at stake here regards the sense-datum conception of understanding, for such a conception undermines the parallel I have sketched between perception and testimony.

Labelling it 'the sense datum conception' is provocative, and deliberately so. In classical sense-datum accounts of perception, one directly apprehends facts about one's own subjective, experiential states, facts that falls short of the world.<sup>3</sup> The challenge in the perceptual case is then is to show how we infer, from the evidential base that one directly apprehends, facts about the mind-independent world. According to the sense-datum conception of understanding, what one directly apprehends in a case of testimony falls short of facts about meaning. The epistemic challenge is to show how one can get from the thin evidential base immediately available in experience to knowledge of what is said. The theoreticity of meaning challenge points towards a disparity between perception and testimony: in the former it is conceded that one perceives worldly facts, whereas in the latter one directly perceives meaningless noises / marks and only indirectly perceives facts about meaning.

Of course, it is open to me to simply deny the theoreticity of meaning claim. Or, more to the point, claim that there is simply no disparity between perception and testimony

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Bilgrami himself concedes a parallel directness at the level of phenomenology, but then denies that such phenomenological reflection has epistemic import. By relating the phenomenological to the notion of thinkable as above, such a distinction itself is undermined.

in this regards. In both, one acquires a distinct ability that allows one to perceive something that one could not perceive prior to the acquisition of such an ability, such that as a result of the acquisition of this ability the content of one's subsequent experience is richer than prior to the acquisition of this ability. Whilst I think that this response is largely correct, it is nonetheless important to explore the theoretical framework underlying such a sense-datum conception of understanding.

Much contemporary discussion of understanding takes place within the context of the notion of interpretation. The very term 'interpretation' implies an indirectness to the act of understanding: there is something to be interpreted, and whatever that something is, it is perceived directly and is, in some sense, more basic than the result of the interpretation, namely that which is understood.<sup>4</sup> This becomes even more apparent when it is claimed that there is no substantive (epistemic) difference between a case of understanding someone in a language with which one is familiar (the home case) and a case of radical interpretation. Heal notes that:

“...at least one presupposition of the idea of radical interpretation...is that rich meaning notions are not an essential part of the basic observational category with which we approach the world. We may speak colloquially of someone hearing a person say that something is the case...but, says the believer in radical interpretation, this is a merely useful idiom and not to be taken seriously. What is really observationally apparent must be something less committal, for example that certain sounds were produced in certain patterns, having such and such cause and the like. Facts about meaning are somehow inferred from such facts.”<sup>5</sup>

Since all understanding involves radical interpretation, the evidential base available for the interpreter to interpret must fall short of knowledge of that which is said. Understanding is thus not direct but proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, one directly perceives something meaning-free; in the second, one uses this as a base out of which one constructs meaning. If one theorises about meaning whilst using the radical case as paradigmatic, it is unsurprising that meaning is seen as theoretical in

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<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, such a formulation is somewhat generous to proponents of sense-data, for it is loose enough to allow that such data present us with propositional content, but that such content falls short of the facts, thereby bypassing problems surrounding the so-called 'myth of the given'.

<sup>4</sup> Mulhall (1985: 77)

<sup>5</sup> Heal (1997: 176)

the sense highlighted by Bilgrami: in such cases one does not directly perceive meaning. As such, the decision to take the radical case as paradigmatic lies at the heart of ‘the theoreticity of meaning’ objection.

The aim of this chapter is to defend a version of interpretationism that does not take the radical as paradigmatic, and thereby undermine the sense-datum conception of understanding. More specifically, I begin by considering Donald Davidson’s version of radical interpretationism [6.2] and consider some difficulties facing it that partly stem from taking the radical as paradigmatic [6.3]. In contrast, a non-radical interpretationism is outlined, and it is argued that this overcomes some of the problems plaguing the radical version [6.4]. Finally, I consider what led Davidson to endorse the radical version to start with, and claim that it stems from a particular conception of the social nature of language [6.5]. The non-radical alternative involves an alternative conception, which is defended and developed in light of the discussion of testimony thus far [6.6].

Let me stress that, despite appearances, my primary interests here are not exegetical. I stress certain aspects of the Davidsonian account that come close to such a sense-datum position, even if it could be argued that they are inessential to the basic insight of his position.<sup>6</sup> Further, I will not consider issues regarding changes in Davidson’s position over time, even if this may have some relevance to the discussion at hand.<sup>7</sup> My aim is to use one reading of Davidson as a way of exploring the ‘theoreticity of meaning’ objection, and to argue that a closely related position, purged of certain basic assumptions such as taking the radical as paradigmatic, is to be preferred as an alternative.

## 7.2 *Radical Interpretationism*

In chapter 3 of this study we considered, and partially endorsed, a version of interpretationism due to Davidson. There we considered a fully informed interpreter,

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to Bilgrami, this interpretation of Davidson appears in Mulhall (1985) and Heal (1997). This is also one aspect of the debate in interpreting Davidson between McDowell (1994: 147-161) and Rorty (1986).

who has the ideal evidence available for interpreting another. According to interpretationism, all the facts about linguistic and mental content are precisely and completely captured by the judgements of this ideal interpreter.

At one level, such an interpretationism involves a rejection of two other ways of theorising about meaning. Firstly, such an interpretationism is a rejection of what could be termed a psychologistic conception of meaning, whereby meaning is conceived in some private sphere behind their linguistic behaviours. Davidson writes that although meaning is not ‘nothing but’ observable behaviour, it is the case that:

“meaning is entirely determined by observable behaviour, even readily observable behaviour. That meanings are decipherable is not a matter of luck; public availability is a constitutive aspect of language”.<sup>8</sup>

In an ideal case, one need not guess or speculate about the contents of a private realm; meaning in such an ideal case is (or at least is in principle) open to view.

Secondly, interpretationism involves a rejection of a strict behaviourism about meaning, such as that of Quine and his project of radical translation, whereby meaning ends up as: “grist for the behaviourist mill”.<sup>9</sup> For the strict behaviourist such as Quine, meanings as such are simply not part of the basic vocabulary with which we describe the world. One has to begin with stimulus meaning, a set of dispositions to linguistic behaviour in observable circumstance. The aim of radical translation is to begin with knowledge of nothing more than knowledge of a strictly physical system and from that somehow explain how we can have knowledge of meaning. Davidson departs from Quine’s model in a number of ways:. As he himself tells us:

“We probably differ on some of the details. Quine describes the events... in terms of patterns of stimulation, while I prefer a description in terms more like those of the sentence being studied...and where he likes assent and dissent because they suggest a behaviourist test, I despair of behaviourism and accept frankly intensional attitudes towards sentences, such as holding true.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I have in mind here primarily differences in the use of the principle of charity as Davidson moves further away from Quinean influence. See, for example, Heal (1997) and Evnine (1991) for some discussion of this.

<sup>8</sup> (1990: 314).

<sup>9</sup> Quine (1969: 26)

<sup>10</sup> Davidson (1984: 230)



Davidson's notion of the radical interpreter thus explicitly differs from Quine's radical translator, including a move from a conception of evidence in strict behaviourist terms of stimulus meaning to the richer, semantic notion of 'holding true', as well as a move from straight translation to a more revealing notion of interpretation.

What then does the interpreter have to go on? What is it that s/he interprets? Whilst matters are not that clear, Davidson offers us one central constraint on the characterisation of the available evidence.

"What evidence plausibly available to a potential interpreter would support the theory to a reasonable degree? ...To deal with the general case, the evidence must be of a sort that would be available to someone who does not already know how to interpret utterances the theory is designed to cover".<sup>11</sup>

Thus, despite Davidson's departure over some details of the Quinean picture, there is a continued concern with the radical case, based upon the claim that: "[a]ll understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation".<sup>12</sup> In the home (i.e. non-radical) case, Davidson freely concedes that one may not actually proceed in the manner of the radical interpreter; one could for example use various heuristic tools in interpretation. However, such practical issues are besides the point. Davidson's interest in radical interpretation is as a part of a reconstructive epistemology, focusing on the justification for meaning ascription in understanding. As such, focusing on the radical case is a useful technique in helping: "to keep assumptions from going unnoticed".<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, even as part of an exercise in reconstructive epistemology, the focus on the radical case can only be used if one assumes that everything required to justify meaning ascription is found in the radical case. So, a basic theme underlying the Davidsonian position is that the radical case forms 'the highest common factor' between the home and radical case in terms of the evidence available to the interpreter.

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<sup>11</sup> Davidson (1984: 125, 128)

<sup>12</sup> Davidson (1984: 125)

<sup>13</sup> Davidson (1984: 125)

This two-stage approach to understanding seems to be a standard interpretation of Davidson, and indeed Davidson himself often seems to suggest that this is the case.<sup>14</sup> Davidson tells us that radical interpretation is ‘interpretation from scratch’.<sup>15</sup> Such interpretation starts from: “evidence that can be stated without the essential use of such linguistic concepts as meaning, interpretation, synonymy and the like”.<sup>16</sup> The reason for this is that:

“uninterpreted utterances seem the appropriate evidential base for a theory of meaning. If an acceptable theory would be supported by such evidence, that would constitute conceptual progress, for the theory would be semantical in nature, whilst the evidence could be described in non-semantic terms”.<sup>17</sup>

Theorising using the radical case ensures such a starting point since:

“[t]he evidence must be of a sort that would be available to someone who does not already know how to interpret the utterances...”<sup>18</sup>

It is thus seen as a tool to help us focus on this evidential base for interpretation. In any case of understanding, interpretation goes on: “redescribing the utterance of certain sounds as an act of saying that snow is white”.<sup>19</sup> In the light of such claims, such a two-staged interpretation of Davidson’s interpretation seems justified.

### 7.3 *The problem of indeterminacy.*

According to the two-stage conception of understanding, what one directly apprehends in a case of testimony falls short of meaning. The epistemic challenge is to show how one can get from the evidential base immediately available in experience to knowledge of what is said. The challenge is an epistemic one: to try and move from a given evidential base to knowledge of meaning. However, this epistemic challenge has metaphysical consequences. Any failure to successfully complete the epistemic challenge (a failure to provide a straight solution to the challenge) could either suggest that we ought to live with the sceptical consequences (a sceptical solution) or suggest that we need to reconceive the challenge itself.<sup>20</sup> The latter option is

<sup>14</sup> For example: Mulhall (1990: 91-120); Heal (1997) and Evnine (1991: 100)

<sup>15</sup> Davidson (1993: 77)

<sup>16</sup> Davidson (1984: 128)

<sup>17</sup> Davidson (1984: 142)

<sup>18</sup> Davidson (1984: 128)

<sup>19</sup> Davidson (1984: 126)

<sup>20</sup> The terms, of course, are taken from Kripke’s celebrated reading of Wittgenstein. (Kripke, 1982).

sometimes presented as a *reductio* of such sense-datum accounts: a) if one starts with the evidential base outlined, this leads to scepticism regarding our knowledge of the meaning b) such scepticism is false, so c) one must be able to directly apprehend more than the thin evidential base allowed by sense-datum theorists. As I will demonstrate, Davidson's account of interpretation leads to a certain scepticism about meaning, which Davidson himself thinks one ought to accept – a sceptical solution. In contrast, I think that such a sceptical solution is undesirable at best, and should lead us to reconsider the evidential base available for interpretation.

For Davidson, to say that a noise or sign produced by a subject has meaning is to systematise that noise within a theory (involving the simultaneous ascription of both meanings and beliefs according to the principle of charity and so on). However, there is no guarantee that there is only one such way of systematising meaning. Indeed, Davidson evinces a number of arguments to the extent that if there is to be one satisfactory theory, there must also be others.

In a revealing passage, Davidson tells us that:

“[w]e must view meaning itself as a theoretical construction. Like any construct it is arbitrary except for the formal and empirical constraints we impose upon it. In the case of meaning, the constraints cannot uniquely fix the theory of interpretation....A better way to put this would be to say: belief and meaning cannot be uniquely reconstructed from speech behaviour. The remaining indeterminacy should not be judged as a failure of interpretation, but rather as a logical consequence of the nature of theories of meaning.”<sup>21</sup>

For example, if we suppose every object has one and only one shadow, Davidson notes the following:

“On a first theory, we take Wilt to refer to Wilt and the predicate is tall to refer to tall things; on the second theory, we take ‘Wilt’ to refer to the shadow of Wilt and the predicate is tall to refer to the shadow of tall things. The first theory tells us that Wilt is tall is true if and only if Wilt is tall; the second theory tells us that the shadow of Wilt is tall is true if and only if the shadow of Wilt is tall. The truth conditions are clearly equivalent....What causes the response...of the

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<sup>21</sup> Davidson (1980: 256)

speaker is an objective situation, and that the response is directed to the...utterance of a sentence. As long as we hold to this, there can be no relevant evidence on the basis of which to choose between theories and their permutations.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, given Davidson’s conception of the intrinsic interrelationship between meaning and thought, such talk of indeterminacy at the level of meaning follows through to the level of thought: it is not just that it is indeterminate whether one is talking about Wilt when one refers to Wilt, it is also indeterminate whether one thinks about Wilt too. Davidson approvingly follows Quine here in calling this the ‘inscrutability of reference’.

Such indeterminacy of reference is not something that Davidson claims we should deny.<sup>23</sup>

“Indeterminacy of meaning...does not represent a failure to capture significant distinctions; it marks the fact that certain apparent distinctions are not significant.”<sup>24</sup>

I find the term ‘apparent’ in this quotation to be very revealing. An everyday account of the phenomenology of PES and TES suggests that there is not such an inscrutability of reference. The mind directly notices objects in the context of thinkables. In thinking about Wilt, in speaking and understanding assertions involving the name, one knows which object is referred to. One thus may expect an account of meaning that does permit such scrutability; such distinctions are indeed ‘apparent’. Davidson then reassures us that such apparent distinctions are not important. As I read it, Davidson partly acknowledges that the claim of indeterminacy runs contrary to a

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson (1980: 257)

<sup>23</sup> I confess that one parallel appealed to by Davidson here seems to undermine just this very point. He tells us that: “[t]he analogy with physics is obvious; we explain macroscopic phenomena by postulating an unobserved fine structure. But the theory is postulated at the macroscopic level. Sometimes, to be sure we are lucky enough to find additional or more direct evidence for the originally postulated structure; but it is not essential to the enterprise. I suggest that words, meanings of words and reference are posits we need to implement a theory of truth. (Davidson, 1984: 222). It is often claimed that the underdetermination of theory by evidence in the case of physics does not imply such indeterminacy; there may well be such a fine structure just we are unable to know it given the available macroscopic evidence. Put differently, it is a sceptical and not constitutive indeterminacy. This seems to me to be different from my understanding of the indeterminacy of meaning which is constitutive and not just sceptical. Maybe Davidson’s point is just to note that the sub-sentential notion of reference is derivative, based upon the whole sentence/thinkable as I noted above.

<sup>24</sup> Davidson (1984: 154) – italics added.

common-sense description of the phenomenology of experiential and mental states, but then denies that one should take this seriously.

Elsewhere, Davidson considers a similar point:

“[One may] be tempted to say, ‘But at least the speaker knows who he is referring to’. One should stand firm against this thought. The semantic features of language are public features. What no-one can, in the nature of the case, figure out from the totality of the relevant evidence cannot be part of the meaning. And since every speaker must, in some dim sense at least, know this, he cannot intend to use his words with a unique reference, for he knows that there is no other way to convey this reference to others.”<sup>25</sup>

Again, there is much to be said about this passage. It seems to me that the temptation Davidson suggests we should stand firm against stems once again from the phenomenology of mental states. When we entertain thinkables, in the form of mental or experiential states, we do seem to know what we are referring to; we make determinate reference to mind-independent objects and properties. Once again, Davidson is aware that the phenomenology of such states goes against the inscrutability of reference he is claiming. However, in urging us to stand firm against this, Davidson presents an explicit argument against taking such phenomenological considerations at face value. Since (i) everyone must be aware in even a dim sense that all there is to meaning is the totality of evidence available to a third party, (ii) such available evidence allows for the indeterminacy of meaning, therefore (iii) meaning is indeterminate.

If we take our phenomenological reflections seriously, we have reason to be wary of conclusion (iii) of the above argument, namely the indeterminacy of meaning. Premise (i) makes a claim regarding the public nature of meaning (and mind), and is a claim we endorsed in Chapter 3 in the context of a discussion of what was termed ‘constitutive interpretationism’ involving the claim that interpretability is a necessary condition for thought. As Davidson put this:

“thoughts, desires and other attitudes are in their nature states we are equipped to interpret; that we could not interpret, could not be thought.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Davidson (1984: 235)

<sup>26</sup> Davidson (1990); page 14.

If we are to endorse premise (i), and yet take seriously our phenomenological reflections so as to be sceptical about conclusion (iii), it therefore seems that the difficulty must lie in premise (ii).

Premise (ii) states that the totality of evidence available to an interpreter allows for the indeterminacy of reference. There are two ways available to undermine such a claim – either we could agree with Davidson regarding what evidence is available but claim that this does not support the indeterminacy claim or we could argue that there is more evidence available than Davidson permits. I will take the latter strategy, for there is more evidence available than Davidson permits, provided one drop one central feature of Davidson's account, provided that is one does not take the radical turn.

Put differently, it seems that there are two different possible versions of interpretationism that emerge. Both versions share a number of central features. Both concur that meaning is public, not residing in some private sphere behind observable behaviour accessed through a process of inductive guesswork. Neither is meaning eliminated, nor reduced to, that publicly observable behaviour. Rather, to say that a linguistic act produced by a subject has meaning is to systematise the act within a theory involving the simultaneous ascription of both meanings and beliefs according to the principle of charity, that makes rational sense of the totality of that individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Interpreting an individual involves placing that which they think, do and say within a rational framework governed by the constitutive ideal of rationality, so that assignments of belief and meaning are rationally consistent with one another, consistent with other beliefs and behaviours, and consistent with the evidence afforded by our knowledge of the speaker's environment.

On the one version, *radical interpretationism*, all such interpretation is treated as proceeding from the base available in the radical instance; no distinction is made between radical and home cases. Phenomenological differences between the two are dismissed as epistemically idle and the result of heuristic and other strategies evolved due to habit. In both home and radical case, interpretation proceeds in two stages whereby meaning is imposed on something that falls short of meaning. Meaning is seen as theoretical in the sense that it is not perceived directly, but is constructed out

of meaningless entities that are perceived directly. As a result of such a two-staged process of interpretation, it is accepted that there is a degree of indeterminacy of meaning, and that reference is inscrutable - despite the fact that proponents display sensitivity to the phenomenological implausibility of such a position.

On the other version, *non-radical interpretationism*, phenomenology is taken seriously from an epistemic point of view, and, as a result, a basic distinction is made between home and radical cases. The radical case may indeed be an attempt to interpret meaningless entities that are perceived directly, and there may indeed be a certain amount of indeterminacy of meaning in such cases. Such indeterminacy is not seen as phenomenologically awkward in the radical case, and meaning may indeed be theoretical. In the home case however, matters differ greatly. Interpretation proceeds in one stage; meaning (amongst other attitudes) is perceived directly, and - as a result - there is no inscrutability of reference nor indeterminacy of meaning. One perceives directly that S asserts that p.

Let us assume for the moment that such a non-radical alternative is coherent. The discussion thus far suggests that radical interpretationism involves allowing for an evidential base for interpretation that leads to scepticism about the determinacy of meaning and reference, such scepticism is implausible and there thus must be an alternate account available. Non-radical interpretationism involves a richer epistemic base (or, at least, overcomes the very notion of there being such an evidential base) and thus should be preferred.

#### 7.4 *Non-radical interpretationism*

The thrust of the discussion thus far has been negative: showing how adherence to taking the radical as paradigmatic leads to the problems associated with the theoreticity of meaning, rather than providing a positive account of an interpretationism that advocates a distinction between home and radical cases. It is to this positive picture that we now turn.

The first thing to stress is that for both versions of interpretationism, interpretation is not a narrowly linguistic affair, but rather part of an attempt to make sense of people.

'We should think of meanings and beliefs as interrelated constructs of a single theory', a theory that aims at making maximal rational sense of the speaker. This was apparent in my introduction of the notion of thinkables in the preceding chapter as a way of delineating the contours of that individual's thought, of structuring her attitudes. If S asserts that 'George Orwell is dead', but dissents from the claim that 'Eric Blair is dead' as a result of not knowing that Eric Blair is George Orwell, we attribute to S the belief with thinkable content that George Orwell is dead, but not as adopting an attitude towards the coarser notion of a state of affairs. The reason for this is that seeing S as taking an attitude towards the latter would not make rational sense of S's behaviour.

The very notion of interpretation regards how we view the speaker, and not, in the first instance, how we view the sounds that emanate from her. The notion of phenomenology, then, pertains to how the speaker is viewed. The central claim to be advanced in this section is that radical and non-radical interpretationism differ in their account of the phenomenology of understanding in that they differ in how they view the speaker herself. In what follows, I will contrast two ways of viewing the speaker and relate this to the difference between radical and non-radical interpretationism [6.4.1], argue in favour of one these [6.4.2], and then relate this to the notion of testimony [6.4.3].

#### *7.4.1 The sideways-on perspective*

Imagine we come across a hitherto undiscovered tribe, making pronouncements in a language that we do not understand and engaging in behavioural practices that we do not share.<sup>27</sup> We attempt to interpret them; we try to make sense of these behaviours. As interpretationists, the meaning of the natives' verbal utterances, if there is indeed to be meaning at all, must lie open to view.

Tribe member 1 - call him Abe - engages in verbal behaviour that seems to us to be classificatory behaviour. When presented with a particular object, he makes a certain

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<sup>27</sup> Whilst the case here is obviously modelled upon the instance of radical translation, the source is here is primarily the case of the Martian fantasy due to Dummett (1973: 295-8) though in reverse - involving us interpreting the Martians.



utterance that seems to be composed of repeatable linguistic sub-units. He repeats the same utterance on subsequent presentations of the object and repeats a similar-sounding part of this utterance when presented with other objects that share certain observable properties (eg. a similar colour) with the former. We have the hunch that he is engaging in classificatory behaviour, providing a verbal term that is applicable to the object he is presented with, a term that predicates something of that object.<sup>28</sup> Further, such classificatory behaviour is not confined to Abe alone. There is a remarkable amount of interpersonal agreement between Abe and different members of the tribe in terms of this, and other, verbal classificatory behaviours.

For Abe, and other members of the tribe, repeated visual exposures to objects of the same colour, for example, is greeted with what seems to be a similar verbal response. The same is true of the presentation of many other objects to members of the tribe. On some occasions, different members of the tribe may offer different responses to objects to those of the group even in the presence of other members, but such differences are settled over time so that a communal consensus emerges in terms of response. However, even though such a communal consensus emerges, it does not necessarily emerge in favour of the majority response: on occasions, members seem to alter their response over time until a new and stable response emerges. Indeed, the same is true of Abe himself: there are occasions when he seems to alter his responses to the same object until a stable response emerges. As such, the success or otherwise of his suspected classificatory practices seem to depend on conditions that are ratification-independent: they are investigation-independent patterns of application.<sup>29</sup> Given the degree of seeming systematicity to these response practices, it seems to us that such subjects are engaged in a classificatory practices involving applying predicates to objects.

It seems possible to capture two different ways in which one such interpretation of Abe takes place: one that takes a sideways-on perspective and one that takes a 'head-

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, I am glossing over a number of well-known difficulties regarding whether one can indeed ground such hunches upon observation, but this is not my immediate concern here.

<sup>29</sup> The whole point of Wright's version of anti-realism is to deny that there are, or need be, such ratification independent conditions. See, for example, Wright (1993) and an overview of some related issues in Boghossian (1989). This discussion has close ties with issues of realism and anti-realism, though these will not be spelt out in detail here.

on' perspective.<sup>30</sup> The distinction is important since I will argue that radical interpretationism claims, whilst non-radical interpretationism denies, that all understanding of another is from a 'sideways-on' position.

According to the 'sideways-on' perspective of understanding, what one sees are two (or more) unconnected events. On the one hand, we see the meaningless dispositions of the native and, on the other hand, we see the world. In order to understand the native, we attempt to link his verbal and other dispositions and the world from this sideways-on perspective; we attempt to see the correctness and incorrectness of the verbal responses in terms of linking these to ratification-independent conditions in the world.

From such a perspective, interpretation is indeed a two-stage process. Firstly one directly perceives two unrelated events: on the one hand, sounds and bodily movements, and, on the other, worldly states of affair. Then, through a process of interpretation (using a variety of rationality principles and charity), one attempts to make sense of that person by connecting these two realms. Interpretation from the sideways-on perspective is precisely how Bilgrami phrased the 'theoreticity of meaning' objection at the outset of this chapter: 'one does not perceive meaning directly but sounds and bodily movements in relation to certain contextual matters out of which meaning is constructed'.

The alternative to adopting such a sideways-on perspective in understanding people is more difficult to describe, and it is easier to see if one considers the first-personal case first. In a case of our own predicative practices, one cannot adopt this sideways-on perspective. One cannot achieve this double-vision: 'here person, there world' as the two perspectives come together. When asked what I believe, I assert that *p*. When asked what is the case, I assert that *p*. To put it colloquially, from such a 'head-on' perspective, mind and world are not two separate things to be linked together through

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<sup>30</sup> This particular image is found in McDowell (1994). In other essays, he uses alternative images that seem to aim at the same position, such as talk of the position of 'cosmic exile' (1984: 350) or 'the bedrock level' (1981: 237).

interpretation.<sup>31</sup> In the head-on case, my perspective of mind becomes a perspective of world. Unless there are reasons to think otherwise, the world exercises a constraint on my thinking from within. (Such talk of ‘constraint from within’ may seem to lead a version of idealism, but, as emerged from the discussion of in the preceding chapter, this suspicion can be removed once we have distinguished firmly between the act of thinking and the contents of thought. It is the latter that provides the constraint here, not the former. Talk of a true thinkable is not to claim a correspondence between thinkable (as truth bearer) and a truth maker conceived from this sideways-on perspective. From within, a true thinkable just is identical with a fact).

Of course, from a head-on perspective, we cannot check whether our predicative practices are indeed correct, for we cannot step out of these practices to inspect the world. However, the point is *not* that ideally we need to step out of our practices in order to compare such ratification-independent facts with the results of our judgements but are unable to achieve this. Rather, the point is that such talk of correspondence from sideways-on is itself incoherent. In the veridical case what we do have is the fact itself. This does not lead us towards a dogmatic acceptance of the verdicts of our dispositions to judge. Whilst we are unable to achieve the double vision required to check for correspondence between predicate and property, it is from within that we are able to exercise some degree of rational control over our practices. We therefore make room for the possibility of a distance between ourselves and world in light of defeaters through second-order reflection. But we do this head-on, not from sideways-on.

Whilst I have introduced the distinction between sideways-on and head-on perspectives in terms of a contrast between third and first-personal case, the former contrast should not be seen as tied to the latter. As a version of interpretationism, all the facts about linguistic and mental content are precisely and completely captured by the judgements of a fully informed interpreter. The notion of a ‘head-on’ perspective applies equally to an instance of ‘interpreting ourselves’ (the first-personal case) or an instance of ‘interpreting others’ (the third personal case), provided in neither case on

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<sup>31</sup> Use of the term ‘mind’ here, should not be taken to refer to some organ – be it material or non-material, but a system of capacities captured as part of the notion of attitude attribution, part of what it is to be subjects of mental life. See McDowell (1998: 281-88) & Putnam (1999: 180 fn. 18).

adopts a sideways-on point of view. From the head-on perspective in both the first and third personal case, there are no two stages of interpretation such that one directly perceives two disparate things and then connects via the principles of interpretation thereby making them meaningful. Rather, one sees the person as 'minded' and such a conception already involves a conception of the world. One thus does not perceive behaviours and sounds which are then interpreted; rather, one directly perceives meaning.

#### **7.4.2 *Mindedness and the head-on perspective***

One way to put this is to say that the very notion of the case in which one takes the head-on point of view is a case in which the interpreter sees the interpretee as minded, that the interpretee has a rationally-structured point of view.<sup>32</sup> I will now argue that the very notion of treating someone as minded in the sense of having such a point of view involves taking a head-on perspective. The argument is a transcendental one, one that stems from thinking about what it is to assume someone has such a point of view.

In interpreting others, we attempt to make rational sense of their behaviours as a whole, and we do so by attributing series of propositional attitudes to the individual. There are, of course, a number of constraints upon our attribution of such attitudes, constraints that stem from our attempt to make rational sense of such individuals. In chapter 4, it was claimed that the notion of perspective is a major source of constraint: one does not only attribute to the individual a coherent cluster of attitudes, but we assume that the cluster of attitudes forms that individual's point of view. In ascribing attitudes, we are not just describing such a pattern of clusters but prescribing that such an individual has a rational point of view.

What does it mean to ascribe a point of view to someone, or even to have a point of view ourselves? At minimum, it is to say that one has a perspective upon something, a distinctive view of something. So, in interpreting someone, we attribute to them a cluster of attitudes such that they could form that individual's unique point of view.

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<sup>32</sup> The term 'mindedness', found in McDowell (1994: 158) and McCulloch (1995: 150), is due to Lear (1982).

The individual's unique point of view of what? What is the something that the individual has a distinctive view of? The obvious answer is 'the world', at least in the case of empirical beliefs broadly conceived. Asking someone what it is that they believe and asking them what is the case does not reveal different answers; they are different ways of asking the same question. It does not seem to make sense of attributing to someone a perspective unless one attributes to someone a particular view of the world.

Suppose we come across Abe from the preceding section, a member of hitherto unknown tribe making verbal utterances that we assume are assertions. We begin, as above, by speculating on the structure of his utterances and form a number of hypothesis regarding the meanings of such utterances. Such speculation is not narrowly linguistic; attempting to make rational sense of Abe's linguistic acts goes hand in hand with an attempt to make sense of Abe's beliefs and other attitudes. However, in our interpretation of Abe it transpires that, over time, whatever content we ascribe to these linguistic acts, we simply cannot find any systematic pattern of employment of such verbal counters. For example, there are situations in which we would expect him to withdraw, alter or correct an assertion in the light of the meaning ascribed, but he does not. By any scheme of interpretation we try and apply, he seems to make logically incompatible claims. Of course, this could be due to a defect in our abilities as interpreters - this is not the point here. The real point stems from recognising that if, over time, the above pattern keeps recurring, we will simply cease to treat Abe as having a rationally structured point of view, that is we will cease to treat him as being minded at all.

Let us spell this out in more detail. Let us say that, in the light of Abe's verbal assertions and other behaviours, we assume that he makes a judgement with the content that *p*. In attributing this to Abe, we assume that he is making a claim, saying something that is subject to assessment as true or false, and claiming it to be true. If it were false, Abe ought to retract this judgement. So, in attributing to Abe a belief with the content that *p*, we see him as making a claim that things are a certain way, a claim that he would retract were things not be that way. Attributing to someone a propositional attitude with content is to see him as committed in certain respects, to see him as bound to something that is independent of his own attitudes, namely to

whatever it is that makes the content true. If our attempts at interpretation do not reveal the individual to be committed in such a manner, if his subsequent behaviours do not reveal him to be constrained by any attitude-independent claims, we would cease to see him as having a rationally structured point of view. The point is thus: it is a presupposition of assuming someone to have a rational point of view that there is something which stands over such content that makes the content correct or incorrect and to which the interpretee is constrained. If the interpretee fails to display sensitivity to this constraint, we would ultimately fail to see him as minded, fail to credit him with such a rationally ordered point of view.

Such constraint is not from outside the conceptual scheme itself seen sideways-on. In attributing someone thinkable content, such content is structured in a manner that conforms to the generality constraint discussed earlier, according to which the ability to entertain thinkables is a structured ability that systematically presupposes connections to other thinkables. So, in attributing to someone an assertion with the structured content  $Fa$ , we assume them to have an general ability that connects that particular judgement with the content of other judgements -  $Fb$ ,  $Fc$ ,  $Ga$ ,  $Ha$ , and so on. As a result of such generality, there is the notion of a condition that constrains the judgement, conditions that would, for example, make them withdraw the assertion. If  $a$  is an object and  $F$  a predicate, one must be able to use such a predicate towards other objects, so that there is a generality to any single act of judgement: in attributing such content there is a constraint on such attributions that emerges from such a generality. This constraint involves factors that are independent of any particular judgement of the interpretee, but they are constraints to which the interpretee is bound. The constraint comes not from outside the thinkable content, but from outside his own judging it to be the case. Were this not so, the very notion of constraint - that seems a central feature of our attribution of content - would be missing.

The constitutive version of the principle of charity defended in Chapter 3 plays a central role here. In ascribing propositional attitudes to an interpretee, the interpreter aims at making maximal sense of her behaviour. In order to do so, he tries to make the person seem reasonable in terms of her own dealings with the world. We also have a number of principles regarding what types of attitudes are acquired through such exposure to the world. As a result, in attributing attitudes to the interpretee, we are

constrained by what we - the interpreters - consider to be the facts. According to the principle, the interpreter interprets others so that they emerge holding beliefs that logically cohere, and so that they emerge holding, by and large, beliefs that the interpreter consider to be true. Again, this is not to deny that there may be occasions in which we are forced to attribute to the interpretee thinkable content that we do not see as facts, even though she may believe these to be. In such cases, we use additional evidence and other beliefs to achieve another rational interpretation in the light of the entire corpus of evidence. Such a situation, the interpretation finally reached involves some inference from evidence directly perceived. In a veridical situation however, one directly perceives the facts.

In sum, treating an individual as having a point of view, we treat that cluster of attitudes as subject to discipline, as a point of view on a joint world that is attitude-independent, though able to exercise constraint on their attitudes through being structured. An interpretative account of an individual requires more than just ascribing thinkable content to that individual's attitudes in a manner that secures suitable interconnections amongst content. It involves some notion of those thinkables as subject to constraint.

#### ***7.4.3 Non-Radical Interpretationism and testimony.***

There are indeed instances in which one has to engage in radical interpretation, instances in which does not initially view the person as minded. On such occasions, interpretation does take place from the sideways-on, attempting to link disparate realms in order to make sense of meaningless behaviours. In such instances, interpretation does proceed in two stages: first, one directly perceives uninterpreted sounds and behaviours and then proceeds to interpret these. In such cases, meaning is indeed a theoretical posit, based on meaningless sounds and movements. Indeed, in such a case Davidson seems right to suggest that the result of such a two stage process may leave room for indeterminacy and inscrutability.

For radical interpretationism, such a case is the model for *all* understanding of another. In contrast, for non-radical interpretationism this is not the case in our normal, 'homely' interactions with people, instances in which we view them as

minded. In such instances we do see meaning directly, viewing all their behaviours as meaningful actions.

To clarify, the phrase 'non-radical interpretationism' refers to the notion of interpretation that goes on in the normal case in which one view the person as minded. The home case is not to be seen as restricted to the instance of understanding someone in one home or primary language, though this is the paradigmatic instance of non-radical interpretation.

Secondly, one should not take the term 'interpretation' too seriously in such a non-radical case. Talk of interpretationism, be it radical or non-radical, is usually seen as referring to an activity: H engages in a complex activity of interpretation in the home case, attributing to others the attitudinal set that makes best sense of their activity in the light of the constitutive ideal of rationality. However, such an implication of the term interpretationism should be resisted. Non-radical interpretation does not refer to the *activity* that we engage in, but is a description of an ability that we achieve through coming to understand a language. The difference between radical and home case lies not in the claim that only in the latter has the interpreter undertaken the more complex activity. Rather, in the home case, the person directly perceives something as the result of his or her learned capabilities, capabilities that could be characterised 'from the outside' as the undertaking of this more set of complex abilities. The phenomenological differences between home and radical case are not merely the result of having internalised a body of theory in the home case that we can employ it quickly and unthinkingly in turning sounds to meaning such that we feel as if we perceive meaning directly. Rather, as a result of acquiring such a competence, we do indeed perceive meaning directly for we come to occupy a 'head-on' point of view. We treat ourselves and others as minded, including directly seeing rational schemes of attitude attributions as constrained by attitude-independent content.

In chapter three, we considered the application of a version of interpretationism to account for the epistemology of testimony. The central claim was that as a result of the principle of charity necessarily involved in any act of interpretation, a fully informed interpreter could not make sense of someone whose assertions were mostly false. Since interpretationism was given a constitutive role, such that all the facts



about linguistic and mental content are precisely and completely captured by the judgements of this ideal interpreter, this lead to the conclusion that ‘necessarily, most assertions are true’. This conclusion was then used as the missing premise to bridge the critical epistemic gap between H believing that S asserted that p and H believing that p. In the chapter I argued that, whilst sympathetic to the notion of interpretationism, such an account was not useful at resolving the problems of the epistemology of testimony.

In the light of the discussion of non-radical interpretationism, it is possible to appreciate the core reason for the failure of such a response. The proponent of interpretationism cannot not be seen as plugging epistemic gaps, for such gaps should not be seen as open to start of with! On that conception of the problem of the epistemology of testimony in chapter three, it is assumed that as a result of understanding S’s assertion that p, H forms the belief that S asserted that p, a judgement that has no bearing on whether the assertion is true. On the non-radical interpretationism endorsed here, this is simply not the case: interpreting someone involves attribution of attitudes that are subject to constraint, such that in attributing a belief to someone one is judging the individual in this regards and seeing them as by and large rational by our own standards.

### **7.5 *Radical interpretationism and the centrality of the idiolect***

It is important to address a central question facing non-radical interpretationism, namely the issue of the parameters of what I termed ‘the home case’. Roughly, how and when do we treat other people as minded? Rather than explore these questions directly, I will consider the factors motivating Davidson’s endorsement of radical interpretation. Once these are clear, it is easier to articulate an alternative that makes the non-radical version more coherent and more compelling.

Although Davidson displays some awareness of the implausibility of the inscrutability of reference claim, he is nonetheless is prepared to bite the bullet and endorse it in the light of his commitment to the radical turn. Why? What motivates Davidson’s commitment to treating the radical as paradigmatic in the face of such difficulties? Answering this question is more difficult than it first appears. Whilst there is one

obvious metaphysical reason for a commitment to a radical turn available, it does not seem to be a reason that need motivate Davidson, given his own metaphysical commitments. As will emerge from my comments, it seems to me that the primary factor motivating Davidson's radical interpretationism stem from a broader conception of the nature of language, rather than the metaphysical claims often assumed. Further, correcting this conception of language is central to understanding the non-radical alternative.

The obvious reason for taking the radical turn would be as part of a project of naturalising meaning, making meaning respectable from the point of view of physicalism. On such a view what one really hears are entities or objects that can be made respectable from a physicalist point of view: sounds and marks. This is made explicit in Quine's avocation of the radical as paradigmatic.

However, given Davidson's broader metaphysical project expressed elsewhere, such concerns need not motivate Davidson directly. Take his celebrated anomalous monism for instance, where it is claimed that one can be a physicalist about the nature of mental events whilst denying that there can be a reduction of the physical to the mental.<sup>33</sup> An event that can be described under two different descriptions, for example as a blink and a wink. Given his event ontology, whereby token events are seen as bare particulars, neither description is to be seen as more basic than the other, and there cannot be laws allowing reduction of one set of laws (regarding mental types, say) to the other (regarding physical types, say). Anomalous monism follows because even if every token physical event is the same as a token mental event, there cannot be laws connecting types of events. This is a case of ontological monism - in the form of events conceived as particulars, but conceptual dualism - in the form of different descriptions, so that there can be ontological, but not conceptual, reduction. Some of the details here are controversial, but the overriding point seems clear.<sup>34</sup> Just as in the

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the essays in Davidson (1980)

<sup>34</sup> Part of the controversy stems from Davidson's various attempts at event individuation. According to Davidson's latter attempts, he follows Quine's criterion such that events are identical iff they occur in the same space and the same time. This does not mean that events are the same as physical objects, even though it is standardly held that occupancy of a space-time region is the individuating feature of these too, since: "events and objects may be related to places in space-time in different ways; it may be for example, that events occur at a time in a place, while objects occupy places at times." (1985: 176) If one individuates events in such a manner, and makes the plausible assumption that anything that exists in space and time is physical, then the individuation of an event in terms of its space-time location

case of a blink and a wink where we have two ways of redescribing the same bare particular event with neither description being ontologically basic, the same applies to the linguistic case too. It is indeed possible to redescribe the event as a content-laden speech act or a sequence of noise emissions, but neither description is ontologically basic. As such, the physicalism that motivates Quine's adoption of radical as paradigmatic should not equally motivate Davidson.<sup>35</sup>

If it is not physicalism per se that is motivating Davidson in his adherence to the radical as paradigmatic, it is quite possible that the motivation stems from his overall conception of the nature of communication.<sup>36</sup> In particular, despite noting certain social aspects of meaning (see below), Davidson views the participants in a communicative exchange as independent individuals, such that communication is at best a degree in correspondence between idiolects. It seems that such individualism about meaning goes hand in hand with a rejection of a distinction between home and radical case.

The centrality of the idiolect is clearest in his rejection of the necessity of shared convention ("a clearly defined linguistic structure") for communication to take place that comes through his discussion of malapropisms. Someone may use the term 'derangement' to mean what we normally mean by arrangement, and someone may use the term 'epitaphs' to mean what is conventionally referred to as epithets. Yet, we

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privileges the physical level of description as basic. However, there are a number of difficulties with such an account, not least the difficulty with actually making sense of the distinction between occurring in, and occupying, space and time. According to Davidson's earlier conception of events as bare particulars, where any event is thus capable of falling under different descriptions, this implies that no level of description as basic. Indeed, Hornsby has argued that on such a view, there is no general theory of events, at least in terms of a single, overriding, individuation criteria. Events may be able to be individuated within the context of a level of descriptive discourse, but there is no overall individuation criteria available. (Hornsby, 1980-1). This means that every event could be described as either physical or mental, which may strike one as strange. However, on this conception of events as bare particulars, it just means that such bare particulars can be subsumed under physical or mental descriptions. There is indeed no sense in which any one description is basic or foundational. Further discussion is needed, including reference to the role that supervenience plays in Davidson's overall account, and it could be arguably claimed that is the redundant and thus unnecessary role played by supervenience in the account that motivates the need for the more recent, and to my mind implausible, account of event individuation.

<sup>35</sup> I do not mean this as a definitive claim; there are alternative ways of defending the primacy for the radical even within Davidson's physicalism – such as defining alternate notions of the basicness of the physical. Rather, my point is that given the subtlety and scope of Davidson's metaphysical position, it does not seem to me that this alone can account for his blindness to the non-radical alternative.

<sup>36</sup> It is understanding that gives life to meaning not the other way around....the notion of meaning is a theoretical concept which cannot explain communication but depends on it.

have no difficulty in understanding what is meant by this person using the phrase: ‘ a nice derangement of epitaphs’; in such a case, communication can succeed, and understanding can take place. The ease with which we can accommodate such malapropisms reveals that understanding and communication need not be based on shared conventions, but rather involves a certain amount of overlap between the self standing idiolects of the communicants. Such overlap is achieved through the construction of a passing theory for interpreting the (linguistic) behaviour of the subject by the interpreter at that time, a theory that attempts to make sense of one another behaviours in rational terms through the attribution of propositional attitudes and so on. The phrase ‘passing theory’ is very apt: given the holistic interdependence of meaning and belief, communication requires a continual generation of theories to accommodate the totality of behaviours of the subject over time. So much so, that we do not even therefore share a single language as an individual, never mind between individuals. Language is a kind of abstraction from the constantly changing idiolects of individual speakers.

Even when Davidson is prepared to recognise the role that social factors necessarily play in understanding linguistic behaviours, the role played by such social factors still embraces the primacy of the idiolect in interpretationism. This emerges most clearly in his recent discussion of triangulation. In the process of triangulation in general cases, the precise position of an object is ascertained by taking a line from each of two known locations to the object, so that the intersection of the two lines determines the position of the object. Davidson applies a similar strategy to cases of interpretation. Identifying the content of attitudes in interpretation involves identifying the object(s) of those attitudes. If we have two individuals interacting with each others (mutual interpreters), one can work out the object of their attitudes by looking for the common cause of their responses.

The triangulation argument :

“shows that there cannot be a private language, that is a language understood by only one creature...there could be no saying of what a speaker was thinker or speaker was talking about...without interaction with a second person.”<sup>37</sup>

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37 (1992: 265)

The argument, repeated with different nuances in a variety of places, is sometimes portrayed as responding to the challenge of drawing the distinction:

“between using words correctly and merely thinking that one uses them correctly, without the appeal to common usage.”<sup>38</sup>

Triangulation requires that, for understanding to take place, there must be some interaction between speaker, hearer and world (at least with regard's occasion sentences). Here, H assigns meanings to S's utterances, and contents to his beliefs, by triangulating his own - and S's own, statements with perceived causes in the world that seem to have elicited both. So, the hearer notes three things: a) a pairing of the S's actions and the stimulus that elicited them, b) his own (H's actions) and the situation that elicited them, and c) the similarity between these previous two. Understanding a speaker thus involves systematically constructing meaning out of these three pairings.

For example,

“Suppose that each time I point to my nose, you say ‘nose’. Then you have it right, you have gone as before. Why do your verbal reactions count as the same, i.e. relevantly similar? Well, I count them as relevantly similar: I find the stimulus in each case the same, and the response the same. You must also, in some primitive sense, find my pointings similar...[B]y yourself you cannot tell the difference between situations being the same and seeming the same...If you and I can correlate the occurrence of other's responses with the occurrence of a shared stimulus, however an entirely new element is introduced. Once the correlation is established it provides each of us with a ground for distinguishing between getting it right and getting it wrong.”<sup>39</sup>

We assume each nose, amongst other objects, have a particular location in a shared, mind-independent world. Such a conception is not available to be had by a solitary thinker, for we would have no conception of the distinction between our treating a given stimulus as similar and the stimulus as being similar. A necessary condition for having such a conception is the presence of at least two creatures interacting within a shared environment.

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<sup>38</sup> (1994: 11)

<sup>39</sup> (1994: 8)

“Only communication can provide the concept, for to have the concept of objectivity...requires that we are aware of the fact that we share thoughts and the world with others.”<sup>40</sup>

In such discussions, Davidson clearly embraces a social aspect to the process of interpretationism. However, talk of the social is *not* an appeal to a shared public language, or communal linguistic practices. The social here is another individual, a second person. Further, the interaction between the two, the speaker and hearer, is very much an interaction between individuals - as the triangulation metaphor highlights. As emerged from the discussion of malapropism, Davidson denies that communication requires membership to a linguistic community with shared practices, but rather requires independent individuals attempting to make sense of each others' behaviours through the attribution of beliefs, desires and meanings. Communication on this account involves individuals with personal idiolects so that communication (mutual understanding) occurs when there is an overlap between two (or more) idiolects.

Given such a conception of understanding and communication, it is no surprise that one would take the radical as paradigmatic: it is indeed correct that all understanding the speech of another involves radical interpretation. As the triangulation metaphor makes explicit, all understanding of another involves two individuals, with their own idiolects, attempting to interpret another from the sideways-on as it were. There is indeed no disparity between the radical and home case, both involve two (or more) individuals attempting to interpret each other with nothing shared. It seems that this conception is (at least, in part) the source of the decision to take the radical as paradigmatic.

For radical interpretationism, the interpreter (H) and interpretee (S) are to be viewed as self-standing individuals, with his or her own private idiolect. In a successful instance of communication and understanding between such individuals, there is a some overlap between such idiolects. The notion of a language itself is little more than a formalised degree of overlap between such idiolects. Talk of a shared language

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40 (1991: 201) Davidson develops the triangulation metaphor into a broader account of the interdependence of three varieties of knowledge: knowledge of oneself, others and the world. See Davidson (1986).

is little more than a heuristic device utilised to aid or speed up interpretation, but ultimately: 'all the understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation'.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, for non-radical interpretationism, H and S are not self-standing individuals, but share a common language and other social practices, so that in a successful instance of communication and understanding between such individuals, one shares meaning. Such a shared, public language is seen as central and becomes the medium for understanding and communication. Successful communication is not just overlapping idiolects, but involve a degree of interdependency between members of a shared linguistic community.<sup>42</sup> Spelling this out in more detail is the final part of this account of non-radical interpretationism.

### 7.6 *Non-radical interpretationism and the sociality of language*

Thus far I have argued that it is Davidson's idiolectic conception of the sociality of language that led to his advocating radical interpretationism. This suggests that a non-radical interpretationism involves a non-idiolectic conception of the sociality of language. Whilst such a claim is indeed correct, it is important to be more specific as to the role played by social factors for non-radical interpretation. The term 'the social aspect of language' can be seen as meaning a number of different things, and it is worth at the outset distinguishing between different positions for so doing will allow us to make explicit the precise conception of sociality adopted by Davidson, as well as to suggest an alternative once problems emerge from within his conception.

It is sometimes suggested that there are two positions available regarding the sociality of language; following Brandom, we can distinguish between I-Thou and I-We versions.<sup>43</sup> Both have in common the rejection of a *psychologistic conception of meaning* referred to above. In contrast to such a conception, it is argued that meanings cannot be determined by purely private rules that are in principle not open to the scrutiny of others, since facts about rules private to an individual cannot generate the distinction between in/correct uses of words characteristic of the normative nature of meaning. Further, both go beyond a claim regarding the *publicity*

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<sup>41</sup> (1994: 125)

<sup>42</sup> See Bilgrami (1992: 70) for the terminology here.

*of meaning*, namely the claim that determinate meaning can be generated by an individual, so long as this is potentially available to others. On such a conception, it is perfectly possible to have and speak a language even if there were no other individual around, provided that whatever it is that constitutes meaning would be available to any other individual were they around. Language and meaning are potentially social in that they could be publicly available, but social aspects are not a constitutive feature of language on this account.

In contrast, I-Thou and I-We conceptions both stress the constitutive role that others play in any account of linguistic behaviour, although they differ both in the identity of the others and the role that they play. *I-Thou sociality* conceives of the sociality of language in terms of the relation between two communicators trying to make sense of each other. The 'thou' involved is none other than an Other; a second person involved in conversation, and successful communication is achieved when there is a sufficient degree of overlap between the pronouncements of the I and the thou to facilitate communication between them. *I-We sociality* conceives of the sociality of language in terms of both speakers being members of a shared community, joint participants in social practices. Within such a community of common practice, there are people teaching, correcting and agreeing with each other and it is this shared practice that allows for the distinction between in/correct meaning. The actual participation within a community plays a constitutive role in the constitution of the individual's meaning.

Brandom argues against I-We Sociality, and in favour of the I-Thou alternative. Consider, for example, a similar situation to that of Abe's above, in which an individual is strongly inclined to apply predicates in a particular manner, and considers such application of predicates to be subject to norms in virtue of the fact that there is the possibility of going out of step with other members of his community. In this case, however, Abe is under an illusion as regards the predicative practices of his community. Here, Abe is under an illusion that he is subject to norms, but yet it does not seem possible to distinguish this from the previous situation involving Abe in which aim is not under an illusion as regards the predicative practices of the community. In both, it is Abe's conception that there is the possibility of going out of

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<sup>43</sup> Brandom (1994). The implication that there are two competing positions is also implied in Smith (1998).



step with the community that provides him with the requisite feeling of being subject to norms. In the former case, he is subject to norms; in the latter he is not, it is merely an illusion. However, it does not seem possible to account for this distinction.<sup>44</sup>

Brandom uses such a failure of I-We sociality to motivate adoption of a version of I-Thou sociality. So, after providing an argument against I-We Sociality, he uses the failure of such an account as motivation for adopting the other alternative.<sup>45</sup> Whilst I am sympathetic to Brandom's argument against I-We sociality, I find this dialectical move to be unpersuasive. Firstly, the I-Thou conception of sociality he endorses is precisely Davidson's idiolectic conception discussed in the preceding section, a version that leads to radical interpretationism and the problems discussed thus far.<sup>46</sup> Further this dialectical move is only persuasive if one assumes, as Brandom seems to do, that these two options are exhaustive, such that the failure of one leads to the adoption of the other. However, there is an alternative available that endorses a truly social conception of language that neither falls prey to the problems of I-Thou or I-We sociality. This alternative is important for it is the position endorsed by non-radical interpretationism.

I will term this alternative *We-I sociality*. As the title suggests it has certain affinities with I-We sociality, in that it points to the constitutive role played by social factors in the constitution of individual meaning. However, here the role played by the community recedes into the background. Such a foreground / background distinction is familiar from the discussion of Wittgenstein in Chapter 2 of this essay, whereby we allowed trusting others to play an essential role in our acquisition of a world view, prior to the possibility of rationally challenging their assertions. It is only as a result of socialisation, becoming a member of a 'we-community', that the notion of mindedness, and hence rational challenge, emerges.

It is through a process of socialisation that one acquires a language, and with this comes a conception of both mindedness and the world.<sup>47</sup> This is a bold claim, but lies

<sup>44</sup> A version of this objection is made in Brandom (1994: 37-42).

<sup>45</sup> (See Brandom, 1994: 38).

<sup>46</sup> Brandom (1994: 659 – n. 50) is explicit about using Davidson as a model for I-Thou sociality.

<sup>47</sup> This is McDowell's notion of *Bildung* (McDowell, 1994: 84-88, 123-125). A central theme of *Mind and World* is to claim that such socialisation should not be seen as non-natural, but as part of the

at the core of the notion of thinkables defended in the previous chapter. Talk of thought, fact or language displays each of these three as having conceptually structured, thinkable content, and it is in virtue of this structure that such content can stand in rationalising relations. When we state facts in sentences, or express thought-content in sentences, we do so because we think of facts or thought-content as structured counterparts to such sentences: objects, properties and the various relations corresponds to singular terms, concepts and predicates, and so on. This common structure of all three is no mere accident, nor does it involve independently of each other, but intrinsically depends on the acquisition of a language.<sup>48</sup> Learning such a language is not a matter of interpretation, linking the language with an independent, prior conception of the world, nor is the notion of a language an object aiming to facilitate communication between idiolects. Rather, it creates the space for the notion of the non-radical, the home case, in which speakers think, talk, see and act in the shared world. The term 'home' is thus not merely used as a contrast to radical, but captures the sense in which acquiring such a language is indeed acquiring a home.

On such a conception, language is essentially social in that it is through socialisation within a linguistic community that a person acquires an understanding of the very structure of rationality itself. Thinkable content is propositionally structured, and it is in virtue of this repeatable structure that the very notions of rational relations (such as justification) come into play. Normative distinctions, such as in/correct use of semantic terms, thus only make sense against the background of such initiation into a linguistic community. On this conception, the role played by the community is not to distinguish between in/correct uses of language through acts of praise or censure by others, but rather one achieves a conception of such usage through initiation into this shared language. The developmental metaphor explored in chapter two, whereby light is seen as dawning as a result of such an initiation, is an apt one for such a position.

In terms of the notion of the sociality of language, it therefore seems that there are more than the two options distinguished by Brandom. Despite differences between the

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acquisition of a 'second-nature'. As McDowell himself acknowledges, the comments here "no more than open the door to a topic about which, no doubt, much more needs to be said." (McDowell, 1994: 186). The same is true of the cursory comments here!

public conception and I-thou conception of sociality, both of these share a central feature that is not shared by the other two conceptions, the I-We and the We-I. According to the former two, the fundamental conception of a language is that of an individual's idiolect, and communication essentially involves some form of overlapping between such idiolects. On the public conception, no further person is needed for meaning (or thought) to take place; On the I-thou conception, at least one other person is necessarily required for the linguistic acts to be about something, to have content. According to the latter two, the fundamental conception of a language is that of a shared, public language. On I-we sociality, the continued interaction with other members of a community is required for the normativity of meaning; We-I sociality, it is the initiation into the community through learning the language that is required for the normativity of meaning. Further, it is this latter option that lies at the core of non-radical interpretationism.

By way of summary, I have claimed that as a result of such a shared social language, we approach other people in manner that includes a rich background within which interpretation takes place. Taking such a shared background seriously is essential for the non radical alternative, and in turn essential for taking seriously the notion of a TES as similar in epistemic role to a TES.

Proponents of the sense-datum conception of understanding attempt to undermine the parallel between a TES and PES, in that it is only in the latter that one sees meaningful facts. I have attempted to undermine the sense-datum conception of understanding by highlighting two different ways of viewing a person: from the sideways-on and from a head-on perspective. In the former, interpretation is two-staged: one begins with meaningless behaviours and sounds and links these to the world via a process of radical interpretation. Issues surrounding the indeterminacy of interpretation emerge as a result of such a sideways-on conception. In the latter, interpretation proceeds in one stage, such that one sees the person as minded and thus as subject to constraint by the world. As a result of acquiring a language, we get a view of the world from within, a perspective. As a result, our conception of

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<sup>48</sup> Much more needs to be said to defend this claim, particularly as it goes against the dominant trend in recent philosophy that sees philosophy of language as little more than an addendum to issues in philosophy of mind. Some initial moves are found in Morris (1993).

mindedness, whether our own or that of another, cannot be seen as independent of the joint world that we share. In such a case, understanding does not proceed in two stages, and one does directly perceive meaning. As such, in a veridical instance of both PES and TES, one perceives facts.

## Conclusion

Rather than provide a conclusion that simply summarises the preceding argument, I wish to present a broader picture that integrates some of the conclusions reached. In particular, I attempt to integrate the discussion of non-radical interpretationism in the last chapter with the discussion of the epistemology of testimony in Part A. More specifically still, I wish to claim that the ‘We-I’ conception of language at the heart of non-radical interpretationism highlights an important framework within which epistemic interaction takes place that is largely ignored by extant theorists of testimony.

In rejecting the autonomous individual as epistemic hero, the common-sense constraints on the epistemology of testimony allow for a social dimension to knowledge. In my account, such a social dimension does not involve a total rejection of the individual as the focus of epistemology, in favour of some conception of, for example, the social group as the basic unit to which knowledge is, and should be, attributed.<sup>1</sup> One may speak of ‘a community of knowledge’, one may even consider questions of the epistemic responsibility of such a community implicit in our attributions of knowledge to such a grouping, but such talk is largely metaphoric. Attributions of knowledge necessarily involve the constraints imposed by the notion of a perspective, and, as our patterns of attitude attribution reveal, such a viewpoint is something an individual alone can have. This focus on the individual is not to deny a social dimension to knowledge. The individual here is hardly the autonomous sceptic, trusting no one but himself. Trusting others plays a central role in the acquisition and distribution of knowledge.

However, it is important to distinguish between two types of trust involved here. Much modern discussion of trust employs a ‘gambling conception’ of the notion. Summarising a definition of the term ‘trust’ that “unites researchers in this area”, Gambetta tells us that:

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<sup>1</sup> This radical notion of the social nature of knowledge is suggested in Hardwig (1985) and Faulkner (2000). In chapter 4 of this essay, I considered the less radical transmission model, that leaves a role for the responsible individual whilst allowing the possibility of transindividual reasons. The reasons for rejecting this moderate position undoubtedly undermines the more radical conception alluded to in the text.

“trust (or, symmetrically, distrust) is a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action...When we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of co-operation with him”.<sup>2</sup>

Assessments of trust in this sense take place between two or more individuals (or groupings), such that one individual assesses the degree of trustworthiness of the other(s) for specific purposes. Trustworthiness is thus seen as a certain property of another, assessed and ascribed to rationalise and aid social interaction between the truster and the person(s) seen as trustworthy. As a result, trusting is a way of minimising the variety of dangers and risks involved in contemporary society, a way of making a reasoned gamble in the lottery of life.<sup>3</sup>

We came across just such a notion of trustworthiness in Fricker’s discussion of testimony in Chapter 2. In deciding whether to trust an individual in terms of the testimonial claims she is making on a particular occasion, we assess her trustworthiness through an assessment of her sincerity and competence on that particular occasion. Such estimates of trustworthiness are part of a psychological interpretation of such an individual, attempting to make best sense of her overall behaviour in that particular context. There may be a reliance on that individual as a result of such an assessment of trustworthiness, so that one relies on the testimony of the trustworthy individual. H trusts S’s claim as a result of seeing S as trustworthy, and such trust is revealed in H’s subsequent actions: he then claims to know certain things as a result, and may act upon such knowledge. Part of making sense of that individual involves a particular decision regarding trustworthiness, so that one can then trust the claims that she makes. On such a conception, one makes a decision to

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<sup>2</sup> Gambetta (1988: 287)

<sup>3</sup> Discussion within this area considers the parameters involved in the rational assessment of such trust, the advantages to individuals and groups of adopting such a strategy of trusting, whether humans have a psychological compulsion towards such attributions of trustworthiness and whether there are normative dimensions to such a conception (such as an obligation of trustworthiness to one who is trusted). In addition to the essays in Gambetta (1988), useful discussions of trust in this first sense include Barber (1983) and Seligman (1997). A seminal paper with regards the normative dimensions of trusting is Baier (1986), whilst the question of psychological compulsion is considered in Wilson (1993).

trust someone based on evidence available for ascribing the property of trustworthiness in that instance, as part of an overall interpretation of that individual, and then acts upon such a decision.

As mentioned in the discussion in Chapter 2, such an account of trusting others strikes me as correct, by and large. In our everyday interactions with others, we do use available evidence to ascribe degrees of trustworthiness to others regarding specific issues, that governs our attitudes of trusting towards them, and as a result, effects our own subsequent actions. These ascriptions of trustworthiness are situation specific: they depend on a variety of contextual factors including an assessment of speaker, hearer, domain and occasion. Such an account explains most instances of learning from others, in the broadest sense of the term, including instances of learning from non-verbal behaviours for example. However, as my argument for a non-unitary account of testimony suggested, the category of learning from testimony is not primarily explained through such an assessment of trustworthiness, though it has relevance in defeating the alternative account proffered in Part B of this study. At the heart of the alternative is a more *basic* conception of trusting another, one that does not involve ascribing the attitude of trustworthiness to an individual on the basis of evidence as part of an interpretation of her, but from the very conception of what it means to treat her as a person.

The sense of *basicness* I have in mind here is illustrated well in Strawson's essay 'Freedom and Resentment'. Strawson makes a distinction between two different attitudes that one can adopt towards another person. There is:

"the attitude (or range of attitudes) of involvement or participation in a human relationship, on the one hand, and what might be called the objective attitude (or range of attitudes) to another human being, on the other. Even in the same situation, I must add, they are not altogether exclusive of each other; but they are, profoundly, *opposed* to each other."<sup>4</sup>

In certain abnormal cases, we can indeed adopt the objective attitude towards another individual: we suspend our ordinary attitudes towards that individual entirely, such that we cease to treat them as human. However, such cases are indeed 'abnormal', for

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<sup>4</sup> Strawson (1962: 201)

they go against the normal human attitude we adopt towards one another in human social interaction.

For example, Strawson considers the case of reactive feelings such as resentment and gratitude, attitudes we take to others because of the attitude others display towards us. Such reactive feelings only make sense from within active involvement and engagement in inter-personal human relationships; they cannot make sense at all whilst adopting an objective attitude to the other. There can be reasons to withhold such reactive feelings towards people in certain situations, and that these reasons divide into two radically different groups. Some reasons invite us to suspend our ordinary reactive attitudes to the agent (e.g. 'he is deranged' or 'she is a child'); such reasons are reasons for not feeling resentment or gratitude towards the agent at all. Other reasons do not invite us to suspend our ordinary reactive attitudes to the agent (e.g. 'she didn't mean to'); such reasons are reasons for not feeling resentment about the particular action of an agent. The former require us to treat the other objectively, and we simply cannot do so for a sustained period as this goes against our very participation in human social interaction.

“The human commitment to participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships is, I think, too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them; and being involved in inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question.”<sup>5</sup>

Our commitment towards seeing others as agents is not something that we can justify through some form of cost-benefit analysis, nor is it explained as being the result of rational choice; it is more basic than this: it is rooted in our very treating of them as human.

It seems to me that part of such participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships involves a certain trusting attitude that I attempted to capture in the preceding chapter through the notion of a head-on perspective. We adopt an attitude of trusting towards

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<sup>5</sup> Strawson (1962: 202)



a person as a result of socialisation into a shared linguistic community, such that, as a result of acquiring a language, one treats the attitudes of oneself and others as generally responsive to the world we jointly share, unless there are reasons to withhold such rational patterns of attitude attribution. There may be reasons in which we suspend such an attitude of 'trust', and these too may fall into two groups: entire suspension of the appropriateness of such an attitude towards the utterances of another through treating her or partial excuses within the overall framework. In the former, we cease to treat her as a mature, adult human and the very framework appropriate for human social interaction is suspended. In the latter, one broadly persists with adopting the normal human attitude, though may have to find alternate reasons to trust her claims. The taking of such a trusting attitude is not something we do as the result of some cost-benefit analysis to minimise uncertainty, but is an essential part of the very attitude we adopt towards others in ordinary interpersonal relationships unless we have reason to do otherwise.

Strawson claims that taking the human perspective that lies at the heart of such reactive attitudes structures our social practices with regards such attitudes, such that concepts such as obligation and responsibility only have a place with regards such a perspective. He makes similar claims with regards the notions of responsibility and obligation in our moral practices. The same seems true with this basic sense of trusting described here: the trust implicit in adopting a human attitude towards ourselves and others structures our social epistemic practices in a variety of ways.

Consider the following common-sense description of such practices.

"If someone has promised me to do A, then I am entitled to rely on it, and can myself make promises on the strength of it; and so, where someone has said to me I know, I am entitled to say I know too at second hand. The right to say I know is transmissible. Hence if I say it lightly, I may be responsible for getting you into trouble."<sup>6</sup>

Making a promise involves both speaker and audience, such that S makes a commitment and sees herself as bound by such a commitment; H is entitled to rely on such a commitment as a result of S's undertaking. The same is true of a claim to

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<sup>6</sup> Austin (1946: 100)

know, as we have seen in the instance of testimony. In claiming to know that *p*, *H* is entitled to rely on *S*'s claim, provided there are no defeaters, such if *S* knows and testifies that *p* *H* can thereby come to know that *p*. Indeed, a similar structure seems to lie behind the social nature of asserting: one ought not to assert that *p* unless one knows that *p* is true, and in turn one takes assertions as sources of knowledge, unless there defeaters available.

For some, such practices need to be rationally justified through explicit evidence in favour of attributing trustworthiness. These practices are thus the result of deliberate rational decisions to trust others for various reasons. For others, such practice serve to create the very notions of knowledge attribution and responsibility taking as they feature as the result of the commitments involved in such interactions.<sup>7</sup> These practices thus actually serve to create the very normative notions that structure our epistemic discourse. In the context of this study, neither of these ways of thinking are correct. Rather, such patterns of transmission of epistemic responsibility are a result of the basic notions of trust that necessarily underlie mature, human social interaction as a result of the human commitment to participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships. This basic notion of trust as a result of treating others as humans structures much of our epistemic interactions with one another, including, in the context of this essay, the doxastic practices surrounding the epistemology of testimony.

Finally, to someone who may claim that such a natural human propensity is little more than an ungrounded charter for gullibility, and that we should seek to adopt a critical disbelief of all assertions of others unless we have sufficient evidence to the contrary, Strawson's response to a related query in the case of reactive attitudes seems highly apposite.

“To the further question whether it would not be *rational*... so to change our world that in it all these attitudes were wholly suspended, I must answer, as before, that one who presses this question has wholly failed to grasp the import of the preceding answer, the nature of the human commitment that is here involved: it is useless to ask whether it would not be rational for us to do

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<sup>7</sup> See Brandom (1994); especially chapter 4.

what it is not in our nature to (be able to) do. To this I must add that if there were, say, for a moment open to us the possibility of such a godlike choice, the rationality of making or refusing it would be determined by quite other considerations than the truth or falsity of the general theoretical doctrine in question.”<sup>8</sup>

Critical reflection through awareness of defeaters may ensure that our account of the epistemology of testimony is no charter for gullibility. Nonetheless, such trusting attitude is part of that human commitment to one another that provides a necessary background for social interaction, and is central to explaining our everyday practices discussed and explored in this study.

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<sup>8</sup> Strawson (1962: 208)

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