

Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy

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1. DIVISION OF EPISTEMIC LABOUR VERSUS THE IDEAL OF INDIVIDUAL EPISTEMIC AUTONOMY

A reference point in philosophical investigation of knowledge from testimony is the ideal of the ‘autonomous knower’. This ideal type relies on no one else for any of her knowledge. Thus she takes no one else’s word for anything, but accepts only what she has found out for herself, relying only on her own cognitive faculties and investigative and inferential powers. Descartes explicitly espoused this ideal, and method, in his *Meditations* (Descartes 1641). Locke equally rejected ‘other men’s opinions floating in one’s brain’ as not constituting knowledge (Locke 1690). The wholly autonomous knower will not accept any proposition, unless she herself possesses the evidence establishing it. Thus she will not accept anything on the basis of another’s word for it, even when she has evidence of their trustworthiness on the topic in question.

Such extreme purism restricts how much one can come to know very severely. We humans are essentially social creatures, and it is not clear that we do or could possess any knowledge at all which is not in some way, perhaps obliquely, dependent on testimony. How exactly does the system of empirical belief—hopefully knowledge—of each of us depend on others’ testimony? There is certainly massive causal reliance on testimony in the process by which each of us develops into a language-user and thinker, ‘grows into possession of a world’.¹ The initial stages of language acquisition by a child inevitably occur through a

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process of simple trust² in its teachers—parents and other carers. In this cognitive developmental process learning meanings is not separable from coming to grasp and accept our shared basic world picture, the common-sense theory which structures and frames our empirical thought. There is, for instance, no distinction to be drawn between learning the meanings of ‘chair’, and ‘horse’, and ‘jump’, and ‘cook’, and learning about chairs, and horses, and jumping, and cooking.³

The fact that each of us is causally reliant on others’ testimony in the historical process by which she acquires her system of concepts and beliefs does not entail that, once adult, each of us remains epistemically dependent on testimony for her empirical knowledge. Perhaps each of us can afterwards push away the ladder of trust in others, up which she has climbed into possession of a world. Beliefs which were first acquired through a process involving simple trust in testimony, and were initially epistemically based on testimony (as we may say once core normative epistemic concepts become applicable to the developing child, viz. when she becomes a thinker capable of epistemic self-criticism), may later acquire an alternative basis. It may be that beliefs from the epistemic source of perception, linked by memory and extended by inference, can take over, together with support from inference to the best explanation and broader coherence. Suppose one could, once epistemically matured, thus push away the ladder of testimony, retaining only the portion of one’s beliefs which remain epistemically supported without reliance on it. In maintaining the ideal, one would then be restricted to what one learns from one’s own senses and preserves in memory, plus whatever one can get to by use of one’s own inferential powers from that base—with a ban on even reasoned, empirically backed trust in the word of others!

There is reason to doubt that one can in that way eliminate all epistemic dependence on testimony in one’s mature system of empirical belief, even if prepared drastically to prune it. For one to do so, her original epistemic dependence on testimony would have, everywhere, to be replaced by adequate support from other epistemic sources, or the belief in question dropped. Now of course it often happens in particular cases that one first learns of something through another’s testimony, and then is later able to confirm it for oneself through perception, perhaps combined with memory and inference. My daughter tells me her new teacher wears glasses; later I see the teacher for myself. The weather forecaster on Tuesday predicts that it will rain on Wednesday; Wednesday proves wet. Facts about a foreign country known to one at first only through travel literature and friends’ reports are confirmed by perception, when one travels there oneself. In these and countless similar cases one later gets first-hand perceptual evidence of what one first believed on testimony. In such cases contrary perceptual evidence would decisively falsify the testimony.

There are other ways, less direct but no less powerful, in which alternative grounds for belief can grow strong enough to take over the support of a belief originally acquired from and based on testimony. Inference to the best explanation and explanatory coherence more broadly can take over the support

of many beliefs originally based solely on others' testimony. It is plausible, for instance, that one's implicit beliefs about what the words of one's language mean no longer rest on the past trusted testimony through which they were learned. One's linguistic interactions with others would not run as smoothly as they do, if one's first teachers had deceived one! (See Adler 1994; Lyons 1997.)

Nonetheless the role of past trusted testimony in the system of empirical belief of each of us is fundamental, because it has shaped the conceptual frame within which current individual perceptions are made—how the sensory given is conceptualized to yield perceptual experience and belief.⁴ Thus, in our three examples above, while it is true that subsequent contrary perception would refute the earlier testimony, these perceptions are themselves subtly dependent on a framework of concepts shaped in part by earlier trust in testimony. I see the teacher's reading glasses, but that she is my daughter's teacher I know only through a set of background beliefs in which testimony is inextricably involved. When it rains on Wednesday I see and hear the rain; but my knowledge that it is Wednesday is testimony-infected, and that very concept and its application is one constituted by human consensus involving testimony. Similarly, when I visit Australia for the first time, in one way I gain personal confirmation of what I had previously known of only through testimony; but my knowledge that I am in Australia at all depends on testimony in multifarious and hard to pin down ways: initially I knew where my flight landed only through trusting the testimony of travel agent and airline personnel, and though the evidence of roadsigns and so forth may take over, these are all put there by human agency, and constitute a kind of testimony. Moreover, the controlling idea in terms of which I conceptualize and slot in all my own personal experiences—of the spherical planet earth with its land masses and seas, its countries, nations, and other geopolitical institutions, its history and prehistory—was acquired from testimony.

This brief sketch has shown how the epistemic dependence on testimony in the beliefs of each of us socially embedded twenty-first-century individuals is subtle and widespread, if not all-pervading. A more sustained enquiry is needed to see whether it could in principle be eliminated by such an individual while leaving her any beliefs at all. Worse yet for the would-be epistemic autosome: it may not be sharply determinable at all, whether and when freedom from oblique epistemic dependence on testimony is achieved, since isolating the contribution of testimony from that of other sources of support, in a system of belief with rich explanatory coherence, is not a clear-cut matter. It is at any rate certain that, in order to live up to the ideal of individual epistemic autonomy, a very great deal of what is believed by a normal member of a modern society, with its extended division of epistemic labour, would have to be bracketed, given up—most of geography, history, the natural and social sciences including medicine, and so forth.

Giving all that up is no more a serious practical possibility than living out the life of a more thoroughgoing sceptic—one who doubts even the evidence of the

senses as indicators of a perceptible external world. Who would really give up the fruits of the sciences including all technology, medicine, dentistry, foreign travel, as well as historical understanding and knowledge—and so on? The epistemically autonomous individual could not trust an electrician to wire her (self-built!) house for her, since she would not accept his testimony about what he was going to do, and that it would work safely; nor her doctor to prescribe medicines; nor would she try ski-ing because her friends (she could not have many!) told her it was fun.

We have found that testimony, for each of us in our modern social and epistemic predicament in which division of epistemic labour along with other sorts is the rule, is an essential source of empirical grounding for her beliefs about the world she finds herself in, and her own place in it. This system of empirically based belief is richly coherent, including its ability to explain its own sources.

Notice that the trust in testimony of which I am stressing the ubiquity need not however be given uncritically, without empirical grounds. I have argued elsewhere that a mature recipient of testimony need and should not trust another's word without adequate empirically based warrant to do so. We have seen that it is impractical to live up to the supposed ideal of individual epistemic autonomy. One cannot live in a modern scientifically and technologically sophisticated society, nor have any social life at all, without trusting others in almost one's every action. But this is not to say that one's trust in the vast heritage of knowledge and know-how built up from others' investigations, expertise, and experience must be blind—uncritical and indiscriminating. Good empirical grounds for taking a fresh instance of testimony to be sincere and reliable—or for being distrustful of it—are often to be had; and inference to the best explanation and rich coherence within one's accumulated system of belief can support, *ex post*, one's reliance on some earlier pieces of testimony, while equally discrediting others. (I here barely touch on issues which need much fuller discussion. See Adler 1994; Coady 1992; Fricker 1994, 2002, 2005.)

Still, one who trusts testimony discriminatingly, only when she has an adequate empirical basis to do so, and whose past trust is now vindicated through support from explanatory coherence, is yet dependent on testimony in her beliefs, and actions based on them. If I take others' word for things, I extend my knowledge far beyond the range I could achieve on my own, but by this very fact I am not epistemically autonomous. I believe many things for which I personally do not possess the evidence, and my believing is premised on the supposition that some other person or set of persons jointly has, or had, access to that evidence, and evaluated it correctly. (These points are expanded in Section 4, below.)

We have seen that even if one could, by a heroic effort of epistemic reconstruction, push the ladder of past trusted testimony away, the project of attaining and maintaining the ideal of complete individual epistemic autonomy is not an attractive or feasible one—one would forgo too much! Is there reason to regret this? In this paper I shall respond to this question by addressing a closely

related one: In what way exactly is one's epistemic self-governance necessarily compromised, by one's practically inevitable dependence on others' testimony? Putting the question the other way about: In what way, and to what extent, can one maintain one's epistemic self-governance despite one's inevitable reliance on others' testimony, and the technological fruits of others' knowledge and expertise, in almost every area of one's life?⁵ I will first prepare the ground to address this question by considering another: In what circumstances, and on what topics, may one properly accept and learn from another's testimony? In developing an answer to this question we will find material relevant to answering our first one.

2. THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND TOPICS OF PROPER ACCEPTANCE OF TESTIMONY

In what circumstances and on what topics may one person with epistemic propriety accept the testimony of another and by so doing learn, acquire knowledge, from her? Conversely: What are the circumstances in which, and topics on which, one person may tell something to an audience, thereby expressing her knowledge, and reasonably intend and expect to be believed, trusted—to have her word on the matter accepted? These are distinct questions, but the mutuality of the illocutionary act of telling means that their answers will coincide, where the expectation of being trusted is well founded.⁶

2.i A Precondition for Testimonial Spreading of Knowledge

As a preliminary I note a precondition for testimony to be given and received at all. For an act of telling to succeed there must be mutual understanding. A message must be got across and accepted. So there must be a proposition which the teller intends by her action to present as true, and this must be identical with the one grasped by her audience as so presented, and accepted by her.⁷ This does not, in itself, entail a shared language. Nor does it entail that, when a shared language is employed, the message conveyed is what the speech act literally means—a proposition which the sentence used is conventionally apt to convey, and is plausibly interpreted as specifying on that occasion.⁸ But communication of a message is most commonly effected by use of sentences of a shared language in accordance with the constraints of their literal meaning, to make explicit assertions. The occasions on which other media are feasible vehicles are relatively few and far between. This being so, the spreading of knowledge by means of testimony, or something like it, is possible to any significant extent only when there is a shared language, and mutual understanding of speech acts between speaker and audience.

Our common-sense view—which I shall not question here—is that we do indeed share a language, including its semantics, with our co-speakers to an extent sufficient for mutual understanding and successful communication. But one can

learn from another's testimony only when one does not already know what she tells one. Hence, if difference of opinion regarding the truth value of some sentence *S* entailed difference of meaning attached to *S*, there would be no learning from others regarding the proposition expressed by *S*.⁹ This observation is, I think, enough to discredit extreme 'holistic' theories about the fixation of meaning (already implausible). But there are certain areas of discourse where disagreement might be thought to undermine the supposition that meaning is shared. If this suspicion were confirmed, then learning from testimony in the strict sense (as opposed to changing one's language to conform more with others) would be shown to be impossible in these areas.

Difference of opinion due to ignorance, where one party simply lacks firm belief either way on the topic, is unproblematic. Equally, disagreement in the strong sense of conflict of opinion is unproblematic, when its origin is traceable to different access to evidence. (In such a case pooling of evidence will produce convergence of opinions.) It is when disagreement in judgement persists despite similar access to evidence that, in certain areas, the supposition of shared meaning may be threatened. If there are certain subject matters where disagreement of judgement in response to the same evidence entails difference of meaning, then there can be no learning from testimony in the strong sense of deferring to others' judgement, letting it override one's own, on those topics.

It is a point familiar from a certain style of philosophical account of how meanings and beliefs are simultaneously attributed to someone, that a tentative interpretation of an utterance which yields a difference of opinion between interpretee and interpreter not explained by differential access to evidence, is thereby thrown into doubt. Other aspects of the total interpretation being equal, it is more 'charitable' hence a priori better warranted, to interpret the other as meaning something else (see Davidson 1984). But other aspects may well not be equal, and so the defeat of the assumption of shared meaning is generally not instantaneous. We all have had futile arguments—"It's green"; "No it's not, it's yellow"—where the suspicion lurks that there is not really a substantial matter at issue, rather than a non-concordance of linguistic usage at its vague edges, compounded perhaps by a pig-headed refusal of the out-of-line debater to adjust her usage. Equally we all have had arguments where it seems certain that there is a substantial, not merely a semantic matter at stake—"It's unfair that you let Julian go in the front of the car, but you never let me", although progress towards agreement may seem no less hard to achieve.

Colour concepts, and other simple perceptually applied concepts; plus moral and also aesthetic concepts, are ones where sorting out substantive from merely linguistic disagreement on particular occasions is difficult; no less difficult than giving an account of how the precise content of those concepts is fixed. In these and some other cases, there really may be no way to distinguish between deferring to others' judgement about the application of an already shared concept, and adjusting one's concept. (We remarked earlier that, in one's initial acquisition of

one's language, there is no sharp line between acquiring new information, beliefs, about things one already has a concept of; and acquiring those concepts.)

These considerations will be relevant in a full investigation of the possibilities for learning from testimony about these topics. It will be important to bear them in mind, when considering to what extent one can defer to others' judgement on moral and aesthetic matters. There may prove to be limitations on this grounded in considerations about meaning, for aesthetic judgement in particular, I suspect.¹⁰ Having noted this, I will not explore it more fully here.

2.ii A Principle Concerning Deferential Acceptance

With these points about the need for shared meaning made, we can proceed with the main positive idea. We can formulate a general principle:

Testimony Deferential Acceptance Principle (TDAP 1): For one properly to accept that P on the basis of trust in another's testimony that P—her word that P¹¹—requires that she be epistemically well enough placed with respect to P so that were she to have, or make a judgement to form a conscious belief regarding whether P, her belief would almost certainly be knowledge;¹² and that she be better epistemically placed with respect to P than oneself; and that one recognize these things to be so.

TDAP1 specifies a condition necessary for epistemically proper trusting acceptance of another's testimony on some topic. It is not sufficient, because while the hearer's cognizance of the testifier's strong epistemic position vis-à-vis the topic makes it rational for her, other things being equal, confidently to expect the testifier's judgement about the matter in question to be correct—to deem her competent about the matter in question—TDAP1 does not speak to the question of the testifier's sincerity. As I have argued elsewhere, the overall trustworthiness of a speaker's testimony breaks down into these two quite separate components. In this investigation I concentrate on the circumstances in which deferential acceptance of another's judgement, as expressed in her sincere testimony, is epistemically proper. Thus, having noted the need for adequate warrant to believe the speaker sincere, I put further consideration of sincerity aside, assuming in what follows that insincerity is not an issue in whether to trust the other's testimony.¹³

The matter of sincerity is one reason why TDAP1 specifies only a necessary, not a sufficient condition, for epistemically proper deference to another's testimony. The only other reason I can think of why other things would not be equal, regarding the hearer's expectation of correctness of the testifier's expressed judgement, is if she were also aware of significant contrary testimony. Contrary testimony will be epistemically significant if it either comes from another equally well-qualified expert; or, in some cases, if it is from many mutually independent sources, albeit not especially expert ones.¹⁴ A more refined

condition incorporating these two factors, which is normatively both necessary and sufficient for deferential acceptance is:

TDAP 2: One properly accepts that P on the basis of trust in another's testimony that P—her word that P—just if she speaks sincerely, and she is epistemically well enough placed with respect to P so that were she to have, or make a judgement to form, a conscious belief regarding whether P, her belief would almost certainly be knowledge; and she is better epistemically placed with respect to P than oneself; and one recognizes all these things to be so; and one is not aware of significant contrary testimony regarding P.

TDAP 2 specifies when it is proper to accept another's testimony that P outright. There will also be situations where neither party is in a position to make a knowledgeable judgement as to whether P, but one is better epistemically placed than the other. In these cases it will be epistemically rational for the worse-placed person to defer to the other's opinion, while falling short of taking her utterance as an expression of knowledge; hence forming only a tentative belief regarding P. This is required when, for instance, an informed decision about how to act is urgently needed. There may be some topics for which this situation is the rule—that is, where knowledge as opposed to more or less well-grounded speculation is very hard to come by.¹⁵ It remains true that one should not accept outright another's testimony that P, unless one reasonably believes her to be so placed as to (almost certainly) form knowledgeable belief regarding P. Hence TDAP2 is the correct general principle governing the outright acceptance of another's testimony.

An explanatory comment is needed on the role of the complementary 'internal' and 'external' components of epistemic propriety in TDAP1 and 2. I have formulated TDAP1 and 2 incorporating both internal and external components, because I am concerned to describe what happens when things go right, and thus how knowledge is spread by means of testimony. Externally, things are going right when the testifier speaks from her expertise-generated knowledge, and is sincere. But epistemic rationality has a key internal component: it is not rational to accept unquestioningly the testimony of an expert who, so far as one knows, is no such thing. And, though not all-in epistemically proper, it is subjectively rational and epistemically blame-free to accept another's testimony, when one falsely but justifiedly believes her to be an expert about the topic, being deceived about this through no fault of one's own. I am against purely externalist accounts of when acceptance of testimony is epistemically proper. These fail to incorporate the requirement that the subject maintain epistemic responsibility for her own beliefs. In Section 3 I spell out the implications, and means of satisfying, this requirement.¹⁶

We may distinguish between a weak and a strong form of deference to another's testimony:

Weak Deferential Acceptance occurs when I form belief that P on the basis of trust in another's testimony that P, when I myself have no firm pre-existing belief regarding P; nor would I form any firm belief regarding P, were I to consider the question whether P using only my current epistemic resources, apart from the current testimony to P.

Strong Deferential Acceptance occurs when I let another's trusted testimony regarding P override my own previous firm belief, or disposition to form a firm belief, regarding P.

The distinction between strong and weak deferential acceptance may or may not turn out to be important. First off, it seems that there could be subject matters where strong deferential acceptance is never epistemically appropriate, although weak deference can be. This fact may illuminate the nature of that subject matter.

Whether for weak or strong deferential acceptance, it seems that TDAP2 is the correct normative principle: her sincerity not being in question, and my being aware of no significant contrary testimony, it is epistemically proper that I defer to another's testimony in forming belief regarding P, or in overriding my own previous belief regarding P, just if I recognize that she is better epistemically placed than I am to determine whether P; and it is epistemically proper that I accept her testimony outright just if I recognize this, and also that she is so placed as to form (almost certainly) knowledgeable belief regarding P. We may introduce a thin and inclusive sense of 'expert' capturing this core normative necessary condition for deferential acceptance expressed in TDAP1 (which is also normatively sufficient, apart from the matters of sincerity and absence of significant contrary testimony):

S is an expert about P relative to H at t just if at t, S is epistemically well enough placed with respect to P so that were she to have, or make a judgement to form a conscious belief regarding whether P, her belief would almost certainly be knowledge; and she is better epistemically placed than H to determine whether P.

2.iii Bases of Expertise

We can now explore the different possible bases of such relative epistemic expertness of S over H regarding some collection of propositions P comprising a subject matter W. In so doing we will be developing a description of the various circumstances in which it is epistemically proper, when she knows them to obtain, for one person deferentially to accept another's testimony regarding some subject matter. The idea of someone's being epistemically 'well placed' regarding P is used so far in a broad catch-all sense. We will now see how a variety of specific circumstances may contribute to this. One is literally the spatio-temporal location of the person; another is particular skills and perceptual and cognitive equipment she possesses.

There are various kinds of situation in which it is obvious and unproblematic that S will at that time be epistemically expert relative to H regarding some subject matter W.

Case One: W is an observable event or state of affairs, and S is or was at the time of its occurrence so positioned as to be able to observe it, whereas H was not.

Suppose, for instance, that Natalie went to the RadioHead concert in South Park, while I did not. Then—assuming she has normal observational and memory capacities—she knows quite a bit of what happened during it, and I can learn from her telling me about it. Without access to some such eyewitness account (written or spoken), I cannot know very much about what happened. Of course Natalie is not my only possible informant. And there may be a limited amount I can infer from other sources of evidence—walking there the next day I observe huge numbers of empty drinks cans scattered around, and see the stage being dismantled. But I cannot learn any detail except from testimony; and only hers is conveniently available.¹⁷

Natalie is an expert on what happened at the concert, relative to me. Hence—if she is truthful—I can learn from her. But her expert status on the topic relative to me is highly accidental. It is based in a mere happenstance about our locations on one particular day, not on any more stable and intrinsic epistemic talent, skill, or base of knowledge that she possesses whereas I lack. Had I possessed a ticket and gone to the concert, while Natalie stayed at home, I would instead have been the expert vis-à-vis her. Such merely accidental and extrinsic expert status is often brief and transient. Emily is momentarily an expert relative to me about what is in the fridge; but only until I take a look for myself.

Case Two: Superior perceptual skill of S over H.

Now suppose Natalie and I are both at the concert, and are trying to make out what is happening on the stage from some distance. I am shortsighted, whereas Natalie has excellent distance vision. She reports ‘the supporting band is coming on’ and I accept her report, not being able to see anything specific for myself. Or I may think I can see something different, but I allow my visually based judgement to be overruled by hers, in the knowledge that she has better distance vision than me.¹⁸ This case is more interesting. Natalie is an expert relative to me about what is happening in the distance not because of an accidental difference in our locations, but due to a superior epistemic skill she has relative to me, which is (in a relaxed sense) intrinsic, and fairly stable. She is not just accidentally better placed, that is spatio-temporally located, than me, regarding the topic; she is better epistemically equipped than me to make judgements of a certain kind—namely, judgements about events occurring in the visual perceptual distance. Let us say that she is not only currently an expert relative to me about the happenings on the stage, in the thin sense defined above; but that this is due to an epistemic *expertise*

she possesses relative to me, regarding a range of matters-in-circumstances. Specifically:

S has an expertise relative to H on some subject matter W at a time t just if S has a superior ability at t to determine the truth of propositions in W which is based in superior perceptual and/or cognitive skills and knowledge, and is hence (in a relaxed sense) intrinsic, or has a crucial intrinsic component.

Exercise of an expertise will almost certainly require that the environment be normal in various respects—as with perceptual skills—and so is intrinsic only in a sense which is relaxed, though surely intuitive. Exercise of specialized cognitive skills may require access to equipment, even laboratories; but has a crucial intrinsic component. An expertise is, in this lenient sense, a superior epistemic power possessed by a person due to her specific differentiating characteristics, such as superior perceptual skills, or specialized field of training and knowledge. Her expertises are relatively stable properties of a person, since they are not owed to mere accidents of spatio-temporal location, but are more deep-seated properties of that person; some owed to genetic endowment, but many acquired through special training or education.¹⁹

S's possessing a superior perceptual ability to H is one kind of expertise which S may have relative to H. This may be due to native differences in perceptual equipment, as with acute versus poor distance vision. But differential perceptual ability may also be due to training and background knowledge. An expert at cricket can see and describe what is taking place during the game—"It was a fast ball that moved in from outside the off stump, and the batsman caught an edge on it, and was caught behind by the wicket-keeper"—when a novice will have discerned almost nothing specific at all. The same goes for aural perceptual abilities, for instance to discern and describe the harmonic progressions in a complex piece of music; or to catch and understand the words of speech in a particular language. Because background knowledge and skills inform and shape perception in this way, there is no sharp distinction between perceptual versus knowledge-based expertise. Many bases of expertise involve both in inextricable combination. The complex perceptual-cum-knowledge-based skill provides a superior ability to determine the truth of a range of propositions in certain circumstances. Other bases of expertise are more heavily grounded in specialized knowledge and training, with a lesser role for associated perceptual skills. This includes scientific knowledge and skills in experimental procedures and the evaluation of data; and technological knowledge and know-how, such as that of the garage mechanic, builder, or computer technician. Most purely cognitive is superior ability at reasoning in a particular abstract domain such as mathematics.

When another has expertise relative to me in a certain, perhaps esoteric, field of knowledge, it is clear that I can and should—assuming I trust in her sincerity—defer to her in forming beliefs about the domain in question. Where the

field is sufficiently advanced and complex, I may not even be able to evaluate the arguments, nor the significance of the evidence, myself; and I may lack the native talents to acquire the skills to do so, even if I had both time and inclination (see Hardwig 1991). We will draw out the significance of these facts in the next section.

We can make some observations about the relations between weak and strong deference, and expertise. Deference to another is appropriate (assuming that she has, like me, a normal endowment of perceptual and cognitive skills) when she but not I has had access to the relevant evidence—for instance, when she but not I has had opportunity to exercise normal perceptual judgemental abilities, as in Case One. Since I have no basis for firm belief in such cases, this will be weak deference. I learn from the other about something of which I would otherwise be ignorant. Her report informs me, rather than overriding my own prior firm belief. Thus we can conclude that: **Weak deference is often appropriate, even when the other has no superior expertise to me regarding the topic, she is merely contingently more expert than me, at this moment.**

In contrast, when I and the other both have access to relevant evidence,²⁰ deference to her will be appropriate only if I accept that she has a relevant epistemic power, an expertise, which is superior to mine. Since *ex hypothesi* we each have access to relevant evidence, I also have a basis for firm belief myself; so this will generally be strong deference. In this type of situation a stronger kind of deferring to another's epistemic power, her superior authority, is involved. I accept the other's judgement as overruling my own, in light of my acknowledgement of her superior epistemic power regarding the matter in question. Our Case Two above instances such strong deference. Natalie has an expertise relative to me on events going on in the perceptible distance. Thus she is better epistemically equipped than me to make judgements about what is taking place on the stage in the park, even though we are standing next to each other, and each able to look towards the stage. If my vision is as good as Natalie's, then I will rationally defer to her testimony regarding what went on at the concert only if I was not there myself. But if I know her sight is better than mine, I may and should rationally allow her reports of her perceptual judgements to overrule my own perceptually based judgements, when we are similarly spatially located.

We may thus conjecture that: **Strong Deference is appropriate only when the other has a superior expertise—an intrinsic epistemic power—to me.**²¹ This is largely true, although there are two counter-cases. First, it can be that I have a basis adequate for firm belief, but S, while having no relevant greater epistemic powers than me, has a stronger one which trumps it. For instance, I believe that Tom is away on holiday on the basis of my memory of his testimony of three weeks ago; but Chloe testifies to having seen Tom in town today. It is not determined whether I should accept Chloe's testimony in these circumstances, without further details. But there surely will be some cases of this kind, where it is right to accept another's testimony overriding one's own previous firm

belief, because she has had access to fresh evidence, though her relevant epistemic powers are no greater than mine. One factor which would do the trick is if Chloe's testimony was independently corroborated by many others. This is our second type of counter-case: I should bow to others' testimony about some matter, even if their skills and evidential position severally are not superior to mine, if weight of numbers is massively on their side. Notwithstanding these counter-cases, our conjecture captures a general tendency.

3. DEFERENCE ON MORAL AND AESTHETIC MATTERS?

We started with the idea that it is rational to defer to another's apparently sincere testimony on some topic *P* just if I recognise that she is better placed than me to judge whether *P* (and I am aware of no significant contrary testimony regarding *P*). This being so, learning from testimony is possible only in domains where it makes sense to think that one person can be better placed than another to make judgements. This in turn requires some notion of objective standards of evidence and correct judgement for the domain in question. If any basis whatever on which a judgement is made is as good as any other, then the idea of another's being better placed than me does not apply. In fact this restriction imposes little more than the very idea of judgement imposes in the first place. There is a determinate content to judge only if there are standards for correct judgement, independent of what seems to any particular individual to be correct. However, it could perhaps be that this minimal notion of objectivity applies in some domain, but for some reason someone else can never be better placed than me to make judgements about it, or at least it could never be rational for me to believe this. Some accounts of self-ascriptions of certain conscious mental states would place them in this category. Exploring the possibility or otherwise of rational deference to testimony may give fresh insights onto this topic, as well as others, though I cannot pursue this thought further here.²²

We are investigating the circumstances in which, and topics on which, it can be rationally permissible, indeed mandatory, deferentially to accept another's testimony. Whether and if so in what circumstances deference to others' testimony on moral and aesthetic matters is ever rational—epistemically and morally proper—is a large topic, an adequate discussion of which would require a separate paper. But I shall make a key preliminary point. The kind of objectivity in standards of judgement which we have just seen to be required—the idea that there are better and worse ways of arriving at judgements in the domain—is relatively unproblematic, and no more than common sense, for both moral and aesthetic judgements. Thus it is only a very moderate thesis to hold that there is such a thing as superior expertise on moral and aesthetic matters. This view can be held without commitment to any metaphysically outlandish and epistemically problematic form of moral or aesthetic realism. The notion of objectivity which

must be invoked need not be understood in terms of correspondence with wholly mind-independent facts, and more or less accurate means of homing in on those. (There may or may not be any domains in which we wish so to understand it!) The required notion of objectivity of judgements in the moral and aesthetic domains can be explained in terms of better and worse ways of arriving at judgements of the class in question, with better and worse defined otherwise than in terms of homing in on mind-independent truth.²³ This being so, there is nothing immediately incoherent, or metaphysically neck-out-sticking, about the idea of moral and aesthetic experts. The idea accords with common sense, and normal practices of deference. Aesthetic experts are those who are specially trained, experienced, and knowledgeable in a certain area—say Baroque music, or Renaissance painting. One would defer to them about the qualities, including aesthetic ones, of items in their field of expertise. The idea of moral experts is equally valid. Some people are especially trained, experienced, and knowledgeable in the kinds of considerations involved in making moral judgements. Such expertise may be primarily in a specific field, involving a particular kind of empirical matter.²⁴ A quasi-realist about the moral, or aesthetic, can make perfect sense of expertise in these domains. I may defer to an expert in an aesthetic field because I know my own opinion-forming processes are crude and uninformed, untrained, in the relevant aesthetic—which amongst Caravaggio's paintings are the greatest masterpieces; or what is a specially good example of an early nineteenth-century English transfer-printed cup and saucer. (Learning through deference, I may come in time to be a bit of an expert myself!)

I might defer for similar reasons in a moral matter. Or I might defer, or seek advice here, not because of a general lack of expertise, but because my consultant is better placed than me—a relative expert—regarding the current matter. She may know more of the relevant background facts about a difficult case regarding custody of children in divorce proceedings, or she may unlike me be impartial, not being involved in the situation as I am. Or I may just want a second opinion, or to talk the matter over with someone else, as part of the process of forming my own judgement. Would it be just, or cruel, to carry out my threat and deprive my son of his *Beano*,²⁵ for getting into trouble at school for fooling about in class again? This is the kind of situation where one may want to confer, and maybe defer to another's judgement.

A full investigation of the possibilities for, and constraints on, rational deference on moral and aesthetic matters must canvas more considerations than those raised here. I suggested earlier that there may be constraints deriving from the meaning of aesthetic predicates—their tie to a specific non-judgemental cognitive-cum-affective response in the subject—on the extent to which deference on aesthetic matters is possible. (One possibility is that only weak, never strong deference, is rationally possible.) For deference on moral judgements, there are important ties with the idea of individual autonomy and responsibility which may place limits. In the present paper I merely wish to

point out that the idea of expertise on these topics is an everyday and apparently sensible one, and thus that deferential acceptance of testimony on these matters is *prima facie* rationally possible, as well as being a common occurrence (see Jones 1999).

We have briefly reviewed the various bases on which another person may sometimes be far better placed than oneself to make judgements about a certain subject matter. We saw that such superior epistemic status is sometimes based in accidents of location, and may be short-lived; but is sometimes based in intrinsic and relatively stable differences in epistemic powers between two individuals. When I appreciate that another person is thus expert relative to me, it is not merely rationally permissible, but rationally mandatory, to defer to her judgement over my own conclusions, regarding the subject matter in question. This being so, one may question whether the supposed ideal figure of the autonomous knower, who refuses ever to trustingly accept another's testimony, *a fortiori* will never allow her own judgement to be corrected by another's, is really such an ideal after all. I will return to this question in my final section. First I address my earlier question: To what extent can one maintain one's epistemic self-governance despite one's inevitable reliance on others' testimony, and the technological fruits of others' knowledge and expertise, in almost every area of one's life?

4. RELIANCE ON OTHERS' WORD AND EPISTEMIC SELF-GOVERNANCE

We have seen, as encapsulated in TDAP2, how it is rational to accept another's word on a topic, and even to allow her expressed judgement to override one's own prior opinion, when one knows that she is strongly placed epistemically, and better placed than oneself, regarding the matter in question. For each of us, her appreciation of her own circumscribed and feeble epistemic powers and small position in the larger scheme of things, together with her grasp of folk psychology, including where applicable appreciation of others' superior expertise and epistemically more advantageous position, entails that deference to others' opinions is rational, in these circumstances. Lack of such appreciation of one's limited powers and others' superior ones, and an accompanying refusal to bow to others' judgement or advice even when they are clearly relatively expert, is pig-headed irrationality, not epistemic virtue or strength.

Does this mean, then, that there is after all no loss of epistemic autonomy incurred by the way in which, in our modern condition, we rely on others' knowledge and its technological fruits for whole swathes of our fabric of knowledge and in our daily lives (as sketched in my introduction)? It does not. It is crucial for the maintenance of epistemic self-governance that our trust in the word of others is given not blindly and universally, but discriminately. By trusting only cannily, and with good grounds, we can do much to retain epistemic

self-governance. I shall return to this theme shortly. But there is still an important loss of autonomy, as I will now explain.

I mentioned our awareness of our own cognitive limitations, our feeble powers. We can only see what is here and now, and that only to a limited extent. Our memories even of this are less than total and often corrupt, and our inferential powers are feeble. A superior being, one who lacked our cognitive limitations, and could do all the work herself, in finding out about the universe, could be epistemically autonomous in a way that no one of us, with our limited research time and processing capacities, is able to be. She would not need to take anything on trust from another's word, because she would have the epistemic power to check up, to find out for herself about everything she wanted to know, without reliance on others. We are not such beings, and so we can extend our knowledge beyond a small base only through rational trust in the spoken or written word of others. My trust in another's word is rational when I have good grounds to believe her competent about her topic and sincere, and by this means I can know about all kinds of matters which I lack the time or talents to find out for myself. But this knowledge from trust in testimony is knowledge at second hand (or third, or fourth . . .), and as such my epistemic position vis-à-vis what I know is in at least one respect inferior to when I know at first hand.

When I form belief that P through my trust in a speaker's word given to me that P, her testimony that P, I take her to speak from knowledge. That is, this is a normative commitment of my accepting her utterance at face value, as an expression of knowledge. If I come to know she does not speak from knowledge, this is a normative defeater for my belief. Additionally, in my own view of knowledge as requiring adequate grounds, I must be disposed upon reflection to form the belief that she speaks from knowledge. This belief is an essential justifying ground for my belief in what I am told and trustingly accept, and so must itself be knowledge. In short: my reason for believing P true is because I believe, or am disposed to form belief upon reflection, that my informant is telling me what she knows. This being so, I know only because someone else's knowledge has been passed on, spread to me by the mechanism of telling, of testimony.²⁶

Knowledge can be passed on in this manner through many links in a chain of trusted testimony. But the regress must stop eventually with someone who knows that P not from trust in testimony. The following axiom holds:

T: If H knows that P through being told that P and trusting the teller, there is or was someone who knows that P in some other way—*not* in virtue of having been told that P and trusting the teller.

It is a consequence of T that if someone knows that P through trust in testimony, there must be some other way in which P is or once was known. Hence T has the corollary:

T corollary: For any proposition P that can be known, there must be some way other than trust in testimony through which P can or once could be known.²⁷

Why cannot a chain of trusted testimony go in a circle, falsifying T? The regress must end with someone who knows that P in some other way, because knowledge requires evidence or grounds. When I know that P from someone's testimony, my personal ground for my belief that P, the warrant in virtue of which I am entitled to it, is my knowledge that my informant knows that P. But in taking P to be known I am rationally committed to an existential supposition: that there is, that it is to say that some individual or group of persons between them possesses, evidence or warrant for P, which is not just that someone they trust has told them that P. As T expresses, knowledgeable belief based on trusted testimony implicitly refers back to the existence of a non-testimonial ground or warrant for what is testified to: the ground or warrant in virtue of whose possession the original teller(s) spoke from knowledge.²⁸ Hence there cannot be a state of affairs that is known of only through trust in testimony. A chain of testimonially spread belief which went in a circle would lack any empirical grounding, and what is believed would not be true unless by luck.²⁹ Consonant with this fact, there is a sense of 'the evidence for P', used in scientific-style discourse, when it is asked: "What is the evidence for P?", in which someone's testimony that P is not evidence for P at all. For instance the question: "What is the evidence that smoking causes lung cancer?" is not answered by responding: a lot of distinguished scientists have asserted that it does. The question asks for an account of the *real* evidence, the evidence on which the experts' conclusion is based. The well-groundedness of belief spread about through testimony depends on the existence of such non-testimonial evidence for P—that is, on its possession, perhaps distributedly, upstream in the chain of informants.

Now we see the respect in which knowledge from trust in testimony is in one way inferior owing to its being at second hand. When I know that P solely from trust in testimony, I do not possess the evidence for P. Instead, my knowledge is premised on the existential supposition that there is non-testimonial evidence for P, although I myself do not possess it. I am rationally committed to the proposition that a person or persons upstream in the chain of informants between them possess that evidence—the grounds for believing P true. Where the proposition is an empirical one that is part of a theory, I am also rationally committed to the proposition that these others have evaluated the evidence and drawn conclusions from it correctly (often, this ability is a large part of a special expertise the others possess vis-à-vis me).³⁰ Is it a weakness in my epistemic position regarding P that my ultimate ground for believing P is this derivative second-order one, the proposition—which I must be disposed to form belief in—that there is empirical warrant,³¹ though unknown to me, for believing P? Where my informant's expert status vis-à-vis me is accidental, it does not seem a worry.—My son tells

me there is still some milk left in the fridge, and I believe him. But if it mattered a lot I could easily check up for myself, and if what he told me were false I would quickly find out. I can get to the first-hand evidence, if need be, and I can evaluate it correctly. But where my reliance on others depends on an expertise they possess relative to me which is more deep-seated, and I lack the ability to check up for myself if it seems worth it, the existential supposition and dependence on others' epistemic skills and truthfulness is more troubling.³²

Epistemic dependence on others is troubling first because it is risky—there are many motives for deceit, and causes of honest error, on the part of each of us; and while each can try to trust only where there is ground to expect sincerity and competence, as elaborated below, each link in a chain of testimonial transmission incurs its own risk of error. It is troubling second, because along with the epistemic dependence on others comes a no less risky practical dependence on them, in many areas—for instance, for maintenance of all the technological devices on which one depends every day, from electric lighting to computer to driving one's car, and so forth. Third, epistemic dependence on others, while it extends one's knowledge base so enormously, also lessens one's ability rationally to police one's belief system for falsity. There are many things a layperson believes for which she would not know how to assess the scientific evidence which supports them, even if presented with it. This being so, these beliefs of one will lack the characteristic sensitivity to defeating evidence, should it come along, which is usually taken to be a hallmark of belief which amounts to knowledge.³³

I have spelled out the bad news for epistemic self-governance entailed by our dependence on the word of others. The good news is that—as I already emphasized—our trust in others need and should not be given blindly, but cannily, only where it is due. Although cognitively limited beings as we are, we must perforce rely on others if we want to enjoy the epistemic and technological riches of modern society, we can take care only to trust those we have good reason to hold worthy of our trust.³⁴ Fortunately we all have some basic cognitive equipment to help us assess both the sincerity and competence of others in many, though by no means all circumstances. This is because we are all experts (though of varying degrees of skill) in one special topic, namely that of folk psychology. Thus, where we do not have access to or cannot evaluate the evidence for propositions in some domain ourselves, we move one level up, and instead evaluate the experts, our human sources of knowledge about this domain.³⁵ But assessing an informant's trustworthiness is not always easy, and sometimes there are not sufficient epistemic resources available to the layperson to enable a firmly based evaluation to be made at all. The risks involved in trusting others are considerable, especially where there are motivations for deception at work. As I have been arguing, there is often good empirical ground for trusting others, and where so it is consistent with our maintenance of our epistemic self-governance, our responsibility for our own beliefs, that we believe on trust in the word of others, relying on their report for the truth of something where we do not possess for ourselves the evidence,

and may not even be capable of appreciating its significance. Moreover, as we saw in Section 2, where I know another to be epistemically expert relative to me on a topic, it is not just rationally permissible, but rationally mandatory for me to accept her judgement in preference to my own, just so long as I have good ground to trust her sincerity. Where there is not good ground to believe an informant trustworthy, however, epistemic self-governance entails that we should not accept the reports of others. Caution and canniness should govern our response to others' testimony. Unless we exercise it, we fail to maintain responsibility for our own beliefs.

5. THE IDEAL REVISITED

I return now to the figure with which I began, the autonomous knower, who trusts no one else's word on any matter, hence believes only where she herself possesses sufficient evidence, non-testimonial grounds, for what is believed. In the light of the material of the last section we can clarify the autonomous knower in this way: she never believes on the basis of a second-order warrant for belief, the belief that someone else knows, someone else possesses evidence showing the truth of the proposition believed. Is this figure really an ideal? We observed that a superior being, with all the epistemic powers to find out everything she wanted to know for herself, could live up to this ideal of complete epistemic autonomy without thereby circumscribing the extent of her knowledge. Given the risks involved in epistemic dependence on others we saw in the last part of the previous section, this superior being is, I suppose, epistemically better placed than humans are. That is, if she knew at first hand just as much as I myself know in large part through trust in others' testimony, she would be epistemically more secure, hence both practically more independent, and—in some abstract sense—more autonomous than I am. In the same way that I might regret that I cannot fly, or live to be 300 years old, I might regret that I am not such a being.³⁶

But what of a human, with no more than human perceptual, physical, and cognitive powers, who attempted to maintain a regime of complete epistemic autonomy—that is to say, who never took anyone's word for anything, and never deferred to another's judgement on any matter? We have seen that rational prudence dictates that one should bestow trust only where it is due; where one has good grounds to believe one's informant competent and sincere. But equally, as encapsulated in TDAP2, where there is good ground to believe another expert relative to oneself, it is not just rationally permissible, but mandatory, deferentially to accept the other's judgement. So what would this individual's beliefs about others have to be like, for her refusal ever to believe on anyone else's say-so to accord with maintenance of a rationally coherent system of beliefs? If rational at all, she would be not an ideal, but rather a paranoid sceptic about others' intentions and capacities. Or perhaps she would be severely cognitively lacking,

simply lacking any adequate grasp of what other people are, their capacities and positions in the world—not a master of folk psychology, but an individual solipsist. She cannot ever admit that anyone else knows anything which she does not independently know herself since—as we saw—to admit this is to provide oneself with a second-order warrant to believe that thing oneself ('A knows that P' entails that P, and this entailment is a priori and obvious). One might wonder also whether she trusts the recorded beliefs of her own past self, as written down in her personal diaries and other records. The human would-be epistemic autonome on closer investigation is not an ideal, but either paranoid or severely cognitively lacking, or deeply rationally incoherent. We all can remember occasions on which someone we know has irrationally refused to change her opinion in response to testimony from someone evidently better placed to judge of the matter than she is. The individual autonome carries this irrational tendency to its irrational extreme.

For each one of us the extent and occasions on which she should accept and rely on others' testimony is a delicate matter, decisions about which require careful assessment on particular occasions. But that there are some occasions on which it is rational deferentially to accept another's testimony, and irrational to refuse to do so, is entailed by her background knowledge of her own cognitive and physical nature and limitations, together with her appreciation of how other people are both like and in other respects unlike herself, hence on some occasions better epistemically placed regarding some matter than she is herself. I may rationally regret that I cannot fly, or go for a week without sleep without any loss of performance, or find out for myself everything which I would like to know. But given my cognitive and physical limitations as parametric, there is no room for rational regret about my extended but canny trust in the word of others, and enormous epistemic and consequent other riches to be gained from it.

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NOTES

1. See McDowell (1994). I am talking here about humans, and how they are psycho-developmentally able to acquire language-and-thought; not about other logically possible intelligences, nor the philosophical fiction who springs instantaneously into existence, a functional replica of a human. 'Testimony' here is to be taken broadly, to include verbal teaching and coaching by others. It would be a mistake to obscure our dependence on trust in others' sincerity and competence, in this developmental process, through a definitional stop.
2. By 'simple trust' I mean: trusting response to what others tell or teach us, by one who as yet lacks the conceptual resources to entertain doubts about the reliability of others' teaching. This is the inevitable initial condition of the infant learning its first words through interaction with its carers. (However many writers on testimony exaggerate how long this initial condition persists—don't underestimate children—they get wise pretty soon! See Clement, Koenig, and Harris (2004).)

3. A distinction cannot be drawn between analytic versus synthetic, amongst the familiar platitudes involving cluster concepts like these, and so many other of our concepts. See Quine (1953).
4. Mature visual experience is basically the result of the visual system's best guess as to what is out there, given the proximal stimulus to the retina. Some of this is hard-wired and hence culturally invariant, notably the perception of 3-D shaped solid objects. But perception is also soaked by thicker, culture-specific concepts, so that its perceptual deliverances to consciousness are much richer: it's a mobile phone; a tomato; my daughter—these and their like are typical parts of the content of perceptual experience, not inferences from it.
5. Complete epistemic autonomy, as described here, by definition requires not relying on anyone else's testimony for any of one's knowledge. I shall explore whether a weaker, but crucial, notion of epistemic self-governance—epistemic responsibility for one's own beliefs—is consistent with accepting things on other people's word for them.
6. That is to say, there is—as will be developed below—a set of conditions regarding speaker's and hearer's circumstances such that both the offering, and the acceptance, of testimony on a topic is objectively epistemically appropriate just when they obtain; so that a speaker gives testimony epistemically properly, and a hearer epistemically properly accepts it, when each knows these to obtain. (Where the speaker or hearer believes justifiedly, but falsely, that they do so, her act or response is subjectively but not all-in epistemically proper.) See Fricker (forthcoming) for a supporting account of the speech act of telling. I there show how the nature of the communicative speech act of telling is crucial to the question when, and on what basis, the teller may properly be believed—to the epistemology of telling, and testimony more broadly. The qualification 'epistemic' to the type of propriety here is not idle—a telling could be epistemically appropriate, but grossly inappropriate in some other dimension, e.g. irrelevance, or rudeness.
7. When going for detail some qualifications are needed here. First, for statements made with sentences containing indexicals, understanding may require grasping an appropriately related content or proposition, rather than the very same one—same referent but different senses: "I'm hungry"; "It's hot here", uttered in a telephone conversation. Second, there can be cases where something is correctly conveyed by testimony, although the utterance is partly misunderstood; it may be that only the correctly understood part is believed. See Goldberg (2001).
8. There clearly can be Gricean (Grice 1957; Schiffer 1972) acts of communication which do not employ language as their medium. There are also non-literal message-conveying linguistic utterances such as ironic or sarcastic ones. And a speaker may succeed in getting her message across, be correctly interpreted and believed, despite using words wrongly in some respect—not in accordance with the constraints and permissions of the literal meaning of the sentence she mistakenly employs. Even where communication of what is literally asserted in the speech act occurs, presuppositions and conventional implicatures may be conveyed too. These acts all share with paradigm tellings the successful getting across of a message. I shall not investigate here the respects in which they differ; except to say that where what is conveyed

is not explicitly asserted there is, I believe, a diminution in the responsibility for the truth of what is got across incurred by the utterer. This is one reason to reserve the term ‘telling’ for acts of communication via explicit assertion exploiting literal meaning, as is done in ordinary parlance.

9. I am being careless here about distinguishing sentence types from particular utterances of them effecting speech acts, and the role of context in fixing what precise proposition a particular utterance of a sentence expresses. This matter, though crucial and pervasive in natural language, is tangential to the current point. The fastidious reader may imagine the necessary complicating adjustments.
10. “There are very beautiful pictures in the Uffizi in Florence, though I have never seen them.”—this sounds deviant to my ear. As opposed to “There are said to be very beautiful pictures in the Uffizi, though I have never seen them”. On the other hand “There are famous paintings by Botticelli in the Uffizi, though I have never seen them” sounds fine.
11. I form belief that P on the basis of trust in another’s testimony that P, when I do so because I take her utterance at face value, as an expression of her knowledge that P. In so doing I take her word for it that P. There is a variety of other cases where a hearer forms belief that P in response to observing testimony that P, which are not cases of trust in that testimony. Fricker (forthcoming) contrasts these cases with the case of trust in the testimony, and argues that the latter relatively narrow category is the key epistemic kind to discern, in theorizing how knowledge can be spread by means of testimony. The condition proposed in TDAP for forming belief in what is stated would not be correct, for a broader category. Rather, it further characterizes the narrow category.
12. There is scope for further refinement here: it could be that an informant is very unlikely to form a belief that P which is not knowledge; but is more prone to error, or careless judgement, than not-P. This kind of one-sided reliability is quite plausible in some cases—e.g. someone who is slow to make a judgement of guilt of another—and a hearer could be aware of this epistemic disposition of an informant. But more usually, someone will be in this way reliable regarding P only if she is also similarly reliable regarding not-P. TDAP as formulated specifies this stronger condition. Perhaps someone could be self-deceived, so that she in some sense ‘really knows’ that P, while kidding herself, and telling others, that not-P. TDAP concerns knowledge expressed in conscious judgement, and so excludes repressed knowledge, if such is possible.
13. In contrast with her competence, or expertness as I am here calling it, I think that one is entitled to presume a speaker sincere, unless there are specific cues or other evidence calling this into question. This fact is not an epistemic principle special to testimony, but is fall-out from correct general principles governing the ascription of mental states to other persons. See Fricker (1994).
14. The issues here are delicate. Mere weight of numbers of concurring testifiers does not per se increase the probability of correctness; it depends on the details regarding the likely explanation of how they have come to hold their expressed beliefs. See Goldman (2002) for an excellent discussion of what epistemic resources a layperson may have, to decide which to trust out of two experts giving contrary testimony.

15. For instance regarding various future matters: the weather, currency and interest rate movements, etc. Here one should defer to and act on the basis of the best advice; while being aware that it is not knowledge—hence hedging one's bets accordingly.
16. An account such as Wellbourne (1994), which holds it sufficient for the recipient of testimony to come to know, that the hearer speaks from knowledge, is purely external and as such violates my requirement. However accounts like Burge (1993) or Coady (1992), which maintain an entitlement to trust testimony as such which is however defeasible, can be seen instead as proposing a specific thesis regarding how internal rationality is satisfied, in this case—albeit one with which I disagree. (In the case of perception, it is plausible that epistemic responsibility permits one to take one's senses on trust, unless aware of defeaters.)
17. This is why one knows so little about what goes on during one's children's days at school!
18. Can I know this, without begging the question—ungroundedly trusting her testimony over mine? Certainly: I have found on many previous occasions that what she has judged from a distance proves correct, as we get nearer. The fact that expertise is time and circumstance relative, often transient, means that another's epistemic expertise relative to oneself can often be conclusively established by oneself, despite one's own inferior epistemic power.
19. Expertise of S has been defined as relative to another person, H. But we can easily extract a more general concept of expertise, which is a superior epistemic power regarding some topic relative to all those without the specialist training or skills in question—the layperson or non-specialist.
20. The notion of 'access to relevant evidence', and certainly of two persons having equal access to relevant evidence, is fraught with difficulty, given the theory-dependence of one's observational powers—as my cricketing example above illustrates. It does not bear much theoretical weight in the present argument, and all I require is that there be some cases where it clearly applies, and others where it clearly does not. I intend that it holds of Case Two, and similar situations.
21. Is superior expertise also normatively sufficient for strong deference? No, since two people both with superior expertise to me may supply contrary testimony. Apart from this, I cannot think why else it should fail to be.
22. Fricker (1998) argues, on precisely this point, that accepting the possibility of correction of one's self-ascriptions of mental states made through avowal, by other evidence from one's behaviour, which might be pointed out to one by others, is a condition for one to be ascribing a genuine concept in these self-ascriptions.
23. I here make a large, but unoriginal claim, which requires at least a fat book for adequate defence. I have in mind positions like the 'quasi-realism' of Blackburn (1984).
24. The inextricable interweaving of fact and value in the considerations relevant to a final conclusion on a complex matter reinforce this point. Consider, for instance, the members of a panel appointed to draw up proposed legislation controlling research using human embryos. Both scientific and moral expertise are required, and intelligent conclusions rest on inextricable understanding of both. Another example of a specific partly moral expertise is making decisions about when children should be taken away from their parents and into care.

25. The *Beano* is a popular comic-strip magazine for children, in the UK.
26. Knowledge requires grounds, and if I trust a speaker who tells me something true but does not herself know it, my own belief will be based on a false premiss and so not be knowledge. This is the general conception of knowledge I favour, and my account of knowledge from testimony is shaped by it. Even if a different view of necessary conditions for knowledge is taken, that the speaker knows what she tells is clearly a rational commitment of a belief based on trust in testimony.
27. The 'other ways' may however include deduction, induction, or inference to the best explanation from premisses some of which were supplied by diverse bits of testimony. See Fricker (forthcoming). The tense qualification is important here—the original informant may have since died, or simply forgotten what she once knew and told to others.
28. T and its corollary do not imply the stronger claim: For any P which is known, there is someone who knows it in a way which has no epistemic dependence on testimony. This stronger claim is false, as is explored in Fricker (forthcoming). The source of testimonially spread knowledge that P may have learned some of the facts from which she inferred P from others' testimony. Thus the ultimate, non-testimonial evidence for any complex theoretical proposition may be possessed only distributedly, by the members of a group. See Hardwig (1991).
29. This remark remains true, but needs careful explanation, when we are dealing with facts constituted by human practices—the boundary between two countries, what something's name is, and so forth. The testimony itself would not make the belief true, but enough people acting on belief in it would do so.
30. My belief is premised on these suppositions not in the strong sense that I must occurrently believe them; rather, they are normative commitments of my forming belief on trust in testimony. As such, I must come to acknowledge them if talked through it—and my trust is normatively defeated if I come to believe any of them false.
31. I say 'warrant' here rather than 'grounds', since there are some types of belief—e.g. some beliefs regarding one's own mental states, and perhaps basic perceptual beliefs—which are empirically warranted, but not by *grounds* for belief.
32. Epistemic dependence of this sort is explored in a series of seminal articles by Hardwig (1985, 1991). Hardwig suggests the schema: 'H has reason to believe that S has reason to believe that P \rightarrow H has reason to believe that P.' The schema only holds of prima facie reason, however—I could know that S has reason to believe that P, while myself being aware of defeaters for those reasons. Our present point is that *the reasons in question are different*. As I have been emphasizing, the ground for belief supplied by trust in testimony is a second-order one. My reason to believe is that I believe that my informant knows that P, hence that she or someone upstream of her has a non-testimonial warrant to believe that P. My original source's reason to believe is this non-testimonial warrant, the evidence for P.
33. A further point is that once the original source of a testimonially spread belief is no longer available, the original warrant for the belief is no longer retrievable. However this feature characterizes most of our beliefs. Cognitively limited beings that we are, we generally form a belief from the evidence, then store the fact in memory and

jettison the evidence. The lack of sensitivity to potentially refuting new evidence is, in contrast, a risk of testimonial belief only.

34. It should be abundantly clear by now that I am against all accounts of how knowledge may be gained through testimony which do not require that the recipient trusts only where she has good grounds to do so. They are inconsistent with the requirement of individual rationality, that epistemic self-governance in the sense of responsibility for policing one's beliefs for truth, is maintained by the individual, the thinking, believing, and acting subject. A rational individual cannot delegate this responsibility to others, although as I am elaborating here, the requirement can be discharged by moving up a level: evaluating the reporters, when we are unable to test their reports for truth directly.
35. In Fricker (1994, 2002) I discuss how non-question-begging evaluation of the dual components of a speaker's trustworthiness, her sincerity and competence, is often possible. See also the excellent discussion in Goldman (2002).
36. No heavy commitment to the coherence of the conception of this superior being is intended or incurred. I use her merely as a heuristic device in the development of my argument.

PART V

NEW AREAS AND NEW
DIRECTIONS IN THE
EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

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Pathologies of Testimony

C. A. J. Coady

I am going to deal with some of the ways in which various forms of telling things to others come under moral or epistemic suspicion. Since I'm considering this against the background of what is (according to me) our very deep reliance upon testimony and the associated trust in others that accompanies it, then I am thinking of these ways as pathologies, in that they present as distortions of or diseases of the normal case of telling and relying on what is told. But, as we shall see, they have very different morphologies and there is a real question about how much of a distortion they might be. In particular, there is a question whether they deserve (all of) the moral and epistemic odium or suspicion that is their usual lot.

The phenomena I shall discuss are gossip, rumour, and urban myth. Another obvious candidate is lying but I shall not treat of it here. Lying is an interesting phenomenon with many different facets of philosophical interest, but since it arises from the deliberate intention to deceive an audience by saying what the speaker believes to be false it is too obvious a pathology of testimony to be treated in a paper concerned with more ambiguous candidates for that title. A more interesting candidate in the present context is the phenomenon of "spin" but reasons of space will prevent my treating of that; it must await another occasion. Gossip, rumour, and urban myth are different in many ways, most notably perhaps in their relation to the truth and the position of the speaker with regard to truth. As already noted, lies are distinguished at least by the intention to say what is believed by the speaker to be false. By contrast, it is plausible to think that gossip is standardly sincere, and may be true and known to be true. Rumour may be true and believed to be true but the justificatory base for speaking it is weak, and urban myth is more legend than rumour—it is more frozen and immune to refutation, but it can function in a similar way to more ephemeral rumours. Initially, I shall treat these phenomena as though they involved mere transmission of propositions, but of course this is a considerable simplification and even abstraction from the reality. Gossip, rumour, and especially urban myth are highly narrative in form; they are presented in a dramatic mode, sometimes even in song or poem, and they often contain, explicitly or implicitly, strong interpretive and evaluative elements. Here, as elsewhere, the picture of transmission as the passing on of a lump of information in a single line of transference

from individual to individual is misleading. Nonetheless, the misleading picture reflects something right, namely, the fact that testimony begins with some form of witnessing. This need not be a perceptual encounter though that is a primary case of witnessing. It can also consist in a proof or an expert judgement, as I have previously argued (Coady 1992: 48, 51–62). Here I mention the point only to deal with one claim about gossip that seems wrong. It is made by Laurence Thomas who gives the following example as a clear case of gossip:

Austin: I can't believe that they are awarding her the Nobel prize in physics. Must be because she is a woman.

Lee: To tell you the truth I have been thinking the same thing myself.

(Thomas 1994: 47)

Thomas thinks this is “surely gossip” (Thomas 1994: 48), but I think it is better described as malicious speculation. I suspect Thomas treats this exchange as obvious gossip because he thinks that gossip, as in the example, must express negative feelings about the subject of the gossip. As we shall see, this negativity need not be a feature of gossip, but, in any case, I am interested in gossip as a possibly degenerate form of testimony, and the exchange between Austin and Lee makes no pretence of being a testimony transaction. Austin's “message” is a speculation; he has witnessed nothing relevant in even the most extended sense of “witnessing”. These are points to return to.

Thomas might reply that he doesn't think of gossip as a form of testimony, even a degenerate form. It is true that there are usages of “gossip” that are wider, and perhaps looser, than the use I am interested in, uses in which any casual exchange or conversation about anything whatever may count as gossip. Sometimes people think this way when they talk of a “gossip session” or “shooting the breeze”.¹ Just chatting about one's own exploits or commenting, speculating, and guessing about aspects of the known exploits of others could then be gossip, but in the sense of the term that interests me you cannot gossip about yourself and conveying guesswork and so on doesn't count as gossip. There is then a degree of stipulation about my approach, but any initial characterization of the topic will involve some stipulation and will express particular theoretical interests. I claim on behalf of my account that it captures a great deal of what people normally mean by gossip (and of rumour and urban myth) and illuminates significant moral and epistemological scenery.

Let us begin with gossip. There is quite an extensive literature on gossip, some of it philosophical, but a lot of it sociological. There are disputes about how to define the topic, as we have already seen, so I will not offer a tight definition, but rather give some necessary marks of the concept of gossip as I understand it. I shall take it that gossip has the following features: it is usually conveyed by those who believe it to be true, it can be the transmission of perfectly justified beliefs, it need not be malicious though it sometimes is. Its subject matter is invariably personal, though of course it can be about persons who represent or are thought

to typify groups. It is also transgressive, in at least the sense that the transmission of the information can be presumed to be unwelcome to the subject of it. Some theorists claim that gossip is distinguished by the triviality of its subject matter. It is, they say, essentially “idle talk”. It is understandable that this should be said, but it remains contentious. After all, gossip about someone’s job prospects or manoeuvrings, about their adulterous conduct, about a political leader’s financial dealings are all matters that may have momentous consequences for the individual concerned and for others affected by his or her actions. Acknowledging this, Rosnow has amended the claim to make it more plausible by concentrating on the style of communication rather than its content. It is the setting and context of the conversation that must have at least the appearance of the casual. As he puts it, the exchange should be “characterized by a kind of *belle indifférence*”. The talk should be “packaged” to appear as idle (Rosnow 2001: 210). This is indeed more plausible and seems to capture something typical of gossip. It is reflected in the casual, bantering tone adopted by many newspaper gossip columnists. One philosopher agrees that an idle tone is characteristic of gossip but takes this to be a moral defect of it. She says, “It is characteristic then of gossip to fail to give matters their due regard; gossip often involves a mismatch between the tone and substance of the discussion. Such a mismatch may simply reveal superficiality or it may constitute a failure of empathy and moral understanding” (Holland 1996: 203). I shall deal with this criticism later, but it is worth noting at this point that much of the literature on gossip is concerned with its moral status. Most of the criticism of gossip is moral rather than epistemic. This suggests that gossip exhibits no essential epistemic difference from ordinary testimony; there is no reason why gossip should be less reliable than ordinary testimony. In what follows, I shall try to assess the moral objections to gossip, but also raise some points about its possible epistemological deficiencies. There is one more mark of gossip that needs to be mentioned, namely, that there is something essentially restricted or intimate about at least the initial range of gossip. This point is hard to make clearly, but the basic idea is that the natural home in which gossip begins is that of a small group, though, of course, the information may spread from small group to small group until the news becomes widespread. Someone is not gossiping who shouts the information from the rooftops for all and sundry to hear.

The debate about the moral status of gossip (sometimes cast as a debate about its positive or negative social impacts) is basically between those who think that gossip violates some significant moral constraint, such as respect for persons, and those who think that gossip has an important social role. These latter sometimes ignore the supposed violation, but sometimes acknowledge it and think that it is outweighed by the good effects.²

First, the moral objections to gossip. Some of these proceed as though gossip must always be malicious. If this were true, then there would indeed be a black mark against it from the beginning. But it is clearly not true, at least if the malice in question is seen as stemming from a motivation to do harm. Many gossips

have no interest in maligning the object of their talk, they are just interested in the buzz of the topic and the status their communication gives them. Indeed, gossip need not retail anything disreputable about its object. I may gossip about something you are doing that is either neutral or positive with respect to your reputation, as when I retail some confidential facts about your soon to be successful house sale or the secret that you are about to be elevated to the peerage. What seems true is that there must be something unwelcome to the gossipee about the revelation you are conveying. The subject of the gossip must at least be presumed not to want the information in question conveyed either generally or to that particular audience.³

I shall proceed as if this unwelcome aspect is essential to gossip, though there are in fact several counter-examples to an unqualified version of this claim. Some very trivial newspaper “gossip”, about, for example, a society wedding may totally lack the unwelcome aspect, but for this very reason we may not want to treat it as gossip, or not as paradigmatic gossip. It is more like advertising or public relations offered under the pretence of news. More interestingly, there is a range of cases where the subject of the gossip may positively welcome the spreading of the information, and may indeed be the source of it, yet the information be both significant and somehow transgressive. Consider the case of academic gossip about who is to be offered a new position. If we think of the successful candidate as either the source, or as least the cheerful subject, then the unwelcome thesis seems imperilled.⁴ There are two possible responses here. One is to shift focus on the subject of the gossip so that the gossip is about the actions of the appointments committee, and only secondarily about the status of the successful candidate. Members of the committee will find the gossip unwelcome—either in reality or by the conventions of confidentiality to which they are obliged to adhere. Another alternative is to say that the candidate may actually welcome the spreading of the news, but must take the stance of finding the transmission unwelcome. To adopt a useful test for gossip, we should ask: would the conversation stop or suffer embarrassment if the candidate suddenly entered the room? If the answer in the present case is, “Yes” then there seems a sense in which the candidate must be viewed as finding the transmission unwelcome whatever he privately thinks.

It is this unwelcome feature of gossip that provides one significant purchase for the moral critic. Granted that gossip need not be retailed with the aim of damaging the subject of it, might it nonetheless count against any proposed good in gossip that it must run counter to the subject’s desire that the information remain confidential or at least restricted? One philosopher has argued that, because of this, gossip violates the Kantian injunction to treat others as ends in themselves and not merely as means. *Prima facie*, there is some plausibility in this. The gossipers need have no regard for the good of the person whose fortunes they report, the facts about them are recounted (at best) merely for the pleasure it gives the speaker and the audience, and possibly for the regard the gossipers achieve by reason of his/her knowledgability. Does this violate the Kantian injunction? This

is one of the points at which the injunction is hard to interpret. Am I treating someone only as a means if I drive tourists by their handsome house to show them a fine example of the sort of Victorian architecture typical of the area? And suppose I know that they don't want their house to be the object of tourist gazing? What this suggests is that the test of "failing to treat someone as an end" cannot rule out all cases of acting against their wishes, even where these wishes are concerned with their privacy. But, perhaps we can only allow such disregarding where the disregard is aimed at achieving some good, and the fact is that gossip has no such purpose.

There are two problems with this. The first is that gossip arguably does have such a purpose, or purposes, and the second is that, even if it doesn't, the subject's desire for privacy, confidentiality, or secrecy may be unreasonable. The social psychologists that give a positive account of gossip often stress that it has a role in solidifying social norms. The idea seems to be that gossip about the behaviour of others takes place in an explicit or implicit context of norms and the evaluation commonly invoked (Oooh, she didn't! Gosh, fancy that! . . .) has the effect of reinforcing those norms. As Rosnow puts it: "the consequences of rumour and gossip also reflect the extent to which social norms can be enforced on individuals who ostensibly threaten or violate them. In small groups, for example, gossip may be a way of shepherding the herd by saying 'These are the boundaries, and you're crossing them'" (Rosnow 2001: 224). Rosnow here seems to be running two different things together. On the one hand, the effect of reinforcing the norms for the group involved in the retailing and hearing of the gossip, and on the other, the enforcing of the norms on the person gossiped about. The latter will not be the direct effect of the gossip since that person, in the first instance, at any rate, doesn't hear it. The former may well take place and lead to the latter.

The reinforcement thesis raises two further puzzles. The first concerns the generally favourable attitude of social scientists to this reinforcement (of either kind), and the second concerns the empirical claim itself that the attitude rests upon. On the first, it is strange (as Holland has pointed out) that the cementing of existing norms is simply taken for granted as a positive outcome. Perhaps this reflects the persistence of the simple-minded cultural relativisms that have been so influential, and so damaging in the history of anthropology and related studies. Whatever the explanation, it is obvious that existing social norms may be either good, bad, or indifferent from a moral perspective. The reinforcement provided by gossip may be to solidify widespread immoral prejudices against blacks, women, homosexuals, foreigners, immigrants, or whatever, and where this is so, it constitutes an objection to the role of gossip not an endorsement of it. As to the second, the role of gossip may just as easily be the breaking down of social norms as the protection of them. In societies with rigid public codes, gossip may serve to show the hypocrisy of those who proclaim and enforce them, thus leading to the destruction of respect for those elites and even of the codes themselves. So, gossip about the sexual behaviour of various influential leadership

groups may lead to the erosion of strong sexual censorship regimes, and gossip about the perks and lifestyle of Communist leaders may have played a part in undermining public confidence in the professed values of fraternity and equality. It is also possible that both reinforcement and subversion can occur together (though directed towards different prevailing norms). Pre-Revolutionary France provides a case in point. In a society in which formal news outlets were stereotyped and tightly controlled by those in power, the primary source of information about the King and the ruling elites came from gossip and rumour. As Robert Darnton has argued in his fascinating book, *George Washington's False Teeth*, gossip and rumour about the French Court not only provided a rare source of personal and political information but thereby possibly played a part in preparing the ground for the Revolution (Darnton 2003: ch. 2). It did this by exposing the hypocrisy of the Court and the unworthiness of the King and his dependence on the intrigues of others. Some of the underground transmission was classical gossip retailed at selected sites such as the Tree of Cracow in the grounds of the Palais-Royal. Other was more rumour, though sometimes beginning as gossip, and other again was song and coded poetry circulated by paper notes or memorized word of mouth. Again, as with the reinforcement story, the question of whether the undermining is good or bad requires independent adjudication. More broadly, the question whether gossip has good or bad outcomes cannot be given a global answer. It all depends on the context and the actual outcomes. We cannot, however, rule out in advance the possibility that the outcomes will be good.

Another good outcome claimed on behalf of gossip is the way gossip can improve individuals' self-regard. By a process of what some have called "downward comparison" we may come to think better of ourselves by comparing our behaviour or character to that revealed of some other person by gossip (Suls and Goodkin 1994: 173; Ben-Ze'ev 1994: 19). The revelation that some famous person, for instance, has feet of clay may reassure us about the normalcy of our own feet. Again, the two questions posed earlier arise regarding this claim. First, it is not clear that bad information about others is a particularly sensible or healthy way of achieving a sound understanding of one's own worth. Self-congratulation can result in self-delusion. Second, the deflating information about the worth of others may equally well give rise to the sense that one should lower one's own standards rather than take pride in maintaining them. Either way of course there may be some solidifying effect of the gossip exchange; the deluded may be mutually bound by their delusions and a group may find some agreeable cohesion in mutually endorsed lowering of expectations of self and other. One possible connection of gossip with norms is that whereby the conveyors of gossip may be led to reassess their moral views by finding that their audience is not as shocked by the gossip as the speakers had expected. Gossip may therefore assist in what could be a useful form of self-criticism.⁵

A further potentially positive feature of gossip that is perhaps too obvious to be remarked upon by social psychologists is the fact that many people find the telling and receiving of gossip enjoyable. Most people are curious to know the truth not only about the physical world or mathematics but also about the deeds and misdeeds of other people. Sometimes this curiosity has a functional point in orienting us towards the people with whom we are going to interact: this is the idea that social psychologists are getting at with their somewhat simplified talk of norm reinforcement and the like. But sometimes the satisfaction of the curiosity is simply fascinating in itself, even if it can also be useful. We are interactive social beings who spend a great deal of our lives in conversation, much of it about other people. News about their journey through life with its pitfalls and triumphs is intrinsically interesting to most people, and it is often even more interesting when we know or believe that we are not going to hear it from them.

I have claimed that gossip is pleasurable for many of us, but there are those who find gossip of any sort uninteresting, even distasteful. They inject a chill of disapproval into the gossip room and often produce a cessation of the activity until they depart. Thereafter, the gossip resumes and often expands to include them as subjects! It would be interesting to explore this difference in attitude and some of its nuances, such as those who are happy to hear gossip but not to retail it, but I shall not pursue this matter here. Of course, it is necessary to stress that when I refer to the pleasure of gossip as good, I do not mean that it is an unqualified good. Pleasure is at best only one good among others; it can be outweighed by other goods or harms, and some pleasures may be inherently illicit, as are those (to take an extreme case) of paedophilia.

This leads us to the claim that there is something intrinsically bad about gossip that may preclude consideration of the good outcomes (if any) or at least may need to be weighed against them. Here, we should consider two of the issues raised earlier. First, there is Holland's claim that "It is characteristic then of gossip to fail to give matters their due regard; gossip often involves a mismatch between the tone and substance of the discussion. Such a mismatch may simply reveal superficiality or it may constitute a failure of empathy and moral understanding." Gabrielle Taylor makes a similar claim, though less forcefully. "Gossipers", she says, "trivialize experience by ignoring the impact with which the author of the experience will in some way have to cope. Thus they distort and belittle that person's experience" (Taylor 1994: 46). On the face of it, both claims seem excessively high-minded. Gossip is not always concerned with matters of moment, and, even where it is, the requirement that tone should match subject matter smacks of puritanism. The idea that serious subjects should only be addressed in a solemn tone of voice presents an affront to the complexity of human communicative intercourse, especially to the dimensions of humour, irony, satire, and playfulness that are rightly characteristic of much of it. Of course, tone may reprehensively mismatch content, as with some sneering discourse, and this may well exhibit

superficiality or moral failure of some sort. My only point is that, contrary to Holland, the tone characteristic of much gossip need not display moral fault, nor need it trivialize what should not be so treated.

Second, there is the issue, already briefly discussed, that gossip is standardly unwelcome to the gossipee. It is natural to think that this shows it to be in violation of respect for persons, and hence immoral. As mentioned above this depends to some degree on why the conveying of the information is unwelcome. There is no absolute right that information about oneself be withheld from others. Respect for privacy cannot reach that far. Perhaps my not wanting facts about myself to be made known to others creates some presumption against doing so, but it may be rebuttable in a variety of circumstances. Nor need these circumstances require some very great good to rebut the presumption. To give a personal example. I was once in a group of philosophers who were criticizing another more famous philosopher in ways that seemed to me to impugn his character as well as his philosophical standing. I had discovered from his publisher that the author under attack had actually assigned all his royalties from a very successful book to charity and proposed to do so again for the second edition. When I mentioned to the author my knowledge of this fact and my respect for his decision, he asked me not to tell anyone about his altruism. But in the company of his somewhat carping critics, I thought it right to do so and did. I think I was justified in acting in this way, and, if so, the example shows that the gossipee's desire to keep the matter secret need not be determinative of the moral status of the gossip. It also shows that Bertrand Russell was wrong to claim that "no one gossips about other people's secret virtues" (Russell 1994: 50). It further suggests that it does not require the prospect of some overwhelming good to validate the gossip transaction, since the author in question is fairly unconcerned with what people think of him.

Another interesting phenomenon is that of what might be called remedial gossip. By this I mean that phenomenon where B gossips about A to C, D, and E and then E tells A that B has been telling them about A. We might be reluctant to call E's transmission "gossip" because it is aimed at alerting A to the gossip about him or her. But it may well be offered in the characteristic tone of gossip and E may be well aware that B, C, and D would be unhappy to have the matter relayed back to A. Nor need E's motives be particularly noble.

I said that gossip is usually conveyed by those who believe it to be true and who may well be justified in their belief. This feature makes it seem that gossip is not, from the point of view of epistemology, a "pathology" of testimony at all. This idea is worth closer examination. One problem with it is that some of the motives typical of gossip may be fragile with respect to truth-transmission. The desire to titivate, or to show one's "insider" status as someone with access to otherwise unavailable information is not the sober background we expect of solid testimony. Bertrand Russell is thinking in this way in the section from which the earlier quotation was taken. He says, "The widespread interest in gossip is

inspired, not by a love of knowledge but by malice: no one gossips about other people's secret virtues, but only about their secret vices. Accordingly most gossip is untrue, but care is taken not to verify it. Our neighbour's sins, like the consolations of religion, are so agreeable that we do not stop to scrutinise the evidence closely. Curiosity properly so-called, on the other hand, is inspired by a genuine love of knowledge."

I have argued that gossip is not necessarily malicious. If it were, then the epistemic objection would carry some weight since an informant who is inspired by malice will be seeking to put another's behaviour in a bad light and this may well bias their testimony. But even gossip that conveys negative information about a person need not be inspired by emphatic malice; it may be mere excitement at discovering the faults or follies of another and an interest in being the one to know and convey such stuff. Curiosity can be as lofty a disposition as Russell claims, but it need not be. It can be more earthy without becoming positively malicious and it may still retain an orientation to knowledge. Leaving aside malice, a disdain for other common motives for gossip faces two problems. One is that various forms of legitimate testimony, even of formal testimony in courts, may be subject to similar motivations. Witnesses conveying information that has no taint of violation may nonetheless be moved by the desire to cut a figure in great events and may delight in the excitement their news will create. They may also be moved by a concern to get things right—any account of what inspires reliable testimony must allow for the existence of mixed motives. Second, even if the motivations associated with gossip are not of the loftiest, they need not be destructive of a concern for the truth. The desire to impress may indeed make one *more* scrupulous in conveying accurate information since one's status as a reliable informant may be crucial to the positive appreciation one seeks.

Another epistemic objection to gossip is that it excludes by its very nature an important source of epistemic reliability, namely, confirmation, falsification, or correction by the subject of the gossip.⁶ If we accept that absence of the subject is a necessary concomitant of gossip then it is indeed true that the gossip situation deprives the gossipers of an additional direct checking resource for the information. But I doubt that this is as drastic an epistemic flaw as it initially seems. In the first place, where the information originates from the subject, and our informant is known to be close to the subject and a generally reliable witness who has no particular stake in lying, it may simply be redundant, verging on the neurotic, to insist on checking with the subject. (Consider the parallel with those in the grip of mild obsessive-compulsion who need to return home to check by perception their firm memory that they have turned off the iron or locked the back door.) There are always further checks one can do on testimonial information, just as there are with observational or remembered information, but it is epistemically redundant to do so in many cases. In the second place, there will usually be little reason to believe that the subject of the gossip can be relied upon to provide valuable confirmation or disconfirmation. After all, since the subject does not want

the information spread at all, he or she is most likely to deny it or refuse confirmation, whether the facts are as reported or not. In the third place, where the gossip does not originate from the subject, it may well be that the subject is in no position to confirm or deny the information. There is an interesting range of cases here. Consider the case where information is that you are to be awarded some honour and the source is an “insider” in the conferring process. You may know nothing of the fact at the relevant stage, or you may know only that there is some prospect of the honour. So your exclusion from the gossip circle creates no epistemic problem for the reliability of the information.

This example is also interesting as a problem for the unwanted criterion of gossip since it is presumably the people in the honouring process (or most of them) who don’t want the information spread, even though it is information about you. Nonetheless, you are likely to want to know about it before the gossip and audience get to hear about it. If, however, you are so unusual as not to care about that, then you would not be discomforted at being present during the gossip session. This, I take it, counts strongly against the transmission being gossip, at least about you—it may count as gossip about the honour process and honour bestowers.

I conclude that this epistemic objection to gossip fails as a general objection, though there may indeed be occasions on which closing off access to the subject’s own testimony has epistemological disadvantages. More generally, gossip as I have defined it is not a pathological form of testimony but a normal form of it. Whatever its moral standing, and I have argued that this may be less dismal than usually thought, its intellectual status is reasonably respectable. In epistemic terms it may be likened to whispered information rather than openly spoken word of mouth.

RUMOUR

Gossip and rumour are often run together in social science treatments, but they are basically different in kind though there are some areas of overlap. At any rate, I shall treat them as differing in the way suggested at the outset, namely with respect to the justificatory base of the information conveyed. Gossip may be true and known or justifiably believed to be so, rumour has by (my) definition no strong justificatory base. The typical way to introduce a rumour is to say, “Have you heard . . .?” whereas the typical introductory mode of delivering gossip is, “Did you know . . .?” The gossip may, of course, convey false information and be mistaken about the strength of the justification he has for the information. But he must present himself as being in an authoritative position with respect to the information. Must he always believe that he is telling the truth and in an epistemic position to do so? Can’t there be deliberately deceitful gossip? Sissela Bok thinks so, indeed she lists “gossip that is known to be false”, as one of the

three main categories of gossip (Bok 1983: 98). But she, like many others, makes no real effort to distinguish gossip from rumour. To my ear, the phrase “lying gossip” does not ring true; the more accurate description of the activity is just “spreading lies”. In any case, it is untypical of gossip. Rumour-mongers, by contrast, may well deliberately create false rumours. In wartime, the spreading of false rumours can be a crucial political weapon, as can be the combating of damaging rumours. Moreover, rumours may well begin in sheer speculation, though they will usually mimic testimonial transmission by conveying the idea that *someone* somewhere is a witnessing source.

A further difference is that rumour is not restricted by topic to the personal. It may be about institutional, political, religious, or physical events. You can spread a rumour about an earthquake but you cannot gossip about it. A further difference is that gossip is normally quite restricted in its circulation. A small group may get together to gossip about a colleague or a boss or whomever, but have no desire to spread the information further. (Gossip columns in newspapers are an exception to this, though even here there lingers some element of the closed group point, inasmuch as the readers of the column are meant to have a sense of being inducted into a privileged, if rather large, group.) Rumour, however, seems essentially prone to run abroad, “to spread like wildfire”. Of course, one area of overlap is that something that begins as gossip may well continue as rumour. This is probably one of the reasons for the widespread failure to distinguish between the two.

Given rumour’s indifference to a secure basis for its reports, can anything positive be said on its behalf? Even raising this question may seem perverse, in the face of the bad reputation so widely enjoyed by rumour. But it should be remarked that the enemies of rumour sometimes have an agenda that is not itself entirely respectable. I mentioned earlier the attempt to control and counteract rumours during wartime. The American psychologist Gordon Allport, for instance, was one of those who set up rumour clinics to help curb the spread of rumours in Massachusetts during World War II. He was later the co-author of an influential study of rumour (Allport and Postman 1965). Allport was helped in the anti-rumour campaign by his doctoral student Robert H. Knapp who defined rumour as “a proposition for belief of topical reference disseminated without official verification” (Knapp 1944: 22). This definition would count every newspaper exposé of government misdeeds or secrets that met with official silence or denial as rumour even if they were true and thoroughly justified. This makes nonsense of our ordinary understanding of rumour and reflects an ideal of official control of information that is, to put it mildly, undemocratic. It is not surprising that it might arise in a climate of war, but those of us who believe that war is frequently unjustified can hardly take consolation from this. Where governments are bent upon the suppression of information, for whatever reason, then “propositions for belief” unendorsed by the authorities will assume greater significance.

One thing that might be noted as an epistemic merit is the power of rumour in providing hypotheses for further exploration. By itself a rumour may be poor epistemic coin, but investigating it may lead to expanding one's knowledge in direct and indirect ways.⁷ The direct route is that of confirmation or falsification of the rumour's contents. The indirect route may be the discovery of interesting information that explains the rumour's genesis, or it may be the discovery of a genuine truth that the rumour misleadingly presents. So we may discover that a rumour to the effect that a rogue politician is selling nuclear secrets to North Korea against his own government's policies and desires is false, but also discover the related truth that a respected senior scientist is selling the secrets with his own government's connivance. Dismissal of reports because they are "mere" rumours can sometimes block opportunities for discovering important truths. One of the most striking instances of this was the rumour emanating from Tokyo in 1941 concerning an impending attack on Pearl Harbor. The US Ambassador Grew reported in January 1941 from Tokyo a rumour that the Japanese Navy was planning a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. It was attributed to the Peruvian Embassy which was regarded by the ambassador and others as "a not very reliable" source. The rumour was dismissed by one and all, including the Ambassador, as fantastic. As it turned out, the date the rumour began coincided with the inception of the Yamamoto plan for bombing Pearl Harbor (Shibutani 1966: 73–4).

In light of these positive aspects to rumour, it might be claimed that those who spread a rumour are not so dastardly as they are usually thought to be. Indeed, with all its faults, the poor coinage of rumour may often be the only information currency available. Some social scientists exploring rumour argue that it commonly arises in response to alarming situations where reliable information is cut off, either deliberately by censorship or repression, or accidentally by confusion or disaster. In such situations, rumour tends to be a focus of high social interaction. The "news" conveyed is not simply passed on from one voice to another, like the passage of a "brick" of information. The item is often speculated upon, criticized, amplified, compared with other related items of rumour, and with what pieces of hard news or testimony are available. In addition the originator of the rumour, if indeed there is only one such source, need not have had anything like observational access to the supposed fact that is spread. He or she may have produced the information as a speculation in the absence of any reliable testimony or observation. Even so, the rumour mill will usually present the rumoured facts as something that is somehow sourced in someone's observations, though it will usually be vague about who that is. Shibutani's discussion of the World War II rumours about the reduction in training and furlough time for US troops in Georgia in late 1944 exhibits this sort of pattern. The rumours were fuelled by the hard news of the increased German counter-offensive in Europe and the absence of any real information about the effect this might have on these newly inducted troops (Shibutani 1966: 9–14).

Psychological investigations of rumour tend to divide between those with an individualistic and rather static picture of transmission and social psychologists, like Shibutani, who see the picture in more dynamic and social functionalist terms.⁸ The former tend to be hostile to rumour and the latter more sympathetic. The former proceed by setting up highly artificial experimental scenarios in which a piece of information is to be passed on to specified others (often the experimenter) and changes in the literal form of the message are noted for inaccuracy. This way of proceeding is open to a number of objections, some of which I have raised elsewhere (Coady 1992). The artificiality of the experimental situations rules out many of the standard ways of confirming, sifting, and interpreting the original informational setting; the emphasis on the literal preservation of a sentence or set of sentences is an unnecessary restriction on the conveying of information; the message in question often has little significance for the witness, and so on. By contrast, the social psychologists emphasize the fluidity of real life situations, the need for information in information-starved settings, the relation of rumour to practical thinking and decision-making rather than speculative reason and abstract truth. Indeed, they are inclined to minimize the issue of truth. So Shibutani says: "rumor is not so much the dissemination of a designated message as the process of forming a definition of a situation" (Shibutani 1966: 9). The cultural historian Hans-Joachim Neubauer describes it as "a mirror in which society catches sight of its hidden self" (Neubauer 1999: 174). These emphases are no doubt important for the empirical study of rumour, but it should be recognized that the dissemination of a designated message is perfectly compatible with forming a definition of a situation or mirroring social psychology. The interest in realistic social settings should not be seen as excluding the concern for the relation of rumour to truth or to epistemic justification.

So is rumour pathological testimony? It seems that it *is* a form of testimony because it involves the transmission of propositions from one or more persons to others, but it often lacks what I have elsewhere claimed to be definitive of testimony. There are sometimes no original sources in even the attenuated senses that I noted in my book since rumour can arise from the merest speculation. Furthermore, the speaker of rumour will often have no competence with regard to the "information" conveyed and may be well aware of that. If we think some degree of authority or competence, no matter how minimal, is a precondition for giving testimony then quite a lot of rumour will be disqualified as testimony. There is a very amusing Australian radio show called "The Coodabeen Champions" in which several witty and very well-informed people comment on sporting events, especially Australian Rules football. In one segment of the show there is a "talk-back" session in which members of the public (in fact, the commentary team with disguised voices) raise topics for discussion. One regular always rang with a rumour, this being the show's acknowledgement of the fact that sporting culture is rife with rumours about secret injuries, the sacking of coaches, the transfer of

players, and so on. “Tony, have you heard the rumour”, he would begin. When pressed on his credentials, it would emerge that his brother’s wife’s uncle knew a bloke who had a neighbour who heard someone in his dentist’s waiting room say he thought he’d heard that if St Kilda suffered one more loss, the coach would be sacked. With credentials as thin as this, we may well want to treat such rumours as not testimony at all.

Nonetheless, they have at least the superficial appearance of testimony. They are not completely unrelated to it, so if we decide that rumours are not *really* or *fully* forms of testimony we will be treating them as what J. L. Austin called “misfires” rather than “abuses” of the speech acts of testifying. Austin’s early discussions of “performative utterances” identified a range of infelicities to which they could be prone in contrast to their failing to be true or false. The idea of infelicities carried over to his more sophisticated discussion of illocutionary and other speech acts. The concepts of misfires and abuses were forged to show different ways in which speech acts could be infelicitous. Misfires make the purported speech act go wrong in a way that nullifies it, whereas abuses constitute real but irregular performances of the act. To use one of Austin’s examples, it is a plausible precondition of successfully marrying that there exists an institutional framework within which the words “I do” serve to effect a marriage. But if, for example, you are already married (in a monogamous society) or the officiating officer is not really a licensed clergyman or appropriate civil official then you have merely gone through a form of marriage. The act has misfired, the marriage is void (Austin 1961: 223–8). By contrast, if you utter the vows of fidelity in the appropriate circumstances with no intention of keeping them you are still married, even if you are a genuine cad and the marriage hardly a paradigm of what it should be. Similarly an insincere promise may not be the best sort of model for promising, but it is still a promise and your commitment can be held against you when you fail to perform. Later, in *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin elaborated the distinction and produced sub-groups within misfires and abuses. Similarly, we might say that the rumour-monger’s lack of credentials makes his testimony void, as testimony, but he has nonetheless gone through a form of testimony; compare the marriage ceremony performed by a bogus clergyman or official. This case of misfired testimony would count as a misinvocation in Austin’s terms (Austin 1962: 14–20).

This gives us grounds for treating rumour as a pathology of testimony and giving a more precise sense to what that means.

URBAN MYTH

Urban myths have much in common with rumours. Indeed, in many respects, they could be seen as a type of rumour. But they have many distinctive features that make it plausible to treat them separately. They have, for instance, much

higher levels of narrative complexity. The “testimony” they offer is presented in the form of a fully fledged story where a rumour is usually rather less developed or embellished. A further difference is the abiding nature of the urban myth. Urban myths tend to survive their implausibility and even refutation in specific cases, and re-emerge, sometimes in slightly different dress, at another time and often place. Quite frequently, they have a kind of moral lesson attached to them, like Aesop’s Fables though not as explicit, and their revival is often triggered by issues of contemporary interest. In December 2002 there was an interesting episode in Tasmania, Australia, where it was widely reported that a truck driver had given a lift to a man of Middle Eastern appearance who left his wallet in the cabin after alighting in the capital city, Hobart. The honest truck driver called after the man who said to him in a rush of gratitude, “Don’t go near Salamanca Place on Saturday.” Salamanca Place is a popular market area near the waterfront and is always crowded on Saturday mornings. There was an American naval ship in the harbour. My son, David Coady, a philosopher at the University of Tasmania, was contacted by the media for comment and pointed out that this was a classic urban myth that had already surfaced elsewhere in slightly different forms. His view was publicized widely, panic was averted, and (fortunately for him and the reputation of philosophers) nothing alarming happened on the morning in question. The truck driver story combines a moral element of virtue rewarded with a more general threatening element.

Then there are the many instances of humorous tales of vindication or revenge. A classic is the one that the avid collector of urban myths, Jan Harold Brunvand, has christened “the \$50 Porsche” though the type of car varies with different national and cultural settings (Brunvand 1999: 77; 1981). One version of the story (in bare bones) goes as follows: Someone is reading the newspaper ads for used cars and sees an ad for a very recent model Mercedes (Porsche, Rolls Royce . . .) available for sale for \$50. He rings the number and a woman answers and says that it is truly available at the price. He goes to the address given and a beautiful woman comes out of an expensive house and shows him a spotless, perfectly maintained Mercedes only two years old. As he hands over the cheque, he asks how it could possibly be sold at such a price. She replies that her husband has recently left her for a younger woman but contacted her just the other day, in a spirit of “surely we can still be friends”, to ask her to sell his posh car since he needed an injection of funds, and to send the money on to him. This she was now doing!

There are other tales that build on primal fears. One is the spider’s eggs myth. Invariably the victim in the story is a woman. In basic outline the story goes that she has gone far off for a holiday, but before (or during) the holiday notices a small sore or lump on her face. At some time on the holiday, the sore swells and bursts, and a whole lot of baby spiders come out. Various embellishments concern whether she knows she was bitten by a spider or it happened while she was asleep, etc. Sometimes she dies of a heart attack. This story seems to have begun

in Northern Europe as late as 1980, but spread to venues in North America and elsewhere.

The field of stories that are called urban myths is very wide and contains much variation, but I shall take it that what I call “urban myth” is invariably false and ill-founded, though commonly enough believed to be true. One qualification that is needed to this is that a true but dramatic and surprising story, based on reliable testimony, may transmute into an urban myth with a life of its own. A case in point is the mathematician’s story: “The Unsolvable Math Problem”. The original true story concerned an episode in the career of the mathematician George B. Dantzig who, as a student at Berkeley in 1940, arrived late for a class given by Jerzy Neyman and noticed that there were two problems on the blackboard. Thinking they had been assigned for homework, he copied them down and went away and worked on them for several days. He then returned to his professor and apologized for taking so long, but they had been rather hard. He asked whether his teacher still wanted them and was told to put them on the desk. Six weeks or so later, he and his wife were awakened by banging on his door early one Sunday morning. It was Neyman saying that he had just written an introduction to the homework and wanted Dantzig to read it so he could send the lot off to a journal for publication. The homework had in fact been put on the board merely to show the class two famous, unsolved mathematical problems in statistics. Various versions of the true story were then in circulation for years afterwards as, for instance, the subject of sermons showing something or other about God or human character. In the course of this, they changed shape in all sorts of ways, even appearing in the film “Good Will Hunting”. So this is a case of numerous fictional accounts having sprung from one apparently genuine happening faithfully recorded by Dantzig and, in part, easily checkable against the publication by Dantzig of his solutions.⁹ Another form of truth for urban myth might be provided by life imitating fiction, if, for example, some deserted wife found herself in the advantageous position described in the “\$50 Porsche” story and took instruction from it! But with these exceptions noted, it is part of qualifying for the title “urban myth” that the tale is false, though for any given story we may not know on hearing it whether it is urban myth or not. Being familiar with a number of urban myths, however, is a good recipe for recognizing others. This is partly because many of them merely ring changes upon the familiar ones, but also because there is a certain narrative style common to many urban myths. I have mentioned Aesop’s Fables and another analogy is with biblical parables except that they are not intended to be believed as historical accounts and are often prefixed by phrases that indicate as much, such as “the kingdom of heaven is like . . .” Often, urban myths play upon certain widespread fears or phobias, and there are some types of myth that invoke the wildly improbable or supernatural. Like rumours, it is usually quite unclear how one could check on the sources of the story. Where there are links in the chain of apparent testimony they quickly come to a halt well short of a reliable witness.¹⁰ Is urban myth a pathology of

testimony? Well, that depends on the degree to which it is presented as testimony or as fiction. Usually, the stories will be told as if true and based somehow on report, but sometimes they flourish merely because they are a good story. So, urban myth is a pathology of testimony in much the same way as rumour, though perhaps closer to fiction.

What general lessons should be drawn from this discussion? The first is that whether some communication is a degenerate form of testimony cannot be simply read off from the form or content of its telling, though either may give clues to this fact. A communication may have the usual hallmarks of an urban myth, for instance, and we may be wise to treat it as such, but it may turn out to be a case where truth is stranger than fiction and there is a reliable testimonial path to that truth. It seemed like an urban myth but it wasn't. The second is that a pathological testimony need not be altogether worthless. The communication may rightly be judged unreliable but turn out to be true, as with certain rumours or lies. Liars can accidentally say what is true while meaning to say what is false and our knowledge of the background to the liar's performance may enable us to spot this and profit from it. Somewhat similarly, a rumour-monger can hit upon the truth without being entitled to any confidence that it is true. This may indeed have been the case with the rumour emanating from the Peruvian Embassy about the planned attack on Pearl Harbor; the ambassador could have been right in his assessment of the general reliability of sources in the Peruvian Embassy. On the other hand, it might have been his assessment of their credibility that was at fault and the communication may not have deserved the title "rumour". Once we have reason to characterize some communication as rumour, then equally we have reason to treat it as lacking credibility. It may, nonetheless, deserve further investigation, if the stakes are high enough, just in case it is true, or with the prospect of discovering some truth that it distorts. Once we establish that some communication is urban myth then we can be sure that it is false (with the minor qualifications noted earlier) but it remains possible that it is a revealing fiction. The matter is different with gossip. Once we have established that some communication is gossip, the question of its reliability and truth is (*pace* Russell) much the same as that of any other piece of testimony.

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NOTES

1. Tom Campbell tells me that there is a Glaswegian phrase for this: "having a good hing".
2. A few are positively euphoric about the merits of gossip, most notably Ronald de Sousa (1994: 25–33). He seems to me far too dismissive of the downside of gossip and he exhibits a sort of romantic exaggeration of its benefits. He says "If all truths became public we would approach utopia" (1994: 31). This blatantly defies the fact that there is sometimes a significant value in privacy and confidentiality.
3. What I am calling the "unwelcome" aspect of gossip might be captured in other ways. It might be thought that my criterion turns too much on the psychology of

the gossip or on what the gossips know of that psychology. David Rodin suggested instead that the information should be “unauthorized”. That might do, though there are then problems about who or what does the authorizing. I prefer to stick with “unwanted” and I note in the text and try to deal with some of the difficulties this choice raises. I suspect that there may be other ways of making the transgressive point that would demarcate a closely similar conceptual territory for our discussion.

4. This objection was put to me by Margaret Coady.
5. I owe this point to Ruth Zimmerling.
6. I owe this perceptive objection to John O'Neill of Lancaster University.
7. Somewhat similar points could be made about ordinary lies.
8. For the more static picture see William Stern 'Zur Psychologie der Aussage', in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft*, 22 (1902) discussed in Neubauer (1999: 157–8) and see also Allport and Postman (1965).
9. According to Brunvand, one of them is in the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 1951. See Brunvand (1999: 452–6) for the full details of what he has christened, in a slightly misleading way, “The Unsolvable Math Problem”.
10. An exception is the virgin birth tale from the American Civil War (see Brunvand (1999: 469–72) where the story is called ‘Bullet Baby’) but it originated in an ingenious hoax by a reputable medical practitioner and is therefore not a typical urban myth.

Getting Told and Being Believed

Richard Moran

Recent interest in the epistemology of testimony has focused attention on what justification we may commonly have in the vast areas of life where we are dependent on what other people tell us. This dependence is not restricted to what we are told in face to face encounters, for we also take ourselves to know all sorts of things that only reached us through a long chain of utterances and documents, whose evidential status we have never investigated for ourselves and which we will never be in a position to investigate. And the content of such knowledge is not confined to the arcana of specialized studies, but includes such mundane matters as the facts of one's own birth and parentage, the geographical and institutional facts of one's immediate environment, and the 'general facts' that make up one's basic sense of what the world is like.

In part it is the enormity of this dependence that makes for the interest in the subject of testimony, combined with the apparent clash between the kind of epistemic relations involved here and the classic empiricist picture of genuine knowledge basing itself either on direct experience of the facts, or on working out conclusions for oneself.¹ It isn't just that the bulk of what we take ourselves to know is so highly *mediated*, as even knowledge gained through a microscope or other scientific instrument must be; rather it is that the vehicle of mediation here—what other people say—seems so flimsy, unregulated, and is known in

This paper has a long history and I have accumulated more than the usual share of debts along the way. In presenting both this and related material, I have benefited from responses of audiences at: Wake Forest University, Arizona State University, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, New York University; the Center for Human Values at Princeton University, Vassar College, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Rice University, Johns Hopkins, Stanford University, Macquarrie University, Sydney, University of Pennsylvania, Amherst College, University of Virginia, Columbia University, University of Chicago, and the University of Minnesota. Earlier versions of this material were presented at the Third Italian American Philosophy Conference, Rome and Frascati, June 2001, and at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, UNAM, Mexico City. I am grateful to my hosts on those occasions.

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plenty of cases to be unreliable, even deliberately so. People do lie, get things wrong, and speak carelessly. And while we may realistically hope for continued improvement in the various technical means of epistemic mediation (advances in scientific instrumentation are part of the history of scientific progress, after all), there is little reason to expect that the fallibility and mendacity associated with human testimony will one day be overcome. So in this light, reflecting on just how much we rely on the word of others, we may conclude that either we are very careless believers indeed, with no right to claim to know more than a fraction of what we think we know, or some great reductionist program must be in the offing, tracing this chain back to something resembling the classic picture of knowledge by acquaintance.²

Hume's famous discussion of the believability of reports of miracles is the *locus classicus* for attempts to understand the epistemic status of testimony as ultimately the same as any other reliable evidence.³ And part of what is meant by this claim is that the basis we may have in any given case for believing what we hear can only be an *a posteriori* judgement to the effect that in this case there is a reliable evidential correlation between the statement we are being offered and the facts themselves. Several recent writers, most notably C. A. J. Coady in his book *Testimony*,⁴ have argued that the Humean picture cannot succeed in reconstructing our actual basis for believing what people say, and that our entitlement to believe what we are told must have, in part, an *a priori* basis. Somewhat lost in much recent discussion, however, is attention to the basic *relationship* between people when one person tells a second person something, and the second person believes him. This is the primary everyday occurrence, and it is the basic way knowledge gets around. Or at least, so we say. For normally (though not without exception) we take it to be sufficient for bringing someone to know that P that they were *told* by someone who knew, and they believed him. And now, of course, if this second person is taken to *know* that P, he may tell another person, and so on. This may seem absurdly simple and unreflective, and to be at odds with an earlier picture of genuine *knowledge* as being more of an achievement lying at the end of an arduous path from belief or opinion. My concern in this paper, however, is not so much with the conditions for knowledge as with the nature of the two sides of the relationship described here. One person *tells* the other person something, and this other person *believes him*. I want to understand what 'telling' is, especially as this contrasts with other things done in (assertoric) speech such as persuading, arguing, or demonstrating; activities which may also lead to belief or knowledge for the interlocutor, but in importantly different ways. And primarily I want to examine the relation of believing where its direct object is not a proposition but a person. For in the basic case described above, it is the speaker who is believed, and belief in the proposition asserted follows from this. These are different epistemic phenomena. For the hearer might not believe the speaker at all, taking him for a con man, but yet believe that what he has said

is in fact true. Whereas when the hearer believes the speaker, he not only believes what is said but does so on the basis of taking the speaker's word for it. I don't mean to suggest that this distinction has been wholly ignored in the literature of testimony, and I will soon come to discuss what I think is the best recent discussion of it. But both it and the distinction between the speech act of 'telling' and other things done with assertion have not been given a central place in the discussion of what is distinctive about the epistemic dependence on testimony. Specifically, I wish to argue that any account of testimony that seeks to resist the (Humean) assimilation of its epistemic status to that of an evidence-like correlation between one set of phenomena and another will have to give a central place to the distinctive relation of believing another person.⁵ Only in this way can we account for what is distinctive about acquiring beliefs from what people *say*, as opposed to learning from other expressive or revealing behavior of theirs. The hope is to show that the paradigmatic situations of telling cannot be thought of as the presentation or acceptance of evidence at all, and that this is connected with the specifically *linguistic* nature of the transfer of knowledge through testimony (which will take us through an epistemological reading of Grice's original account of non-natural meaning).

EVIDENTIAL RELATIONS AND THE A PRIORI

It is in part due to the epistemological context of recent discussion of testimony, that argument has focused on the question of the *a priori* or *a posteriori* status of our justification for beliefs acquired in this way. In recent work, both C. A. J. Coady and Tyler Burge have argued against a broadly Humean picture, by attacking the idea that we could only have *a posteriori* justification for believing what others tell us.⁶ Coady presents more than one argument against the Humean idea, but several of them begin with the following strategy. If we can only have *a posteriori* grounds for taking what people say to be a reliable guide to the facts, then on such a view it must be conceivable for there to be a community of speakers whose assertions bore *no* reliable relation to the facts. If we are to be in a position to deploy an *a posteriori* argument for the existence of such a correlation, it must be possible for us to begin confronting the linguistic evidence without begging that very question. Coady presents a powerful and connected set of arguments for the conclusion that this is not, in fact, a coherent possibility. Not only would the practice within the community of making or accepting assertions soon break down on such assumptions, but from a perspective outside the community there are deeper reasons connected with the interpretation of speech which prevent the Humean scenario from being realizable. For assigning *content* to the utterances of the hypothetical speakers requires, for familiar reasons, regular correlation between assertive utterances and the conditions under which they would be true. Massive disparity between the content we assign to utterances

and their truth or rationality would oblige us as interpreters to revise our original assignments of content to them. So there is, in fact, no genuine possibility of a community of speakers whose assertions failed, as a general rule, to correlate with the facts. And thus, contrary to the Humean picture, our general justification for believing what people say cannot be a purely empirical, *a posteriori* one.⁷

Both arguments direct themselves against the idea that we have, at best, empirical, inductive grounds for believing what people say. I don't dispute this general point or the particular way it is argued for in these two instances, but do want to point out that this general form of argument describes no particular role for the notions either of a speaker *telling* someone something, or of *believing* that speaker. What the generality of such arguments provides is a defeasible *a priori* warrant for believing that what other people say will normally be true. But any argument pitched at that level of generality will leave untouched the question of whether believing the person (as opposed to believing the truth of what is said) is a legitimate, and perhaps basic, source of new beliefs. For we might well have an *a priori* defeasible warrant for accepting the beliefs we gain through observing the behavior of others (verbal and otherwise) without this warrant involving the concepts of 'saying' or 'telling' at all. By itself, such a justification is no different from the presumptive right we may have (*ceteris paribus*) to rely on the deliverances of the senses or of memory. At this level of argument, the speech of other people could still be something which is treated as *evidence* for the truth of various claims about the world, the difference would only be that here we may have some non-empirical right to treat this phenomenon as evidence, perhaps even very good evidence.⁸ This general line of thought begins, then, to look more like a non-skeptical *version* of the basic Humean view, and less like a vindication of testimony as a distinct source of beliefs, one not reducible to a form of evidence. And yet it is the special relations of telling someone, being told, and accepting or refusing another's word that are the home of the network of beliefs we acquire through human testimony. And these relations, I hope to show, provide a kind of reason for belief that is categorically different from that provided by evidence.

Another way of putting this criticism would be to say that arguments of the generality of Coady's do not address the question of what is distinctive about acquiring beliefs from what people *say*, as compared with other things people do. At bottom, the epistemological role of communicative speech is not seen as essentially different from that of other behavior. But the observable behavior of other people may be a source of true beliefs in all sorts of ways, which need have nothing to do with believing the other person. I may look out my window on a sunny day and see people bundled up against the cold, and then reliably conclude from this that it must be colder outside than it otherwise looks. This transition in thought is not essentially different from the picture according to which I observe the verbal behavior of some exotic community, and in seeking to understand what it means, I necessarily rely on various assumptions about their rationality

and general awareness. And here one could point out that the same ‘rationalizing’ or charitable constraint on understanding what these people say also provides a defeasible warrant for taking *what* we understand them to say to be *true*. This is because we take their speech normally to express their beliefs, and we take their beliefs (as interpreted by us) normally to be true. This familiar, general scheme applies in the same way to the behavior of the people I see bundled up against the cold, and to the verbal behavior observed by the Radical Interpreter. Pictured in this way, one’s relation to the exotic speech community does not involve being *told* anything at all, or believing *them*, any more than it does in the case of the people observed from the window. In both cases it is just a matter of an inference from behavior which is seen as rational to some conclusion about the state of the world. So nothing along these lines, justifying the beliefs we acquire from other people, can count as a vindication of our reliance on *testimony*, since it is not a vindication of what we learn through believing other people.

This is, of course, the familiar role of speech and its relation to belief in contemporary philosophy of mind, and it should not be surprising to see it exerting a degree of control over the recent discussion of testimony. Within this discourse, speech is seen as a kind of interpretable human behavior like any other. When we interpret such behavior, we seek to make it understandable within the rational categories of what is called ‘folk psychology’, and ascribe beliefs and other attitudes which will be reasonable approximations to the True and the Good. And this picture of our relation to the speech of other people leads almost imperceptibly into a view about testimony. For we can argue from here: when we interpret the speech of another we do not only learn about the speaker, we also learn about the world. Most obviously, when someone makes an assertion we may not only learn about what he believes, but if the assertion is *true*, we may also learn the truth of what is asserted. And if our interpretation is guided by principles of charity, we will indeed take most of what people say to be true, even in cases where we have no independent reason for thinking it true. In this way, the fact of the other person’s belief (as interpreted by us) may function as *our* reason for believing the same thing. We thus gain true beliefs about persons as well as about the world they are talking about.

PERVENSITY, DEPENDENCE, AND RISK

What this general scheme provides us with is a presumptive right to share the beliefs we take the speaker to have. But, other things being equal, we would have the very same right *however* we learned of that person’s beliefs.⁹ This epistemic warrant described in this scheme need not involve a dependence on speech any more than it did when I learned about the weather by seeing how people outside were dressed. Speech, of course, can be an especially revealing and fine-grained basis for belief-ascription, but from this perspective it is but a particular instance of the more general scheme of interpreting behavior.

Since it is knowledge of the other person's beliefs that is doing all the epistemic work on this picture, we should note that while speech is in some obvious ways a privileged route to such knowledge, it is also one which subjects the interpreter to special risks which are not shared by other possible ways of coming to this same knowledge. When I learn of someone's beliefs through what they *tell* me, I am dependent on such things as their discretion, sincerity, good intentions—in short, on how they deliberately present themselves to me—in a way that I am not dependent when I infer their beliefs in other ways. People are known to lie, exaggerate, and otherwise speak in ways that do not express their genuine beliefs. Thus, in relying on what a person says, I am incurring an additional risk that the behavior he is manifesting may be deliberately calculated to mislead me as to what he believes. I am here dependent on *him*, and his intentions with respect to me, and not just on my own abilities as an interpreter of the evidence. This source of error is a much more remote possibility in the case of inferences drawn from the private observation of someone's behavior. The people bundled up against the cold *could* be dressed up like that just so as to fool me, but this is hardly the everyday occurrence that lying and misrepresentation is. And that risk of error is not a possibility at all for those ways, real or imaginary, of learning someone's beliefs directly and without the mediation of voluntary expression or behavior at all (i.e., whatever is imagined in imagining the effects of truth-serum, hypnosis, or brain-scans). If the epistemic import of what people say is at bottom that of an indication of what they believe, it would seem perverse for us to give any privileged status to the vehicle of knowledge (speech and assertion) where we are most vulnerable, because most dependent on the free disposal of the other person. And if we are considering speech as evidence, we will have eventually to face the question of how recognition of its intentional character could ever *enhance* rather than detract from its epistemic value for an audience. Ordinarily, if I confront something as evidence (the telltale footprint, the cigarette butt left in the ashtray), and then learn that it was left there deliberately, and even with the intention of bringing me to a particular belief, this will only discredit it as evidence in my eyes. It won't seem *better* evidence, or even just as good, but instead like something fraudulent, or tainted evidence.

Insofar as speech does occupy a privileged place in what we learn from other people, this sort of view seems to picture us as perversely preferring to increase our epistemic exposure, by placing ourselves at the mercy of the free disposition of another, according a privileged place to human speech, which is here construed as a kind of evidence that has been deliberately tampered with. On the 'evidential' reconstruction of testimony, speech functions as no more than a very possibly misleading way of learning the speaker's beliefs. Other things being equal, some more direct way of learning would be better; and *in particular* we should prefer any way of learning the speaker's beliefs that was not wholly dependent on his overt, deliberate revelation of them. Anything that necessarily involved his free action in this way, and thus brought with it the possibility of deliberate deceit,

could only be a *less* reliable way of learning his beliefs than some otherwise comparable way that involved going behind his back (mind-reading, brain-scans, private observation of his behavior). If speech is seen as a form of *evidence*, then once its intentional character is recognized (that is, not just as intentional behavior, but intentional with respect to inducing a particular belief) we need an account of how it could count as anything more than *doctored* evidence.

ASSERTION AS ASSURANCE

Let us contrast this view with another picture of how what another person tells me may contribute to my belief, a picture that *will* give central place to the act of saying something and the response of believing or disbelieving the person. On a genuinely non-Humean account, when someone tells me it's cold out I don't simply gain an awareness of his beliefs, I am also given his *assurance* that it's cold out. This is something I could not have gained by the private observation of his behavior. When someone gives me his assurance that it's cold out he explicitly assumes a certain responsibility for what I believe. What this provides me with is different in kind, though not necessarily in degree of certainty, from beliefs I might have read off from his behavior, just as what I gain from his declaration of intention differs from the firm expectation I may form from knowing his habits. On the evidential picture, by contrast, the speaker's assurance as such just clouds the issue, since all the verbal expression of assurance can do is interpose an additional piece of (possibly misleading) evidence between me and what I really want to know. I now have some more behavior to interpret, verbal this time, which brings with it special new possibilities for being misled. From my role as interpreter of others, my ultimate destination is the truth about the world, but often I must pass through the beliefs of another person as my only (fallible) access to this truth. And now relying on what he deliberately *says* provides me with at best a distinctively fallible way of learning what his beliefs *are*.

On both views, when I take someone's word for something I am peculiarly dependent on the will or discretion of the speaker, in a way that I would not be in the situation of interpreting the evidence of his behavior. But they view this dependence differently. On the Assurance view, going behind his back to learn his beliefs would not be better, or even just as good. Rather, it is essential to the distinctive reason for belief that I get from assertion that it proceeds from something freely undertaken by the other person. Only as a free declaration does it have that value for me. Evidence, by contrast, is not dependent on presentation in this way. A phenomenon will count as evidence however it came about, whether by natural causes or by someone's deliberate action, or just as easily by his inadvertence or carelessness. But nothing can count as someone's assurance that was not freely presented as such, just as talking in one's sleep cannot count as making an assertion or a promise.¹⁰ The two views, then, oppose each other most directly

over this issue of the role of the speaker's freedom, and the hearer's dependence on it. On the evidential view, dependence on the freedom of the other person just saddles us with an additional set of risks; now we have to worry not only about misleading (natural) evidence, but deliberate distortion as well. On the assurance view, dependence on someone's freely assuming responsibility for the truth of P, presenting himself as a kind of guarantor, provides me with a characteristic reason to believe, different in kind from anything provided by evidence alone.

In the remainder of this paper, I want to sketch out a defense of the alternative picture above, and explore the case for denying that human testimony should be thought of as providing the same sort of reason for belief that ordinary evidence does. A guiding question will be: As hearers faced with the question of believing what we are told, how are we to understand the nature of our dependence on the free assertion of the speaker, and how does this dependence affect the question of whether our epistemic relation to what is said is ultimately an evidential one?

In a ground-breaking paper on the central questions of testimony, Angus Ross (1986) begins by raising the question of whether it makes sense in general to treat what people say as a form of evidence, and he explicitly relates this question to the fact that speaking is a voluntary act. I have some differences with how he understands this relation, but the general line of thought seems to me deeply right and worth developing. Let me begin with a moderately lengthy quotation from the early pages of Ross's article.¹¹

The main problem with the idea that the hearer views the speaker's words as evidence arises from the fact that, unlike the examples of natural signs which spring most readily to mind, saying something is a deliberate act under the speaker's conscious control and the hearer is aware that this is the case. The problem is not that of whether the hearer can in these circumstances see the speaker's words as *good* evidence; it is a question of whether the notion of evidence is appropriate here at all. There is, of course, nothing odd about the idea of deliberately presenting an audience with evidence in order to get them to draw a desired conclusion, as when a photograph is produced in court. But in such a case what is presented is, or is presented as being, evidence independently of the fact of the presenter having chosen to present it. If a speaker's words are evidence of anything, they have that status only because he has chosen to use them. Speaking is not like allowing someone to see you are blushing. The problem is not, however, that the fact of our having chosen to use certain words *cannot* be evidence for some further conclusion. Our choices can certainly be revealing. The difficulty lies in supposing that the speaker himself sees his choice of words in this light, which in turn makes it difficult to suppose that this is how the hearer is intended to see his choice. (Ross 1986: 72)

First of all, it should be noted that Ross's target, like mine, is not the class of all speech acts, nor even the class of all *assertoric* speech acts. Not everything done in speech, not even everything done with sentences in the declarative mood, involves the specific relations of telling and being believed. Assertions are also made in the context of argument and demonstration, for instance, where there is no assumption within the discourse that the speaker is to be believed on his

say-so.¹² In such a situation the speaker is not expecting to be *believed*, but is attempting to provide independent convincing reasons for the truth of his view, or laying out the steps of a proof. *Telling* someone something is not simply giving expression to what's on your mind, but is making a statement with the understanding that here it is your word that is to be relied on. It is a common enough understanding, and commonly justified, but it is not one in place in such contexts as persuasion, argumentation, or demonstration. For different reasons it is also not the understanding of the speech of a person in the context of therapeutic treatment, in the oral examination of a pupil, or in the police interrogation of a suspect. Such discourses will contain *statements* of various kinds, but they may be received by the interlocutor in a very different spirit, as evidence for truth of a very different kind from the overt subject of the subject's statement. This again is quite different from the exchange of information through telling and being told in everyday life. (And on the picture of speech to be developed here, these other discourses emerge as ultimately dependent on the central discourse of telling.)

Having said that, however, how is seeing one's own utterance as evidence supposed to be incompatible with seeing my utterance as a voluntary act of mine, in Ross's words seeing it as up to me what I shall say? He notes that there is nothing in the idea of evidence itself which is inconsistent with a person's deliberately presenting something as such, as when a photograph is introduced as evidence. And, it should also be noted, an item like a photograph can serve as good evidence even when it was not only deliberately *presented*, but also deliberately *produced* so as to lead one to a particular conclusion. So why cannot the speaker have essentially the same relation to his own words, as something he deliberately produces and presents to serve as evidence for some conclusion (and hence to bring the hearer to some desired belief)? Part of the answer Ross gives lies in the following view. Seeing the utterance as evidence would involve seeing it as the outcome of some general empirical law, the sort of 'reliable correlation' Hume has in mind, connecting the making of the statement with the obtaining of the facts in question. Ross acknowledges that I may see the words of others or my own *past* words in this light, but

What I cannot do is see the words I now choose to utter in that light, for I cannot at one and the same time see it as up to *me* what I shall say and see my choice [...] as determined or constrained by facts about my own nature. (Ross 1986: 73)

Such a stance toward one's own utterances may be barely possible, he says, but it is hardly compatible with taking responsibility for those acts. While the emphasis on responsibility is important, I don't think this part of Ross's response leads in the right direction. For, as far as 'reliable correlations' go, why could I not see my own utterance as securely linked with the truth, not in virtue of my being determined by the facts of my own nature, but in virtue of my own free but unswerving commitment to the truth? The sort of reliability my Humean interlocutor wants to count on does not abolish my freedom. I can present myself to

myself and others as *reliable* in various ways, without that meaning that my reliability is a *constraint* to which I am passively subject. My utterance is a voluntary act of mine, something I take responsibility for, and *part* of what I take responsibility for is its correlation with the truth. So it seems it cannot be because I see my utterance as freely chosen that it cannot be taken either by myself or my audience as evidence for the truth.

However, there is another strand in what Ross is saying here that clarifies the role of the speaker's freedom and its clash with the idea of evidence. In the first passage quoted he says that something like a photograph will be evidence independently of the fact of the presenter having chosen to present it; whereas by contrast,

If a speaker's words are evidence of anything, they have that status only because he has chosen to use them.

Strictly speaking, this last statement is not quite right, as we've already briefly seen. If we've agreed that in various contexts a person's words *can* be treated as evidence, then this need not be dependent on the speaker's having *chosen* to use them. If my analyst can adopt a symptomatic stance toward my more conscious and deliberate statements, then he may make similar revealing inferences from my botched utterances, slips of the tongue, as well as the words I may utter under hypnosis, or while talking in my sleep. Speaking *is* a form of behavior, after all, and human behavior is infinitely interpretable, infinitely revealing, in ways that are not at the disposal of the person to determine their meaning. One's words can be evidence when not *chosen* at all, revealing like a cry of pain; or they can be evidence against one's intent, as when someone's tone of voice reveals that he's lying. What *is* true, however, but still in need of defense here, is that a statement only provides the kind of reason for belief that *testimony* does if it is understood to be something freely and consciously undertaken by the speaker. It is with respect to *this* sort of reason for belief that we, as hearers or readers, are *essentially* dependent on the free disposal of the speaker or writer. Thus, if the idea is that something is evidence, or is being treated as evidence, when it is a reason for belief independently of whether it was intentionally produced or presented as such, we need a fuller characterization of the kind of 'independence' that pertains to the category of evidence, and defense of the idea that testimony as such provides reason for belief that is *not* independent of assumptions involving the freedom of the speaker.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND STATEMENTS

It is here that Ross's passing contrast between our epistemic relations to photographs and speakers is worth developing in some detail. There are many ways in which what we see and what we believe may be dependent on what others do, say, or show to us. In my direct experience of a footprint, I may be dependent

not only on the person who made it, but also perhaps on someone who drew it to my attention. And when my epistemic relation to it is mediated by another person in these ways, I am subject to the ordinary risks of distortion, since in principle any evidence may be tampered with. But even with these particular risks and dependencies, my relation to the footprint is still a perceptual one, and does not involve me in the specific relation of believing another person. And this is so even if my perception of it is technologically mediated in ways that involve the doings and expertise of other people. In discussing the nature of photographic realism, Kendall Walton (1984) compares what we see in photographs with what we see through a microscope or in a mirror, to argue for the claim that in all three cases we actually *see* the thing in question, even though this seeing is mediated in various ways, and even though photographs can be doctored in various ways.¹³ Real *experience* of a thing may also be mediated or subject to various epistemic risks, without that abolishing the difference between being told about it and experiencing it oneself. As Walton points out, what I see directly when someone points out the window may also be altered in various ways to deceive, but that doesn't transform the situation from perception to depiction. In Walton's terms, a photograph can be 'transparent' to the scene it depicts in part because, unlike the case of a drawing, what we see here is not essentially dependent on what the photographer thinks is there in the photograph. As with a telescope, we may 'see through' the photograph to the scene itself.

In this regard, consider the case of the photographer in Antonioni's movie *Blow Up* (1966). He takes some pictures in the park of a woman and a man, and then later discovers that one of his shots apparently shows the man's corpse lying in the bushes. This is not what he saw or believed at the time, but it is what he sees now. Still, the photograph he took is evidence, of the most ordinary kind, for the fact that this man has been killed. And it is evidence for this regardless of the photographer's beliefs about the matter. That is, it would be evidence even if he positively *dis*believed what it shows, or even if he took the photograph and showed it to someone with the deliberate intent to deceive. Its status as evidence is wholly independent of his beliefs or intentions. And it is for that reason that his *own* relation to the photograph can be an evidential one, like a detective or other investigator. When he gets home he crops and enlarges and studies his photograph in order to see more deeply into what it shows, to convince himself that the corpse on the grass is really there. In this way his own epistemic relation to the photograph he took is the same as that of the friend he shows it to later. They can both learn from it, or doubt what it shows. The situation would be quite different if he were to have made a sketch of what he saw in the park, or taken some notes on what he observed there. It would be absurd for him take his sketch home and blow up *it* to examine more closely what it shows about the man in the park. And were he to show his sketch or his notes to another person to convince him about the man in the park, he would be offering him a very different kind of reason to believe what happened. If he shows his

friend a sketch of a corpse lying in the grass, and this is to be a reason for him to believe there *was* such a corpse, his friend has to assume such things as that the sketch was not made with an intent to deceive, that the person who made it was observing things accurately and not liable to error, and even that the aim of the sketch was an accurate picture and not an imaginary scene, etc. In short, the beliefs and intentions of the person who made the sketch are crucial for its status as a reason to believe anything about what was there in the park. Without those assumptions, the sketch does not become *poorer* evidence; it ceases to be evidence of any kind, or any other reason to believe. It's just a piece of paper, and any correlation with the facts in the park could only be by the merest chance.

So how does the issue of freedom figure in here, in a way that distinguishes the case of verbal testimony? After all, the photographer freely takes his picture, and then may freely present it to another person as a reason for believing a man has been killed. How is this different from his friend's relation to his verbal report of what he saw? So far we have seen the following difference. The status of the photograph as a reason to believe something does not depend on the photographer's own attitude toward it as evidence. It depends only on the camera's ability to record the scene, which need not involve any choice or consciousness on the part of the photographer at all. (The exposure could have been made by a remote timing device.) As such the photograph can serve for him as an independent correction of his impression of the scene, in a way that his drawing cannot. It is for this reason that when he looks at his photograph with his friend, they both stand in the same epistemic relation to it; confronting it as independent, public, evidence, and trying to discern its import.

By contrast, the *speaker's* choice enters in essentially to the fact that his utterance counts at all as a reason for belief. The point is not that his utterance is voluntarily produced, for that in itself has no epistemic significance, and does not distinguish the case from that of the photographer. Rather the point is that the speaker, in presenting his utterance as an *assertion*, one with the force of *telling* the audience something, presents himself as *accountable* for the truth of what he says, and in doing so he offers a kind of guarantee for this truth. This shows up in the fact that if we are inclined to believe what the speaker says, but then learn that he is *not*, in fact, presenting his utterance as an assertion whose truth he stands behind, then what remains is just words, not a reason to believe anything. We misunderstood the intent of Professor Higgins when we heard him say something about the rain in Spain, and now upon realizing this, the utterance as phenomenon loses the epistemic import we thought it had (whatever knowledge we may indeed take him to have about such matters). By contrast, if we learn that the photographer is not, in fact, presenting his photograph as true record of what occurred in the park, the photograph as document retains all the epistemic value for us it ever had.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NON-NATURAL

Still, one might ask, why speak of the audience's dependence on the freedom of the speaker, rather than simply refer to their dependence on what the speaker has (freely) *done*? The reason is that the relevant speaker's responsibility is not simply his responsibility for the *existence* of some phenomenon, in the sense that he is the one who deliberately produced these spoken words. Rather, he is more centrally responsible for those words *having* any particular epistemic status. What is the difference, then, between the speaker's role in *providing* something (his utterance) with a particular epistemic status, and the role of someone like a photographer who *produces* something *with* a certain epistemic import?

It is here, I think, that a consideration of Paul Grice's original 1957 paper 'Meaning' proves helpful. The relation of evidence, one phenomenon's being an indication of something else, is the central form of what Grice calls 'natural meaning'. Natural meaning is not something at the disposal of the speaker to confer or revoke, but is a matter of the independent obtaining of causal relations in the world (e.g., the way smoke means fire, or doesn't). Nonetheless, persons belong to this same natural world and may thus produce or exhibit various evidential phenomena, and employ them to get some point across (e.g., pointing to the smoke pouring out of the oven). But spoken words typically bear a different relation to the facts. In his 1957 article, Grice is primarily concerned to delineate the conditions for something he calls "non-natural meaning", or MeaningNN. This project famously evolved into an attempt to ground the notions of the meaning of an expression in a language in the complex intentions had by utterers of expressions on occasions of use; and, presented as a non-circular account of either word-meaning or sentence-meaning, it was progressively refined into baroque complexity under the pressure of counter-examples. However, the interest and importance of the original account of non-natural meaning is not exhausted by the prospects for an intention-based semantics of the sort he proposed. What he isolates under the title of 'non-natural meaning' is a central form of intersubjective dependence, one that is indeed paradigmatically linguistic, but not restricted to linguistic communication.

A striking thing about the essay is how the technical notion of non-natural meaning is introduced by contrast with natural meaning, as if this were an antecedently intuitive notion, one whose definition we could progressively refine by consulting our intuitions about a series of well-crafted cases and asking ourselves whether we should call *that* a case of non-natural meaning. We are given hints, of course, by way of both similarity and contrast with more familiar notions like that of conventional meaning, but Grice's target notion only emerges through the consideration of the cases devised and presented. The cases themselves all

have a similar form in that in all of them one person does something which either succeeds or not in inducing another person to some belief *P*. This common *telos* to the cases invites two related questions. Since the end-point of each of these encounters is that one person ends up with a new belief, we might look at the progression of cases from an epistemological point of view and ask what it is that brings the person at the receiving end to this new belief, what reason he may take himself to have been given for adopting it, and why the particular kind of reason Grice's account of non-natural meaning zeros in on should be of special significance, either epistemologically or otherwise. It is not, of course, as if the other ways of inducing belief, disqualified as candidates for the non-natural, are thought to be insufficiently grounded. Salome certainly acquired justified belief about the fate of John the Baptist by seeing his head presented on a charger, however this may fall short as a case of non-natural meaning. Rather, the target notion of non-natural meaning is meant to capture a *way* of gaining a reason to believe something that is importantly different from others and that we have special reason to be concerned with, both as purveyors and receivers of such reasons. So the first question is: what is special about the reason for belief associated with non-natural meaning? And secondly, as the proposed definition of non-natural meaning is progressively refined in Grice's essay, what pre-theoretical notion is supposed to be guiding our intuitions along the way, so that we can feel conviction about a range of cases that seem to fall more or less squarely in the category? Here Grice is more explicit, since by way of explaining the distinction that matters to him, and why something like the case of Herod's presentation to Salome does *not* count as non-natural meaning, he says, "What we want to find is the difference between, for example, 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' and 'telling' and between 'getting someone to think' and 'telling' " (Grice 1957, in Strawson 1967: 44). So it is the ordinary notion of *telling* someone something, *that* way of inducing belief, that is to play a guiding role in determining which cases satisfy the philosophical notion of non-natural meaning, and Grice's distinction between natural and non-natural meaning can be seen as motivated by a concern with the difference between *telling* a person that *P* and other ways of bringing him to that same knowledge, such as providing him with evidence for *P* (evidence that may be accidental or contrived, openly displayed or inadvertently revealed).

As examples of 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' some fact, Grice cites such cases as that of showing someone a compromising photograph, or leaving the china my daughter has broken lying around for my wife to see.¹⁴ In these cases, the phenomenon in question has some independent evidential significance, even though the person may be responsible either for drawing attention to it (the broken china), or actually producing it (the photograph). Their independent significance shows up in the fact that the photograph or the china would have functioned as a reason for the belief in question without anyone's intervention or presentation, even if only stumbled upon accidentally.

By contrast, in cases of ‘telling’ or ‘non-natural meaning’, the person (hereafter the ‘speaker’) plays quite a different role in bringing his audience to believe something. Here, as is well known, a crucial role is played in Grice’s account by the recognition of the speaker’s intention. Examining this role will help clarify the specific ‘dependence on the freedom of the speaker’ that I’m claiming is characteristic of the relation of testimony, and which distinguishes it from a relation of evidence.

Following Grice’s progression then: a handkerchief left at the scene of the crime may throw suspicion on someone and perhaps lead to genuine belief in his guilt. But as a piece of evidence it would induce that belief whether or not it were left there intentionally, and non-natural meaning (and ‘telling’, surely) must at least be the upshot of something intentionally done. Further, it should be part of non-natural meaning that the intention to induce a particular belief is *manifest* to the person on the receiving end, and not like artfully planted evidence designed to steer him toward the desired conclusion. Further still, this belief-inducing intention must not simply be *known* to the audience, something he pieces together despite the speaker’s best efforts at concealment; rather the speaker must fully expect and intend that his intention will be manifest to his audience. In this way, the audience can appreciate that another person is openly playing a role in directing him to learn something, by presenting a piece of evidence for them both to see and assess. This makes this knowledge, or at least this awareness of the evidence, ‘mutual’ between them, and hence available as an object of cognitive and communicative cooperation between them. However, this is not yet non-natural meaning, since these conditions are fulfilled when Herod presents the head of St John to Salome, or when the compromising photograph is flourished. Here, although the audience has been directly and openly led to some belief, she has not been *told* anything. Rather, Salome has been shown something and reliably left to draw her own conclusions. Herod manifests a definite intention in bringing her this news, and he bears an obvious responsibility for Salome’s altered state of belief. But there is yet another responsibility he does not assume here, which marks the difference between “ ‘deliberately and openly letting someone know’ and ‘telling’ ”, and this is shown in the fact that, while his intention regarding her belief is indeed manifest, it is inert as far as Salome’s belief is concerned, just as it is when the person is shown a compromising photograph. It isn’t doing any epistemological work of its own. Both people would draw essentially the same conclusions whether the evidence in question were deliberately and openly displayed to them or not. So we might say that Herod’s epistemic responsibility for Salome’s belief is merely contingent, like that of the person showing the photograph. In these cases they play a role in making a piece of evidence available to another person, but they are not responsible for it having the epistemic import it has.

For Grice, however, nothing can count as a case of non-natural meaning if the relevant belief could be expected to be produced whether or not the intention

behind the action were recognized. The speaker must not only intend that the audience recognize his intention, but this recognition must itself *play a role* in inducing the belief in question, and that means that the recognition of the speaker's intention must not just as a matter of fact help to bring about the relevant belief, but must be *necessary* to its inducement. In this way we arrive at Grice's original formulation of non-natural meaning in his 1957 paper:

A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention. (Grice 1957, in Strawson 1967: 45)

If the audience could not be expected to arrive at the intended belief *apart from* the recognition of the speaker's intention regarding that belief, the speaker must take upon himself the role of providing something with a particular epistemic import that it otherwise would not have, and in this way Grice sharply distinguishes non-natural meaning from the presentation of evidence. For any phenomenon with some independent evidential import will naturally be one which might well be expected to induce belief without the recognition of anyone's intention. That's just what it is for a phenomenon to be ordinary evidence for something else. To count as an instance of telling someone something, however, the speaker must present his action, his utterance, as being without epistemic significance apart from his explicit assumption of responsibility for that significance. In this way he announces that the reason for belief offered here is of a different kind from that stemming from externally obtaining evidential relations.

As Ross points out (1986: 75), from the point of view of the audience, considered as a reason for belief, the role of the recognition of intention is left somewhat mysterious here. The question is: just how does my recognizing that this speaker intends that I should believe P play a role in actually *getting* me to believe that P? If we compare this case with that of other things someone may want me to do it's clear that the mere recognition that he wants me to do X does not, in general, provide me with much of any reason at all for complying. Why should we be so much more compliant when we recognize that someone wishes us to *believe* something? How can the mere recognition of someone's intention be expected to induce belief?

When looked at in this way, recognition of the speaker's intention may seem inadequate to induce belief. It may also seem pointless, adding nothing of epistemic value to what the audience already has. Again, compare this with the picture of radical interpretation, according to which the epistemic significance of speech is that of an indication of the speaker's beliefs. Once I employ this scheme of interpretation to learn what the speaker believes, I am then in possession of knowledge of a certain set of facts, viz. the speaker's state of belief, which *does* have straightforward evidential value for me, quite independently of how or whether the fact of his believing is explicitly presented to me. The speaker's state of mind is phenomenon, which has the same independent evidential import for

me, regardless of how I may have learned of it, and regardless of whether it was manifested deliberately or inadvertently. And, as we saw, this same scheme of interpretation can provide a basis for me to infer the likely *truth* of these beliefs, and so come to share them myself. I ascribe beliefs on the basis of his verbal behavior as I would from any other behavior, and in neither case do I rely on recognition of any *intention* to manifest his states of mind. And indeed, what could be the epistemic interest for me in learning of any such intention on his part? By hypothesis, I already know what he takes to be true, and I can now make of this knowledge what I will, deciding for myself whether this adds up to good reason for *me* to take his belief to be true. If his verbal behavior is evidence for his beliefs, then it doesn't *add* to my evidence as interpreter to learn that, in addition to his believing P, the speaker also has the intention that *I* should believe P too (and come to this belief on the basis of recognition of that very intention, etc.). From my side, either learning of his belief is, on balance, sufficient for me to believe P too, or it is not. Nothing further about his intentions, or just *how* he would like me to arrive at this belief, will be evidentially relevant for me at all. Or else, as before with the tainted evidence, learning that his belief was deliberately manifested now casts doubt on my ascription, because the evidence of his behavior is now contaminated by its aspect of performance.

What is needed is more direct focus on the speaker's *explicit presentation* of himself as providing a reason for belief. For it is *not*, in fact, the audience's mere *awareness* of the speaker's intention that is to provide a motivation for belief. If I simply *discovered* on my own that this person had the intention that I believe P, this need not count for me as a reason for belief at all. (Why cooperate with his designs on me, however benign?) The conditions given so far still have not accounted for any special importance to the overt act of *saying*, the explicit manifesting of one's intention, as opposed to simply doing something that allows one's intention to become known. If, unlike a piece of evidence, the speaker's words have no independent epistemic value as a phenomenon, then how do they *acquire* the status of a reason to believe something? It seems that this can only be by virtue of the speaker's there and then explicitly *presenting* his utterance as a reason to believe, with this presentation being accomplished in the act of assertion itself. The epistemic value of his words is something publicly conferred on them by the speaker, by presenting his utterance as an assertion. And indeed, it is *because* the speaker's words have no independent status as evidence that their contribution to the audience's belief must proceed through the recognition of the speaker's intention. Further, the intention seeking recognition must not simply be that the audience come to believe something, but must include the intention that the audience recognize the speaker's act of asserting as itself constituting a reason for belief. If it seems difficult to see how anything, even someone's words, could acquire some epistemic value through something like *conferral*, perhaps because this suggests something too arbitrary or ceremonial to constitute a genuine reason for belief, it should be remembered that for both parties this conferral is by its

nature an overt assumption of specific responsibilities on the part of the speaker. This is no more (or less) mysterious than how an explicit agreement or contract alters one's responsibilities, actions which are also within the capacities of ordinary speakers. The speaker's intent then, is that for the audience, the very fact that this speaker is freely and explicitly presenting P as worthy of belief constitutes his speech as a reason to believe that P.

Of course, as with any public assumption of responsibility, the appropriate abilities and other background conditions must be assumed to be in place for it to amount to anything. For the speaker to be able to do this it must be assumed by both parties that the speaker does indeed satisfy the right conditions for such an act (e.g., that he possesses the relevant knowledge, trustworthiness, and reliability). These background conditions can themselves be construed as evidential, or at any rate not at the behest of the speaker to determine, but they are not themselves sufficient for giving any epistemic significance to the speaker's words, for the relevance of these conditions only comes into play once it is understood that a particular speech act is being performed with those words (i.e., an assertion or promise rather than something else). The speaker has to constitute his utterance as having this or that illocutionary force before the empirical background conditions can contribute anything to its epistemic significance. Hence the idea is not that the speaker's word's "all by themselves" should count as a reason for belief, or that the speaker's authority over the constitution of the particular speech act he is performing (e.g., as assertion rather than recitation), shoulders the epistemic burden all by itself. As with the explicit assumption of responsibility that goes with making a promise, its success will depend on the various conditions that go into the speaker's being in a position to take on any such responsibility, and which make for his public assumption's being anything for another person to count on. But in considering the speaker's words, the audience's belief in his knowledge and trustworthiness do not do him any epistemic good if it is still left open just *what* kind of action (if any) the speaker is presenting his utterance as. As far as relating to his words goes, the speaker's knowledge and trustworthiness is epistemically inert for the audience until the question of the particular speech act or illocution is settled. Determining his utterance as an assertion is what gets the speaker's words into the realm of epistemic assessment in the first place (or at least epistemic assessment of the sort that is relevant to testimony: we may indeed make evidential use of the words or inarticulate sounds made by someone asleep). And in this matter, the speaker and his audience are in essentially different relations to the epistemic import of the speaker's words. The speaker does not relate to the question whether his utterance is a committed assertion or not as something to be settled by evidence, because as a speaker of the language he plays an essential role in making it the case that his utterance is an assertion or not.

Hence Grice's original formulation needs some further refinement. The speaker intends not just that the recognition of his intention play a role in producing belief that P, but that the particular role this recognition should play is that of

showing the speaker to be assuming responsibility for the status of his utterance as a reason to believe P. This addition is necessary since in principle there are all sorts of ways in which the recognition of intention could ‘play a role’ in producing belief, ways that would not capture what is meant by ‘telling’ or ‘non-natural meaning’, or the correlative notion of believing the speaker. One such way would be manifested in the familiar situations of ‘double-bluffing’ where, e.g., I tell you I’m traveling to Minsk, knowing you’ll take me to be lying and attempting to conceal my plans to travel to Pinsk, and hence meaning to deceive you about my genuine plans to go to Minsk after all. Knowing all this about me, however, you see through the ruse and conclude that I’m indeed going to Minsk, just as I told you. Here the recognition of intention does indeed play an essential role in the belief arrived at, and the audience comes to believe that what I say is true, but this is not a case of believing the speaker.¹⁵ And there are other possible ways in which the recognition of intention might play a role, even a necessary one, but of the wrong sort.

Grice is sensitive to an incompleteness here, when he suggests toward the end that it should somehow be built into the definition that the intended effect must be something which in some sense is within the control of the audience, or that in some sense of ‘reason’ the recognition of intention behind X is for the audience a reason and not merely a cause (Grice 1957 in Strawson 1967: 46). It is not the speaker’s aim that the belief in question be produced by the audience’s simply being so constituted that his awareness of the speaker’s complex self-referential intention somehow produces the belief in him. That would fail in another way to describe the nature of the dependence on the person as such and the importance of mutual recognition. For the audience must not simply respond with belief, but must *understand* what the speaker is saying, and must understand what the speaker is *doing* in saying P, which is to say, purporting to present him with a reason for P. And the audience must believe P *because* he understands what the speaker is saying and what he is doing in saying it. In addition, and crucially, the audience must take this entire understanding to be *shared* by himself and the speaker. That is, he takes himself to be responding to just the kind of reason for belief that the speaker is presenting himself as offering (which is why cases of “double-bluffing” are not cases of believing the speaker).

Any of the ‘proto-Gricean’ ways of producing belief, the cases leading up to the full definition of non-natural meaning, provide us with something mediating between the audience and the speaker, something other than the person as such that is being depended on. Believing the speaker, on the other hand, involves accepting the offer to rely on *him*, and not something connected with him or as a consequence of what he has done. This direct dependence on the speaker’s offer of responsibility is what is expressed in the ‘hereby’ that is implied, and sometimes explicitly stated, in illocutions such as ‘telling’, ‘warning’, or ‘accepting’, for it is in this very presentation of himself that the speaker assumes responsibility for the audience’s belief.¹⁶ The implied ‘hereby’ is thus also an expression of the

self-referentiality of the Gricean formula, for it declares that it is dependence on the person as such, and not on something else he might point to, that is solicited in saying that he *hereby* tells his audience that P.¹⁷ In this way we can see the progressive refinements of Grice's definition of non-natural meaning as each aimed at laying bare the reliance of the audience on the other person as such. The belief is to be produced not simply by the speaker's action, or by his intention, or by the audience's awareness of his intention, or anything else outside their encounter. Just as the audience could treat the handkerchief or the photograph as evidence for P, and thus without trusting the speaker for the truth of P, so he could treat the speaker's action or intention as a similar kind of evidence without trusting the speaker, without his belief that P involving dependence on the person of the speaker as such.

When Grice says that the belief in question should be "something which in some sense is within the control of the audience", or that it should function as a reason for him and not a mere cause, this is not meant to suggest that the audience complies with the speaker's intention as a kind of favor, adopting the belief on request (as Ross notes, 1986: 74). But it does serve to clarify the kind of role that is to be played by the mutual recognition of the speaker's intention, how that can matter epistemically to the audience in the way suggested by Grice's progressive refinements of the account of non-natural meaning. The account of this role suggested by the Assurance view is that the mutual recognition of intention can play the role for the audience of providing him with a reason for belief, because he sees the speaker as presenting himself as accountable for the truth of P, and asking, through the recognition of his intention, that this offer of his assurance be accepted. And it is understood by both parties that this acceptance is something which the audience is free to give or refuse. The speaker is asking that a certain authority of his be acknowledged; the authority to invest his utterance with a particular epistemic import, and this investment occurs by his explicit assumption of responsibility for his utterance's being a reason for belief. This is the role for the recognition of intention that the speaker is asking for. And, I would argue, it is *only* such a role that could account for how, in the case of speech, the recognition of intention *enhances* rather than detracts from the epistemic status of the phenomenon (utterance), reveals it to be something other than doctored evidence.

The idea of assertion as providing reason for belief through the explicit assumption of responsibility for the truth of what is said accounts for a number of contrasts between belief through testimony and belief through confronting evidence. It points the way to understanding how the recognition of intention can play a positive role, rather than see it as something that is either epistemically irrelevant or undermining to the evidential value of the utterance. Further, a specific assumption of responsibilities is essentially an expression of a person's freedom, something that only makes sense as consciously assumed. It is for this reason that

words spoken during sleep, or under hypnosis, do not have the value of testimony, because they do not count as *assertions*, whatever expressive psychological value they might still retain as evidence. Like a promise or an apology, something only counts as a person's assertion when consciously presented as such by him.¹⁸

Promises and apologies, like acts of telling someone something, can be more or less reflective, more or less deliberate, done more or less voluntarily or under duress. Reference to the speaker's assumption of responsibility for the truth of what he says is not meant to deny that much of our speech is spontaneous and unreflective, or that much of what we acquire from the speech of others is more or less passively absorbed. 'Telling' also includes telling something by mistake, to the wrong person, or just blurting something out when we meant to keep silent. We express our freedom not only in our considered actions, but also in the actions that go wrong, or are forced upon us, and the outbursts that we immediately regret. Blurring something out when you meant to keep silent is still a different matter from either talking in one's sleep, or having the utterance of those words be produced by electrical stimulation of the cortex. And the epistemic significance for the audience is entirely different in the two kinds of cases: in relating to the words produced by electrical stimulation we *may* learn something, but what we learn need not be dependent on such assumptions as, e.g., whether the person had any understanding of the words themselves, or any sense that he was providing anyone with a reason to believe something. These assumptions, however, are still indispensable to the understanding of the words that escape us or are forced from us, and they express the role of the person as such in providing a reason. This is confirmed by the fact that both speaker and audience relate to the blurring out differently than they would to the cases of talking in one's sleep or through electrical stimulation. In the latter case, the speaker would not *regret* what he said or try to make amends; in a sense what happened didn't involve *him* at all.¹⁹ And for that matter, a person may also *lie* spontaneously or out of panic as well as tell the truth. But surely the description of a person telling a lie makes reference to such things as the intention, whether conscious or not, to exploit the trust of one's audience and present oneself as providing them with a reason for belief. At the same time, it is consistent with the Assurance view to think of assertions and tellings as something like the default assumption for indicative sentences in the declarative mood. It requires more, rather than less, sophisticated intentions to utter 'The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain' and *not* mean it as an assertion. And so, barring any special reason to think otherwise, we may be entitled to treat an utterance of an indicative sentence as an assertion of it.²⁰ But in a given case we may be wrong about this, and it remains true that what settles the question about the status of the utterance is whether or not the speaker is presenting it as true.

THE SPEAKER'S CONFERRAL: HAVING YOUR SAY, GIVING YOUR WORD

We are now in a position to clarify the problem Ross suggested with the idea of a speaker presenting his utterance *as* evidence for his audience. The problem is not that the speaker's words could not be *taken* as evidence by his audience. In principle, anything said or done by the speaker can be given a symptomatic reading. Nor is it true that the speaker could not privately *intend* that his words be taken as evidence. This would be the intention for many cases of deceit or more everyday manipulation, for instance. In a given case, my primary aim may be for my listener to draw the conclusion that I'm being scrupulously candid or self-revealing, and I accomplish this by confessing some minor fault of mine. Here, I am not *telling* anyone of my candor, giving my word on it (whatever good that would do), but rather doing something (in this case: saying something) that I hope will be taken as evidence for it. When it is a question of *non*-natural meaning, by contrast, the speaker is not relying on evidential relations alone to get his point across, but rather is counting on the explicit presentation of his intention to be the very thing which *makes* his words a reason for believing something in the first place. The recognition of his intention could only function this way if it was seen to be his assurance of the truth in question, his explicit assumption of responsibility for the truth of what he says. By contrast, the presentation of his utterance *as* evidence would be an implicit denial of this responsibility, breaking the link between the proposition he is giving his backing to and the belief he is hoping to induce, in which case there's no question of believing *him*. Thus for the speaker to present his word *as* evidence would be for him to present it as a reason to believe, while suspending the guarantee that gives it the epistemic significance of testimony in the first place. This is the problem Ross is pointing to.²¹

And as we have seen, to present something as evidence is to present it as having its epistemic value independent of one's own beliefs about it, or one's presentation of it, or the conferral of some status upon it. To offer some phenomenon as evidence is to present it as belief-worthy independent of the fact of one's presenting it as belief-worthy. When we present something as evidence for someone, we are inviting that person to 'see for himself', to find it convincing as we do. And we are prepared to offer reasons why it should be convincing, reasons independent of our simply *claiming*, once again, that it is belief-worthy. To present something as evidence is to be in a position to *report* that it is a reason for belief, and to be in this position one must be presenting that claim of belief-worthiness as having a basis in fact that is independent of one's reporting itself. A photograph has such an independent epistemic basis, independent of anyone's conferral. As a phenomenon, it counts as a reason for belief independently of anything concerning how the photographer may conceive it or present it. Because of this independence, its epistemic status is something the photographer himself may *discover*

about it, or speculate about. His relation to this question is in principle no different from anyone else's. He may, of course, happen to know something about how it was produced that we don't know, and which may affect its epistemic status. But he may not know anything of the sort, and conversely we might know more about it than he does. He marshals the same kinds of reasons as any other viewer in considering the question of what beliefs the photograph may provide a basis for.

But the speaker's relation to the epistemic status of his own assertion *is* different from anyone else's. For the speaker, it is not a matter of observation or speculation whether he is indeed presenting his utterance as something with the force of a committed assertion, and were he somehow unclear about this, then to that degree his utterance would be something less than a committed assertion. He may inquire into his own reliability, truthfulness, and command of the facts, but the status of his utterance as assertion is a matter of what he is then and there prepared to invest it with. It has been noted by more than one philosopher that the relation of 'believing someone' does not have a reflexive form; it is not a relation a person can bear to himself.²² The problem with this, we can now say, is the problem with the idea of a person offering and accepting an epistemic guarantee from himself, which would require him to be simultaneously in command of and at the mercy of his own freedom. This is another basic feature of testimony not captured by an evidential perspective on it. Speaker and audience do not confront the utterance as a phenomenon with an independent or natural epistemic status which they could assess in the same spirit, for the speaker does not confront his own assertion as a *phenomenon* at all, but as an issue of his commitment. To speak of 'conferral' of epistemic status is intended to register the fact that to count an utterance as, e.g., an assurance or a promise just is to count it as something presented with a particular epistemic status, the status of a reason for some belief (as contrasted with the status, say, of recitation or ironic mimicry). To count as a competent speaker of a language is to be recognized as having definitive 'say' over which illocution one's utterance counts as, whether as informative assertion, or as promise or apology, whether as a mere recitation or as a claim expressing one's commitment. An utterance counts as an assertion or an apology just in case the speaker presents it as such to his audience, in the appropriate context where his audience can be expected to recognize what it is being offered. The speaker cannot count as having promised or asserted something if he had no such intention, or if he did not present his utterance to be seen as a promise or assertion, whereas the evidential import of what he says and does is independent of such conditions.

The speaker's authority to determine the illocutionary status of his utterance is the authority he has to present himself as accountable for the performance of some speech act. This is not a matter of discovery for the speaker, something he could investigate or report on, as he might with respect to the evidential status of something. When it is a question of the evidential status of something, even something the person himself has done, he and his interlocutors are on an equal

footing with respect to establishing its standing as a reason for belief. A person does not speak with any special authority about the evidential significance of his actions, including his verbal ones. By contrast, the authority to present oneself as 'hereby' assuming certain responsibilities in speech makes the speaker's epistemic position irreducibly different from that of his audience. For him the import of his words is not an independently obtaining fact, something he has his own opinion about, but is directly dependent on the import he is then and there prepared to invest them with. And it is internal to the notion of the speaker's authority to confer illocutionary status on his utterance that he also has the exclusive authority to cancel or revoke such status. Words can be retracted, apologies or warnings taken back, but only by the speaker himself. At the same time, he has no authority to determine, much less cancel, the evidential import of anything he has said or done, not even of his retraction itself.

When all goes well, in testimony a speaker gives his audience a reason to believe something, but unlike other ways of influencing the beliefs of others, in this case the reason the audience is provided with is seen by both parties as dependent on the speaker's making himself accountable, conferring a right of complaint on his audience should his claim be false. Whether this counts as a good or sufficient reason for belief is *not* a matter of the speaker's illocutionary authority, but will depend both on his sincerity and on his having discharged his epistemic responsibilities with respect to the belief in question.²³ But his presentation of his utterance as having this particular illocutionary force *is* what makes it candidate for epistemic assessment in the first place, and determines what kind of reason for just what proposition his audience is being presented with.

This way of looking at testimony makes much of the fact that in its central instances speech is an action addressed *to* another person, and that in testimony in particular the kind of reason for belief that is presented is one that functions in part by binding speaker and audience together, and altering the normative relationship between them. It doesn't follow from this, however, that someone outside that normative relationship can't avail himself of it and thereby acquire a reason to believe the same thing. If one person gives his word on something to another, whether as promise or assertion, someone overhearing this may derive a sufficient reason to believe, say that the speaker will in fact do what he promised or that what he asserted is true. And the overhearer improves his epistemic situation in this way, without entering into the altered normative relationship of the two parties involved in giving and accepting of words. He has not himself been *told* anything, much less promised anything, and no right of complaint has been conferred upon him.²⁴ To say this much, however, does not provide a reason to assimilate his situation to that of someone confronting a piece of evidence, or suggest that the speaker's illocutionary and epistemic responsibilities aren't playing a

genuinely epistemic role here. For even though the statement was not addressed *to him*, the overhearer is still in a different position from that of someone confronting a piece of evidence like a photograph or a footprint. It still makes a difference to his epistemic relation to the overheard report that he is responding to something whose epistemic significance is not independent in the way of a photograph or footprint, but is inherited from the speaker's assuming responsibility for the truth (and meaning) of what he says. This is so even if, as we might say, that responsibility was undertaken with respect to another person and not himself.

Naturally there is a certain vagueness as to just what situations will count as overhearing, and in a given case the addressee may be a group of people. Nonetheless, while the overhearer may get a reason to believe without having the right to complaint that is conferred on the addressee, the fact that the overhearer of the assertion acquires any reason to believe from listening to these words is dependent on them being addressed to someone, with the force of assuming responsibility and thereby conferring a right of complaint. The overhearer of testimony is not in the same normative relation to the speaker as the addressee is, but his gaining any reason to believe is dependent on such a conferral having been given to someone. Without that, the question of what speech act, if any, is being performed with these words would not be settled, and hence the overhearer could not get started on assessing their epistemic significance. (Imagine overhearing someone say "The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain". Until you know what speech act, if any, is being performed here, you don't know if considerations of reliability or trustworthiness are even relevant to the status of the words as source of knowledge about the weather in Spain.) So, while in both cases (promising and telling), the overhearer can gain a reason to believe something without entering into the normative relation of promisor-promisee or teller-believer, in the overhearing of testimony he only gains a reason to believe something because such a relationship *has* been established by the original speaker and addressee.

This, then, is how I suggest we understand Ross's claim that the evidential view is inconsistent with the kind of reason for belief offered in everyday human testimony. In telling his audience something the speaker does not present his utterance as something with the force of evidence because that would be to present his words as having their specific epistemic import apart from his assurance, and the responsibility he thereby assumes. And in obscuring the speaker's responsibility, such a stance would also obscure the nature of the audience's dependence on him. For if it were a matter of evidence then in principle we would both be on an equal footing with respect to establishing its epistemic import. But this equity does not obtain with respect to someone's words, where it is up to the speaker alone to determine whether they are to count as an assertion or other committed speech act.

EVIDENCE AND DISHARMONY

The two broad views about testimony which I've been calling the Evidential View and the Assurance View are in no disagreement over the status of an assertion or a promise as essentially the action of a free agent. Both views are clear that speaking is a voluntary activity, and that the speech of others has *that* kind of significance in our lives. Where they differ is in how that freedom is related to the status of the utterance as a reason to believe. For on the Assurance view, it is not just that a particular free action is seen to have some epistemic import, but rather that the epistemic import of what he does is dependent on the speaker's attitude toward his utterance and presentation of it in a certain spirit, whereas by contrast, it is in the nature of genuinely evidential relations that they are not subject to anyone's conferral or revocation. It might still be asked, however, whether it doesn't still all come down to evidential relations in the end. The following reconstruction may be offered: Yes, the speaker freely assumes responsibility for the truth of what he asserts. But now this very act of assurance is a *fact*, which the audience confronts as evidence (of some degree of strength) for the truth of what has been asserted. Speech is acknowledged to be importantly different from other (indicatively) expressive behavior, but the audience's relation to it, as a reason to believe something, can only be evidential.

The claim of the Assurance view, however, is not that an assertion could not be treated purely as evidence. It is always possible to treat anything a person says or does as constituting further evidence for one thing or another, and there is no level at which this somehow becomes impossible. The point instead is that refusing to acknowledge any epistemic stance toward the speaker's words other than as evidence means that speaker and audience must always be in disharmony with each other, for in the contexts of telling, promising, and apologizing the speaker is not *presenting* his utterance as evidence. And it is internal to the speech acts of, e.g., telling or thanking that they are not presented as evidence for one's belief or gratitude. To present one's utterance as evidence would be to do something other than to tell, promise, or apologize.

This claim may seem paradoxical. On the Assurance view, the making of an assertion can be treated as evidence, can properly *be* evidence for various things, but the practice cannot coherently be described as the *offering* of evidence. But how could this be? If the speaker recognizes that his asserting can be, or even just *is*, evidence for the truth of the very proposition asserted, then how could there be anything amiss with him presenting it *as* something (viz. evidence) that he sees it legitimately *is*? But this general possibility for self-defeat should not be surprising. To allay the sense of paradox here, compare the assurance given in a *promise* with that of an assertion, and consider the incoherence or self-defeat in saying something like, I promise; but of course I might change my mind, or forget, or cease caring. Here as well, the speaker is only saying something that

both parties know to be true, about himself and about promises in general. But to say so is, at the very least, contrary to the spirit in which a promise is made, contrary to the very point of making a promise. And what makes for this self-defeat is precisely the presentation of it in an evidential spirit. For notice: for someone to say 'I promise, but I might change my mind' is to refer to his promise as a fallible indication of future performance. That is, it is to present it as a kind of defeasible evidence for what he will do. And, of course, insofar as a promise is seen as evidence at all it can only be seen as *defeasible* evidence. Hence for the speaker to offer his promise as evidence means he must be offering it as, at best, defeasible evidence, with respect to which the promisee is on his own. And to do so is contrary to the point of making a promise, which is assurance.

The disharmony between speaker and audience entailed by the Evidential view comes out in the consideration of two possible responses to receiving a promise. If someone promises to mail a letter for me, one thing I might do is accept his promise, placing myself in his hands and taking myself to now have sufficient reason for believing that he *will* mail the letter. If it turns out he *doesn't* mail the letter, either through carelessness or because he never really intended to, then I will feel aggrieved and let down. This is the ordinary expectation and liability to disappointment. I might, however, opt for another kind of response altogether. Here I don't *accept* the promise; I simply don't go in for that sort of thing, as I may not accept promises from a small child or (for different reasons) from someone I despise, but in another way I do take seriously the fact that he made one to me. In this spirit I may reason: 'He is unlikely to make a promise he won't fulfill, since that would discredit him as a future promisor, and there are great and obvious advantages in remaining someone whose promises are accepted. Therefore, the fact that he made this promise to me makes it probable that he will in fact mail the letter. So I believe he will.' If, on this second scenario, I later discover that he did not mail the letter after all, my reaction will be different. I will be disappointed, of course, and I will be surprised that he would discredit himself in this way. But I can't confront him with my complaint or my resentment because I never accepted the promise in the first place. My relation to this person's promise is similar to my relation to the person I suspect of 'double-bluffing' me. I don't believe him; there's no question of that. But nonetheless his statement that he's traveling to Minsk functions as my reason for believing that this is what he will do. In both cases the speaker has made me a free declaration which I then make evidential use of to infer to the truth of what he says. On the Evidential view, this second type of response to promises and assertions would have to be the only epistemically legitimate one, and yet such a reconstruction would yield an incoherent description of the practices of telling or promising. It would be incoherent because on such a view the speaker would have to be in the position of offering assurances that are never accepted, and which he knows are never accepted, and the audience would nonetheless be relying on the continued offering of such free assurances to serve as his evidential base.

The issue of harmony between speaker and audience goes deeper than this, however, and helps to delineate the relationship between the speaker's authority to determine the illocutionary status of his utterance, and its actual epistemic import. In asserting that P, where the context is one of 'telling', the speaker is not in a position to constitute his utterance as a good or sufficient reason for P, since that will depend on his credentials and success as a knower, as well as his honesty. But in the act of telling his audience that P, he does claim definitive 'say' in determining that his utterance is being presented as a *reason for belief*, rather than, say as a speculation or grammatical example, as well as determining just *what* it is that he is giving his word on. From the speaker's perspective both determinations matter to the alignment of speaker and audience that he sees himself as aiming at. From a purely evidential perspective, however, it shouldn't matter to the audience whether the route from the speaker's words to a true belief involves the loop in double-bluffing or not. And just as clearly in such a case there would be failure of correspondence between the spirit in which the statement is made and that in which it is received. The speaker who asserts P is *not* indifferent to whether he induces belief in his audience through the loop of double-bluffing. His assertion is asking for belief in the *very* proposition stated and for the *very* sort of reason that he is then and there presenting to him. And *that* sort of reason is bound up with his presenting himself as accountable for this truth. In double-bluffing, the reason for belief taken by the audience is different from the reason the speaker offers. What 'telling' aims at, by contrast, is that there be a correspondence or identity between the reason the speaker takes himself to be offering and what the audience accepts as a reason. So we might say, in telling his audience that P, the speaker asks that his authority be acknowledged to determine what sort of candidate reason for what belief is up for consideration. This is the spirit in which his statement is made, and it is this that is denied by treating his utterance in a wholly evidential spirit, in which the question of what is being considered a reason for what is anybody's business, and is not tethered to the speaker's awareness or intent. Conversation may of course move into and out of this dimension of assessment, but for purposes of either agreement *or* disagreement it cannot begin there.

In the speech act of telling, the speaker commits himself to his audience with respect to a particular proposition, and with respect to the kind of reason being presented. This follows from the difference between doing something that *has* a certain epistemic significance (as with taking or showing a photograph) and being responsible for something's *having* the epistemic significance that it has (as with a speaker and his words). In telling his audience something, the speaker aims at being believed, an aim which is manifest to both parties, and which binds the speaker and audience together with respect to a norm of correspondence between the reason offered and the reason accepted. When an act of telling completes itself, speaker and audience are aligned in this way through their mutual recognition of the speaker's role in determining the kind of reason for belief that is up

for acceptance, so that when the speaker is believed there is a non-accidental relation between the reason presented and the reason accepted. The speaker says, in effect, "The kind of reason for belief you gain from my statement is precisely the kind of reason for belief I am hereby presenting myself as offering you. Insofar as there is a disparity between the two, I disavow responsibility for whatever belief you may derive from my assertion." Presenting his utterance that way is a kind of declaration of transparency to his audience: the kind of reason overtly presented is precisely the reason that is meant to count for you. When the background of the speaker's knowledge and sincerity can be assumed, and the speaker is in fact believed by his audience (a common enough occurrence, after all) the two parties are in sync with each other in a way that they would not be if the audience were to take the utterance either as a reason for some other belief rather than the one stated, or a different kind of reason for that belief (as with double-bluffing). Taking the utterance as evidence detaches the reason-giving significance of the utterance from the speaker's authority to determine what he is thereby committing himself to.²⁵ From an evidential perspective it may function as evidence for any number of things, for which the speaker's competence or responsibility may be irrelevant. This is manifestly not the speaker's perspective on the epistemic significance of his statement, which he sees in terms of the nexus of a specific responsibility assumed and a specific entitlement conferred.²⁶

For the act of telling to complete itself there must be a correspondence between the reason being *presented* by the speaker and the reason *accepted* by his audience. This is the nexus that is aimed at in the self-reflexive aspect of the Gricean formula, wherein the speaker asks that the very reason he is thereby presenting be the reason that the audience thereby accepts (i.e., through recognizing that very intention). Telling aims at being believed, which proceeds, via the speaker's overt assumption of responsibility, by joining together the particular belief proposed for acceptance, the kind of reason being presented for it, and the reason accepted by the audience. An evidential stance, by contrast, de-couples all of these from each other, to be reassembled as the observer thinks best. But such a stance is contrary to the speaker's perspective on his action, insofar as it pictures his presentation of himself as meaning, in effect, that as far as reason-giving force goes, the audience is on his own; as if the meaning of his utterance were "Now I have spoken; make of it what you will", rather than "Take it from me".

More is conveyed in our ordinary assertions that the specific proposition asserted, and more is often *intended* to be conveyed by the speaker, and much of this will be picked up in an evidential spirit. All of which is to say that not all, not nearly all, speech takes the form of one person telling something to another, testifying to its truth. Not everything we need to convey is best conveyed by being *told* to another, in part because not everything we need to communicate is something we could sensibly ask to be relied on for, present ourselves as accountable for, or ask to be accepted on our say so (e.g., the occasional comedy or tragedy in someone asserting his own dignity or probity). Nonetheless, it is clear enough

what Anscombe means when she speaks of the insult and injury in not being believed.²⁷ And the offence remains even when the speaker's audience takes his having made the statement to count as evidence for its truth, just as above he may take the speaker's having made the promise to make it more probable that he will do the thing in question. The offence lies in his refusing to accept what the speaker freely and explicitly offers him, in favor of privately attending to what the speaker's action passively reveals, just as someone might refuse an apology while still taking it in this case to be a reliable indication of remorse. What makes sense of such refusals is the fact that acceptance of an assertion or an apology doesn't just put one in a different epistemic position with respect to the facts, but brings with it certain vulnerabilities and responsibilities of its own. Accepting an apology, for instance, brings with it the responsibility to put away one's resentment, and makes one vulnerable to a particularly bruising possibility of deceit. These risks are avoided by simply taking the apology as more or less good evidence for remorse, and then making of it what one will.

The Evidential picture puts speaker and audience into disharmony with each other in mislocating the connection between what the speaker does and the fact that it provides a reason for belief. From the speaker's point of view, it is not a matter of what his behavior passively indicates, but a matter of what he then and there presents himself as assuming responsibility for. Unlike an evidential relation, the connection between the speaker's words and what he asserts or what he promises is entirely at his disposal to declare or to retract. The possibility of such retraction is central to the meaning of speech acts of assertion, promising, and the like, and shows how different they are in meaning and consequence from other actions. The speaker alone has the authority to bestow such epistemic import on his words, or cancel it; whereas he speaks with no such authority over the evidential import of anything he does or says.

Speaking of course, *is* an action; something with consequences in the world like other actions, and which leaves behind evidence of itself. But the exclusivity of the speaker's authority shows that retracting one's words is not to be confused with undoing the consequences of an action that went wrong. Often enough, another person could in principle clean up after the mess I made as well as I. But no one else can take back what I said. And, of course, taking back what I said does not make it as if it never happened. After I've taken back what I said it may still take a long time for me to undo the damage my hard or thoughtless words have caused. But that doesn't mean that taking them back doesn't accomplish anything, that I might just as well not have returned to them. There's still an important difference in the situations before and after the angry words are retracted. Indeed, taking them back was a prior condition for the more practical (or consequential) work of starting to try to undo the damage they caused. And that's a different kind of task. I cannot '*hereby*' undo the damage, the hurt feelings I caused; that takes consequential work, which may fail in unforeseen ways, like any other action. But again, that doesn't mean that the sort of thing I *can*

accomplish 'hereby' is something I perform magically or effortlessly, or that it may not be something I can only manage with great difficulty. It will, however, be a different kind of difficulty from that involved in repairing the actual damage. If I try and fail here, at the level of retraction or apology, it will not be for reasons of unforeseeable accidents, or the general resistance of the world to our wills.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Locke: "For, I think, we may as rationally hope to see with other Men's Eyes, as to know by other Men's Understandings. So much as we ourselves consider and comprehend of Truth and Reason, so much we possess of real and true Knowledge. The floating of other Men's Opinions in our brains makes us not a jot more knowing, though they happen to be true." (Locke 1975: 1, 4, 23.)
2. Or back to observation sentences: cf. Quine and Ullian (1970: 33–5), which makes explicit comparison of testimony with the 'extension of the senses' provided by telescopes and radar.
3. 'On Miracles' (Locke 1975).
4. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
5. I follow other recent writers in characterizing this as a Humean position, but I don't argue for the attribution. For a dissenting view, see Saul Traiger (1993).
6. Coady (1992) and Burge (1993).
7. Burge's argument is very different, and I will not be examining its details here. In particular, unlike Coady as we will see, his account does not appeal to a principle of charity in the situation of radical interpretation. What it shares with Coady's argument is the aim of providing some *a priori* warrant for believing what is said. Burge argues for what he calls the Acceptance Principle, which states that: A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so (Burge 1993: 467). He states that this is not an empirical principle (1993: 469). And the general form of justification associated with it is meant to apply equally to our epistemic dependence on other *people* ('rational sources') and to our dependence on certain *capacities*, what

he calls ‘resources for reason’, such as memory and perception (1993: 469–70). By contrast, for my purposes the difference between our dependence on memory and perception and our dependence on other people is all-important for the understanding of testimony.

8. Summarizing his line of criticism of one version of the reductionist thesis associated with Hume, Coady says “The difficulty consists in the fact that the whole enterprise of RT” in its present form requires that we understand what testimony is independently of knowing that it is, in any degree, a reliable form of evidence” (Coady 1992: 85).
9. With some obvious exceptions; for instance, if I learned of his beliefs from the bragging admission of the person who deceived him. But these sorts of cases are just what is taken to be excluded by speaking of ‘other things being equal’.
10. When in the course of a discussion of Moore’s Paradox and the idea of “two people speaking through my mouth”, Wittgenstein asks, “Where is it said in logic that an assertion [*Behauptung*] cannot be made in a trance?”, I understand him roughly to be saying: Logic (on some conception of it) may well say nothing about the speaker’s awareness of what he is doing in making an assertion, just as the same conception of logic permits statements of the form ‘P, but I don’t believe it’, but both possibilities are contrary to the point and hence the meaning of assertions (Wittgenstein 1980, §818).
11. I should add that I’ll only be discussing a part of Ross’s argument, focusing on his criticism of an evidential view of testimony, and not his positive account of how assertion contributes to belief. Michael Welbourne’s account of testimony in his monograph, *The Community of Knowledge* has various affinities with Ross’s, including the denial that an act of telling is presented by the speaker as evidence, and an emphasis on believing the speaker as the target notion for an understanding of testimony (and the concept of knowledge itself on Welbourne’s view).
12. And if we take it that assertions are made in the course of following out a proof, or in *ad hominem* argument, then it’s clear that their role in providing reason for belief needn’t even depend on the assumption that the speaker believes what he says. See Moran (2005).
13. For purposes of the account of testimony developed here, we need not of course follow Walton in his claim that the object itself is in fact seen in the photograph, for it is precisely the differences between photographs and assertions that concern me here.
14. Grice (1957), in Strawson (1967: 44). Ross discusses natural vs. non-natural meaning at p. 74.
15. At the end of her paper, Anscombe (1979) points out that it is a requirement of any successful account of the phenomenon that it explain why we only speak of believing someone when we take them to be both right about the facts and truthful in intent.
16. Austin (1962: 57).
17. Here I agree with Harman (1986: 88) in seeing as mistaken Grice’s later attempts to eliminate the self-referentiality in his original formulation for non-natural meaning. (“Much of this complexity is artificial and due to Grice’s refusal to stick with the original analysis and its appeal to a self-referential intention.”)

18. Coady (1992: 45–6) distinguishes genuine testimony from the situation of someone who has been hypnotized specifically to say something, perhaps even with the expectation of being believed. But his reason for excluding this case is different from mine. For Coady, this cannot count as ‘testifying’ because it fails to satisfy the condition that the speaker has the relevant competence, authority, or credentials to state truly that P (1992: 42), since the words have more or less been ‘planted’ in the subject. This focus on epistemic authority seems misplaced, however. For the speaker in this case *could* after all also happen to have the requisite competence and authority on the subject. Instead, the reason this doesn’t count as testimony is that, in his present condition, he is not presenting himself as responsible for P’s being true.
19. Holton (1994) provides an illuminating focus on the role of what Strawson refers to as the Participant Stance and the Reactive Attitudes, especially with regard to the distinction between belief through trust and belief through reliance. Holton says of the latter case, “Seen in this way, a person is like a measuring device: they respond to the environment in various ways, and we infer from their response to what the environment is like” (1994: 74).
20. Something like this assumption is expressed in Bernard Williams’s idea of assertion as the “direct expression” of one’s belief (Williams (2002: 74 *passim*), which I discuss in Moran (2005: 347–50)).
21. “No abandonment of the agent’s perspective, no abdication of responsibility for one’s actions, is involved in seeing those actions as generating entitlements and obligations, either on the part of ourselves or on the part of others. (Compare the case of promising or issuing a command.) There is on the present account no difficulty in seeing the hearer as taking the speaker’s words in the spirit in which they are honestly offered” (Ross 1986: 79).
See also Robert Brandom’s richly developed account of assertion in terms of the constellation of entitlements and obligations (Brandom 1994: ch. 3).
22. After a ‘preamble’, Anscombe *begins* her essay with the statement “‘Believe’ with personal object cannot be reflexive” (1979: 144). See also Cavell: “A striking exception to the thought that I can stand in any relation to myself that I can stand to others is that of belief. Why apparently can I not, in grammar, believe myself?” (Cavell 1979: 393).
23. Cf. Williamson (1996): “To make an assertion is to confer a responsibility (on oneself) for the truth of its content; to satisfy the rule of assertion, by having the requisite knowledge, is to discharge that responsibility, by epistemically ensuring the truth of the content. Our possession of such speech acts is no more surprising than the fact that we have a use for relations of responsibility.”
24. For further discussion of the assertions and promises, emphasizing their differences as well as similarities in their relations to the speaker’s responsibilities, see Watson (2004).
25. That the directness of the audience’s dependence on the person of the speaker as such is related to the directness of the speaker’s own relation to the reasons on which he *bases* his belief is something I have been helped to see by Leite (2004). Because the speaker’s statement of his reasons is not a hypothesis he makes about the origin of his belief, his assertion makes *him* (and not, e.g., something inside him) directly accountable for the truth or believability of his claim. Leite puts it the following

way: “Suppose that you consider reasons for and against a claim, find that certain reasons decisively support holding it, and sincerely declare that you believe the claim for those reasons. In the usual case, you thereby directly determine what the reasons are for which you hold the belief. Moreover, in declaring your reasons you both open yourself to epistemic evaluation or criticism on account of those reasons’ inadequacy and incur certain obligations—in particular, an obligation either to give up the belief or to seek better reasons, should those reasons prove inadequate. A minimal adequacy condition for an account of the epistemic basing relation is thus that it allow (1) that the reasons for which a belief is held can be directly determined in this way, and (2) that one sometimes directly opens oneself to epistemic criticism and incurs further justificatory responsibilities by sincerely declaring that one holds one’s belief for particular reasons” (2004: 227–8).

26. Putting it this way describes the relationship of speaker and audience in terms of an essentially correlative or “bi-polar” normativity, of the sort that has recently been explored by a number of philosophers. By contrast, the non-personal nature of evidence, the independence of its epistemic force from its being presented as a reason *to* another person, expresses the “monadic” character of its normativity. It was only at a late stage of working on this paper, that I began to see the direct relevance to these issues concerning testimony of the work on “correlativity” “bi-polar normativity” and private law by Ernest Weinrib (1995), Martin Stone (1996 and 2001), and Michael Thompson (2004); as well as Stephen Darwall’s work (forthcoming) on the second-person standpoint, all of which will repay further study in thinking about speech and testimony.
27. Anscombe, (1979: 150). See also Austin (1979: 100).

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