

The Social Character of Testimonial Knowledge[†]

Introduction

Through communication, we form beliefs about the world, its history, others and ourselves. A vast proportion of these beliefs we count as knowledge. We seem to possess this knowledge *only* because it has been communicated. If those justifications that depended on communication were outlawed, all that would remain would be body of ill-supported prejudice. The recognition of our ineradicable dependence on testimony for much of what we take ourselves to know has suggested to many that an epistemological account of testimony should be essentially similar to accounts of perception and memory. This premise I want to dispute.

Most would deny that perceptual knowledge is mediated. The acquisition of knowledge through communication is mediated in one obvious sense. In a case of successful perception, one knows that the world is a certain way because one is aware of the world being that way. But if we come to know that the world is a certain way through communication, we have no comparable awareness of how the world is. We know that the world is a certain way only because another has represented the world as being that way. As such, our acquisition of knowledge can depend on why the speaker represented the world to be that way and whether or not the speaker knows that the world is how he represented it to be. Thus testimony is mediated in the sense that the intentions of

another, and the justification possessed by another *are relevant to* the audience's acquisition of knowledge. These considerations have no parallel in either perception or memory.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a growing consensus in philosophy that epistemological accounts of testimony, perception and memory should be similar. John McDowell writes:

Just as one can capture a knower's justification for believing what he does by saying that he sees that things are thus and so, or that he remembers that things are thus and so, so one can capture a knower's justification — his knowledge-constituting standing in the space of reasons — by saying that he has heard from so-and-so that things are thus and so.¹

McDowell proceeds to give a disjunctive account of testimony, which accords, in all its essential aspects, with the disjunctive account he provides of perceptual knowledge.² Similarly, when Tyler Burge considers our *entitlement* to rely on testimony it turns out that:

Many of the differences between content passing between minds and content processed by a single mind derive from differences in modes of acquisition and in necessary background conditions, that do not enter in the justification force underwriting entitlement.³

This distinction — between a belief's genesis and its justification — allows Burge to drain the distinctive features of testimony of epistemic significance. Reliance upon testimony, as with reliance on memory or perception, is simply reliance upon a "resource for reason".⁴

I think that this approach to testimony gets its epistemology drastically wrong. In this paper I aim to provide an epistemological theory of testimony that recognises its difference to perception and memory. I take as my starting point the work of Tyler Burge. I focus on Burge's theory of testimony for a number of reasons. It provides an extreme case of aligning testimony with perception and memory. It is well argued. And unlike McDowell's theory, it lies within the mainstream of epistemology.

This paper is composed of five sections, this introduction and a conclusion. In the first section I consider Burge's *Acceptance Principle*, which states our entitlement to credulously accept testimony. The way in which Burge introduces the Acceptance Principle presupposes that, in certain respects, testimony is similar to perception and memory. In the second section I question this presupposition and consider a way in which testimony is quite distinctive. This motivates a converse principle stating that we must support our acceptance of testimony with reasons. I name this the *principle of assent*. In the third section I argue that the principle of assent is consistent with the justification of the Acceptance Principle and that it is compatible with a particular interpretation of the Acceptance Principle. I name this *re-interpreted* Acceptance Principle the *principle of warrant*. In the fourth section, I combine the principles of warrant and assent to form a *hybrid theory of testimony* and outline how this theory relates to existing epistemological accounts of testimony. In the fifth section I consider two different ways of understanding the principle of warrant. These provide two models of the *social nature* of testimonial justification. Finally I conclude by considering the dynamic that exists between individual knowers and communities.

Burge's Acceptance Principle

On Burge's view a belief is justified by the reasons that support it. He distinguishes two species of justification: argumentative justifications and entitlements.⁵ Argumentative justifications are arguments articulated by a believer to the truth of a proposition. The reasons articulated, therefore, "must be available in the cognitive repertoire of the subject".⁶ Entitlements state our epistemic rights to rely on certain cognitive practices. They are equally constituted by argument. But the articulation of such an argument requires a "God's eye" view of the cognitive practice.⁷ Thus, entitlement is the "externalist analog of the internalist notion, justification" (*ibid.*, p. 3). Entitlements "need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject".⁸ This may best be illustrated by turning to the relevant entitlement: our entitlement to credulously accept testimony.

We are entitled to trust testimony. When a speaker presents his testimony as true the audience is entitled to accept it, other things being equal. *A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so* (*ibid.*, p. 467). This is Burge's *Acceptance Principle*. Unless the audience possesses reasons to reject something that is intelligibly presented as true, he is entitled to accept it.⁹

The justification that Burge offers for the Acceptance Principle is extremely abstract. Its starting point is that seeming intelligibility allows an audience to presume that a speaker is rational. Its crux is the claim that because a speaker is rational an audience can presume that what the speaker presents as true, is true. Its "general form" is that an

audience is entitled to accept testimony because “*it is prima facie preserved (received) from a rational source, or resource for reason; reliance on rational sources — or resources for reason — is, other things equal necessary to the function of reason*”.¹⁰

An immediate and difficult problem for this argument is that it can be rational to lie. As such it seems that the (prima facie) *rational* characteristics of the source do not suffice to establish the (prima facie) *truth* of the source’s presentations. That is, the crux of the argument is far from obviously true. Why should a speaker’s rationality establish the presumption that when his testimony is presented-as-true, it is true? Burge provides the following argument.

One of reason’s primary functions is that of presenting truth, independently of special personal interests. Lying is sometimes rational in the sense that it is in the liar’s best interests. But lying occasions a disunity among the functions of reason. It conflicts with one’s reason’s transpersonal function of presenting the truth, independently of special personal interests. [Therefore]... Unless there is a reason to think that a rational source is rationally disunified - in the sense that individual interest is occasioning conflict with the transpersonal function of reason - one is rationally entitled to abstract from individual interest in receiving something presented as true by such a source. (*Ibid.*, p. 475).

One should be clear that insofar as a lie is rational its rationality is *independent* of the liar’s personal interest in that *any reasonable person* with such beliefs and desires would have acted accordingly. However, Burge’s point is that to understand a lie as rational one needs to consider the liar’s perspective. To understand the presentation of a truth as rational no such relativisation is needed. A primary function of reason is to present truth and truth is not relativised to a believer or time. Thus no relativisation is needed

because one can take, so to speak, “God’s view”. Let me call this the transcendental perspective: from this perspective the presentation of truth is a primary function of reason.

Burge takes the transcendental perspective because he is concerned, not with our justification in acquiring testimonial beliefs but with our entitlement to such beliefs. Burge’s conception of entitlements is a conception of a form of epistemic justification that articulates our right to rely on those cognitive practices that accord with the norms of reason. A focus on the norms of reason elides many of the differences between reliance upon perception, memory and testimony. Thus, the general form of the justification of the Acceptance Principle involves the equation of “rational sources” and “resources for reason”.

Lying effects “a disunity among the functions of reason”. The presentations of a rational source are not merely rationally supported — lies may be rationally supported. The presentations of a rational source may be presumed to be the presentations of reason. This is a strong presumption of rationality. This presumption underlies the Acceptance Principle and its justification. Burge states, “a *presupposition* [*not* a consequence] of the Acceptance Principle is that one is entitled not to bring one’s source’s sincerity or justification into question, in the absence or reasons to the contrary” — my emphasis. (*ibid.*, p. 468).

The Distinctiveness of Testimony.

The general form of the Acceptance Principle and its justification “are formulated so as to be neutral on whether what is ‘presented as true’ comes from another person” (*ibid.*, p. 474). If this is the case, I would argue, then the Acceptance Principle cannot apply to testimony. The fact that what is presented-as-true does come from another person is a distinguishing feature of testimony. In this section I will argue that this feature renders testimony epistemologically distinctive.

In order to recognise the distinctiveness of testimony one should start with the obvious point that we acquire testimonial knowledge through *communication*. However, our purposes in communicating are *not* merely to inform our audiences. Informing our audiences may be a secondary or derivative purpose — as when we tell someone something in order to get them to act — or it may be no purpose at all. Our purposes in communicating are many and varied. Few of these communicative purposes seem to *require* that a speaker believe what he expresses. For example, if I seek to reassure you, there seems to be no *need* for me to express something I believe, my concern is to express something you should find reassuring to believe and believable.

To a certain extent non-informative and non-deceptive communicative purposes can be bracketed by speaking of presentations-as-true. However, even if “testimony” and “presentation-as-true” are taken to be synonyms, story telling and jokes are still testimony. The existence of such speech acts makes it wrong to treat insincerity as the defeating condition in the acquisition of testimonial knowledge. One does not ordinarily acquire testimonial knowledge from a speaker who presents that *p* as true and yet

believes it to be false. Yet if the speaker were merely fooling it would be wrong to call him insincere. An insincere reassurance may be a lie, a joke isn't. Suppose that a speaker presents that p as true. Let me call this, the speaker's testimony. Let me say that if the speaker believes that p is true and he is correct, it is the case that p , then the speaker is *dependable*.¹¹ Whilst, if the speaker believes that p is false, let me say the speaker is *artful*. Insincerity implies but is not implied by artfulness. Artfulness implies but is not implied by undependability: a speaker may be quite sincere and yet express a falsehood. Considerations of artfulness and dependability are relevant to the successful acquisition of knowledge by testimony. Testimony thereby differs from perception and memory because these considerations have no corollary in either perception or memory.

It might be argued that considerations of artfulness and dependability are comparable to considerations of illusion in perception and memory. It is equally true, for instance, that if a subject is to acquire (non-inferential) perceptual knowledge, then he must not be hallucinating. However, this parallel only holds for the case of a speaker's dependability. The parallel does not hold in the case of artfulness because the expression of something thought to be false is quite *intentional*. It is the relevance of another's intentions that renders testimony *fundamentally* distinct from perception and memory.

A speaker cannot *believe* something that he thinks is false. A speaker can *express* something that he believes is false. Insofar as our purposes in communicating are varied, insofar as a speaker can communicate with no intention to either inform or deceive his audience, there seems to be no rational imperative constraining speakers to be artless. Even from the transcendental perspective artful communication is rational. When we fail to acquire knowledge from perception there is a sense that something has gone wrong.

When we fail to acquire knowledge from communication there is no sense that we have failed to communicate.¹²

The recognition of this distinguishing feature of testimony is reflected in our tendency to be sceptical of testimony. Our psychological attitude towards what we seem to perceive or remember is one of acceptance. Our psychological attitude towards what another tells us is to accept what we are told *only* given the presence of further background belief. These beliefs may relate to the testimony as a type. We distinguish types of content and types of speaker — an individual speaker can be thought of as a particularly narrowly defined type. These beliefs allow us to support acceptance with the judgement that the testimony is *credible*. On many occasions our acceptance is also supported by a judgement that the particular content expressed is true. Our psychological disposition is to accept testimony only given suitable supporting background beliefs about the testimony's credibility and truth.

Given that a speaker's intentions in communicating need not be informative and given the relevance of these intentions to the acquisition of testimonial knowledge, I take this psychological disposition to be rational. It is doxastically irresponsible to accept testimony without some background belief in the testimony's credibility or truth. In the case of perception and memory rational acceptance only requires the absence of defeating background beliefs. In the case of testimony, rational acceptance requires the presence of supporting background beliefs.¹³

This demand of responsibility may be expressed as a criterion of justification. *An audience is justified in forming a testimonial belief if and only if he is justified in accepting the speaker's testimony.* Call this the *principle of assent*. The "justified" should

be understood in Burge's narrow argumentative sense: a subject is justified if and only if there is an argument "available in the cognitive repertoire" of the subject to the truth of what is believed.

Assent and Acceptance

In this section I want to argue that the principle of assent is compatible with the Acceptance Principle and consistent with its justification. I take the Acceptance Principle first.

The following distinction may be drawn. A justification connects an episode of believing with the truth of the proposition believed: it should state for what reasons a belief is held and it should determine that the proposition believed is, at least, likely to be true. These two aspects are conceptually separable: one may discriminate between the *justification of a belief* and the *justification of a proposition*. Thus the distinction I should like to draw is between the justification supporting the proposition expressed by the speaker's testimony and the justification supporting the audience's acceptance of this proposition.

The Acceptance Principle draws an epistemic consequence from the following presumption. One may presume that (seemingly) intelligible testimony is true because one may presume that it is justified. (Read "testimony" as "presentation-as-true".) This distinction between the justification of a belief and the justification of a proposition allows the following interpretation of this presumption. If a given testimony is justified, this justification epistemically supports the *proposition* the testimony expresses. If an

audience understands and accepts this testimony, this justification continues to support this proposition, now the object of the audience's belief. In this sense, justification is *preserved*. However, *this justification does not justify* the audience's acceptance of the testimony.

To interpret the Acceptance Principle in this manner is to pursue an analogy suggested by Burge. "The Acceptance Principle" Burge states, "is clearly similar to what is widely called a 'Principle of Charity' for translating or interpreting others." , 487. The Principle of Charity is primarily a methodological rule of interpretation, which could be glossed: *one should optimise the agreement between oneself and another*. However, given Davidson's view of interpretation, this methodological rule has the epistemic consequence that belief by its nature is veridical.¹⁴ This epistemic consequence could be formulated as the principle: *one is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that any given belief of a rational speaker is true*. Confronted with a sentence held-true, this principle does *not* entitle the interpreter *to accept* that *this sentence is true*. In forming beliefs as to *which* sentences held-true are true the interpreter is guided by "hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course common-sense, or scientific, knowledge of explicable error."¹⁵ How these beliefs are *individually* justified "is no easier to specify than to say what constitutes a good reason for holding a particular belief."¹⁶

On this re-interpretation the Acceptance Principle does not state the conditions that justify belief. As such it does not articulate an epistemic right to credulity. Thus interpreted the Acceptance Principle might be better phrased: 'a person is entitled, other things being equal, to presume that those propositions presented as true and

intelligible to him are justified'. Or more simply, *a person is entitled to presume other things being equal, that propositions expressed by intelligible testimony are justified*. To this principle the following claim about preservation should be appended: whatever justification in fact supports a testimonially presented proposition continues to support this proposition once accepted. This interpretation of the Acceptance Principle is consistent with the distinction between testimony and belief. Given the distinctiveness of testimony, one may presume that a *particular* proposition is justified only if one has reason to believe that the presenting testimony is credible (or one has independent reason to think that the proposition is true).

Let me now turn to the justification of the Acceptance Principle. What I termed the principle of assent is consistent with Burge's justification of the Acceptance Principle because the latter requires a strong assumption of rationality. This assumption, recall, is needed to support the crux premise in the justification of the Acceptance Principle. This is the premise that we are entitled to presume that another rational source of presentations-as-true is a source of true-presentations. The *mere rationality* of another source entitles us to presume that the presentations-as-true of this source will be justified. It would entitle us to this presumption only if *being rational* could be identified with *being doxastically responsible*.

Our psychological disposition is to accept testimony only given the appropriate supporting beliefs. Given the unique character of testimony, this disposition is doxastically responsible. The principle of assent asserts that these reasons are needed for justified belief. This assertion is consistent with the justification of the Acceptance Principle because an audience must also be a rational source. One could possess the

ability to understand presentations of propositional content only if one possessed the ability to intelligibly present propositional content. Thus, *if* there is a presumption that an interlocutor's presentations of content are backed by reasons, there should *equally* be a presumption that an interlocutor's reasons for accepting what is presented rationally back the belief formed through acceptance. That is, the entitlement articulated by the Acceptance Principle presupposes that the reasons accompanying acts of acceptance in fact justify our testimonial beliefs. This is captured by the principle of assent.

The Hybrid Theory

I have re-interpreted Burge's Acceptance Principle and coupled it with a principle I termed the principle of assent. Before stating the resulting epistemological theory let me get clear about terminology.

Let me introduce the term *warrant* in order to reserve the term *justification* for argumentative justifications, that is, in order to understand *justification* in Burge's narrow sense. This is *not* to say that warrant is constituted by a reliable process. I would argue that being produced by a reliable process, or tracking the truth, is necessary to a belief's warrant but I do not want to build this into the definition of warrant. I want to understand *warrant* generically as referring to any species of positive epistemic evaluation.¹⁷ If, for instance, entitlements are a form of positive epistemic evaluation, then an entitled belief is a warranted belief. A positive epistemic evaluation that is broader than, and yet which encompasses, justification is needed because testimony

allows that many of the things we believe may be supported by reasons that we have no access to and processes that are beyond us.

With this definition in hand, I propose the following theory of testimony.

(A) *An audience is warranted in forming a testimonial belief if and only if he is justified in accepting the speaker's testimony.*

(B) *If the audience is warranted in forming a testimonial belief, then whatever warrant in fact supports a speaker's testimony continues to support the proposition the audience believes.*

Let me call this the *hybrid theory of testimony*. It is hybrid because it is composed of two principles, one *internalist* and the other *social externalist*. I named (A) the principle of assent; it articulates an internalist claim. It is internalist because the formation of a warranted testimonial belief requires a justifying argument that articulates the audience's reasons for believing. This argument must be based on the audience's own experiences; in the fundamental case the audience's reasons for acceptance will be his experience of what testimonies are credible. Let me name (B) the principle of warrant; it articulates a social externalist claim. It is externalist because in accepting testimony an audience frequently believes propositions whose warrant could not possibly be equated with whatever justification the audience has for acceptance. This externalism is social because the existence of this warrant depends on there being other agents for whom this proposition is warranted. That is, the principle of warrant states the sense in which testimony preserves warrant.

Let me define the *extended warrant* of a proposition presented by testimony as the conjunction of the warrant possessed by the original speaker for believing this proposition together with any further warrant provided by the chain(s) of communicators. The presumption that intelligible testimony is warranted plays a role akin to that played by the principle of charity: an audience may presume that his *justification for acceptance* hooks onto the extended warrant of the proposition accepted. In the same way an interpreter may presume that his reasons for taking a sentence to be true pick up the native's reasons. Our justifications for acceptance, as it were, refer to the further more complete warrants that we take to support our testimonial beliefs.

The hybrid theory is hybrid in another sense: it can be seen as a combination of *reductionism* and *anti-reductionism*. To contrast reductive and anti-reductive positions is one way of setting up the debate on testimony.¹⁸ The reductionist would assert that it is our reasons for accepting testimony that provide the justification for our testimonial beliefs. The warrant of a testimonial belief is thereby *equated* with the warrant that is possessed for the associated judgement of credibility. This position is reductionist in that 'testimonial warrant' thereby reduces to the warrant that we possess for beliefs deriving from other sources of knowledge. By contrast, the anti-reductionist would assert that a belief formed through credulous acceptance could be warranted *merely* because it is a testimonial belief. The judgement that a testimony is credible or that the proposition it expresses is true is thereby *fundamentally irrelevant* to the warrant of the associated testimonial belief.

Anti-reductionism is by far the most common epistemological position — on this definition both Burge and McDowell are anti-reductionists — and reductionism has been

severely criticised, most notably by Coady.¹⁹ However, both theories are grounded in well-motivated epistemological ideas. Each may be seen as the product of an attempt to directly extend an epistemological theory that is successful, to whatever degree, for perception and memory. The reductive and anti-reductive positions then emerge as reactions of their guiding epistemological idea to the epistemic distinctiveness of testimony. That is, both positions may be represented as the product of those forces that have shaped the hybrid theory.

One could suppose that perception and memory are sources of knowledge because our perceptual and recollective faculties or mechanisms are reliable. This supposition could be extended. One could equally suppose that testimony is a source of knowledge because we possess a reliable *testimonial faculty*. This faculty would take as input the fact of a speaker uttering 'U' and expressing that *p*, the circumstances of the speaker's utterance and any other relevant beliefs of the audience. As output this faculty would produce in the audience the disposition to believe credible testimony and the disposition to disbelief otherwise.²⁰ Alternatively, one could suppose that perception and memory are sources of knowledge because an apparent perception or recollection provides defeasible reasons for belief. Again this supposition could be extended. One could equally suppose that the mere fact of a speaker uttering 'U' and intelligibly expressing that *p* provides a *prima facie* reason for believing that *p*.

Both of these suppositions have a certain antecedent plausibility. The problem that testimony poses for both is that our psychological attitude is to be much more sceptical of what others tell us than what we seem to see or remember. I spent the second section

of this paper developing and defending this attitude. Recognition of this attitude, I suggest, provokes the following changes to the suppositions just made.

With respect to the supposition that we possess a reliable testimonial faculty, it may be the case that our dispositions to acceptance are in fact reliable, but whether or not this is the case is a matter of some concern for us. We know that speakers can be undependable and artful. We desire to avoid dumb credulity. Thus we possess quite extensive background beliefs to support any act of acceptance. Insofar as our acceptance of testimony is guided by this reasoning, it seems that any supposition of reliability must be based on the supposition that our reasoning is adequate. However, if the *process* of acceptance is essentially the *rational* process of assessing credibility, then it seems better to characterise the posited testimonial faculty in internalist terms. Reductionism is the position that results.

With respect to the supposition that mere intelligibility provides a reason for belief, it may be that there is some basic connection between intelligibility and truth, but it is matter of concern for us whether or not this connection holds between any given utterance and its truth. Again, we know that speakers can be undependable and artful. It seems plainly gullible to just accept something *merely* because it is intelligible. This is not to say that no such epistemological principle is tenable. But if such a principle is to remain tenable, it cannot claim that mere intelligibility provides a *reason for belief*. An alternative type of epistemic appraisal is needed. Burge introduces the notion of entitlement. Entitlement is *not* a reason for belief; the Acceptance Principle is not to be used as a premise in an argument to justify acceptance. The Acceptance Principle,

rather, states that sometimes an audience is entitled to accept testimony credulously, without reason. This position is anti-reductionist.

The hybrid theory combines reductionist and anti-reductionist claims. The warrant of a testimonial belief cannot be equated with the warrant that is possessed for the associated judgement of credibility. The propositions that we come to believe through testimony may be supported by an extended warrant that is much greater than, and of quite a different nature to, the warrant supporting a judgement of credibility. However, a judgement of credibility, or the judgement that the proposition a testimony presents is true, is not irrelevant to the warrant of the associated testimonial belief. No belief formed through credulous acceptance could be warranted; one needs reasons for accepting testimony.

Communities of Knowledge

Our justifications for acceptance can be knowledge supporting, but they need not be. Our acquisition of knowledge can depend on whether or not another possesses knowledge. The knowledge possessed by an individual can depend on the external social fact of whether or not warrant is possessed by others. How should this social nature of warrant be modelled?

To focus this question, let me consider a simple case of epistemic dependence. An original speaker S_1 sees that p and tells S_2 that p , S_2 tells that p to another and so on till we get to S_n who tells that p to the audience A . Suppose that S_1 knew that p , that A was

warranted in forming the testimonial belief that p , and that A did not have a knowledge supporting justification for acceptance. In this simple case how should one characterise A 's relationship to speakers S_1 to S_n ? Within the context of the hybrid theory the issue is how to interpret the principle of warrant given a larger context of communicators. However, this question is independent of the hybrid theory: it should be addressed by any theory of testimony allowing that audiences can be epistemically dependent.

I want to consider two classes of answer to the question of A 's relation to S_1 to S_n . On the first *transmission model* S_1 to S_n form a *chain of testimony* and A knows that p if and only if there is knowledge in the chain. There are two options here depending on whether A 's knowing that p requires S_n has knowledge, or merely that one of S_1 to S_n have knowledge. Burge's position fits the transmission model. He states, "If the recipient depends on interlocution for knowledge, the recipient's knowledge depends on the source's having knowledge as well."²¹ This suggests the stronger claim that A 's knowing that p requires S_n has knowledge. However, in a footnote Burge immediately removes this implication. "Some chains with more than two links seem to violate this condition. But there must be knowledge in the chain if the recipient is to have knowledge based on interlocution" (*ibid.*, note 24). This makes the weaker claim that A 's knowing that p requires one of S_1 to S_n to have knowledge. This weaker claim seems the right one. Suppose a teacher propounds a theory he does not believe. The teacher's rejection of the theory seems to imply that he does not have knowledge of it. However if the theory is known, then it seems that the students could be in a position to acquire this knowledge.

The alternative is the *community model*. On this model S_1 to S_n form a *community of knowledge* and A knows that p if and only if the community possesses knowledge.²² Hardwig suggests that only the community model can explain scientific collaboration. He refers to an experiment, recording charm events and measuring the life span of charm particles, that was conducted by *ninety-nine* physicists.²³ This immense collaboration was required not simply because the experiment needed approximately 280 man / years to execute but also because a division of skills and knowledge was needed in order to execute it. Suppose that S_1 to S_n were the ninety-nine physicists and that p the experimental result. Hardwig states,

Unless we maintain that most of our scientific research and scholarship could *never*, because of the cooperative methodology of the enterprise, result in knowledge, I submit that we must say that p is known in cases like this. But if $[A]$ knows that p , we must also say that someone can know “vicariously” - i.e. without possessing the evidence for the truth of what he knows, perhaps without even fully understanding what he knows. And this conclusion would require dramatic changes in our analysis of what knowledge must be. If this conclusion is unpalatable, another is possible. Perhaps that p is known, not by any one person, but by the *community* composed of $[S_1$ to $S_n]$.²⁴

Obviously we want to allow that our scientific research can result in knowledge. Thus Hardwig claims that testimony presents the epistemologist with the following dilemma. An internalist requirement on knowledge is that a subject S can know that p only if S possesses evidence for the truth of p . The epistemic dependence experienced on certain occasions where testimonial knowledge is acquired then forces us to either abandon this

internalist requirement — and thereby introduce “dramatic changes in our analysis of what knowledge must be” — or regard this requirement as satisfied, in some sense, by the community of knowledge.

The hybrid theory avoids Hardwig’s dilemma. The judgement that a testimony is credible provides a reason for thinking that the proposition it presents is true. Possessing a belief in the credibility of a testimony, the audience possesses evidence for the truth of the propositions it presents.²⁵ Burge would simply deny there is a problem: the Acceptance Principle and its justification do not introduce “dramatic changes”.

My interest lies in the second horn of Hardwig’s dilemma and the idea that a community can possess knowledge. Our linguistic practices certainly provide some support for this idea. We treat many scientific discoveries as *common knowledge*. For instance that the Earth goes round the Sun or that water is H₂O. If that *p* is common knowledge, one could state “we know that *p*” or speak of “our knowledge that *p*”. In both these statements there is an equivocation. The pronouns ‘our’ and ‘we’ could refer distributively to epistemic subjects *qua* individuals, or they could refer *collectively* to epistemic subjects *qua* members of some community. In this latter sense, the sentences “we know that *p*” and “our knowledge that *p*” refer to knowledge that is possessed by the community.

This raises the question of how a community could possess knowledge. Hardwig seems to suggest that it is *the community that knows*. Obviously he would allow that *A* can acquire knowledge from *S_n*’s testimony. Thus *A* could acquire knowledge even if none of *S₁* to *S_n* have knowledge (and by the assumptions made *A* does not have a knowledge supporting justification for acceptance). I want to reject this notion of common

knowledge. If A acquires knowledge, then at least one of S_1 to S_n must know that p . (Maybe S_n , the article writer who collates all the results.) This accords with the first horn Hardwig's dilemma. An internalist will require that the knower have some cognitive access to the warrant supporting what is known. A community could have access to the warrant supporting what is commonly known only if some community member had access to this warrant. That is, no one in a community can know unless someone does.

On the *transmission model* S_1 to S_n form a *chain of testimony* and A acquires knowledge that p if and only if one of S_1 to S_n have knowledge. This condition should be understood recursively in the sense that S_n has knowledge if and only if one of S_1 to S_{n-1} has knowledge, S_{n-1} has knowledge if and only if one of S_1 to S_{n-2} has knowledge and so on. Thus, it is *not* required that one of S_1 to S_n have access to, or awareness of, what warrant determines that p is known. By contrast, on the *community model* S_1 to S_n form a *community of knowledge* and A acquires knowledge that p if and only if one of S_1 to S_n has access to, or awareness of, what warrant determines that p is known. (For example and respectively S_1 seeing that p , and S_n collating all the results of the other scientists.²⁶)

There seems little to choose between these models, both can certainly explain Hardwig's case of collaboration. However, I think that the community model is to be preferred because it provides a way of understanding the internalist 'access condition' at the social level. To illustrate this I want to consider a case where I think that it is intuitive that knowledge is lost.

A warrant should determine at least that a proposition is likely to be true. Many ordinary empirical propositions, for instance that it is raining outside, we can directly see to be true. The case of scientific theorems is quite different. We cannot directly judge whether

or not a statement about charm particles is true. If we are to believe some such statement, a justification is required. In the illustration considered, the experimental result constituted the basis of such a justification. The case of mathematical theorems is similar. Whilst some mathematical or logical truths may be intuitively grasped, or “seen” to be true, most require a justification. Fermat’s Last Theorem falls with the many: it is warranted only insofar as it is justified, that is proved.

Suppose Fermat did prove his last theorem. Let Fermat be the original speaker S_1 who tells S_2 his last theorem, S_2 then tells another and so on till we get to S_n who tells Fermat’s Last Theorem to A . And suppose that every acceptance of testimony was justified. Given these suppositions, it seems that A acquires knowledge.²⁷ Fermat can articulate the proof of his Last Theorem therefore he has knowledge. At least one of S_1 to S_n has knowledge therefore on both the transmission and community models A acquires knowledge.

Now consider the situation after Fermat’s death. Suppose Fermat died after S_{n-1} told S_n Fermat’s Last Theorem but before S_n told A . What is A ’s epistemic position given these suppositions? On the transmission model it is no different. Once Fermat told S_2 , S_2 has knowledge and, therefore, someone in the chain has knowledge.²⁸ On the community model, A ’s acceptance of S_n ’s testimony could still be justified by the belief that Fermat was a credible mathematician (and S_n an honest speaker) and thus A ’s testimonial belief could still be justified, but it could no longer count as knowledge. It could no longer count as knowledge because the community that is S_2 to S_n no longer contains any members who could articulate a proof of Fermat’s Last Theorem. The community, therefore, no longer contains any members who have knowledge. This bit of knowledge

has been lost.

This is not to imply that lost reasons no longer warrant. It is plausible to suppose that even if Fermat were to forget the proof of his Last Theorem, the fact that he did once articulate this proof is sufficient for his belief in his Last Theorem to count as knowledge. It is to imply that the conditions under which knowledge is lost to individuals differ to those under which it is lost to communities. If Fermat were to forget the proof of his Last Theorem (suppose he was suffering from senile dementia or some other ailment), then the community created by his testimony would lose access to this knowledge supporting warrant. As such, the community could no longer be said to know Fermat's Last Theorem and this is just short-hand for saying that all those who know this proposition only in virtue of being a member of the community could no longer be said to know Fermat's Last Theorem.

It is hard to provide an account of how knowledge is lost on the transmission model. Knowledge clearly can be lost and I take it to be intuitive that it is lost in this instance. On the transmission model it would not be lost. One may go further. It is plausible to suppose that there is a chain of testimony linking us to Fermat.²⁹ Thus, given the supposition that Fermat did prove his last theorem, its recent proof has made no change to this theorem's counting as knowledge. This seems wrong. I conclude that the community model provides a better conception of the social nature of testimonial warrant.³⁰

Conclusion

The case of Fermat illustrates a certain dynamic that exists between individual knowers and communities of knowledge. To conclude I should like show how the hybrid theory provides a means of conceptualising this dynamic.

According to the hybrid theory, the acquisition of knowledge requires the audience possess some *justification for acceptance*. However, an audience's justification for acceptance will rarely recapitulate the *extended warrant* of the proposition accepted. A consideration of how the audience's justification for acceptance can be related to the extended warrant of the proposition accepted then provides a means of conceptualising the epistemological engagement between an individual and the community.³¹ This engagement has (approximately) the following pattern.

If the audience's justification for acceptance is *no more* than a judgement of credibility, then, ordinarily, it should provide no supplementary reason for the truth of the proposition accepted.³² In this case the audience acquires knowledge only insofar as the extended warrant possessed by the community is knowledge supporting. If the audience's justification for acceptance provides further reasons to believe that the proposition presented by the testimony is true, then these further reasons can supplement the extended warrant possessed by the community. However, even if the audience's justification for acceptance were knowledge supporting, the prior extended warrant could still support the proposition accepted because the audience's justification would not, ordinarily, recapitulate this extended warrant.³³

Knowledge is retained all the while the extended warrant that supports the proposition known is accessible to the community. To say that an extended warrant is accessible is to say that some set of community members, individually or conjointly, have access to or could articulate this extended warrant. Where the kind of knowledge retained is that which requires warrant to be some kind of justifying argument, paradigmatically mathematical and scientific knowledge, then the extended warrant the community must have access to must be such a justifying argument. Where the knowledge retained is everyday empirical knowledge then the extended warrant the community must have access to could take one of three forms. (1) It could be the warrant that was originally associated with this piece of empirical knowledge. (2) It could be a justification based on this original warrant. (3) It could be a justification of the belief that the testimony expressing this piece of empirical knowledge is credible.³⁴ In the case of (3) one could speak of the community judging this testimony to be credible.

Let me end on a metaphysical note. The hybrid theory makes the possession of testimonial knowledge a fundamentally social affair. It is social in the strong sense that knowledge can be supported by a warrant that requires group articulation. Both a speaker's and an audience's reasons may be relevant. The social dimension is not merely the external. I end with the thought that these cases are metaphysically fundamental. This, I think, is Brandom's point.

If one *individualises* the space of reasons, forgetting that it is a *shared* space within which we adopt attitudes towards *each other* - and so does not think about standings in the space of reasons as socially articulated, as potentially including the social difference of perspective between attributing and undertaking

commitments, that is between your standing and mine - then one will not be able to understand knowledge as a standing in the space of reasons.³⁵

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[†] I am indebted to M.G.F. Martin and Matt Soteriou. My thanks to Matt Nudds and Tom Crowther.

¹ McDowell, J. "Knowledge by Hearsay" in *Knowing from Words*, edited by Matilal (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), pp. 195-224, p. 210.

² See McDowell, J. "Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982): 455-79.

³ Burge, T. "Content Preservation." *Philosophical Review* 102, no. 4 (1993): 457-488, p. 474.

⁴ Dummett stresses the similarity of testimony and memory, see Dummett, M. "Testimony and Memory" in his *The Seas of Language*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 411-428. For an emphasis on the general epistemic similarity of these faculties see Coady, C.A.J. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ The term *argumentative justification* is Sosa's. See Sosa, E. "'Circular' Coherence and 'Absurd' Foundations" in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) edited by LePore, pp. 387-397.

⁶ "Content Preservation" *op. cit.*, p. 459.

⁷ Burge, T. "Computer Proof, A Priori Knowledge, and Other Minds" *Philosophical Perspectives* 12, Language, Mind and Ontology (1998): 1-37, p. 28.

⁸ "Content Preservation" *op. cit.*, p. 458.

⁹ I.e. the "entitlement holds unless there are stronger reasons (available to the person) that override it." Burge, T. "Interlocution, Perception, and Memory" *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1997): 21-47, p. 22, n. 4.

¹⁰ "Content Preservation", *op. cit.*, p. 469

¹¹ Dependability is not equivalent to reliability: it concerns a *particular* presentation.

¹² McDowell claims that there is a sense in which we have failed to communicate. There is a sense because the essential function of communication is the transmission of information. He justifies this claim by a speculative appeal to our evolutionary history. A bird's squawk can warn other birds of the presence of a predator and the assertoric use of language, McDowell suggests, is a descendent of such proto-communication. See McDowell, J. "Meaning, Communication and Knowledge" in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P.F. Strawson*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), edited by VanStraaten, pp. 117-139. I should like to note three things. (1) Birds squawk more for display than to inform. (2) Group formation is plausibly the origin of human society and language. See Durkheim, E. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life: a Study in Religious Sociology*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1912) and Levi-Strauss, C. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1949). This suggests that the essential purpose of communication is the generation of the trust needed for any relationship. Jokes engender trust as much as informative truth telling. (3) It is probably better to side with Davidson on this. "It would be good if we could say how language came into existence in the first place. These matters are, however, beyond the bounds of reasonable philosophic speculation." Davidson, D. "Three Varieties of Knowledge" in *A.J. Ayer Memorial Essays*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) edited by A.P. Griffiths, pp. 153-166, p. 157.

¹³ One may put the *background* role of these beliefs this way. If an audience were to lack a dispositional belief in either the credibility of a given testimony or the truth of the proposition it presented, the audience would not accept the testimony. Supporting points are made by Adler, J. "Testimony, Trust and Knowing" *The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 5 (1994): 264-75.

¹⁴ See Davidson, D. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" In *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-319.

¹⁵ Davidson, D. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 183-198, p. 196.

¹⁶ Davidson, D., ed. *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, *op. cit.*, p., xvii. This quote is out of context but its guiding idea is not. The whole quote starts, "Understanding can be secured only by interpreting in

a way that makes for the right sort of agreement. The “right sort” however is no easier ...” Davidson’s thought here is that the Principle of Charity cannot be made more specific than the rule glossed because whether the interpreter attributes error, whether or not he judges that in this case the sentence held true is not-true, is determined by his hunches etc. That is, the justification supporting these judgements is a matter of whatever “constitutes a good reason” for belief. It is not the entitlement stated.

¹⁷ As such, I am not understanding ‘warrant’ in Plantinga’s sense of ‘whatever is needed to make a true belief knowledge’. I allow for warranted true belief that is not knowledge.

¹⁸ For example see C.A.J. Coady “Testimony and Observation” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1973): 149-155, Leslie Stevenson “Why Believe What People Say?” *Synthese*, no. 94 (1993): 429-451, Elizabeth Fricker “Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony” *MIND* 104, no. 414 (1995): 393-411. These positions are sometimes called Humean and Reidian respectively.

¹⁹ Anti-reductionism could, for instance, be attributed to C.A.J. Coady, Michael Dummett, John Hardwig, P.F. Strawson, M.O Webb and Michael Welbourne.

²⁰ Fricker’s posits the operation the following subjunctive sensitivity, which she calls *monitoring*. “It is true throughout of the hearer that if there were signs of untrustworthiness, she would register them and respond to them.” Fricker, E. “Against Gullibility” in *Knowing from Words*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994) edited by B.K. Matilal, pp. 125-61, p.150. If she posited a correlative sensitivity to trustworthiness, then the ability to monitor could be understood in faculty terms.

²¹ “Content Preservation” *op. cit.*, p. 486.

²² The term ‘community of knowledge’ comes from Welbourne, M. “The Transmission of Knowledge” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 114 (1979): 1-9. He defines a community of knowledge in terms of *sharing* knowledge. If {A, B, ... } share knowledge of the facts that {*p*, *q*, ... }, then {A, B, ... } are a community of knowledge. This community of knowledge is constituted by acts of telling that {*p*, *q*, ... } as fact. I find this definition too reified. Academic philosophers may agree over few facts but surely constitute a community of knowledge. I use ‘community of knowledge’ to mean a social group constituted by acts of communicating about a certain topic.

²³ The article referred to is: “Charm Photoproduction Cross Section at 20 GeV”, *Physical Review Letters* 51 no. 5 (1983): 156-159.

²⁴ Hardwig, J. “Epistemic Dependence” *The Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 7 (1985): 335-349, pp. 348-9.

²⁵ Admittedly, it is not the best possible evidence. However, it is evidence in the ordinary way in which empirical generalisations are evidence for empirical predictions. And there could be no reasonable motivation for requiring that evidence be the best possible evidence.

²⁶ Let me be clear. The formulation of these models in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is compatible with the hybrid theory *only* given the background assumptions that (1) the audience’s acceptance is warranted and (2) the audience does not possess a knowledge supporting justification for acceptance.

²⁷ How difficult the proof was could be relevant. If the supposed proof was as difficult as the contemporary proof provided by Michael Wiles, then the audience would have a potential defeater for his judgement of credibility. That is, were he to know of the proof’s difficulty he would have reason to think S_n’s testimony non-credible. See Burge, “Computer Proof” *op. cit.*, note 9. Thus, for simplicity, let me suppose that the proof was as simple as Fermat’s marginalia suggests.

²⁸ This is to consider only these members of the chain that are alive. If this restriction is abandoned, the situation is worse. It is worse because *once* somebody in the chain has knowledge, there will *always* be somebody in the chain who has knowledge.

²⁹ In fact there is a direct chain: Fermat’s mathematical works are, what could be termed, *fossilised* testimony.

³⁰ I said that Burge holds the transmission model. This is clear in “Content Preservation” *op. cit.* However “Computer Proof”, *op. cit.*, has the following to say. “The conditions of dependence on previous members in the chain are complex. One’s immediate interlocutor might perhaps not be knowledgeable. But the interlocutor must either pass on knowledge that reposes somewhere in the chain or, as a computer might, *otherwise indicate the existence of grounds for knowledge.*” Note 9, my emphasis. Can one “otherwise indicate” historic warrants that are now inaccessible? If the answer to this is ‘No’, then it seems

that Burge's conception fits with the community model. One could interpret the italicised clause as a reference to a community possessed knowledge supporting warrant.

³¹ This characterisation of the relation of an individual to the community is not intended to be exhaustive. In particular I am concerned with the social character of warrant, rather than content. The claim that content has a social character is made by Burge, Tyler. "Individualism and the Mental." In *MidWest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. IV, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1979) edited by P.A. French, Jr. T.E. Uehling and H.K. Wettstein, pp. 73-121. And the claim that the relationship between warrant and content has a social character is made by Coady *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-73.

³² I say 'ordinarily' because in some cases the *only* warrant supporting a proposition is the judgement that the testimony presenting it is credible. For example the audience may be a historian making a judgement about a piece of fossilised testimony. See condition (3) below.

³³ A dialogue at the conference of physicists would be an example here. I say 'ordinarily' because, rather than recapitulate the extended warrant, the audience's justification may defeat the extended warrant. For example, and speaking crudely, Copernicus defeated our warrant for the Ptolemaic system.

³⁴ Consider the following situation. "Perhaps you and I and many others together map the coast of Australia: then I know by nontestimonial means that *this* bit has *this* shape; you know similarly *that* bit has *that* shape, and so on". Plantinga, A. *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 87. Suppose 'you and I and many others' are members of Captain Cook's crew. And consider the community of knowledge constituted by our composition of this map. In this community of knowledge the knowledge that '*this* bit has *this* shape' satisfies (1). The knowledge that 'Australia is *this* shape' satisfies (2). Now suppose the ship returns to England, the map is accepted by the Royal Geographical Society and all the crew dies. In the community of knowledge created by the now dead crews' testimony the knowledge that 'Australia is *this* shape' satisfies (3).

³⁵ Brandom, R. "Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LV, no. 4 (1995): 895-908, p. 904.