

TESTIMONIALY BASED KNOWLEDGE FROM FALSE TESTIMONY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this paper is that there are cases in which a recipient can acquire testimonially based knowledge from false testimony. The qualification of the knowledge as 'testimonially based' is important in characterizing the kind of case I wish to present. Ralph can come to know that Sally broke the vase from the nervousness she exhibits as she testifies (falsely) that she did not do so; Jennifer can come to know that Maurice does not know the difference between chimpanzees and orang-utans from his false (but sincere) testimony that he saw three chimpanzees at the local zoo; and so on. We might say that in each of these kinds of case the knowledge comes from the testimony without being testimonially based in the appropriate sense.¹

I shall be interested rather in cases of testimonially based ('TB') knowledge from false testimony. That there are such cases is of interest, if only because the philosophical literature on testimony has adopted an orientation from which the very possibility of such cases is obscured. The literature focuses exclusively on the conditions of transmission of epistemic status (justification, warrant, knowledge) in cases in which the proposition attested to is identical with the proposition believed by the recipient. The result is that TB knowledge from false testimony can seem impossible, for the simple reason that knowledge presupposes truth. I mean here to establish the possibility of such cases, and to draw out some implications of this possibility. Because the possibility of TB knowledge from false testimony trades on allowing that the proposition believed on the basis of the testimony need

¹ This distinction is owed to R. Audi, 'The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 34 (1997), pp. 405-22, see esp. fn. 14, p. 420. Cases of this sort will not be the focus of this paper.

not be identical with the proposition attested to, I also seek to expand discussion of TB belief and knowledge to include cases in which this identity does not hold.²

II. TESTIMONIALY BASED KNOWLEDGE

Given that I aim to present a case of TB knowledge from false testimony, it is important to characterize TB knowledge in as neutral a way as possible, in order to prevent objections to the effect that my conception of TB knowledge is too permissive (by treating as TB knowledge cases which ought not to count as such). Rather than proposing a particular characterization of TB knowledge which might then be objected to in precisely this manner, I shall instead propose a set of conditions which are such that if S 's belief that p satisfies those conditions, then S 's belief that p is to count as TB knowledge. In order not to beg any questions against any particular conception of TB knowledge, I shall present these conditions at a high level of generality (i.e., abstracting away from the details that distinguish the various conceptions of TB knowledge). My aim in doing so, of course, is not to formulate an analysis of TB knowledge, but rather to formulate what all parties should acknowledge is a set of jointly sufficient conditions for TB knowledge.

To my mind, five main conditions have been presented by one theorist or another in attempts to analyse what is involved in cases of TB knowledge.

First, S 's belief that p must satisfy an acquisition condition: it must be acquired from some piece of testimony.³ Where the testimony in question is

² Various articles focus exclusively on the case of S 's coming to know that p on the basis of accepting T 's testimony that p . This orientation is explicit in M. Welbourne, 'The Transmission of Knowledge', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 29 (1979), pp. 1–9, at p. 3; F. Dretske, 'A Cognitive Cul-de-Sac', *Mind*, 91 (1982), pp. 109–11, at p. 109; E. Fricker, 'The Epistemology of Testimony', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 61 (1987), pp. 57–83, esp. pp. 68–9, and 'Against Gullibility', in B.K. Matilal and A. Chakrabarti (eds), *Knowing from Words* (Amsterdam: Kluwer, 1994), pp. 125–61, at pp. 136–8; L.F. Stevenson, 'Why Believe What People Say?', *Synthese*, 94 (1993), pp. 429–51, at pp. 434–9 (see also pp. 442–3 and 448–9); Audi, fn. 14, p. 420 (where he speaks of 'your coming to know ... the proposition to which I attest'); J. Lackey, 'Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (1999), pp. 471–90, at pp. 473–4; P. Graham, 'Transferring Knowledge', *Noûs*, 34 (1999), pp. 131–52, at p. 131. Each of these articles deals with (some of) the conditions under which S acquires the knowledge (or, in some cases, merely the warranted belief) that p on the basis of S 's accepting T 's testimony that p . If it is not already obvious, my criticism here is not that this orientation is objectionable, but rather that it has the potential to obscure the possibility of the type of case to which I am trying to draw attention.

³ I am assuming that we have to hand a workable conception of what it is to count as testimony; for alternative accounts see C.A.J. Coody, *Testimony: a Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. 2; Fricker, 'Against Gullibility', esp. p. 139; Graham, 'What is Testimony?', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 47 (1997), pp. 227–32.

expressed, say, by testifier T 's utterance U on occasion O , satisfaction of the acquisition condition is presumably a matter of S 's observation of U figuring in the right kind of way in the causal aetiology of S 's belief that p .

Secondly, S 's belief that p must satisfy a semantic condition: it must be acquired from testimony which presented-as-true the same content as that of the belief which S acquired from that testimony.⁴ Thus we see that this requirement actually includes two distinct conditions: a semantic one, stipulating that the very content of the belief acquired be presented-as-true in the testimony, but also a pragmatic one, stipulating that the informational content of the testimony be presented *as true* (= be attested to), as opposed to being presented as hopeworthy, or as dubious, etc.

Thirdly, S 's belief that p must satisfy an epistemic-ground condition: the epistemic status of S 's belief that p , i.e., its status as warranted (or justified; I have no axe to grind), must turn on T 's trustworthiness and on T 's authority with respect to p on O . More specifically, this condition states that S 's belief that p is warranted if and only if T (or T 's testimony; again I have no axe to grind) is trustworthy and relevantly authoritative. The biconditional is appropriate when we are considering cases in which T 's testimony is the only epistemic support of S 's belief that p . But there are cases in which this is not so, as when S , who already believes that p prior to T 's testimony that p , takes this testimony to provide additional epistemic support for S 's belief. Such cases can be captured by replacing the biconditional with the conditional, yielding 'If T (T 's testimony) on O is trustworthy and relevantly authoritative, then S 's belief that p is warranted'. Since this point does not affect my main argument, I shall ignore it.

The point of this third condition emerges from the two cases presented by Audi (fn. 14). In each case, knowledge which is (in the loose sense) 'from testimony' is nevertheless not testimonially based. In the first case, Audi asks us to imagine that he attests, in a baritone voice, that he has a baritone voice; only he does not know this, since he falsely believes that he has a tenor voice. Having observed Audi's utterance, S (who has an excellent ear for these things) comes to believe that Audi has a baritone voice. From the present perspective, the case is excluded from the domain of TB knowledge on the ground that neither Audi's trustworthiness nor his authority with respect to the claim he makes is implicated in the warrant enjoyed by S 's belief that Audi has a baritone voice. In the second case, Audi asks us to imagine a case in which S comes to accept the conclusion of an argument which, though presented by Audi, is an argument which S knows Audi barely understands (and where S 's accepting the conclusion derives from S 's

⁴ See T. Burge, 'Content Preservation', *Philosophical Review*, 102 (1993), pp. 457–88, regarding the notion of 'presentation-as-true', as used in connection with testimony.

own recognition that the premises are all true and that they entail the conclusion). From the present perspective, this case is excluded from the domain of TB knowledge on the same ground as above: neither Audi's trustworthiness nor his authority with respect to the conclusion to whose truth he has attested is implicated in the warrant enjoyed by *S*'s belief in the truth of that conclusion.

To count as TB knowledge, a testimonially based belief must satisfy whatever remaining conditions there are on knowledge, in a way that is appropriate to the phenomenon of testimony. Minimally, these include a truth condition (the belief must be true) and a warrant condition (the belief must be epistemically warranted in the manner appropriate to the epistemic-ground condition). As noted, the satisfaction of the warrant condition is a matter of the vindication of *S*'s reliance on the trustworthiness and relevant authority of *T* (or *T*'s utterance *U* on *O*); that is, it is a matter of *T*'s actually being trustworthy and of *T*'s actually possessing the relevant authority with respect to *p* on *O*. It is worth noting in this respect that *S*'s belief that *p* can satisfy the epistemic-ground condition without satisfying the warrant condition, as when *S*'s belief that *p* depends for its warrant on the authority of *T*, but *T* fails to be relevantly reliable and/or authoritative. (One might also choose to add other conditions to these two conditions on knowledge; but since the addition of such conditions would not substantially affect my argument, I shall disregard this in what follows.)

I have little doubt that there are many controversies regarding what it takes to satisfy the various conditions just listed. The most interesting concern what it takes to satisfy the warrant condition. One's views on this matter will be shaped, e.g., by whether one is a reductionist or an anti-reductionist regarding the epistemic status of testimony,⁵ whether one treats trustworthiness and authority as predicated of testifiers or occasions of testimony,⁶ and whether one is externalist or internalist about epistemic justification. I do not want to enter into any of these debates. Fortunately, for the purposes of my argument I can remain neutral on all of them. My

⁵ For the anti-reductionist side see, e.g., Coady, *Testimony*; Burge, 'Content Preservation', and 'Interlocution, Perception, and Memory', *Philosophical Studies*, 86 (1997), pp. 21–47; Stevenson, 'Why Believe What People Say?' (this last presenting a conclusion asserting a moderate kind of anti-reductionism). For the reductionists see, e.g., Fricker, 'The Epistemology of Testimony', 'Against Gullibility', and 'Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony', *Mind*, 104 (1995), pp. 393–411; J. Adler, 'Testimony, Trust, Knowing', *Journal of Philosophy*, 91 (1994), pp. 264–75; J. Lyons, 'Testimony, Induction, and Folk Psychology', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 75 (1997), pp. 163–77 (where it is argued that some arguments against reductionism are not successful).

⁶ See, for example, Adler's reply in 'Testimony, Trust, Knowing' to J. Hardwig, 'The Role of Trust in Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophy*, 88 (1991), pp. 693–708; and M. Webb, 'Why I Know About as Much as You', *Journal of Philosophy*, 90 (1993), pp. 260–70.

case for the existence of TB knowledge from false testimony will rest on two contentions: first, that if a given belief satisfies all of the conditions above, then it is *ipso facto* a case of TB knowledge; secondly, that there are cases in which we can determine that a given belief does satisfy all of these conditions without entering into the debates above. I now proceed to present the case.

III. TESTIMONIALY BASED KNOWLEDGE FROM FALSE TESTIMONY: AN EXAMPLE

III.1. Martha is a very reliable friend of George. George hears Martha talking about a party she attended last night. Speaking of what she saw there, Martha reports that Jones was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party. (Context makes it perfectly clear that Martha makes this judgement on the basis of an observation she made while at the party.) However, George happens to know that Jones was not at the party in question. (George was privy to Jones' last-minute decision not to attend the party; Jones subsequently spent the entire evening in question with George.) George also knows that there are several people in town who are often mistaken for Jones (he is a rather regular-looking fellow). Still, none of George's doubts on the score of whom Martha saw warrants any doubts in his mind on the score of Martha's sincerity, nor does George doubt Martha's observation regarding the colour of the T-shirt worn by the person in question (whoever that person was). Consequently George accepts Martha's testimony in so far as this testimony includes the informational content that *someone or other* was wearing a bright pink T-shirt at the party. That is, having heard Martha's testimony, George comes to believe that someone was wearing a bright pink T-shirt at the party.

(If one resists using the notion of 'accepting' some piece of testimony in cases in which the recipient does not accept the whole proposition attested to, then we would need to coin another word to characterize this kind of 'acceptance'. Perhaps we could use 'P-accepts', where 'P' indicates that what is accepted is part, but only part, of the informational content of the proposition attested to. Throughout this paper, unless indicated otherwise my use of 'accept' will be neutral between (full) acceptance and P-acceptance.)

I submit that (given some stipulations which we can build into the story) this is a case in which George acquires TB knowledge from Martha's false testimony. I propose to establish this by arguing that it satisfies (or can be extended to satisfy) the various conditions above. Since it is obvious, I hope,

that the story can be told in such a way that George's belief satisfies the acquisition and truth conditions, I shall restrict myself to arguing that it satisfies the other three (semantic, epistemic-ground and warrant) conditions as well.

III.2. I shall begin with the semantic condition. Was George's belief (that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party) acquired from testimony which presented-as-true the information that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party? To be sure, the proposition Martha attested to is that Jones was wearing such a shirt. Even so, it seems reasonable to hold – what I shall call 'claim (C)' – that Martha's testimony (to the effect that Jones was wearing such a shirt) did present-as-true that someone was wearing such a shirt. Various considerations support the claim.

The first type of support for claim (C) comes from reflecting on the institution of testimony, and in particular on the role of the semantic condition in that institution. Testimony is a conduit for the transmission of knowledge (or at least of warranted belief): when all goes well, knowledge (warranted belief) is transmitted from one person to another. But if the institution of testimony is to serve as a reliable conduit for the transmission of knowledge, then the institution must be governed by a principle according to which, for all instances of testimony, the proposition believed on the basis of accepting that piece of testimony (the 'received proposition') must derive from the proposition attested to in such a way that the received proposition contains no more information than the one attested to – on pain of the received proposition's being liable to falsity in ways in which the proposition attested to was not. Ensuring that the received proposition is so derived is the point of the semantic condition. And we can note that claim (C) is consistent with the spirit of this point behind the semantic condition. In particular, there can be nothing wrong with a policy which would allow that the received proposition can be distinct from the proposition attested to, so long as the former does not contain any information which is not already contained in the latter. Whatever this talk of 'containing information' comes to (more on which below), this condition would be satisfied so long as the received proposition is recoverable as an instance of existential generalization on the proposition attested to.

But there are some objections that might be made to this. The first is that the conception of the semantic condition on which claim (C) is true is too demanding, ruling out cases which should count as cases of TB belief.⁷ Suppose that you tell me Jones was wearing a bright pink T-shirt at the party, that I have no evidence against the proposition to which you attest,

⁷ This objection, and the following illustration, were suggested by an anonymous referee.

that I take you to be trustworthy, etc., but that I also know that the guest of honour always wears that shirt (and that no one else does). As a result I come to believe that Jones was the guest of honour. This case does not satisfy the semantic condition as characterized above, but (the objection maintains) it is a case of TB belief for all that.

In reply, I want to suggest that this is not a case of TB belief at all, but rather a case of a belief acquired via an inference from a TB belief. This distinction, between the categories of TB belief proper and belief acquired as a result of an inference from TB belief, can be supported by appeal to what I shall call the principle of epistemic deferral. Suppose that (to continue the objector's example) it turns out that, while in all past cases the pink T-shirt was worn by the guest of honour and by no one else, in this case Jones (for devious reasons) wore the shirt without being the guest of honour. Now suppose that Judy, alive to the possibility of Jones' deviousness, challenges me to justify my belief that Jones was the guest of honour. It is clear that I cannot reply by saying that you so testified. (You would be quite right to protest against this attribution!) This is a clear indication that my belief that Jones was the guest of honour is not a TB belief, for it seems that in cases of TB belief the following principle of epistemic deferral holds:

If S 's belief that p is a TB belief acquired from T 's testimony, then S is entitled to pass the justificatory burden (with respect to S 's belief that p) on to T .

Without formulating this principle more precisely, I take it that the legitimacy of some version of the principle is behind the suggestion that, in cases of actual TB belief, the reply 'I heard X say so' is an acceptable (though not epistemically fundamental) reply to 'How do you know that p ?'. From this it follows that cases in which one would *not* be entitled to pass the justificatory burden on to another in this way are *ipso facto* not cases of TB belief. Hence the would-be objection does not involve a case of TB belief, and so fails to show that the semantic condition as conceived above is too restrictive.

However, this reply makes vivid another possible objection to the conception of the semantic condition proposed above. On this objection, the semantic condition as conceived above is seen as too liberal, allowing as cases of TB belief some cases that should not count as such. One might think to support this objection by appeal to the very distinction between TB belief proper and belief which is merely inferred from TB belief. For, returning to the original George–Martha example, it might be maintained that the informational content *that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt* was not presented-as-true by Martha's testimony so much as inferred from what was presented-as-true by Martha's testimony.

But this objection too is misguided. To begin with, the objector who holds that the above conception of the semantic condition is too liberal, and who hopes to show this in reference to the George–Martha case in the manner recently indicated, cannot appeal to the epistemic deferral principle to substantiate this allegation: that principle does not rule out the George–Martha case as a case of TB belief. For if challenged to defend his belief that someone or other was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, George could reply ‘I heard Martha testify to that effect’. To see that George is entitled to this reply, we need only note how we would react were Martha to deny epistemic responsibility for the claim that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party. If she were to deny this responsibility on the grounds of not having said that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, we would clearly side against her (‘Come now, Martha, what you said included this information!’). If so, the allegation that George’s belief is not a TB belief cannot be established by appeal to the epistemic deferral principle.

Building on this reply, we can tailor our comments more narrowly to the semantic condition itself. I have been claiming that the information *that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party* was presented-as-true by Martha. To support this we can appeal to a notion already in use in philosophy of language publications, that of *conveying* information. This notion can be used to explain why it is that we would side against Martha, were she to disavow epistemic responsibility for what George believes (on the basis of his having accepted a portion of her testimony). The explanation involves a point about the semantics of Martha’s utterance: the reason why George is entitled to say ‘I heard Martha say so’, when challenged regarding his claim to know that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, is that what Martha said, in testifying as she did, *conveyed* this information. Had her testimony not conveyed this information, he would not have been thus entitled. And so we see that the fact that we think that George is so entitled is evidence for the semantic thesis that the relevant information was conveyed in what Martha said (in testifying as she did).

As I mentioned, the notion of information-conveying has already been characterized and used in philosophy of language publications in matters not directly related to the present issue. So, for example, in the course of trying to defend his particular analysis of the notion of samesaying, M. Richard writes ‘To assert the proposition expressed by “Margaret wore a puffy pink suit” is to convey that expressed by “Margaret wore a suit”’.⁸ If

⁸ M. Richard, ‘Semantic Theory and Indirect Speech’, *Mind and Language*, 13 (1998), pp. 605–16, at p. 608. See also N. Salmon, ‘The Pragmatic Fallacy’, *Philosophical Studies*, 63 (1991), pp. 83–97, for a discussion of the notion of conveying information and its relation to what is said.

Richard's claim here is warranted, then the concept of conveying information appears to be available for use in other contexts – the present one, for example. And, though it is beyond my purpose here to defend Richard's claim (or his analysis of conveying), I note that the very fact that his concept of conveying information dovetails with the one I have presented above (in connection with my proposed conception of the semantic condition) should be some confirmation of the utility of this notion for semantic theory – and in particular for use in the present context.

Perhaps one final example will serve to illustrate the plausibility of my 'liberal' conception of what is presented-as-true. Suppose that Mary utters 'On September 24 it was raining very hard', but as she utters 'very hard' a loud noise makes these words inaudible. Greg, who was listening to Mary but who failed to realize that she uttered those last two words, accepts what he hears of Mary's testimony and so comes to believe (in a way that otherwise conforms to the conditions on TB belief and knowledge) that on September 24 it was raining. Here there can be no question of Greg's inferring this informational content from what Mary presented-as-true (Greg does not realize that the utterance extended beyond the words 'On September 24 it was raining'). Despite that, this is apparently a case of TB belief. As such, it must be taken to satisfy all of the conditions – and in particular, the semantic condition – on TB belief. And so, while this example differs from the George–Martha example in many important respects, if my description of it is acceptable the example does illustrate the particular point I am presently trying to make regarding what it takes to satisfy the semantic condition.

III.3. I turn next to the epistemic-ground condition. I shall say that (for arbitrary believer Q and proposition that p) Q 's belief that p satisfies the epistemic-ground condition in a straightforward way when the epistemic warrant for Q 's belief that p turns on whether that belief is rationalized by (some instance of) the following, which I shall call

Schema 1

1. Speaker T said (performed the speech act of saying) that p
2. T (T 's testimony on this occasion) satisfies the conditions on trustworthiness and authority regarding the question whether p
3. Therefore p .

(Perhaps I should add a 'no evidence available contrary to the truth of p ' condition to these two premises; however, since doing so would not affect my argument, I shall stick with the simpler version.) And I shall say that Q 's belief that p is rationalized by schema 1 when (first) there is a T and a speech

act of T 's on which both of the premises of schema 1 are true, and (secondly) the truth of both premises of schema 1 is relevant to the epistemic appraisal of Q 's belief that p . (It should be clear that one's views regarding what it takes to satisfy the relevance condition will depend on, e.g., whether one is an internalist or externalist about epistemic justification.) The point of this analysis is this: to have acquired a belief in a way that satisfies the epistemic-ground condition on TB belief and knowledge is simply to have acquired a belief whose warrant depends on the say-so of another, in the manner of schema 1.

Returning now to the case of George and Martha, we can see that George's belief that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party does not straightforwardly satisfy the epistemic-ground condition. This is so for the simple reason that on the basis of the evidence he has available George rejects (or would reject) the proposition to whose truth Martha has testified. That is, George would reject as false the relevant instance of premise (2) of schema 1. At the same time, however, George's belief that someone or other was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party is not rationalized by schema 1, but it is rationalized in an analogous way.

I can formalize the point with the following special case of schema 1, involving cases in which the communicated proposition is singular:

Schema 1.1: singular propositions

1. Speaker T said (performed the speech act of saying) that a is F [where ' a ' is a singular term]
2. T (T 's testimony on this occasion) satisfies the conditions on trustworthiness and authority regarding the question whether a is F
3. Therefore a is F.

George's belief cannot be rationalized as the outcome of an application of schema 1.1, any more than it can be rationalized as the outcome of an application of schema 1. However, his belief can be rationalized as the outcome of an application of a schema which is an abstraction from schema 1.1. The relevant schema is this:

Schema 2

1. Speaker T performed a speech act that amounted to a saying whose content included the information *that ... is F* (i.e., that something is F)
2. T (T 's testimony on this occasion) satisfies the conditions on trustworthiness and reliability regarding the question whether ... is F (i.e., whether something is F)
3. Therefore something is F.

And so we see that while George's belief cannot be rationalized as the

outcome of schema 1, and so does not straightforwardly satisfy the epistemic-ground condition on TB belief and knowledge, his belief can be rationalized by a schema (= schema 2) which is an abstraction from a special case (1.1) of schema 1.

Interpreting this result, we can say that George's belief satisfies the epistemic-ground condition on TB belief and knowledge, albeit in a non-straightforward way. This is a fancy way of saying two things: first, that what George believes (= that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt) depends for its warrant on Martha's trustworthiness and her relevant authority (this is why it is correct to speak of George's belief as satisfying the epistemic-ground condition in the first place); and secondly, that the relevant authority is not the authority *vis à vis* the truth of the proposition Martha attested to, but rather the authority *vis à vis* that portion of what she attested to containing the informational content that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt (this is the point of the modification 'in a non-straightforward way').

III.4. So far I have argued that George's belief satisfies the semantic and epistemic-ground conditions on TB belief and knowledge. Assuming that (it would be easy to tell the story in such a way that) his belief satisfies the acquisition condition and the truth condition, we shall have vindicated the claim that he has acquired TB knowledge from Martha's false testimony when we have shown that his belief satisfies the warrant condition. It seems easy to construct the story in such a way that the warrant condition is satisfied. Suppose that Martha really did see someone (albeit someone she mistakenly took to be Jones) wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, and that it was that experience which she was reporting when she testified that Jones was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party. Suppose that Martha is a trustworthy sort, that she perceived the T-shirt in question in a good light, and that her eyesight has never been anything but excellent. Then Martha was trustworthy and authoritative with respect to the hypothesis that the individual she saw was wearing a pink T-shirt; in which case George's belief, whose warrant turns on Martha's trustworthiness and on her having the relevant authority, satisfies the warrant condition as well.

But there is at least one objection to the claim that George's belief satisfies the warrant condition on TB belief and knowledge. The objection might be presented as follows. At the time of the party, Martha may never have explicitly formed the belief that someone or other was wearing a pink T-shirt. That is, she may only have formed the belief that Jones was. What is more, if at the time she presents her testimony (i.e., some time after the party) she were questioned as to whether someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, she would respond by saying 'Of course: Jones was!'. This

shows that, to the extent that at the time of her testimony Martha believes that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt, this belief is not justified (and so does not amount to knowledge), on the ground that (though true) this belief was inferred from a false premise. But (the objection continues) testimony can only transmit or preserve justification and knowledge, it cannot generate them. And so, since at the time of her testifying Martha did not count as justifiably believing (let alone knowing) that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt, she could not have transmitted such knowledge to George.

There are two objections to this line of reasoning. First, it is simply not clear that testimony only transmits justification and knowledge. On the contrary, that testimony can generate justification (as opposed to merely transmitting pre-existing justification) has been argued by Audi.⁹ What is more, it has also been argued that testimony can generate (not merely justification, but also) knowledge (for which see Lackey). So one of the main premises used by this objection is arguably false.

But secondly and more importantly, even if we assume that testimony only transmits justification (*contra* Audi) and knowledge (*contra* Lackey), we can equally describe a case in which (at the time of her testimony) Martha would count as knowing (and so as having a justified belief) that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, even as she falsely testifies that Jones was. Suppose that, instead of inferring that someone was wearing such a shirt from the proposition that Jones was, Martha consulted her memory when queried whether someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party. Presumably she could continue to recall having seen someone wearing a pink T-shirt at the party. To be sure, before being apprised that the person whom she recalls as having worn such a T-shirt could not have been Jones, she might well take herself to be recalling that Jones was wearing a pink T-shirt. But this only shows that memory reports are fallible (no surprise there). What is more, she would be reasonable to have more confidence in her claim to have recalled that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt than she has in her claim to have recalled that the person in question was Jones. If so, then upon being told that Jones was not at the party, she would quickly correct her erroneous report, but would continue to insist that she recalls having seen *someone* wearing that ('awful') pink T-shirt. Thus it seems that we can describe a case in which Martha does count as knowing (and so as having a justified belief) that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party, even as she falsely testifies that Jones was. And so we see that, even if

⁹ See especially Audi, 'The Place of Testimony', pp. 409–10; see also J. Edwards, 'Burge on Testimony and Memory', *Analysis*, 60 (2000), pp. 124–31, at pp. 127–9, for a suggestion, not endorsed by Edwards, regarding how Burge's views on the testimonial transmission of justification can be used to support this view.

the reasoning behind the objection is accepted, this does not show that there are no cases in which Martha would count as having that knowledge at the time of her testimony. Indeed, I have described such a case.

It is worth remarking in this connection that if George is to count as having acquired TB knowledge from Martha's false testimony, then he must not have acquired the belief that someone was wearing such a shirt by inferring it from the false belief that Jones was. For if George did acquire the belief that someone was wearing such a shirt in this way, then this belief would not amount to a case of testimonially based belief (as opposed to a belief inferred from a testimonially based belief), nor would it amount to knowledge (because inferred from a false premise). But again this does not tell against the claim that, given how he acquires the belief in the story presented above, George's belief that someone was wearing a pink T-shirt is a case of TB knowledge from false testimony.

IV. A PROGRAMMATIC CONCLUSION

I have just presented a case which (I have argued) is a case of testimonially based knowledge from false testimony. Admittedly my argument here falls short of conclusiveness. But given its plausibility, I want to conclude with a programmatic interpretation of this result.

The programmatic lesson to be drawn from the existence of cases of TB knowledge from false testimony is this. When epistemologists interested in testimony speak of the 'authority' (also the 'reliability') of the testifier (or of the testimony on a given occasion), this involves a simplification which, though usually appropriate, sometimes is not. As a first approximation, the simplification is that what the expressions 'authoritative' and 'reliable' apply to, when they apply on a given occasion to *T*'s testimony that *p*, is (the testifier's epistemic position relative to) the whole judgement that *p*. On the contrary, the George–Martha example suggests that testifiers can be epistemically authoritative (reliable) about one aspect of their testimony on occasion *O* but not authoritative (reliable) about another aspect of that very same testimony on *O*.

No doubt this talk of 'aspects of testimony' is less than clear. The main problem is that the notion of epistemic authority appears to be intelligible only in characterizing the relation between a subject and a judgement or claim: for it is only judgements or claims that have truth-values, and it is really the truth-value of a judgement or claim about which the subject can be said to be authoritative. For this reason, while it does make sense to speak of the epistemic authority a subject bears to (the truth-value of) a whole

proposition (= the content of a judgement or claim), it does not appear to make any sense to speak of a subject as being epistemically authoritative with respect to (the truth-value of) part of a proposition, for parts of propositions do not have truth-values.

For these reasons, we might try to make the point, which I made above by speaking of ‘aspects of testimony’, in the following way. From the perspective of understanding how the testimonial transmission of epistemic justification works in this case, the proposition to which Martha testified can be seen as containing two distinct ‘pieces’ of information. Since we shall want to speak of Martha as authoritative or not with respect to each of these ‘pieces’, each must be represented as a whole proposition. We might do so, for example, by saying that one of these ‘pieces’ of information is (what is expressed by) ‘That man [alternatively: the man I saw] was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party’, and the other is (what is expressed by) ‘That man was (=) Jones’.¹⁰ The point would then be that she is authoritative (reliable) regarding the first, but not the second.

At the same time, care is needed in interpreting the foregoing.¹¹ If the George–Martha example is to be interesting, it is important that what Martha said, in testifying as she did, must not be analysable as an assertion of two (implicitly conjoined) propositions. This is important, because examples in which testimony to the effect that p and q gives rise to a situation in which the recipient believes that p but does not believe that q are prevalent and not all that interesting. In order to make clear that the George–Martha case is not of this less interesting sort, I emphasize that the point of the previous paragraph is not that Martha’s utterance of ‘Jones was wearing a pink T-shirt at the party’, which appears to express one (singular) proposition, is in fact an assertion of two (implicitly conjoined) propositions. The point is rather that from the perspective of an examination of the testimonial link, the one (singular) proposition expressed by Martha’s utterance can be broken down into two distinct components (‘aspects’, ‘pieces’ of information) and that testimonial authority can be passed along with respect to either component. Once we have convinced ourselves that we can make sense of the idea of testimonial authority accruing to ‘aspects of testimony’ in this manner, we need only remind ourselves that the (conjunctive) representation employed in doing so is employed only for that purpose, i.e., only for the purpose of understanding how epistemic authority can be transmitted in informational packets that fall short of the full proposition.

¹⁰ This is the kind of analysis discussed by Gareth Evans in *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford UP, 1982), pp. 143–91, when he attempts to characterize what is unique about identification-free varieties of reference.

¹¹ I thank a referee for pointing out the need to make the following point clear.

The (conjunctive) representation employed there is not meant to capture what is said in such cases. This is as it should be, since appearances ought to be respected, and by all appearances Martha's utterance expressed one and only one proposition.

Once we remind ourselves of situations of the sort I have been discussing in the George–Martha case, we shall have seen our way to recognizing that there can be TB knowledge from false testimony, even in cases in which the testimony involves the presentation-as-true of one and only one proposition. To those interested in the epistemology of testimony, this result ought to convince us of the need to widen our scope of interest from an exclusive focus on content-preserving cases of TB belief and knowledge to include all of the cases in which information is conveyed in a testimonially based way from speaker to hearer.¹²

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