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INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVES ON TESTIMONY

Almost everything we know depends in some way on testimony. Without the ability to learn from others, it would be virtually impossible for any individual person to know much beyond what has come within the scope of her immediate perceptual environment. The fruits of science, history, geography – all of these would be beyond our grasp, as would much of what we know about ourselves. We do not, after all, perceive that we belong to one family rather than to another – this is something we are told.

Despite the overwhelming importance of testimony, it has been neglected to a large extent in the philosophical tradition. Arguably, this has resulted from a general sense that our other cognitive faculties, such as perception, are more basic and therefore ought to be the primary focus of our investigations. In recent years, however, the idea that testimony is of secondary importance has been forcefully challenged, and new ways of thinking of testimony have been fruitfully explored by a number of philosophers. The present issue of *Episteme* aims to build on this body of work and to broaden it by incorporating insights from three different groups of people: philosophers who have already done considerable work in social epistemology, philosophers who are for the first time applying their work in other areas of epistemology to testimony, and psychologists who study the development of our ability to learn from others. The papers in this issue, with one exception, were delivered at the fourth annual *Episteme* conference, held at Rutgers University in June, 2007.

Paper Summaries

Although there has long been discussion of inference to the best explanation both in philosophy of science and in epistemology, Peter Lipton provides the first application of this natural idea to the epistemology of testimony in his "Alien Abduction: Inference to the Best Explanation and the Management of Testimony." In particular, Lipton examines the prospects of applying inference to the best explanation – also known as 'abduction' – to an account of the way we decide whether to accept the word of others – also known as 'aliens.' The central idea of this application is that a hearer decides whether to believe the testimony of a speaker by considering whether the truth of that claim would figure in the best explanation of the fact that the speaker made it. In other words, the hearer believes the fact uttered when it is part of the best explanation of the fact of utterance.

The topic of epistemic egoism is one that has received considerable attention in the epistemology of testimony. This is not difficult to understand: claims

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central to the epistemic egoist stand in stark contrast to much of the work done by social epistemologists. In "Ethical and Epistemic Egoism and the Ideal of Autonomy," Linda Zagzebski distinguishes three degrees of epistemic egoism – extreme epistemic egoism, strong epistemic egoism, and weak epistemic egoism – and argues that all three of these notions are incoherent. In particular, Zagzebski argues that the epistemic egoist trusts her own cognitive powers, and exercising these powers in a world like ours commits her to trusting those of others, thereby committing the egoist to a rejection of epistemic egoism. Moreover, since epistemic autonomy is frequently identified with one of the forms of epistemic egoism in question, Zagzebski claims that epistemic autonomy is similarly incoherent.

Since a central debate in the epistemology of testimony centers around whether positive reasons are necessary for testimonial justification, the cognitive capacities of young children is a key issue. For if young children are not capable of acquiring the relevant sort of positive reasons, they will be denied testimonial knowledge on views that have this as a necessary condition. In "The Basis of Epistemic Trust: Reliable Testimony or Reliable Sources?," Melissa A. Koenig and Paul L. Harris examine empirical findings that shed light on the nature and scope of children's trust in the testimony of others. In particular, they review recent psychological work on children's consumption of testimony in relation to Hume's claim that testimony is trusted because hearers have observed a general conformity between reports and the corresponding facts in the past and then, via inductive inference, come to trust testimony encountered in the future. According to Koenig and Harris, while one facet of Hume's claim is supported by empirical findings regarding children's trust in testimony, another is not. Children are sensitive to whether testifiers have proved accurate in the past and this affects their subsequent trust in that testifier, but rather than focusing on features about testimony in general, children attend to the trustworthiness of individual speakers and form judgments about the reliability of particular people. More precisely, this empirical work shows that, from an early age, children monitor the reliability of specific informants, differentiate between those who make true and false claims, and keep that differential level of reliability in mind when evaluating new testimony from these testifiers.

Recent work in the epistemology of testimony typically proceeds against the background of assuming successful communication between the speaker and the hearer, with relatively little attention devoted to the process of linguistic communication itself. In "Beyond Words: Communication, Truthfulness, and Understanding," Patrick Rysiew argues that questions about linguistic communication, or what he calls questions in the *epistemology of understanding*, in fact have important consequences for the epistemology of testimony. In particular, he shows that a familiar and well-entrenched view of linguistic communication has as a consequence the falsity of 'literalism' – it is rare for speakers to mean just what they say, and even when they do, that itself is something the hearer needs to realize. Rysiew then shows that, contrary to what has been suggested in the literature, the failure of literalism does not provide support for the view that the

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justificatory basis of testimony beliefs is importantly inferential. Indeed, the falsity of this view of linguistic communication in fact undermines a central premise in a key argument for the inferentialist view that independent positive reasons are necessary for justifiedly accepting a given testimonial report. In this way, Rysiew illustrates how discussions of the epistemology of understanding have a significant bearing on questions in the epistemology of testimony.

While the concept of trust has received much attention in the epistemology of testimony, it is often understood as having epistemic significance only insofar as it is grounded in appropriate evidence or reasons. Paul Faulkner challenges this widespread view in "A Genealogy of Trust," arguing that trusting a speaker involves the adoption of a credulous attitude that neither needs to be based on evidence nor needs to be responsive to counterevidence. Instead, Faulkner claims that this attitude of trust is basic and is thus not reducible to the belief that the speaker in question is a trustworthy or reliable epistemic source. Nonetheless, given that trust is a discriminating attitude that is not adopted universally, trust can provide reasons for accepting a speaker's testimony that are epistemically evaluable. The reasons provided by trust can, therefore, be either epistemically good or bad. Given this, being based on trust identifies testimony as a unique way of acquiring knowledge.

Tyler Burge's influential theory of testimony is often taken to allow for the possibility of both testimonial a priori warrant and testimonial a priori knowledge. In "Testimony and A Priori Knowledge," Albert Casullo argues that there is a tension in Burge's account of the relationship between these two: on the one hand, Burge maintains that in the absence of countervailing considerations, application of the Acceptance Principle – according to which a person is a priori entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so – provides sufficient entitlement for knowledge. On the other hand, Burge argues that the recipient's own proprietary entitlement to rely on interlocution is insufficient by itself to underwrite the knowledge. While the former claim suggests that testimony is an independent source of warrant and is supported by the analogy with perceptual entitlement, the latter suggests that testimony is a dependent source of warrant and is supported by the analogy with preservative memory. Casullo argues that there are three approaches to resolving this tension: reject the analogy with preservative memory, reject the analogy with perception, or reconcile the two analogies. After defending the first approach, Casullo concludes with an assessment of the impact this option has on the scope of a priori knowledge.

In "Discrimination and Testimonial Knowledge," John Greco focuses on a question recently raised in the literature by Sanford Goldberg: how is it that young children acquire knowledge on the basis of the testimony of their caretakers even when the children are themselves undiscriminating consumers of testimony? According to Greco, the scope of this problem extends far beyond young children to include adults who intuitively acquire testimonial knowledge despite being locally

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unreliable recipients of testimony. After considering and rejecting several strategies for solving this puzzle, he offers a novel solution of his own that includes three steps: first, Greco argues that the relevant levels of generality specifying knowledge-relevant cognitive processes are at least partly a function of our interests and purposes as information-sharing beings; second, he claims that our interests and purposes as information-sharing beings include our interest in identifying reliable sources of information; and third, he argues that reliable sources of information are at least sometimes specified by virtue of their social status. Thus, because socially approved sources are reliable processes, knowledge can be acquired on the basis of their testimony, even when the consumers are themselves locally unreliable.

In "Disagreement and Group Inquiry," Marc Moffett considers the widely held view that a belief is fully justified only if it holds up against the strongest available counterarguments and, accordingly, that we can be appropriately confident that it holds up in this way only if there is critical discussion of those beliefs among epistemic peers. Moffett argues that while this view has intuitive plausibility, it leads to skepticism about our theoretical beliefs by forcing us to confront the problem of whether there can be reasonable disagreement among epistemic peers in a particularly intractable form. For, according to Moffett, it is arguably the case that equal weight should be given to one's own view and that of one's epistemic peer when there is disagreement, and this has the consequence that we should be agnostic with respect to the overwhelming majority of our substantive theoretical beliefs. Given this, to the extent that our situation satisfies the conditions necessary for ideal rational inquiry, the goal of such inquiry – namely, the acquisition of theoretical knowledge – will be undermined. Finally, Moffett claims that the most promising way to resolve this problem is to appeal to the underdetermination of theory by evidence in conjunction with a principle of epistemic conservatism.

In "Epistemic Authority, Testimony and the Transmission of Knowledge," Arnon Keren presents an account of testimonial knowledge that purports to have the resources for explaining not only the widespread acceptance of the transmission view of testimonial knowledge – according to which a hearer can come to know that p on the basis of a speaker's testimony that p only if the speaker herself knows that p – but also various counterexamples to this thesis found in the literature. In particular, Keren presents an account of what it is to trust a speaker that explicates this notion in terms of granting the speaker epistemic authority on the asserted proposition, thereby resulting in the speaker's testimony providing the hearer with a second order, preemptive reason for believing the proposition in question. According to Keren, his account reveals that while testimony does indeed involve the transmission of an epistemic property from speaker to hearer, the proper lesson of such counterexamples is that the relevant property to which principles for the transmission of knowledge should appeal is epistemic authority, not knowledge.

In "Argumentation and Distortion," Jonathan Adler focuses on the question: why is there so much misrepresentation of arguments in public forums? He argues that standard explanations in terms of self-interested biases are inadequate since

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much of this misrepresentation can be explained by our commitment to norms that disallow "no-firm-judgment" responses. While these norms permit flat-out agreement or disagreement, they disallow responses involving degrees of support or dissent, the suspension of judgment, and indifference. Given this, the acceptance of such norms has the consequence that there are very limited and intellectually demanding options regarding acceptable responses to arguments. This, in turn, leads to misrepresenting or distorting the views of others in an effort to justify our own judgments so as to satisfy the norms in question.

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