

Second-Hand Knowledge*

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1. The Importance of Testimony

We citizens of the 21st century live in a world where division of epistemic labour rules. Most of what we know we learned from the spoken or written word of others, and we depend in endless practical ways on the technological fruits of the dispersed knowledge of others—of which we often know almost nothing—in virtually every moment of our lives. Interest has been growing in recent years amongst philosophers, in the issues in epistemology raised by this fact. One issue concerns the depth and extent of our epistemic dependence on testimony, as we may label this broad epistemic source: Do we have any knowledge at all that is free of epistemic dependence on what we have learned from others? A related question is whether our entitlement to believe what we have learned from others can be explained without invoking any epistemic principles special to testimony.¹ These questions concern, as it were, the macro-epistemology of testimony. In the present discussion I shall focus instead on the micro foundations. Testimony, in our broad sense, can occur through an extensive range of types of spoken and written means of purportedly factual communication, including telephone calls, e-mails and personal letters, lectures and radio broadcasts, newspapers, textbooks and encyclopaedias, personal diaries, and public records of all kinds. But the central paradigm—what started the whole communication thing off—is surely that of face-to-face spoken encounter, when one person tells something to another, thereby intending and hoping to share her knowledge with her audience. I begin by describing the speech act of telling, identifying what takes place in a felicitous act of telling. From the nature of the speech act of telling, we see precisely how it is that knowledge is, when all goes as it should, acquired from teller by trusting hearer, in such an act, and in acts of testimony more broadly.

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¹ Some early landmarks in the recent literature are Coady (1992), Matilal and Chakrabarti (1994), Welbourne (1986).

The rest of the article develops some consequences of this description. First, we see that knowledge gained through trust in testimony is always and necessarily knowledge at second-hand. It is so, since when a hearer forms belief in what she is told through trust in the teller, on her say-so, she takes the teller to be expressing knowledge, and this normative commitment is an essential part of the hearer's grounds for her belief. Moreover, the trusting hearer's ground for her belief refers implicitly to the grounds of entitlement she presumes the teller to possess, in taking her act at face value, as a publication of her knowledge. I finish by spelling out some crucial epistemological consequences of this fact. It is the deepest reason why the epistemology of testimony is different from that of perception, despite various parallels in their nature as epistemic sources.

2. The Speech Act of Telling

I believe the best way to understand how knowledge is spread through testimony, is to begin by describing what happens, and how knowledge is spread from speaker to trusting hearer, in the paradigm case. This occurs when one person tells something to another in face-to-face communication, by means of a speech act made in a sentence of a shared language, used with its literal meaning. If we get straight about what goes on in this paradigm case, we can then go on to examine the similarities and differences with the various further kinds of communication through which knowledge can be diffused, such as those listed above.²

I shall describe a type of act which I believe approximates the ordinary language concept of telling (some caveats will be briefly mentioned). I believe this type to be a real linguistic and epistemic kind, and the right kind to focus on, if we wish to understand the epistemology of testimony.

We begin with the speech act of assertion. As with my account of telling, in what follows I describe what I believe to be a key kind, both for speech act theory, and for epistemology. I believe it describes a type of speech act constituted, and its occurrences made possible, in part by tacit conventions; thus one of which ordinary language users must and do possess, at least implicitly, the concept. However I do not claim that it exactly matches all the whimsy and happenstance of everyday usage of 'asserts'. Such is not my current, more theoretically motivated, project.

² Testimony, that is communication of knowledge, through the hearer's trust in what the speaker presents as being so, can occur also when a shared language is not used literally, and when the language of the message is not fully understood by both parties—successful uptake of the intended message can still be achieved, and the same commitment to its truth incurred by the speaker. There are also non-linguistic Gricean acts which successfully communicate a message, which certainly share some features of testimony. See Grice (1957), Schiffer (1972), Searle (1969).

When a speaker S asserts that P to an audience or hearer H (by uttering a sentence of their shared language, apt for this speech act) she thereby vouches for the truth of P to H. She presents P as being so, in an act whose import is that H can form belief that P on her say-so—H's eventual belief that P will be justified by reliance on S's word. The 'bottom line' of this import of S's act, is that H can complain to S if P turns out to be false. (Though S is excused from blame if her belief in P was warranted, that is S was properly sure that P, but her belief was false through bad luck.) This being so, one should not assert that P unless one's epistemic position is such that one may properly believe oneself to know that P. And one who asserts that P thereby represents herself as knowing that P.³

We could instead introduce a thinner notion of assertion, associated with stand-alone declarative utterances of indicative sentences, of which the preceding description is false. Assertion, in the thinner sense, does not necessarily present the asserter as knowing what she asserts. I admit that the word 'asserts' is probably sometimes used, when assertion in the thin sense only is involved. For instance, in contexts where it is mutually understood that the standards of evidence available are too low for knowledge to be so much as in question, or that stating what one knows is just not the language game in play—perhaps in debates in ancient archeology, or in philosophical discussion, or heated argument on whatever topic.⁴ But I insist, as I need to, that such contexts are mutually recognized by speaker and hearer. Outside such contexts, a speech act which purports to be, and is reasonably taken to be, an assertion, is expected to be made from knowledge; and is properly criticisable by its intended audience, if the speaker makes assertions for which she has evidence inadequate for knowledge—which are only conjectures, or guesses, or are deceptive in intent.⁵

In asserting that P, the asserter offers her word that P to her intended audience H. She licenses H to believe that P on her say-so. How so? What enables such a feat? It is the conventionally constituted force of her speech act that, in asserting P, the speaker S purports to speak from knowledge. The relevant conventional regularities in the use of words, and regarding the significance of various forms of acts of utterance, together with complex human interpretational skills, make assertion, like promising and other types of

³ I agree with Williamson (2000) that assertion is governed by the rule 'assert that P only if you know that P'. Special mutually recognized contexts aside, this rule describes the guiding norm, and there seems no requirement to describe the practice instead by a more infallibly followable 'internal' rule. Hawthorne (2004) emphasises the link between knowledge and assertion.

⁴ See Elgin (2002).

⁵ As John Hawthorne has pointed out to me, outside such special contexts, if someone asserts that P, it is always appropriate to ask: How do you know that?

speech acts, possible.⁶ This is not the place to explore this phenomenon fully. But it is interesting to observe that assertion shares with promising a performative aspect. In promising, the promiser by her act commits herself to bring about the state of affairs she by her choice of words specifies. In asserting, the asserter by her act vouches for the truth of the proposition she by her choice of words specifies. It is through convention to this effect, that the promiser or asserter's act has this self-binding force.

But how *exactly* is the license to H to believe that P on S's say-so issued? What precise license, that is grounds, will a belief formed and held on this basis have? In asserting that P, S purports to speak from knowledge. But it is a priori and obvious that if S knows that P, then P. Thus once H gets into an epistemic position to know that S knows that P, she thereby has a basis for knowledgeable belief that P herself. When H hears, with understanding of both its content and force, S's assertion that P, then provided she has a basis to know that S is trustworthy⁷, she comes to be in that position. Moreover, in knowing that S knows that P, she thereby also knows that S possesses grounds or warrant strong enough for proper sureness that P.⁸ These facts are crucial to how H's belief that P, acquired through her trust in S's assertion, can be adequately grounded and so amount to knowledge (more on this later). Notwithstanding this, I think the primitive convention governing the speech act is that S, in asserting that P to H, offers to H a licence to believe P on her say-so—she gives her word that P to H. It is a *consequence* of this force of the speech act of assertion, that one must assert only what one properly takes oneself to know. (Similarly, the basic convention-constituted fact about promising, is that the promiser undertakes to do the specified act. It is a consequence of this that one should promise to do only what one both intends, and is within one's power.)

⁶ Lewis (1969) gives the classic account of convention. I am not convinced that language-use is sustained by conventions in the full Lewisian sense—which requires iterated mutual knowledge, and expectations rationally based upon this—but there are certainly arbitrary regularities in how words are used, sustained by expectations generated and maintained through general adherence to those same regularities. See Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Sperber and Wilson (1986) for discussion of speech acts and pragmatics of language use. Conventional linguistic meanings do not fully fix the content and force of particular speech acts, for instance the reference of definite descriptions and indexical expressions, so that interpretational skills on the part of both speaker and hearer are needed, in addition to knowledge of conventionally fixed semantic properties, for mutual understanding to be attained. See Davidson (1986), Travis (1997).

⁷ This key property of the speaker is explained more fully below.

⁸ Of course S may in turn have learned that P from proper trust in another's testimony. But, as will be examined in the next section, if anyone in the chain is to have knowledge, this regress of dependence on trusted testimony must terminate in a teller whose grounds for her belief in P is not that she properly takes another's word for it.

All this being so, the speech act of assertion is tailor-made for telling things to other people. Tellings are a subset of assertions⁹. In a paradigm and *felicitous*¹⁰ telling, the teller rightly takes herself to know that P, and seeks to share her knowledge with her intended audience, whom she believes ignorant, or possibly ignorant, as to whether P. Telling is the proprietary linguistic means—often the only practicable way of achieving this, and almost always by far the easiest—of letting someone else know what one already knows oneself.¹¹ The illocutionary act of telling is achieved when there is uptake: the intended audience correctly grasps the content and force of the speech act, recognizing that she is being told that P. It is consummated when the audience trusts the teller, forming belief that P on her say-so. Knowledge can be and often is spread from speaker to hearer by this means. When I tell someone that P, speaking from knowledge, and she forms belief that P through properly trusting my telling, I enable her to know that P. When my audience comes to know that P on this basis, her knowledge that P is grounded in her knowledge that I myself, the teller, know. In this manner I give to her knowledge at second hand (more of this later). This type of action, telling, exists and has a rationale, in our repertoire of mutually understood speech act types, in virtue of what is achieved in a felicitous act of telling which is taken up and consummated. Telling is a social institution for the spreading of knowledge, enabling it to be possessed at second-hand. This fact is consistent with lots of tellings, maybe even most, being infelicitous in one or more ways.

Tellings, and testimony more broadly, must have an intended audience, since their defining intention is to convey information, or purported information, to that audience. But this intended audience may be indeterminate, perhaps thought of only existentially by the teller, as in radio broadcasts, or perhaps thought of only as a possible future audience, as in diaries written with posterity, or one's forgetful future self, in mind.

Not all assertions are tellings. As I am introducing the concept, the object, or purported object of a telling is to convey information to an audience believed by the teller possibly to lack it. ('Purported' only, since a telling may have deceptive intent.) A telling apparently aims to let the audience

⁹ This claim holds of the core concept I seek to describe. Ordinary usage of 'tells' includes also the telling of stories, which are at most fictional or make-believe assertions. I think it is plausible to suggest there are two recognizable sub-divisions of our practice with 'tells' here. There is also the use for commands, instructions and injunctions generally.

¹⁰ I take this term, and that of the 'illocutionary act', from the classic and seminal work on speech acts of Austin (1962).

¹¹ The subject matter of a telling need not be a matter of practical importance to its audience. We humans are curious—we have a general, non-instrumental interest in knowing how things are in the world, and in sharing that knowledge, regardless of practical relevance to our lives.

know what the teller already knows.¹² But while all assertions, special mutually recognized contexts aside, purport to express the speaker's knowledge, not all assertions are aimed at conveying information to an audience believed possibly ignorant. There is the familiar range of examples: recapitulation of facts, examination situations, and so forth. Nonetheless the gap between assertions and tellings is small. An assertion need not be made with the aim of imparting the speaker's knowledge to an audience believed to lack it. As just suggested, its intent may instead be to demonstrate that the speaker has knowledge, which she believes her audience already to possess; or to bring to mind or re-emphasise something already mutually known. But it must have an intended audience. Without this, there is no distinction between asserting that P—vouching for the truth of P—and merely voicing a thought of or wish that P.

One who tells that P vouches for the truth of P. She makes as if to publish her knowledge that P, as if to put the information that P into the public domain¹³. She presents it as available to be picked up by anyone who hears and understands the content and force of her utterance. Hence, so long as the speaker indeed speaks from her knowledge, it is so available, to anyone who understands and properly trusts her presentation—takes her act at face value. This is, in a nutshell, how telling can make available a teller's knowledge to others who witness her speech act. It is available, to any hearer who trusts the teller, and is warranted in thus taking her act at face value.

Thus, although a telling must have an intended audience, it is not only the intended audience who can avail herself of the reason to believe made available by the act of telling. An eavesdropper can witness the same act and, providing she has an epistemic basis properly to trust the teller, may equally acquire knowledge at second hand, as the intended audience does. Moreover, her grounds or basis of entitlement is essentially the same. Unlike some, I do not think the audience/eavesdropper distinction is directly epistemically rele-

¹² Robert Audi has objected to me that we speak of 'telling' in other cases also. Certainly there are the usages already noted, for telling of stories, and injunctions. Are there also factual tellings which do not aim to inform? Perhaps so: the examiner says to the student being examined orally in hope of escaping a fail result: "Tell me what you know about Alexander the Great". But her inclusion of "what you know" here maybe signals that the point of the act is to demonstrate the student's knowledge. It would be odd if she said instead: "Tell me about Alexander the Great"—"But you know more than me about him already" the student might aptly reply! Even if some people persist in telling others things they already know them to know, this is not appropriate. My daughter responds to my reminders on matters of practical import with an irritated "You don't need to keep telling me that, I already know!" An elegant reminder of the proper use of the speech act.

¹³ Tim Williamson objects to me that this does not well describe the whispering of a secret to a friend. But I use the phrase 'publication' to underline the feature of tellings elaborated below, that they are a public good: anyone who overhears my telling can pick up on the knowledge thereby expressed, so it is *only* by whispering that I can prevent others from also coming to know what I tell.

vant. There is no special entitlement to believe (nor requirement, epistemic or moral) made available to the intended audience of the telling, which is not available to anyone else. The entitlement to believe made available by a telling, or indeed any assertion, is what economists call a public good: it is in the nature of my speech act, that I cannot, even should I want to, make available an entitlement to believe to you, without simultaneously making it available to anyone who hears and understands me doing so. Would it were so simple to restrict one's sharing of information! No, if I want to tell you that P, and I don't want anyone else in earshot to know (not just believe, but know!), it is not enough that I address you, and not the others. I have to whisper, or somehow otherwise make sure they do not hear what I say to you!

It is nonetheless true that the entitlement all may acquire derives from that made available to the intended audience, in two respects. First, it is that audience for whom the teller takes the trouble to make it available by means of her speech act. Perhaps she would not make the effort to tell anyone else! Second, that there is such an entitlement available depends on the fact that the utterance is an audience-directed speech act. If I overhear you exclaiming to yourself that P, I cannot, or cannot so easily, pick up the same sort of entitlement to believe P. Without an intended audience there is no distinction between an exclamation which involves vouching for truth—an assertion, and a mere expression of thought without any such commitment.¹⁴

Who the addressee of an utterance is may be circumstantially relevant, in evaluating the trustworthiness of the teller regarding that utterance.—"I heard her tell M that P, and I'm sure she wouldn't lie to him."—"She told me I'd got the job, and she wouldn't do so to me unless she was really certain." It is irrelevant to consider as such whether one is oneself part of the intended readership of a newspaper or other publication, in determining whether to accept what it says. But, in reflection on its likely trustworthiness, the nature of its intended readership may be relevant.

It is not merely that overhearers, as well as the addressee, can acquire knowledge. The basis for knowledgeable belief available to the addressee is no different from that available to overhearers. She does not have a different type of, nor a stronger, basis for belief. Indeed, it can be that an overhearer has

¹⁴ This being so, the question whether one can make assertions without another person as intended audience turns on the question whether one can assert things to oneself as the audience to whom one vouches for truth. Barring a radically dysfunctional divided self, the domain of abnormal psychology (such as Gollum in the film version of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*), this act would be necessarily otiose, and hence I am skeptical. Only a creature in an Alice-in-wonderland type fantasy would complain to itself that it had misled itself by telling itself something untrue, or which was only a guess! Perhaps one can forcefully remind oneself of things, by enunciating them. In any case, the epistemic difficulties in discriminating, amongst utterances with no other person as intended audience, those which vouch for truth, and which do not, would preclude much learning from such over-hearings.

stronger grounds for belief. Suppose that O overhears S telling H about the relative merits of computer game packages. O knows S well, and knows that she is an expert on this, and is moreover a very reliable informant generally. In contrast, S is a stranger to H. In this situation O has far stronger grounds for belief in what she hears S tell to H, than H does. Moreover, S should be more offended if O later exhibits doubt regarding what S said, than if H does. O should know that S is to be trusted about these things, and S is properly offended if she doubts her. But H, who is a stranger, has no particular reason to trust S; so S has no reason to feel offended if H is reluctant to accept her word without further corroboration, on this very contestable topic. Indeed, she might reasonably regard H as foolish to do so, without knowledge of her credentials!¹⁵

Telling is like radio broadcasting. Anyone who can tune her radio into the wavelength can pick up the signal. Similarly, anyone who tunes into the speech act, correctly latching onto its content and force, and who in addition has a basis properly to trust the source, can pick up the information purportedly thereby offered. However, unlike many, I think picking up the information purportedly offered, believing what one is told, depends on believing the teller trustworthy, and so trusting her act really to be what it purports to be, a broadcasting of knowledge. Moreover I think this belief in the teller's trustworthiness needs to be empirically grounded. There is no general epistemic entitlement to trust any teller, just so long as one lacks evidence of her untrustworthiness.¹⁶

What is it exactly, to trust a telling? It is to take the teller's act at face value, as really being what it purports to be, a sincere expression of knowledgeable belief; hence to form belief in what is told, on the teller's say-so. This involves trusting the teller, because face value is not always true underlying value.¹⁷ The teller makes as if to express, publish her knowledge that

¹⁵ Here I am disagreeing with Hinchman 2005. He holds first, that the addressee gains a special entitlement to belief, not available to overhearers; second, that the addressee, and no other, slights S in a special way, when he fails to take her word for it.

¹⁶ "But why on earth did you trust what that man said?"—"Well, I didn't know anything about him, and so I thought it was alright to believe him." This surely gets the placing of trust the wrong way round! In favour of the view that there is a defeasible entitlement to trust any teller, see Burge (1993), Coady (1992), McDowell (1994). For the case against, see Fricker (1994, 1995, 2002, 2004)

¹⁷ Compare: perception is apparent sensory confrontation with things being thus-and-so. Taking it at face value is forming belief that things are as it appears, thus and so. Sometimes they are not. In contrast with testimony, I do think that one is entitled to believe one's eyes, unless one has special grounds for distrust. Some of the reasons for this contrast are canvassed in my final section. Another contrast is underlined there too: in talking of 'taking a telling at face value' I mean merely: taking the teller's act to be what it should be, and purports to be—an expression of her knowledge. I do not mean to suggest that when I witness a telling it is to me somehow as if I perceive the state of affairs testified to. So accepting a telling at face value is not a case of taking things to be as they

P. But the act may be cunning, not really expressing what it purports to express—the teller's intent may be deceptive. Or she may be honestly mistaken. In the same way, one accepts an act of promising at face value, and believes what is promised will be done, only if one trusts the promiser—in this case, to be sincere in her promise, that is to genuinely intend to do what she promises; and to be both steadfast, and capable of carrying out the promise, in due course.

To trust a particular telling is to trust the teller, regarding that particular utterance. Once a hearer forms belief that P on a teller T's say-so, she is consequently committed to the proposition that T knows that P. But her belief about T which constitutes her trust, antecedent to her utterance, is something like this: T is such that not easily would she assert that P, vouch for the truth of P, unless she knew that P. Call this dispositional property of T her *trustworthiness with regard to P*.¹⁸ T's trustworthiness with regard to P, conjoined with the fact that she asserted P, is strong evidence that she knows that P. This is how a hearer can come to know that P, and that the teller T knows that P, in consequence of knowing that T told her that P, and that T is trustworthy with regard to P. Her knowledge of the last two facts grounds her belief in the second, which in turns grounds her belief in the first.

These last remarks concern the epistemic grounding relations between beliefs attributable to a properly trusting recipient of testimony. No implausible claims about attentional processes of inference are entailed, or suggested. A hearer may sometimes deliberate about whether a speaker is trustworthy, before opting to believe her. But belief is often formed immediately, without conscious deliberation, when one is told something by some-

appear to be—as is the case when I form belief directly on the basis of my visual perception.

¹⁸ A more detailed treatment here would split up the two ingredients of the teller's trustworthiness, her sincerity, and her competence about the matter in hand—that is to say, roughly, the fact that she would not sincerely assert that P, unless she knew. Note that this competence in turn can be split into an 'internal' component—she would not sincerely assert that P, unless properly sure—and an external one, concerning the non-perversity of her environment. The detailed treatment would also show how a teller can be trustworthy, and known to be so, regarding a particular utterance, even though she is not a generally reliable informant. I offered such a detailed treatment in Fricker (1994). However, as will appear below, I no longer think the precise definitions given in that work are the best way to theorise how knowledge is spread through the proper operation of testimony. In that work I addressed the problem: How can a hearer get from knowledge that S asserted that P, to knowledge that P? And I developed a definition of 'competence' suited to bridge that gap. But a speaker can be competent in that sense, without knowing what she asserts—see next section. I now think that my earlier treatment failed in not seeking to describe what goes on when telling functions as it should, and the hearer takes the teller's utterance at face value, taking her to speak from knowledge. This approach yields the present, narrower, definition of 'competence'.

one one trusts. The present proposal about what makes belief based on trusted testimony be knowledge is entirely consistent with this fact.

The key positive point is that belief in the trustworthiness of the teller is a normative commitment incurred, in believing what one is told on the basis of trust in the teller—that is, believing what she says because one takes her act at face value, and forms belief on her say-so, taking her to speak from knowledge. Belief in the teller's trustworthiness must be at least dispositionally present, in a minimally rational trusting hearer; and if she knows what she is told, that potential belief must be potential knowledge, hence must be adequately empirically grounded. I think that in fact hearers often have beliefs regarding potential tellers' trustworthiness in a psychologically real, causally active sense. Beliefs about which and what types of people are trustworthy, on what topics, are present in our cognitive background, and operate like switches, shaping our doxastic response to episodes of telling. They also evolve constantly in response to fresh input: cues from context, and signs in the speaker's manner of her likely trustworthiness or lack of it.¹⁹

I have described the speech act of telling: it is the purported publication of her knowledge, with the intent to inform her audience, by a teller. And I have described what it is for a hearer—who may but need not be the intended audience—to trust the teller regarding her utterance: it is for her to take it at face value, as such a publication of knowledge, forming belief in what she is told on the teller's say-so. We have seen that when the hearer's belief in what she is told is thus based in trust of the teller, she takes him to be speaking from knowledge. That the teller knows what he asserted is a key premiss in her justifying grounds for her belief in what she was told. This is the distinctive mechanism involved in the spreading of knowledge through trust in telling, and in testimony more broadly.²⁰

I have described a category: coming to know that P through being told that P, and trusting the teller. This is narrower than the category: coming to know that P as a result of being the audience of a telling that P. I can make all kinds of inferences from observing a person tell something to someone else, maybe me. For instance, from her accent, that she is a native French speaker. If her statement is 'I am a native French speaker', this coincides with

¹⁹ Fricker (1994, 2002) offers some more detailed conjectures about such processes. Of course the everyday psychology of our reception of testimony is an empirical matter, and my armchair speculations are tentative.

²⁰ For simplicity and clarity this discussion focuses on face-to-face tellings. But my main conclusions extend to what we may call extended testimony—the newspapers, books and so forth mentioned earlier. The main difference between extended testimony, and the core case of face-to-face telling, is that spatial and temporal distance between testifier and audience affects the possibilities for evaluating trustworthiness. (Coady (1992, Ch.16) explains how the principal reason why hearsay is not admitted as evidence in courts of law, is because the giver of the cited report cannot be cross-examined—that is, their report cannot be subjected to interrogation to test coherence under pressure.)

the proposition she asserts, and so our broader category is instanced. But if the basis of my belief is my perception of her accent, not my trust in the truth of her assertion, based in my belief in her trustworthiness regarding this matter (perhaps I have good reason to expect her to lie about what her native language is), then it is not belief acquired through trust in testimony—the epistemic kind we are interested in describing and investigating. Similarly, suppose I have somehow come to know of the bizarre contingent correlation that when and only when Pinocchio utters a truth, his nose becomes visibly shorter.²¹ When Pinocchio asserts that P, and his nose shrinks, I have reason to believe that P. But this is not via my belief that he is sincere, and speaks from knowledge. My basis for my belief does not refer back to Pinocchio's presumed knowledge of, or warrant for, what he asserts. It is not a case of knowledge gained through trust in testimony, and unlike this, it is not knowledge gained at second-hand. Pinocchio's assertions-plus-shrinking-nose are a strangely mediated natural sign of the proposition asserted. We do not regard or treat others as mere natural signs of what they assert, nor merely as measuring instruments, when we believe what they tell us through our trust in them. The fact that our belief in their trustworthiness (as we saw, a normative commitment ascribable whenever we trust their tellings) is, or at least should be, empirically based, in no way undermines this point.²²

From our description of the speech act of telling—both its production, and its uptake—we may conclude that the primary function²³ in a linguistic community of telling, is to spread knowledge from *one individual to another*. This is what telling is for, and is what occurs in felicitous tellings. There are two aspects to this spreading of knowledge. First, the hearer comes to know the same proposition²⁴ that the speaker knows, and expressed. Second, her gaining knowledge, when she does, depends on the speaker's knowing what he asserts.²⁵

We have seen already why this second condition holds, of our relatively narrow category: forming belief through trust in testimony. When the hearer

²¹ The true example from Collodi's moral-laden tale is invoked in Elgin *op. cit.*. Pinocchio's nose gets longer whenever he tells a lie.

²² Here I disagree with Hinchman (2005) and Wanderer (2001), who seem to think that only trust given as it were *a priori*, with no empirical basis for it, is consistent with this point. In my view our trust typically has an empirical basis, and certainly should do so.

²³ By this I mean that its doing this serves certain interests of the community, and that its doing this explains its existence. If no-one ever told the truth, speaking from knowledge, telling as a speech act would almost certainly die out.

²⁴ Or an appropriately related proposition, for indexical sentences.

²⁵ Is there a gap between a speaker's asserting that P while knowing that P, and her expressing her knowledge—'speaking from knowledge'—in her assertion? Perhaps so: perhaps one might know, but lack the knowledge that one knows; alternatively one might know that one knows, but one's intention in speaking be not to inform, but, say, to bring a counter-suggestible audience to believe the opposite. Whether there is such a gap is not critical for anything I say here.

H does not merely treat the teller T as a happenstance natural sign of what he asserts, but believes him because she takes his speech act at face value, as an expression of knowledge, then, as we saw above, H's belief in what she is told is grounded in her belief that T knows what he asserted. This is a key premiss in H's justifying grounds for her belief. If T did not know, then H's justification for her belief would contain a false premises, and so that belief would not be knowledge—even if T had in fact spoken truly, though not from knowledge. When H's belief is thus based on trust in T's testimony, her ground for it is aptly expressed in the defence: "T told me that P, and he would not do so unless he knew."

Several writers have endorsed the principle that a recipient of testimony can come to know what is testified to only if the testifier knows whereof she speaks.²⁶ In my account this fact is not postulated as an unmotivated primitive principle, but is derived from a description of the speech act of telling, and hence of what it is to take such an act at face value, together with a plausible general view of necessary conditions for knowledge. My account gives a satisfying explanation of why this principle holds—for the core case, when the hearer believes what she is told through her trust in the teller. (As we will see below, it does not hold for the broader category: coming to know that P, through being the audience of a telling that P.)

3. Knowledge at Second-Hand

In the light of our description of the speech act of telling and its trusting reception we can draw an important conclusion. Knowledge gained through trust in testimony is always and necessarily second-hand knowledge. As entailed by the account of telling developed above, a trusting hearer gains knowledge from what she is told only if the teller speaks from his knowledge.²⁷ This being so, it seems that telling and testimony more broadly, like

²⁶ See Audi (2006), Burge (1993), Ross (1975), Welbourne (1986,1994)

²⁷ Lackey (1999, 2006) argues that one can acquire knowledge that P from testimony that P, even though the testifier does not know that P. I agree with her. My Pinocchio case is precisely such a case, and I describe others in the next section. Where I disagree with Lackey, is on how testimony as an epistemic source is best theorized. I have described the case where the hearer forms belief in what she is told due to her trust in the teller, taking her speech act at face value, as an expression of knowledge. The result that a recipient of testimony can come to know what she is told only if the teller speaks from knowledge holds only for this relatively narrow category. I believe this is the distinctive core mechanism we need to identify, to understand the nature of testimony as a socio-linguistic means of spreading knowledge. Lackey instead suggests that, to understand how knowledge can be acquired from others' testimony, we should focus on the question: who are the reliable testifiers? And she introduces several cases of reliable testifiers that P who do not know that P. While I agree that knowledge may be acquired in some of these cases, it is not by means of the core mechanism of trust. Focussing instead on Lackey's question neglects the nature of the speech act of telling, and thus does not enable us to understand how testimony works to spread knowledge when it is functioning properly, in

memory, is not an original source of knowledge but merely a conduit for it. Memory and testimony do not on their own generate new items of knowledge, but only (I speak loosely!) transmit them.²⁸ The following principle is true:

T: If H knows that P through being told that P and trusting the teller, there is or was someone who knows that P in some other way—not in virtue of having been told that P and trusting the teller.²⁹

Telling can pass on knowledge that P from a knowing teller to her properly-trusting hearer. In trusting the teller, the hearer takes her to speak from knowledge. A further consequence is that the trusting hearer must suppose there to be non-testimonial grounds for belief in P, not known by herself, but by the teller, or if not her, then a teller upstream of her in the chain of testimony. If the hearer gains knowledge that P, there must be some non-testimonial source, someone who knew that P not just through being told, to stop this regress of justification.³⁰

Principle T states a crucial truth about telling, which applies equally to testimony more broadly. But we must not overstate the non-originating nature of testimony as an epistemic resource. This stronger thesis is false: 'If H knows that P through being told that P and trusting the teller, there is or once was someone who knows that P in a way entirely free of epistemic dependence on testimony'.

The following kind of situation falsifies the stronger thesis: Many informants tell SS their diverse observations. They speak from knowledge. SS, with epistemic propriety, takes their word for them. From the conjunction of these observations, SS is able to draw an inference to their explanation, P.

accordance with the nature of the speech act. A different result would also arise, if a different—for instance reliabilist—general account of conditions for knowledge were held.
28 Knowledge is not a virus or a substance, and talk of 'transmission' must not carry one away. The literal truth about 'transmission' is no more than what was described in the previous section. Being carried away would be, for instance, proposing an account of how testimony can spread knowledge which is not consistent with our general view that knowledge requires the knower to possess adequate grounds, and to have a conception of how she knows which makes sense of her belief to her (see Fricker (2004)).

29 A present-tense version of T is false—the originating informant may have died since she told what she knew, or simply have forgotten it.

30 Hardwig (1991) suggests this schematic principle: 'A has good reason to believe that B has good reason to believe that P → A has good reason to believe that P'. I propose a second complementary principle: A has good reason to believe that P on the basis of trust in B's testimony → A has good reason to believe that B has good reason to believe that P. The key point here is, however, that *A's reasons are entirely different from B's*: B knows the original evidence for P, while A has a second-order warrant for her belief—her basis for believing B to be trustworthy; she does not possess the original evidence for P. See below, and Fricker (2006).

She tells someone else, H, that P. In this chain, there is no one individual who knows that P in a manner wholly free of dependence on testimony. And there is a sense in which testimony has contributed to the generation of knowledge. It is an essential contributor in a complex process that generates knowledge.³¹ Similar processes can occur involving memory. I may remember many things originally learned separately, and putting them together, draw an inference from them. Then I remember this result.³²

The example given is just one way in which epistemic dependence on testimony may be present in a belief that is not gained through, and based on, trust in testimony. In fact a more diffused, systemic dependence on past testimony pervades our whole system of empirical belief, even when what is passed on through telling is, say, a report of observation from one person.³³

Notwithstanding this caveat, T is an important result. Its greatest epistemological significance lies in this corollary:

T corollary: For any proposition P that can be known, there must be some way other than trust in testimony through which P can or once could be known.³⁴

There cannot be a state of affairs that is known of only through trust in testimony. Why not? Because, as T expresses, knowledgeable belief based on trusted testimony implicitly refers back to the existence of a non-testimonial ground or warrant for what is testified to: the ground or warrant in virtue of whose possession the original teller spoke from knowledge.³⁵ We can say this, while bearing in mind that the 'other ways' may include deduction, induction, or inference to the best explanation, from premisses some of which were supplied by diverse bits of testimony. Consonant with this fact,

³¹ This simple case exemplifies a fact of our epistemic situation, especially in the sciences, in the 21st century emphasized by Hardwig (1986, 1991): very often, with scientific results, no one individual possesses, or is even capable of understanding, all of the evidence on which a complex theory ultimately rests. More complex and longer interconnecting chains of testimonial dependence, similar to the simple type given here, characterize our situation of epistemic interdependence. T and its corollaries are consistent with this fact. That, when someone knows that P through trust in her teller, there must be someone who knows P not just through trust in her teller, is consistent with this source for P knowing it in a way that depends on testimony to other matters—the evidence for P.

³² Robert Audi pointed out to me another way in which memory may originate, as well as preserve, knowledge: I first enjoy an experience, but without forming belief. Later, I form belief from accessing this purely experiential memory.

³³ See Coady (1992), Fricker (1994, 1995, 2004, 2006)

³⁴ As with principle T, the temporal qualification here is important. Many historical matters can now only be known of at second-hand, through spoken or written testimony, because the original sources, the people who knew at first hand, have now died, or forgotten, the matters to which they once testified.

³⁵ A possible exception to this principle, our knowledge of others' mental states based on their avowals, is discussed in the next section.

there is a sense of 'the evidence for P', used in scientific-style discourse, when it is asked: "What is the evidence for P?", in which someone's testimony that P is not evidence for P at all. For instance the question: "What is the evidence that smoking causes lung cancer?" is not answered by responding: a lot of distinguished scientists have asserted that it does. The question asks for an account of the *real* evidence, the evidence on which the experts' conclusion is based. (Though, to repeat, several individual tellers may retail the evidence for P, the data that P explains, through their testimony.) The well-groundedness of belief spread about through testimony depends on the existence of such non-testimonial evidence for P—that is, on its possession, perhaps distributedly, upstream in the chain of informants.³⁶

As we saw earlier, there are ways in which a hearer may acquire knowledge that P, as a result of auditing an assertion that P, other than through trusting the teller. T and its corollary do not hold of these. How can a hearer acquire knowledge that P, from auditing an assertion that P, other than through taking the speaker to know whereof she speaks? One generic kind of way in which this can occur, is when the hearer has background knowledge of some causal linkage which ensures that the speaker will assert only truth on her topic, despite the fact that she does not speak from knowledge—as in the Pinocchio case described earlier. Or when, even if the speaker does in fact speak from knowledge, belief that she does so is not the justifying ground for the hearer's belief in what she tells—as in the 'I am a native French speaker' case mentioned earlier.³⁷ A hearer who forms belief that P, in response to auditing an assertion that P, through this kind of epistemic route, is not taking the speaker's utterance at face value, as an expression of knowledge. She is not accepting what is offered in it—not accepting the warrant to believe that P on his say-so, which is offered by the asserter. She is instead treating the speaker as a contingently reliable measuring device or instrument—a natural sign of what is asserted, rather than an authority about it.

Another kind of case is when I take another's assertion that P as evidence for P, but without accepting her word that P outright. I weigh the fact that she apparently takes herself to know that P as one piece of evidence, no more. When I treat another's assertion as evidence in this way, it may add to other evidence—perhaps the weight of others' corroboration, or non-testimonial evidence, and the whole provide me with an epistemic basis for P suffi-

³⁶ Hardwig *op. cit* rightly emphasizes that in our modern condition of division of epistemic labour, no one individual may possess, or be capable of appreciating, the evidence which ultimately grounds, for instance, a theory in nuclear physics. But there must be a totality of non-testimonial evidence, distributed among the various epistemic labourers, which is in principle (that is, temporal and cognitive limitations of the collateral set aside) collatable—or else the theory lacks an empirical basis.

³⁷ Recent literature discussing such cases includes Coady (1992), Lackey (1999, 2006), Adler (1994, 1996)

cient for knowledge. Thus I may acquire knowledge that P, though I did not simply trust the speaker's original utterance, but took the fact of its being made as a non-conclusive datum. This kind of case subdivides—according to whether the speaker did in fact speak from knowledge or not, and whether my eventual basis for belief that P includes belief that she did so. If it does, then this may after all be a case of trusting the teller—the further evidence featured in my calculations as evidence that she was in fact trustworthy, and spoke from knowledge. But I may come to know that P, in part from the evidence of her assertion, even if it was based on inadequate evidence, and she did not know—for instance, if she and others all jumped to a conclusion from individually inadequate perceptual evidence; but the fact that they all made the same observation is strong enough evidence to ground knowledge of what each over-boldly concluded.³⁸

Since there are these other ways in which knowledge that P can be gained from observing testimony that P, which do not conform to T, am I protecting my thesis that knowledge through trust in testimony is essentially second-hand through a definitional stop which renders the result uninteresting? I do not think so. When I take another's word for it that P, I trust her in a way that makes my relation to her different from when I treat the fact of her apparent confident belief that P as one piece of evidence to be weighed with the rest. I take her utterance at face value, as nothing less than what it purports to be, an assurance that P, and an expression of knowledge. I treat my teller with respect, in a way that I do not when I treat her expressed belief merely as defeasible evidence. One might say that I treat her as an end, not merely as a means. A fortiori this contrast holds, when through background information possessed by me, and not by her, I treat the fact of her utterances as a reliable natural sign of what is asserted. Moreover, as suggested earlier, it is plausible to see the function of testimony—its proper means of spreading knowledge—as being through the mechanism of trust in the teller, when her act is taken to be what it purports to be, an expression of knowledge, which offers to the hearer an entitlement to believe on the teller's say-so. T holds only for the relatively narrow category I have described. But it is a category which reveals the nature of the speech act of telling, and of testifying more broadly, and enables us to discern and describe a crucial means of knowledge-spreading which is a true epistemic kind.³⁹

In my final section, I spell out some key consequences for the epistemology of testimony of our finding that knowledge gained through trust in tes-

³⁸ Peter Lipton pointed out this kind of case to me.

³⁹ Readers of earlier writings of mine such as Fricker (1994) will observe that my view on how testimony should be theorized has evolved since then. I have been influenced in particular by Moran (2006). See also Hinchman (2005), Wanderer (2001) I disagree with these writers, however, in insisting that the respect given to a teller in trusting her should be empirically grounded, it is not owed a priori

timony is necessarily and always knowledge at second hand, and hence that anything which can be known of by means of trust in testimony can, or once could, also be known of in some other, more direct, way.

4. Some Epistemological Consequences

Because knowledge gained through trust in testimony is knowledge at second-hand, the evidence that a state of affairs *W* obtains provided by testimony to it is always only indirect evidence of this. It provides evidence for *W* only in the sense that it provides evidence that there is, that is that some individual or group between them possesses, evidence, or an appropriate non-testimonial warrant, for *W*. This being so, testimony that some state of affairs obtains is never canonical evidence for its doing so. Evidence *E* for some state of affairs *W* is canonical for *W* if and only if: (i) it is immediate evidence for *W*, evidence whose status as such is not mediated by any further empirically known connection linking *E* and *W*—if *E* then probably *C*, and if *C* then probably *W*; and (ii) *E* is such that someone's having a conception of *W* at all requires that they appreciate the evidential force with respect to *W* of *E*. I think there are some concepts of states of affairs for which some type or types of evidence are canonical. For instance: possessing a colour concept plausibly requires being disposed, in the absence of defeaters, to make colour judgements when one has certain colour experiences. The experiences are canonical evidence for the instantiation of the colour concept.⁴⁰ I believe this holds both of colours, and of other observational concepts such as simple shape concepts, and it is in my view part of a good philosophical explanation of why the epistemology of perception, at least for such observational concepts, is direct. That is to say, while perceptual belief is defeated by knowledge of some abnormality in the conditions of perception, its proper formation is not epistemically mediated by empirically-based knowledge of the reliability of perception, nor of the normality of current conditions. One is entitled to believe one's eyes, accept at face-value one's visual experience, in the absence of defeaters.

In contrast, that one is disposed to trust others' testimony regarding the instantiation of some state of affairs *W* is never an ingredient in what it is to possess the conception of *W*. One's conception of *W* must be independently fixed, for one to be in a position to understand the testimony in the first

⁴⁰ Although I think general verificationism is false, I think it is true that there are some concepts of observable states of affairs (e.g. colours, shapes) such that a certain kind of evidence, namely certain perceptual evidence for them, has an intimate connection with their content. I am inclined to accept Peacocke's view that these concepts may be individuated epistemically—by this most direct way in which their instantiations can be known. (See Peacocke (1999) and Fricker (2002b)) Of course many of our concepts are theoretical in a broad sense, and there is no particular way of coming to know of their instantiation which is privileged or canonical—essential to our grasp of them, and thus of what it is for a state of affairs involving their instantiation to obtain.

place.⁴¹ By the same token, one's understanding of what is asserted is not undermined, if one's responses to testimony on this topic are predominantly cautious and skeptical. Rationally based skepticism about the testimony will be in virtue of one's skepticism about the holding of the purported link from the assertion, to the fact asserted—either that the teller has deceptive intent, or that her asserted belief is not properly sure, not well-founded in an appropriate truth-related warrant, so that she does not know what she asserts, and her confident assurance is no guarantee of its truth. What it is for W to obtain is entirely independent of these facts about the teller, and one's grasp of what it is for W to obtain is entirely independent of one's dispositions to form opinions about them.

Notice precisely what is independent here. It is not merely that one's conception of W is fixed independently of one's disposition to form belief in W, in response to certain perceived sounds, phonological items. These two things are clearly modally independent, given the arbitrary conventional nature of language. More important is that one's conception of W is fixed independently of any disposition to form belief that W obtains in response to one's perception of what one perceives as, and believes to be, an assertion that W obtains. Given what has already been developed about the nature of the link of testimony, it is clear that the connection between an assertion or telling that W obtains, and W's obtaining, is always mediated by a further linkage—the route through the teller's mind, her own belief and its expression. So an assertion that W obtains is never—pace one special case to be discussed shortly—immediate evidence for W. Reacting to it as if it were—not showing grasp of the indirect and non-constitutive nature of the link from S asserting W, to W, would reveal gross conceptual confusion in a hearer. If I were to respond to S's assertions that W as if they were direct signs of W, this *would* undermine the supposition that I have a grasp of what it is for W to obtain! This fact of the mediated, indirect and non-canonical nature of the link between testimony and what is testified to is, in my view, the most fundamental reason why the epistemology of testimony is inferential, not direct, in contrast with the epistemology of perception.

It also shows why there can be no such thing as 'testimonial experience' of that which is testified to, enjoyed by the understanding recipient of testimony.⁴² 'Testimonial experience' as of W's obtaining, if it existed, would be

⁴¹ By T, in trusting someone's testimony to W, one implicitly accepts—since one is committed to this—that the teller, or an informant upstream of her, has grounds for believing that W obtains. And these must be non-testimonial grounds, on pain of regress. Thus, even if W is the instantiation of an epistemically individuated concept, it cannot be testimony to it which individuates it.

⁴² This idea is hinted at in McDowell's suggestion that learning a language is almost like extending one's perceptual powers (McDowell 1980). It is proposed explicitly in Wanderer (2001).

a sort of perception of W's obtaining, a non-belief phenomenal-cum-representational state as of W's obtaining which can ground knowledge of this, enjoyed in hearing with understanding an assertion that W obtains. It has been suggested that, when one is listening attentively to a trusted teller, in one's attentive understanding of his discourse, it is as if one were confronted with the facts retold themselves. The supposed epistemological upshot is that testimony, at least in these circumstances, yields direct though defeasible knowledge of what is retold, in a manner parallel to how perception proper yields knowledge.

But how could it seem to one in such a circumstance as if one were confronted with W's obtaining, when one's conception of W, together with one's commonsense grasp of the nature of speech acts, and the intentions and beliefs of the speaker from which they issue, shows how a speech act, however trustworthy, is an entirely different, spatially and temporally removed, and only contingently linked event? Suppose that a vivid account of, say, a shipwreck, by a survivor, conjures up imagery in its audience. Still, unless they are grossly conceptually confused, they would never regard this as their awareness of what he is recounting—a state which non-inferentially grounds knowledge of what happened. The events retold happened elsewhere, and long before. The vividness of the survivor's account is at most circumstantially relevant to its likely accuracy. A known liar might give such a vivid tale; in enjoying its effects, one has no more inclination to believe him, than one does in understanding fiction generally. The possibility of understanding fiction itself supports the falsity of the direct-phenomenal-awareness thesis concerning what it is like to understand trusted testimony.

The link from the occurrence of a reported event, say a shipwreck, and a survivor's account of it, is multi-staged, going via the survivor's memory, and her intention to give an account of what she remembers. Even if she remembers accurately, she may exaggerate, and she may not be truthful at all. Given that the route from any witnessed event to testimony to it goes thus via the mind of the teller, I do not see that 'testimonial experience'—apparent confrontation with the facts testified to—were there such an experiential phenomenon, would be anything other than a dangerously misleading form of illusion—a sort of hallucinatory faculty, which one would have to learn to discount, in making judgements on the basis of what one is told. But in any case I do not believe that representations of this kind occur in normal understanding of heard speech.

The representations involved in understanding speech acts, including tellings, are crucially unlike those involved in both perception, and experiential memory, in this phenomenological-cum-epistemological respect. I think that when we hear and understand speech we typically enjoy understanding experience: a quasi-perceptual representation of the content and force of the

speech act; and that this grounds a hearer's knowledge of what speech act has been made. This knowledge is accordingly, in normal human language use, a kind of perceptual knowledge.⁴³ But there is no perception, or quasi-perception, of the state of affairs therein asserted to obtain, as opposed to the content and force of the assertion of it. Our perception is of meaning, but this is not at all the same as apparent sensory confrontation with the truth condition of the understood sentence. With literal truth we report: "I heard her say that P". But not: I heard or saw P—through her saying of it.⁴⁴

Given these facts, the best version of the direct-awareness account of understanding testimony would claim that, on favourable occasions, a hearer somehow perceives both the content and force of the speech act and also, simultaneously and inextricably, the trustworthiness of the speaker. It is no part of my theory that the trustworthiness of a speaker can never be perceived, from appropriate cues in her manner and situation, perhaps conjoined with background knowledge. But I deny that this is an inextricable part of a single representational state. Perception of trustworthiness, if and where possible, simply provides the basis, on that occasion, for a key premiss in the hearer's justifying grounds for believing what she is told, on that occasion.—She both grasps what the teller asserts, and detects that he is trustworthy, and so quite properly believes him. (In contrast, it would not be right to say that, whenever I believe my eyes, I both seem to see, say, that P, and at the same time, but distinctly, perceive that the circumstances of perception are normal. I perceive no such thing, and my perceptual knowledge that P is not based in empirical knowledge of their being so.)

It is important to see that this key feature of testimony—the multi-stage causal chain through the teller's mind, and consequent contingency of the link between any state of affairs and her report of its obtaining—is consistent with the fact we acquire various of our concepts, perhaps all of them, and certainly the labels for all of them, initially, through learning our language in a process of simple trust.⁴⁵ Conceptually speaking, if not epistemically, we climb up the ladder of testimony, to then throw it away. Mummy saying 'red' was how I learned what is called 'red'. But as I become a master of folk physics and folk psychology, I appreciate that Mummy's saying something is red is one thing, its being so another—even if she is in fact always truthful and accurate. That her reports of the colours of items are always correct is contin-

⁴³ Fricker (2003) develops and defends this theory.

⁴⁴ The linguistic data on this are complex, but I think support my point: for visual perception, we say both: 'I see the ship sinking', and 'I see that the ship is sinking'. For knowledge from testimony, while we do say: 'I hear that the ship is sinking' (i.e. hear from a verbal report), the more direct form: 'I hear the ship sinking' does not exist as way of describing one's hearing of this from testimony.

⁴⁵ By 'simple trust' I mean a trustingly receptive attitude on the part of one—a small child—who does not yet have the conceptual resources to raise doubts about the trustworthiness of her teacher.

gent, due to her moral and epistemic virtues, not guaranteed by what it is for things to be coloured.⁴⁶

I have shown that, when a hearer forms belief through trust in the teller, that the teller speaks from knowledge is a ground for her belief, so that she knows what she is told only if the teller indeed spoke from knowledge. This entails that knowledge through trust in testimony is knowledge at second hand. We saw that this in turn entails, on pain of regress of justification, T Corollary—for any proposition that can be known, there must be some way other than trust in testimony through which it can or once could be known. What is more, for any proposition which is known, knowledge of it must be founded in the possession by some individual, or distributedly among some set of individuals, of a non-testimonial ground or warrant for belief in it. But do these results ensure the further claim TNC argued for in this section?

TNC: For all types of state of affairs W, testimony to W is not canonical evidence for W.

Thoughts of two possible counter-examples to TNC may have been troubling the reader: performatives, and a speaker's avowals of her own mental states. Performatives would certainly be a counter-example, if they were instances of telling, or testifying. But they are not. Coming to know through trust in testimony is coming to know through properly taking the speaker to be expressing knowledge, in what she asserts. But the performance of a performative act—for instance 'I hereby promise...' does not issue from antecedent knowledge that one has promised—it cannot, since before the act there was no such fact to know. The act of promising is certainly canonical evidence for the coming into existence of a promise. By the same token, its making is not a case of telling, or the giving of testimony. So knowing that someone has made a promise, by observing them to do so, is not a case of acquiring knowledge through trust in testimony. Precisely because the act

⁴⁶ Nor by what it is for colour words to have the meaning, in the linguistic and social community in question, that they do. The reader may object that my argument in this section—stressing the contingent and non-constitutive, non-apriori nature of the evidence for any state of affairs provided by testimony to it—is flawed by its neglect of considerations about what fixes meanings in a community. Coady (1992, Ch.9) has used Davidsonian themes regarding the fixation of meaning to argue that there is an a priori link between testimony and what is testified to (see Davidson 1984). While I think there are indeed constitutive issues of the fixation of meaning to consider here, I believe the non-contingent constitutive links which can be argued for from such considerations are very weak. At most there can be shown to be an essentially vague upper bound on the proportion of false assertions there can be in a community, and these only concerning a small range of predicates for observational concepts. And even this much is problematic (see Graham 2000). No results strong enough to affect what is here argued can be soundly derived from considerations about the fixation of meaning. Note that such arguments may, but need not, be framed in Davidsonian, interpretationist, terms.

creates the promise, rather than reporting it, there is nothing to trust or distrust the promiser about.—Or rather, one may or may not trust her to keep her promise; but there is no call for trust, on the question of whether she has really made it or not; her act constitutes her doing so.

The case of a speaker's reports or avowals of her own mental states is more problematic. The nature of mental states and the status of the subject's self-ascriptions of them, both in private judgement and in public declaration or avowal, is a deeply problematic and much studied area. A discussion even remotely adequate to the complexity of the topic is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁷ Hence I shall confine my remarks to the presentation of a dilemma to the proponent of the thesis that the case of avowals provides a counter-example to TNC. Here goes: either a broadly Cartesian view of the mind is correct, on which reports of mental states are just that—reports of an independent, antecedent fact known through some form of inner observation. In this case these reports, while presumably highly reliable, since the scope for error to slip in is so small, are nonetheless reports of an independent state of affairs, and are not canonical for its obtaining. In this case a subject's reports are testimony, and testimony which conforms to both T, T Corollary, and TNC. Alternatively, the Cartesian view is false, and avowals are expressions of the subject's state, not reports of anterior private knowledge of it. In this case the evidence avowals give of a mental state is indeed canonical for it; but by the same token, they are to be likened to performatives, and are not properly seen as instances of telling or testifying.⁴⁸ In either case, there is no counter-example to T nor to TNC. Suppose there is a mid-way between these two horns: we can somehow describe avowals in a way which sees them both as reports, hence as cases of telling; yet also as canonical evidence for what is told. In this case, I would concede that self-ascriptions of mental states provide a counter-example to TNC—though not to T and its corollary, which are strictly entailed by the fact that knowledge through trust in testimony is knowledge at second-hand. However, in the very nature of the link between speaker's report and state of affairs reported, we can see that this is the only possible exception to TNC. I pointed out that the causal chain from the speaker's report to what she reports or tells of is indirect, since it goes via her own mental states—her memory of and belief in what she reports, and her desire to publish her supposed knowledge. In the case when the topic of report is those mental states themselves, and only in that case, we have a qualification to our general rule that testimony to a state of affairs is always a comparatively indirect way of knowing it to obtain. In the case of someone's

⁴⁷ I offer an account in Fricker (1997).

⁴⁸ On this Wittgensteinian view of mental self-ascriptions as 'avowals', the subject's utterance does not express her own prior knowledge that she is, say, in pain. So—our present concern—she is not telling what she knows. Instead this piece of verbal behaviour is a 'criterion' for her being in pain. See Wittgenstein (1953)

knowledge of her own mental states, it is she alone who has more direct access—if that is indeed the right model for self-knowledge.

An objector might still contend that in asserting TNC I am committed to a tendentious, and in some cases clearly false, realism about what it is for various kinds of state of affairs to obtain. I will finish by discussing some cases that might be thought to involve this, and show it is not so. It might be held that some 'secondary qualities' are concepts F of properties such that necessarily, an object is F just if everyone in some relevant group judges it to be so. Suppose this were so for aesthetic qualities. This is consistent with both T and TNC. First, judging an object to be F is one thing, asserting it to be so is another. Taciturness and deceptive intent intervene between them. Second, more importantly: even on this broadly idealist conception of what it is for aesthetic qualities to be instantiated, no one individual's judgement is sufficient for, or constitutes, its own truth. (Indeed it is a condition for the very idea of a quality about which the subject is judging, hence a genuine content to be judged of, that this not be so.)—But if a quality F were of this kind, would there not then be a conceptual link between everyone's judging it to be instantiated by some item, and its being so? So this massed judgement is canonical evidence for F's being instantiated? Even if it is true that there is a metaphysically necessary link here, and that it holds in virtue of the nature of the concept, this does not amount to mass testimony being canonical evidence here. We explained the idea of canonical evidence for W, not merely as there being a metaphysically necessary link between the evidence in question (here, mass judgement), and truth; but as appreciation of the force of the evidence being partly constitutive of possession of the concept in question. There is no question of this here. That either aesthetic qualities, or colours, smells and so forth are mind-dependent in the way outlined, is an unobvious and controversial philosophical thesis. Implicit grasp of it is not a condition for mastery of colour concepts, nor aesthetic ones. So someone who refuses to accept everyone else's unanimous testimony, say, that a certain item is green, not yellow, or that a certain statue is very ugly, may be epistemically pigheaded, but she does not thereby show a lack of grasp of the concept of green, or of ugliness.

There is a whole range of social and institutional facts which are constituted, not so much by everyone's being disposed to judge them to be so but, in this case, by their all habitually acting in ways predicated on their being so. Some examples: what the everyday names are of particular persons, cities, countries, and so forth, is constituted by everyone habitually and constantly calling them by those names. All kinds of political and social facts are constituted by various common beliefs, institutional practices and rules: that Paris is the political capital of France; that there exists a border between two countries in a certain place; and so forth. Again, I do not see that this kind of

dependence of a social fact on the habits and expectations of persons which constitute and maintain it is inconsistent with either T or TNC. The same points made in connection with secondary qualities apply again: no one person can make Paris be the capital, or the border be at a certain place, by believing or asserting it to be so; and in this case, it is not mass judgement, but mass action, which constitutes the fact. Moreover, it is not a condition for mastery of the concept of a name, or of a national boundary, to appreciate that these are socially-constituted facts. Maybe it is getting near to a condition for understanding what a name is, to appreciate that everyone's calling X 'Fido' is bound up with what it is for Fido to be a name of X. But no one person's testimony is canonical evidence for this. For matters like the border of a country, perhaps the pronouncements or rulings not of just anyone, but of individuals or institutions with certain credentials and role is constitutive. Here we are approaching the fuzzy borderline between reports of pre-existing and independent states of affairs for which the teller should have adequate evidence, on one hand—the domain of testimony—and stipulations: official rulings of one kind or another which set up a fact by pronouncement, rather than reporting on a pre-existing one. Like performatives, these linguistic actions do not conform to T and TNC; like performatives, they are not instances of testifying.

5. Conclusion

I have described the speech act of telling, and what it is to trust such an act, taking it at face value as an expression of the speaker's knowledge. We saw from this description how it is that, when all goes as it should, knowledge is spread from speaker to trusting hearer by means of telling. The account proposed of what makes the trusting hearer's belief in what she is told be knowledge, entails that knowledge from trust in testimony is by its nature always knowledge at second hand: the hearer's ground for her belief includes her belief that the teller spoke from knowledge, and so she knows only if this is indeed so; her trust is premised upon this fact. We saw the further consequence that—with at most the possible exception of knowledge of others' mental states from their avowals—testimony is never the most direct means of coming to know of something, and is never canonical evidence for the state of affairs testified to. It was suggested that testimony contrasts with perception in this key epistemological respect, and that this is the deepest reason why the epistemology of testimony is inferential, in contrast with perception. Knowledge of what one perceives is grounded directly, though defeasibly, in perceptual experience, while a trusting hearer's knowledge of what she is told is grounded in her perceptually based knowledge of the

speech act made, together with empirically grounded knowledge of the trustworthiness of the teller.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ See Fricker (forthcoming 2007) for further development of my arguments for this contrast in the epistemology of testimony, versus perception. My thanks to Jonathan Adler, Robert Audi, Catherine Elgin, John Hawthorne, Richard Moran, Stephen Schiffer, Matthew Soteriou, and Tim Williamson, for comments and/or discussion on an earlier draft, as well as Peter Lipton, Neil Manson and other participants at a workshop in King's College Cambridge in September 2003, and commentators at the May 2005 Rutgers Epistemology Conference. The research on which this paper is based was done in the first half of 2002 during a period of leave from teaching and administrative obligations funded in part by a fellowship from the Mind Association, and I am very grateful for this. Its publication was sadly delayed by the sudden and unexpected death of my lifetime companion Michael Bacharach in August 2002. His comments and rigorous criticism were always invaluable, and this paper is the poorer for the lack of them.

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