

**TESTIMONY, JUSTIFICATION, AND VIRTUE:
INVESTIGATING THE JUSTIFICATORY SOURCE
OF TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE**

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Abstract

The epistemology of testimony is an inquiry into the nature of testimony as an epistemic source. Given that testimony is an epistemic source, is it a basic or generative epistemic source? Or does it derive its epistemic credentials from other more basic and generative epistemic sources, like; perception, reason, and introspection? If testimonial knowledge is dependent on other basic epistemic sources, it means that testimonial knowledge is inferential. On the alternative, if testimonial knowledge is basic, it implies an inherent justificatory power. Given that there are two cognitive agents in testimonial epistemic transaction – the testifier (speaker) and the receiver (hearer); where do we situate the justificatory power of testimonial knowledge, the testifier or the hearer? The responses to these questions have generated theories that dominantly swing between reductionism and anti-reductionism, bringing in the inferentialist and non-inferentialist perspectives. These theories, however, fail to successfully establish whether

testimonial knowledge is basic or not and therefore, makes it problematic to establish the justificatory source of testimonial knowledge. The less dominant quasi-reductionism of Duncan Pritchard opens up the possibility to consider Miranda Fricker's application of epistemic virtues to testimonial justification. Therefore, with the aim to establish the justificatory source of testimonial knowledge, this paper critically analyses and evaluates the role of epistemic virtues in testimonial knowledge. We argue that testimonial justification is a two-way process, and conclude that testimonial belief is justified as knowledge on the basis of the intellectual virtues of the testifier's cognitive character traits and the hearer's cognitive faculties and excellences.

Keywords: Anti-reductionism, Epistemic source, Reductionism, Testimony, Virtue epistemology.

Introduction

This paper aims to establish the justificatory source of testimonial knowledge. The problematic lies in the question whether testimony is, or not, a basic epistemic source? By basic epistemic source, we mean a source of knowledge that is not reliant on other epistemic sources for its epistemic credentials. For instance, perception is considered to be a basic epistemic source because we acquire perceptual knowledge through our perceptual engagement with the world, without reliance on any other cognitive faculty. Thus, the question, reformulated is: can testimony, without reference to other purported more basic epistemic sources like reason, experience, and introspection, generate knowledge in the hearer (receiver)? Reductionism and Anti-reductionism have emerged as the two dominant positions in this discourse. A corollary of the problematic, which is the focus of this paper is the question: What is the actual source of the justificatory power of testimonial knowledge; the trustworthiness of the testifier, or the belief of the hearer? We rely on existing literature, to critically analyse and evaluate the various

issues within the purview of the discourse on the testimonial justification. First off, we analyse the meaning and nature of testimony, as well as, the different approaches to testimony and testimonial knowledge. Secondly, we explicate the relationship between testimonial knowledge and justification. Thirdly, we shall investigate the role of epistemic virtues in testimonial knowledge. Thereafter, we conclude, based on our analyses, that neither the testifier nor the hearer of testimony has the monopoly of justificatory power because the latter is not dependent solely on either the testifier or the hearer, but a shared responsibility between the testifier and the hearer.

On the Meaning and Nature of Testimony

Testimony is “a statement or other communication that purports to state a fact or provide information.”¹ From its Latin etymology, which is a synthesis of two words: *testis* – witness, and *monium* – which signifies an action, state, or condition, testimony describes a proof or demonstration of some fact, evidence, or a piece of evidence that confirms or negates a state of affairs. Therefore, we can understand testimony as that which a declarative sentence asserts, either written or spoken. Needless to say that most of the body of knowledge we presently have are products of the testimony of others which we have learnt from their spoken and/or written words. We depend in endless practical ways on the technological fruits of the dispersed knowledge of others.² Hence, Dan O' Brien describes it as the way human beings obtain knowledge through linguistic communication.³

Despite, the fact that much of the beliefs that constitute our knowledge system extensively dependent on testimony, the very vast

¹ Alvin Goldman, “Testimony and disagreement,” in Alvin I. Goldman and Matthew McGrath, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 207.

² Elizabeth Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, no. 3 (Nov. 2006), 592-618.

³ Daniel O'Brien, “Introduction to the Epistemology of Testimony,” *Philosophica* 78 (2006), 6.

role testimony plays in our acquisition of knowledge, has not enjoyed a corresponding vast treatment in the history of traditional epistemology (TE). The latter did not consider testimony as a basic epistemic source; its epistemic status was reduced to inference based on the trustworthiness of the speaker, which makes it a mere transmitter of knowledge.⁴ Testimony was conceived to be less reliable than other epistemic sources, like; experience, reason, and introspection.

Testimony embodies beliefs, and the beliefs acquired through testimony are considered, by TE, to be second-hand because they have been passed on to the believer by someone else. Although testimonial beliefs are considered second-hand, they are not second-rate since on some occasions they may amount to knowledge.⁵ Like knowledge, testimony is propositional. Given that propositions are statements of fact about the world, they have a truth-value and therefore, are considered to be a medium for knowledge transfer.

As a medium of knowledge transfer from the testifier to the receiver, testimony presupposes credulity, especially when dealing with a trusting receiver – the latter readily believes whatever the information the testifier provides. Within this context, the issue of trust and reliance become important factors to consider in the epistemology of testimony. The interesting questions here are: (i) Is the receiver's credulity founded on the reliability of the testifier? (ii) Is credulity not an invitation and/or license to gullibility.⁶ What reason, if any, is there for a receiver to believe a testifier, given that the testifier is capable of lies, deception, error, and poor ambiguous or misleading expressions? Does the receiver have good reason to rely on or believe the testifier/speaker? Note that the terms hearer and receiver, testifier and speaker, are used in this paper as synonyms. Sometimes, our testimonial information is misleading or false. But as

⁴Dhirendon M. Datta, "Testimony as a method of knowledge," *Mind* 36, no. 143 (July 1927), 354-358. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2249544>.

⁵Daniel O'Brien, "Introduction to the Epistemology of Testimony," 6.

⁶Duncan Pritchard, *What is this thing called Knowledge?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 99.

Duncan Pritchard avers, this kind of testimonial deceit, in itself, is not all that troubling given that there are some checks and balances through which we evaluate the testimony of others. The problem, however, with testimonial knowledge is that we are not able to offer independent grounds for most of our testimony-based beliefs.⁷ In the opinion of Laurence Bonjour, this is precisely the problem with testimonial justification – our inability to provide general justification for testimony-based beliefs.⁸

Contemporary social epistemology tries to investigate whether testimony provides knowledge and justification. If it does, how does it provide knowledge and justification; by yielding basic knowledge or basic justification like perception and introspection/reflection?⁹ The idea is to plausibly establish if belief in a testifier's words is actually caused by inference. The questions correlated to this are:

- I. Does the receiver of testimony believe, disbelieve, or suspend judgement about what she hears?
- ii. Is the receiver *justified* in believing what she hears?
- iii. Does the receiver acquire knowledge from what she hears?

The attempts to respond to these questions raise another key question, namely; is testimonial knowledge inferential or non-inferential? For those who argue that it is inferential, a testimonial belief only amounts to knowledge if it is justified, and for it to be justified, it must be supported by inferences available to the hearer. On the contrary, non-inferentialists insist that we do not need to work through inferences to possess testimonial beliefs, that even if we have the ability to make such inferences, it does not play a justificatory role in testimonial beliefs.¹⁰

⁷Duncan Pritchard, *What is this Thing called Knowledge?* 91.

⁸Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classical Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 2nd edition (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 164.

⁹Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 137.

¹⁰Daniel O'Brien, "Introduction to the Epistemology of Testimony," 6.

The inferential vs. non-inferential debate is concomitant with the question of whether testimony is a basic epistemic source or not.¹¹ While the inferentialists insist that testimonial knowledge is not basic in the sense in which perceptual knowledge is basic because the former derives its justificatory power from perceptual, memorial and inferential resources, non-inferentialists opine that even though testimony may be causally related to perception, the former does not need to be epistemically dependent on the latter. In other words, non-inferentialists insist that the justification of testimonial beliefs is not derived from other sources since a hearer can acquire knowledge from simply hearing the testimony of another.

Testimonial Knowledge: Basic or not Basic?

Inferentialists provide a reductionist account of testimonial knowledge by arguing that the latter is a derivation of more basic forms of knowledge and justification. On the contrary, non-inferentialists maintain an anti-reductionist account that testimonial knowledge and justification are basic. The underlying assumption that undergirds both positions is that our testimonial beliefs are justifiable on the basis that testimony provides evidence for the truth that it asserts. The argument can be formulated in a bi-conditional: Either we trust the testimonies of others on account of what we have acquired from other epistemic sources or we do based on what we have independently verified to be true. Therefore, we are generally entitled to trust what others tell us.

Reductionism is the argument that we can only rightly hold a testimonial belief if it is traceable to a non-testimonial justification.¹² The implication here is that our personal evidence is insufficient to justify testimonial knowledge. According to Axel Gelfert, if our testimony depends on our sense perceptions for its reception and the sincerity and competence of the testifier for its truthfulness, it means that our justified testimonial beliefs must have been derived from,

¹¹Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classical Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 165.

¹²Duncan Pritchard, *What is Wrong with this Thing called Knowledge?* 82.

and ultimately reducible to more basic epistemic sources, like perception, memory, and inference.¹³ For James Van Cleve, “testimony gives us justified belief . . . not because it shines by its own light, but because it has often enough been revealed [to be] true by our other lights.”¹⁴ Here, Van Cleve collapses three other forces of justification – perception, memory, and inductive inference, into testimony. This position is described as “global reductionism,” the view that, based on the general reliability of inferential appeal to testimony, hearers are justified in believing particular instances of testimony.¹⁵

David Hume's work, “On Miracles,” promotes this position. Here, Hume argues that our general observations of testimonial trustworthiness in the past, allows us to inductively infer that fresh items of testimony would be justified.¹⁶ We do not have any *a priori* reason to think that beliefs gained through testimony should be true. Therefore, we need independent grounds to justify our testimonial beliefs. He further argues, as Michael Huemer affirms, that the observation of the veracity of human testimony and their conformity to the facts of the testifier's report provide the assurance of our testimonial beliefs.¹⁷ This implies that our beliefs are proportionate with evidence to the extent that we either have a proof or a probability. We have a proof when the testimony and evidence are in constant and unalterable conformity and a probability when they

¹³Axel Gelfert, “Hume on Testimony Revisited,” *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2010), 62.

¹⁴James Van Cleve, “Reid on the Credit of Human Testimony,” in J. Lackey and E. Sos, (eds), *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

¹⁵Alvin Goldman and Thomas Blanchard, “Social epistemology”, *The Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/epistemology-social/>, [Accessed 29/02/2020].

¹⁶David Hume, “On Miracles,” *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, (1748), E. Steinberg (ed.) (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1977), 74.

¹⁷Michael Huemer (ed), *Epistemology; Contemporary Readings*, (Routledge, New York, 2002), 225.

(testimony and evidence) are not in constant and unalterable conformity.¹⁸ Hume assumes that the trustworthiness of testimony depends on the evidence that the testifier is likely to be right. Therefore, whether we accept a testimony or not must depend on inferential reasoning; from the speaker's track record and the plausibility of the claim to the acceptability of the specific testimonial claim in question. Our reliance on testimony is based on our observation of a constant and regular aggregation between testimony and the facts in the external world.

According to Alvin Goldman, the following questions would arise from Hume's position:

- i. Do we all, individually, make enough observations to justify our conclusions?
- ii. Are our range of individuals and subject-matters diverse enough to warrant our acceptance and application of such a general principle of justification to testimonies and persons, even those we have not met before?¹⁹

For Anthony Coady, we do not have enough observational bases to inductively conclude that testimony is generally reliable because we cannot individually achieve the required amount of fieldwork to reach such conclusions. For instance, even though many of us have never witnessed the process of giving birth to a baby or examined how blood circulates around the body, we nonetheless, still hold the conclusions we have about them based on the testimony of others.²⁰

Elizabeth Fricker attempts to mitigate the global reductionist position of Hume by advocating a local reductionism. She argues that the general principles of testimonial trustworthiness in Hume's account do not sufficiently warrant a receiver's justification in particular acts of testimony. In addition to these general principles, she contends that the receiver requires background evidence, based on observation and memory, about the specific testifier to warrant the receiver's justifiedness. The receiver achieves this by constantly

¹⁸ Axel Gelfert, "Hume on Testimony Revisited," 63.

¹⁹ Alvin Goldman, "Testimony and disagreement," 208.

²⁰ C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 82.

evaluating the testifier for trustworthiness and make her conclusions based on the pieces of evidence available to her. Therefore, all that is required for a testimonial belief is that the testifier is reliable in relation to her specific testimony, and not the general reliability of testimony. Reliability here refers to the sincerity of the testifier and not the testimony itself.²¹

Thomas Reid advanced an anti-reductionist argument against Hume's reductionism. Anti-reductionism is the view that testimony, like perception, memory, and introspection, is a basic epistemic source.²² The anti-reductionists argue that a receiver is justified to hold a testimonial belief, based on the testimony of a testifier, given that the receiver has no defeaters (doubts) about the credibility of the testifier. Based on the general assumption of credulism that human beings have the natural propensity to speak the truth, and a disposition to confide in the veracity of others,²³ Reid argues that testimony is a social intercourse between intelligent beings by which human knowledge is transmitted.²⁴ According to him, although Hume broke away from the traditionalist scheme with his (Hume's) reductionist account of testimony, he did not free himself from his own implausible principles.²⁵ His argument tended toward individualism and solitude, which are against human nature. The human person is social by nature, and therefore, hardwired to trust the testimony of other people. For Reid, we should rely on common-sense in our quest to justify testimonial knowledge instead of past experiences as posited by Hume, because, the experiences of the past

²¹Elizabeth Fricker, "Against Gullibility," in B. K. Matilal and A. Chakrabarti (eds), *Knowing from words: Western and Indian philosophical analysis of understanding and testimony* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 125-161.

²²Alvin Goldman and Dennis Whitecomb (eds), *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2011), 73.

²³Thomas Reid, "Inquiry into the Human Mind," in *Inquiry and Essays*, R. E. Bean Blossom and K. Lehrer (eds), (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1983), 236-237.

²⁴Thomas Reid, "Inquiry into the Human Mind," 236.

²⁵Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163.

cannot, of themselves, provide a belief of what is in the future.²⁶

Other anti-reductionists like Tyler Burge and Richard Foley argue that irrespective of the amount of evidence in support of the testifier's reliability and sincerity, a receiver of testimony is warranted to believe the testimony of a given speaker. According to Burge, a "person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him unless there are stronger reasons not to do so."²⁷ This implies that a receiver of testimony does not necessarily require positive support for the sincerity of the testifier to hold a testimonial belief. What is required is that the receiver has no evidence that defeats the testifier's reliability and sincerity. Goldman supports this argument with the assertion that without defeaters, like prior experience, testimonial justification comes free for the receiver without reference to any positive reason for believing the testifier.²⁸

To moderate the rift between reductionism and anti-reductionism, Duncan Pritchard proposed a quasi-reductionist thesis. Against anti-reductionism, he argues that credulism permits widespread gullibility, which is not epistemically attractive. Against reductionism, he insists that we cannot resolve the issue of testimonial justification by providing additional instances of testimony that support the original testimonial belief. If the reductionist position is correct, we have to look for adequate supporting grounds that are non-testimonial. In the absence of the latter, reductionism leads us directly to a form of scepticism about the epistemic status of our testimonial beliefs.²⁹ Pritchard's quasi-reductionist thesis is a hybrid position that accommodates the motivations and respects the intuitions of both the reductionist and anti-reductionist. According to O'Brien, when we cannot have testimonial knowledge without non-testimonial epistemic support for our beliefs, we express the spirit of reductionism. This is,

²⁶Thomas Reid, "Inquiry into the Human Mind," 236.

²⁷Tyler Burge, "Content Preservation," *Philosophical review* 102 (1993), 457-488.

²⁸Alvin Goldman, "Testimony and Disagreement," 209.

²⁹Duncan Pritchard, "The Epistemology of Testimony," *Philosophical issues* 14 (2004), 326-328.

however, compatible with certain fundamentalist or credulist intuitions in the sense that it provides some epistemic support by means of testimonial evidence.³⁰ In this wise, quasi-reductionism brings within its ambience the two-key intuitions regarding any knowledge inquiry, namely; that knowledge is a cognitive achievement, and that knowledge is not compatible with luck.

Hume's reductionism assumes that we should only trust testimony when we have evidence that the testifier is likely to be right. It is an inferential position that places testimonial justification on the relationship between the reliability of the testifier and supporting evidence, which invariably implies that the justificatory power of testimony lies in the reliability of the testifier. Reid's anti-reductionism argues for the reliance on common-sense in the quest for justifying testimonial information. This is a non-inferential position that presupposes that credulity is based on the common-sense of the receiver of testimony. Here, the responsibility of justification is hinged on the receiver of testimonial information. Pritchard's quasi-reductionism supports a justificatory model that accommodates some elements of both the inferentialist and non-inferentialist considerations. It synthesises the reliability of the testifier with the innate natural tendencies of the receiver to account for testimonial knowledge. If Pritchard's synthesis is correct, it means the justification of testimonial knowledge is a shared responsibility between the testifier and the receiver. Herein, the latter applies common-sense in the exercise of her credulity to apprehend the reliability of the testifier. This seems to be Miranda Fricker's concern when she explicates the idea of the testimonial sensitivity of the hearer.

By the testimonial sensitivity of the hearer, Fricker describes a virtuous display of perceptual capacity by the receiver towards a testimony. For the virtuous receiver to trust the testifier, she must consider the testifier to be trustworthy to a degree that enables her to achieve a reasonable level of trust towards the testifier and the

³⁰Daniel O'Brien, "Introduction to the Epistemology of Testimony," 8.

testifier's testimony.³¹ According to Fricker, there is an emotional aspect proper to cognition, which is displayed through empathy. Therefore, it is only when the virtuous receiver is in such an empathetic relationship with the testifier, that she can make a good judgement of the latter's trustworthiness.³² Given that empathy is the ability to identify with the feelings of others; epistemically, it describes being in the same cognitive situation with someone. Consequently, for a receiver to consider a testifier reliable, both the receiver and the testifier must possess some form of similar cognitive abilities, which are only perceptible empathically. Such cognitive abilities are rooted in the theory of epistemic virtues, hence, we need to consider how epistemic virtues impact on testimonial justification.

Epistemic Virtues and Testimonial Justification

If Fricker is correct about the idea of the testimonial sensitivity of the hearer as analysed above, it would mean that epistemic virtues impact on testimonial justification. Given that this is the case; we should investigate the importance of the impact of virtue in testimonial justification. Such an investigation warrants that we consider virtue epistemology since the virtues in question here are epistemic virtues. Essentially, virtue epistemology (VE) is modelled on intellectual virtues, which is sometimes described as epistemic virtues. It promotes the Socratic and Aristotelian idea that a truly virtuous agent would be an excellent cogniser,³³ because intellectual or epistemic virtues are characteristics of the cognitive agent that promote intellectual flourishing, which accounts for excellent cognition. Therefore, VE defines knowledge in terms of virtue-theoretic concepts, with two variants to its thesis. The first variant is traced to Aristotle's notion that intellectual virtues are cognitive excellences, which constitute reliable or truth-conducive qualities of the agent. This is virtue reliabilism. And the second variant is linked to

³¹Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), 79.

³²Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 80.

³³Julia Driver, "The Aristotelian Conception of Virtues," in *Uneasy Virtue* (London: Cambridge university Press, London), 6.

Aristotle's ethics, whereof, intellectual or epistemic virtues are conceived as character traits, like; fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual courage, etc.³⁴ This is virtue responsibilism.

Virtue reliabilists argue that it is possible to acquire knowledge in the absence of an exercise of intellectual character virtues. Consequently, they insist that virtue responsibilists character model of intellectual virtue does not provide a helpful account of the nature of knowledge because any analysis of knowledge aims to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.³⁵ Virtue responsibilists, on the contrary, argue that intellectual virtues are states that indicate an intellectual grasp of the truth.³⁶ Therefore, they disagree with virtue reliabilists that intellectual excellences are competencies that properly position us to pursue the truth. Virtue responsibilists consider virtue reliabilists' class of virtues as natural powers, faculties, and receptivities that provide the grounds for intellectual virtues. However, they are nurtured to the extent to which they find expressions in refined character traits of epistemic agents. Therefore, we can argue that intellectual virtues do not only refer to refined character traits but also to our nurtured inherent capacities.

Virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism share the same aim – the attainment of truth and knowledge, which is critical to intellectual well-being and flourishing. While the former considers cognitive qualities or faculties that effectively aid the attainment of truth and knowledge, the latter is concerned with the character traits of the cognitive agent that enable the attainment of truth and knowledge.³⁷ Both variants of VE credit knowledge to the believer. Considering that social epistemology (SE) advocates the view that

³⁴Paul Faulkner, "A Virtue Theory of Testimony," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 114, no. 2 (2014), 189. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9264.2014.00370.x.

³⁵Jason Baehr, "Character Reliability and Virtue Epistemology," 197.

³⁶Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtues*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 38.

³⁷Anselm Jimoh, "A Critical Assessment of Virtue Epistemology," *Flash: Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2015), 7.

the trustworthiness of the testifier justifies testimonial knowledge, it would seem that VE would run into tension with SE.³⁸ This, at least, is the view of Jesper Kallestrup and Duncan Pritchard, who argue that a robust VE is opposed to SE, especially the epistemology of testimony.³⁹

Kallestrup and Pritchard differentiated robust VE from modest VE. The latter, for them, defines knowledge in both virtue-theoretic and non-virtue-theoretic concepts, and the former, which is their concern, defines knowledge only in virtue-theoretic concepts.⁴⁰ According to Benjamin McCraw, as Kallestrup and Pritchard conceive it, for robust VE, “there is nothing more to knowledge than true belief plus some virtue-theoretic condition or set of conditions.”⁴¹ This implies that a cognitive agent's true belief in knowledge is a credit of the agent's (who is the believer) virtuous activity. This is the Credit Thesis (CT), which states that: “S knows that p only if S believes that p because of S's virtuous operation.”⁴² The CT situates the credit for true beliefs that yield knowledge to the individual believer, which in the view of Kallestrup and Pritchard defeats the paradigm of VE as SE. This is so because the CT commits robust VE to epistemic individualism. The latter is the view that justification supervenes on internal features of the cognitive agent.⁴³ Internal features here should not be associated with epistemic internalism or externalism, but instead, refers to the cognitive faculties of the individual cognitive agent.

The position of Kallestrup and Pritchard notwithstanding, the question of interest in relation to our subject matter – the possibility of a virtue epistemology of testimony is: “What justifies out uptake of

³⁸ Benjamin W. McCraw, “Virtue Epistemology, Testimony, and Trust,” *Logos and Episteme* V, no. 1 (2014), 95-102.

³⁹ Jesper Kallestrup and Duncan Pritchard, “Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2012), 84-103.

⁴⁰ Kallestrup and Pritchard, “Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism,” 85-86.

⁴¹ McCraw, “Virtue Epistemology, Testimony, and Trust,” 96.

⁴² McCraw, “Virtue Epistemology, Testimony, and Trust,” 96.

testimony? That is, when our acceptance of a bit of testimony to *p* is the acquisition of the belief that *p*, what justifies this acceptance?”⁴⁴ The two prevalent answers to this are: (i) The reductionist view that because “our grounds for acceptance are all the things we believe about the testimonial situation [our] uptake is ... justified ... in so far as, our beliefs about the testimonial situation overall support the conclusion that a piece of testimony is true.”⁴⁵ (ii) The none or anti-reductionist view that “we do not need grounds to be justified in the uptake of a bit of testimony. Rather, we have a general defeasible entitlement to accept what other people tell us.”⁴⁶ Fricker does not find these prevalent views favourable to her project. She opines that our uptake of testimony is more often immediate and non-inferential, even though it is informed and supported by the background beliefs we have. This claim poses an epistemological challenge, namely; how do we account for the fact that our uptake of testimony is immediate and non-inferential, and yet supported by background beliefs? According to Fricker, virtue ethics provides the resolution to this challenge.

Virtue ethics expounds on how perception can deliver judgement. Using the example of kindness, Fricker argues that a kind person does not calculate or appeal to principles to determine which situation requires her kindness. She (kind person) is reliably sensitive to the situational features, which provide her the reasons to be kind. The kind person perceives the situational features as her reasons to judge what she ought to do in any given situation. Therefore, to resolve the epistemological challenge, the receiver of testimony only needs a testimonial sensibility that cognises the features of the testimonial situation which enables the receiver to see that a piece of testimony is trustworthy or not trustworthy. According to Fricker, “The main idea is that where a hearer gives a suitable critical

⁴³Kallestrup and Pritchard, “Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-Individualism,” 86.

⁴⁴Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony,” 190.

⁴⁵Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony,” 190.

⁴⁶Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony,” 190.

reception to an interlocutor's words without making any inference, she does so in virtue of the perceptual deliverances of a well-trained *testimonial sensibility*.⁴⁷

Fricker draws the following closely related parallel between “the virtuous agent's moral perceptual capacity and the virtuous hearer's testimonial capacity,”⁴⁸

- i. That in the testimonial as in the moral sphere, the judgement model is perceptual, and so non-inferential.
- ii. In both spheres, good judgement is uncodifiable.
- iii. In both spheres, the judgement is intrinsically motivating.
- iv. Intrinsically reason-giving
- v. In both spheres the judgement typically contains an emotional aspect that is a proper part of the cognition.⁴⁹

As Faulkner emphasises, the first two points of parallel – (i) and (ii), define the operation of sensibility, while (iii) to (v) are considerations on the nature of the judgement output.⁵⁰ For Fricker, these five points of parallel are consistent with “the spontaneous, unreflective phenomenology of the testimony [which provides] so much impetus for non-inferentialism.”⁵¹ Therefore, they explicate how our testimonial sensibility provide the spontaneous judgement about the trustworthiness of a bit of testimony.

Concerning whether, and how epistemic virtues impact on testimonial justification, our take is that cognitive faculties as intellectual virtues require character traits as intellectual virtues, to serve as indicators for the intellectual grasp of truth. As such, for testimonial information to be justified there is a need to establish that neither the virtue reliabilist cognitive faculties nor the virtue responsibilist character traits are indispensable. To this extent, we can talk about a virtuous hearer or a virtuous speaker; both of them have

⁴⁷Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 71.

⁴⁸Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 71.

⁴⁹Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 72.

⁵⁰Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony,” 192.

⁵¹Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice; Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 80.

an important role to play in testimonial justification. Here, Pritchard's quasi-reductionist approach is applicable – the synthesis of the reliability (trustworthiness) of the testifier/speaker and some innate natural tendencies (credulity) of the receiver/believer. This is a two-way justificatory process, which brings together the reliability of the virtuous testifier as indicated by her refined character traits (which mark an intellectual grasp of truth) and receiver's cognitive faculties – innate natural tendencies (which properly positions her to pursue truth).

Almost all hearers access testimony for credibility. According to Fricker, the virtuous hearer does not arrive at her credibility judgment of testimony through principles that are pre-set because such pre-set principles are usually not precise or comprehensive enough to do the job.⁵² On the other hand, Fricker argues that the speaker arrives at her credibility judgment through the aid of cues, which indicate her moral attitude towards the hearer. Based on this, we argue that there are cases where the speaker may have a positive moral attitude without having the right information that will lead to truth in her testimony. More so, moral attitudes may not be as stable as epistemic attitudes can be, especially because of their emotional content. As such, we argue that the speaker's moral attitude towards the hearer may not be sufficient in aiding the hearer to arrive at a proper credibility judgment of testimonial information.

The two-way justificatory process, we propose, for testimonial justification is characterised by the following features: (i) The indispensability of cognitive faculties and character traits. (ii) The reliability of the virtuous testifier. And (iii) the sensitivity of the virtuous hearer to the epistemic salience of the testifier, based on epistemic empathy. This model is both perceptual and inferential because it involves the speaker's reliability and the hearer's perceptual capacity. The idea of testimonial justification being both perceptual and inferential implies an interconnection between the reliability of the testifier (as some form of non-testimonial supporting

⁵²Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice, Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 75.

ground for justification) and the innate natural tendencies of the hearer through which she apprehends the speaker's reliability, as a basis for justification.⁵³ The reliability of the speaker goes beyond what is established beforehand, it includes what is to be established in the present through the epistemic virtues of the speaker. This interconnection stimulates the justificatory process both internally and externally. When a testifier gives a testimony on a particular incidence, the hearer does not access the credibility of the testimony solely by relying on the testifier's reliability, the hearer relies also on her perceptual capacity to access the credibility of the testimony. The wide-ranging advantage of this kind of interconnection is that it allows us to understand that an epistemic agent's reliability is not merely pre-established but has to be re-established at every point.

Our analysis above establishes that testimonial judgement is both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. This further implies that testimonial justification entails the cognitive abilities of both the hearer and the speaker because the virtuous hearer is motivated to accept what the speaker says, not just based on her cognitive capacities, but also based on the cognitive character traits of the speaker. The idea here is that an agent with excellent cognitive faculties has what it takes to apprehend cognitive traits because they seem to be two sides of the coin. Herein is a uniformity of cognitive situation identified above as epistemic empathy. It is an approach to testimonial justification that follows the paradigm of Pritchard's quasi-reductionist thesis.

A possible objection to this model would be on the grounds of its sufficiency to resolve the question of testimonial justification. For instance, we could ask: Does this model provide general justification for testimonial beliefs? That is to ask if testimonial information is sufficiently justified when the hearer and speaker are involved in the justificatory process on the grounds of epistemic virtues? This is the point where we align with Laurence Bonjour who argues that the problem of justifying testimonial knowledge has persisted because of our inability to provide general justification for testimonial beliefs.

⁵³Duncan Pritchard, "The Epistemology of Testimony," 327.

According to him, because we cannot successfully distinguish all the different kinds of cases of testimonial uptake,⁵⁴ we cannot adequately assess the justification of testimonial beliefs. Therefore, we cannot begin to provide a general justification for testimonial beliefs.⁵⁵ Given that BonJour is correct, which we think he is, our concern is whether the two-way model we have proposed sufficiently takes care of most cases of testimonial uptake? Our response to this is affirmative.

Conclusion

This paper aims to establish the source of justification of testimonial knowledge. Given the vastness and practical indispensability of testimony as a source of knowledge, we embarked on the project of analysing if testimony is a basic or generative epistemic source. This project brought to the fore the discourse on reductionism and anti-reductionism theories of testimony. The failure of both theories to satisfactorily resolve the nature of testimony as a basic epistemic source gave way to Pritchard's project to synthesize the plausible claims of both theories in his quasi-reductionism thesis. Pritchard's project provides the grounds to consider Fricker's idea of the testimonial sensitivity of the hearer. The application of Fricker's idea permits us to explore the role of epistemic virtues in testimonial justification, a permission that necessitated that we briefly but critically analyse the literature on virtue epistemology. Based on our various analyses, we argued that testimonial justification or the justification of testimonial knowledge lies in the reliability of the testifier as a trustworthy cognitive agent and the perceptual capacity of the hearer to access the credibility of the testimony. This provides us a justificatory process that is both perceptual, from the perspective of the testifier, and inferential from the perspective of the hearer. The entire breadth of this paper is couched in the attempt to establish a proper way of justifying testimonial beliefs as knowledge. We have

⁵⁴Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classical Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 164.

⁵⁵Lawrence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 158.

argued in this paper that a general justification for testimonial beliefs rest, not solely on either the testifier or the hearer, but on both players – the testifier and the hearer, in the epistemic transaction involving testimony. This is because a testimonial belief is justified as knowledge based on the intellectual virtues by the testifier's cognitive character traits and the hearer's cognitive faculties and excellences.