

'TESTIMONY' AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE: AN EXAMINATION

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Abstract

This paper examines the primacy of testimony as a source of knowledge. Most discussions in the literature of classical Epistemology often identify the senses (perception), reason and memory as the primary sources of knowledge. Testimony - knowledge or information a hearer gets from the speaker - has either been neglected or made to play the second fiddle on the grounds that testimony-based beliefs cannot be reliably justified as a genuine source of knowledge and sometimes the reliability of testimony (if any) is linked to other sources of knowledge (the reductionist thesis). This paper seeks to present the primacy of testimony as a source of knowledge arguing that knowledge whether gotten from the senses, reason and memory etc is not entirely subjective but has a social dimension which is rooted in the testimony of others. The study employs analytic method.

Keywords: Testimony, knowledge, reductionism, anti-reductionism, epistemology

Introduction

The question of the sources of human knowledge is one of the fundamental concerns of Epistemology. How do we know what we claim to know? Where does our knowledge come from? Philosophers are divided in their opinions. Some argue that all our knowledge claims are primarily from the senses. The Aristotelian – scholastic dictum; “Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu” - There is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses” (cited in Eboh, 10) moderately highlights the primacy of the senses as epistemic perceptual windows. Others argue that the senses are defective and prone to error. Hence, our knowledge comes from reason. This is the contest between empiricism and rationalism.

Chisholm (57) identifies four sources of human knowledge: External perception, memory, Self-awareness (reflection or inner consciousness) and reason. Traditionally, much of the concern about the sources of human knowledge has always rotated around these sources. Testimony is often neglected or not considered as the primary source of knowledge. It is claimed that testimony cannot be a source of knowledge per se compared to other sources of knowledge already established in that it does not generate knowledge; it is only considered a 'vehicle' for the transmission of knowledge generated by other sources.

Is there anything we know or claim to have known which does not directly or inferentially come from the testimony of others? Think of the things you claim to know right now: for

instance, angle of a straight line is 180° ; the earth is spherical in shape; amoeba reproduces by binary fission, gamma rays have stronger penetrating capacity than alpha and beta rays, $\text{CH}_3\text{COOC}_2\text{H}_5$ is the chemical formula for ethyl ethanoate etc. “Most of these beliefs will have been gained not by finding out the truth of the claim in question yourself but by being told that this claim was true by others”. (Pritchard, 90). Almost everything we know comes from the testimony of other people, yet, overtime testimony as a source of knowledge has not been given due attention. In most cases, it is neglected completely. Lipton (1) gives two reasons for this apparent neglect, namely, appeal to individualist bias of Western Epistemology and the belief that testimony is a derivative rather than creative or generative source of knowledge. In the same vein, Owens (11) suggests that testimony does not live up to the enlightenment ideal of rationality captured in the motto of the Royal Society- 'Nullum in verba' (on no man's word). Notwithstanding these positions, there had been traces of allusion to testimonial knowledge by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. In his writing, *The Ways of knowing*, Montague (25) also pinpointed the primacy of testimony when he said: “We get more of our beliefs from the testimony of our fellows than any other source. Little of our knowledge of the universe is directly tested by our own intuition, reason, experience or practice”. Nowadays, there has been explosion of interest in Testimony occupying special chapter in social epistemology especially in the works of Coady, Burge, Paul Faulkner, Thomas Reids and Jennifer Lackey etc.

In transmitting testimonial beliefs, it is often noticed that most speakers (including revered epistemic authority or experts) sometimes intentionally or unintentionally assert falsehood. What was hitherto heard or believed to have been true based on the testimony of others had on several occasions in the past been demonstrated otherwise. For instance, the aged-long Ptolemaic geocentricism gave way to Copernican heliocentricism. Again, it was widely held by Dalton's Atomic theory that atoms are indivisible and indestructible particles of an element and that atoms of the same elements are the same, particularly they have the same mass numbers but later the phenomena of radioactivity and isotopy respectively proved them otherwise. The questions are: Is testimony an autonomous or reliable source of knowledge? Is testimonially-based belief justifiable? If so, under what conditions and if not, why? “When hearers are epistemically entitled to accept the speaker's assertion, is the entitlement due to the testimony itself or instead to other sources? Is it apriori or is it to be justified aposteriori?” (*Stanford Encyclopadie of Philosophy*, Epistemological problem of testimony, Revised Monday August 27, 2012). These and similar questions which are at the heart of the Epistemology of testimony have divided the camps into reductionism (inferentialism) and non-reductionism (non-inferentialism). Despite these challenging questions begging for justification, this paper argues for the primacy of testimony as a source of knowledge which has gained so much credence within the context of social Epistemology as against the individualist or subjectivist conception in traditional Western Epistemology.

What Is Testimony?

From its etymology, the word testimony is from the Latin word 'testis' meaning 'a witness', from where we can obtain another Latin word 'testimonium' and the English equivalent 'testimony'. Testimony is knowledge a 'hearer' learns or gains from the 'speaker'. 'A' knows that 'C' because 'B' says so. The 'B' here need not necessarily be an epistemic authority or

expert. "Testimonial knowledge is acquired through the process of transmission from speaker to hearer.... In assertion, the speaker extends an invitation to the hearer to understand and believe him" (Etuk, 22). For the hearer to trust the speaker's word is for the hearer to ascribe epistemic authority to the speaker. The hearer takes the speaker to be in a position of transmitting knowledge and so seeks the speaker's testimony.

Within the legal milieu or context of courtroom where formal testimony is given, "someone sworn in testifies, offering information supposed to represent what the person knows or believes. Often such testimony recounts what was witnessed first-hand, but (informal testimony) can be an expression of what we believe about something such as the implication of scientific theory or the potentials of human character (Audi, 150). Testimony is written or oral information said or proffered with a view to conveying ideas or knowledge to someone else. Such information can be credible or reliable or unintentionally or intentionally deceptive given with the aim of deceiving the hearer or listener. Formal kind of testimony is inferentialist:

When I hear courtroom testimony [*I do not swallow it hook, line and sinker*] I appraise the witness, place a testimony in the context of the trial and my general knowledge and accept what he said only if, on the basis of this broad perspective, it seems true (Audi, 151). The non-formal or informal testimony on the other hand, the beliefs, produced on the hearer is not inferential (Audi, 152).

This, for me, does not seem true in all cases. If you tell me, say informally, for instance that the salary of a Graduate Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy is N80,000, I may accept it instantly or if I am interested I can go on to cross check the assertion with relevant persons and accept it finally in an inferentialist way. Inferentialism is not a remarkable line of symmetry for formal and informal testimonies as both can be either way.

From the above it could be asked- is testimony the same with or different from simply telling somebody or informing him/her about something? For example, "It rained heavily in Abak yesterday!", "Fr. Nkereuwem Ekpo is an alumnus of Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri", "Ikpe Annang Clan in Essien Udim Local Government Area comprises 14 villages" etc. The line of distinction or symmetry between telling and testimony is very thin. Probably one way of differentiating it is that all testimonial beliefs involve some kind of telling but not all telling can be said to be testimonial. For Audi (151), "We might regard all testimony as a kind of saying. But not all saying – even apart from what is said in fiction – is testimony". Testimony has a heavier and serious connotation and/or implication than just telling or saying something.

What Is Knowledge?

We don't intend to go into the nuances and the difficulties involved in attempting to define knowledge. The question of what is knowledge is a difficult one to answer let alone capture it in a single definition. The different nuances involved in the examination of the verb "to know" and the noun "knowledge" also point to this difficulty. Sometimes any attempt to define what knowledge is, presupposes even our initial and presupposed notion of the thing to be defined. Hence, Donceel (281) rightly avers that it is not easy to define knowledge because "defining is an act of knowledge. That which is to be defined enters into the definition". However, for the

purpose of this paper, let us grant that knowledge is dependable or trustworthy information which has been reasonably demonstrated to be true, believable and undefeatable.

Testimony and The Question Of Knowledge

As noted earlier, traditional sources of knowledge were limited to perception, consciousness, memory and reason. Testimony of others was either neglected or not given due attention. However current trend in Social Epistemology considers testimony an indispensable and fundamental source of human knowledge. Audi (150) puts it clearly that “We do not even learn to speak or think without the help of others and much of what we know depends on what they tell us. Children in their first years of life depend almost entirely on others for the knowledge of the world”. Thus, what was often thought as an insufficient source of human knowledge is actually the most fundamental and constitute the ground and pathways upon which other sources of knowledge are based and developed. It is a social foundation of knowledge.

Can testimony give knowledge? What justification do we have for believing as true or accepting as knowledge what we hear from others? In response to questions such as these, Audi (158) offers what he considers two facets of testimonial credibility namely, “The sincerity dimension concerning the attester's honesty and second the competent dimension concerning the attester having experience or knowledge sufficient to make it at least likely that the attester holds a belief of the proposition in question or of closely related ones, then they are true”.

In a different work (Audi, 1997:410) says “My testimony cannot give you testimonially grounded knowledge that P without my knowledge that P. There are other authors who hold similar view. For instance, “If S knows that P then... S can bring his listeners to know that P by telling them that P” (Coady, 1992); “If a recipient depends on interlocution for knowledge, the recipient's knowledge depends on the source having the knowledge as well” (Burge, 486). This implies that the condition upon which the judgement of testimony as a reliable source of knowledge (if any) is grounded on knowledge by the speaker, credibility of the attester (trust) and on competence (perhaps based on preceding test and/or supposed qualification). But how do we measure honesty and competence? how grounded are such criteria as honesty, knowledge and competence to turn beliefs or testimony into knowledge since experience shows that even the most credible and competent person sometimes fails or intentionally behaves in a way contrary to the judgement of expectation. The tendency to always trust a speaker, an expert, for example, once judged to be credible and to distrust another considered to be unbelievable in the past can be misleading on several occasions. There is always room for exception, change, improvement and even error.

If testimony is a source of knowledge and knowledge ought to be justified, true, believable, reliable etc, then, the same supposedly holds of testimony. The dependence on the reliability of other sources of knowledge, the speaker's possession of knowledge of the thing spoken about as credibility are among the suggestions that have divided the camps into reductionism and anti-reductionism.

Reductionism holds that testimony is not on its own a fundamental source of knowledge and its acceptance and epistemic justification is dependent on other sources of knowledge. What is often called testimonial justification is inferentially reduced to the justification of other sources of knowledge – perception, reason and memory. In other words, “we properly form beliefs based on testimony only because we have seen [or noticed a conformity between reports and the corresponding facts with the assistance of perception, memory and inductive inference] other confirmed instances. Testimony-based justification is therefore reducible to a combination of perceptually-, memorially-, and inferentially based justification” (Epistemology of Testimony, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Reductionism also appeals to the background evidence such as past testimonial successes, (im)personal knowledge of the speaker/informant. Here, one infers the reliability of the present testimonial beliefs from the reliability of others or previous instances. I believe a piece of information 'c' from X because X once told Y and Z pieces of information 'a' and 'b' in the past and they were all confirmed to be true. It seems to assume that a reliable informant, say an expert, who had been known to be credible and reliable in the past will always be so. But experiences have shown that most credible and dependable experts do make unimaginable mistakes both in judgement (as in the case of law) and in actions (as in the case of surgical operation).

Hume is generally taken to be the proponent of reductionism. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he makes the leading reductionist statement: “Our assurance in any argument of this kind [from testimony] is derived from no other than our observation of the veracity of human testimony and of usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses” (222) and again he says “The reasons why we place any credit on witnesses and historians are not derived from any connection which we perceive a priori between testimony and reality but we are accustomed to find the conformity between them (223).

To justify testimonially-based belief on the dependence on other sources like memory, inference and perceptions or on the trustworthiness of the speaker can lead to circularity in argument or infinite regress since other sources of knowledge themselves need to be justified and guaranteed.

The anti-reductionist position holds that the justification of testimony-based belief is not reduced from the justification of other sources. Although the dependence of testimony on other sources is acknowledged, yet it is asserted that such dependence is only psychological and causal. It may be warranted purely on the speaker's knowledge and other a priori principles. Hence we are entitled to accept what is intelligibly presented to us as true especially when it emanates from epistemic community. For the non-reductionists, so long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters, hearers can be justified in accepting what they are merely told on the basis of the testimony of the speaker. According to Tyler Burge's acceptance or entitlement principle, “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” (467). Here, Burge ties justification to intelligibility condition without spelling out the criteria for something being intelligible. Besides, what may appear intelligible for 'A' may out-rightly appear nonsensical for 'B'. How can one, a novice in this case, who may have to rely on the

testimony of the speaker, intelligibly and genuinely choose between two disagreeing experts? (Goldman, 85). The entitlement thesis is not sufficient. Other philosophers who or whose works may be considered anti-reductionist are- Thomas Reid and Coady

Foley (63) presents a parity argument that lays emphasis not only on trust in memory and perception but on oneself (self-trust) and from there trust in others is established. If we trust our own beliefs to be true, we ought to trust the beliefs of others since to some extent we rely on the beliefs of others to form our own beliefs. Thus, “it is reasonable for me to think that my intellectual faculties and my intellectual environment are broadly similar to theirs” (63). The parity argument as developed by Foley is not tenable. Its emphasis on our dependence on the beliefs of others to form our beliefs only proffers a kind of chain framework which holds true even for false beliefs; the person on whose beliefs mine was based might have been testimonially undependable. It is possible for 'X' to believe 'Y' believes 'z' while 'X' himself does not.

In discussing testimony and question of knowledge, it is necessary to consider its moral dimension which tries to examine, for instance, how the hearer's past experiences and biases or prejudices against the speaker can vitiate his or her trust on the speaker's testimony. For example, when I fail to trust a speaker's word because she is a woman (gender bias); he is from a particular ethnic group or race (racial bias) etc. Normally, if someone willingly or unwillingly deceives us once or twice, we tend to be careful with his testimony and conversely, if someone had in demonstrated his trust-worthiness and dependability in the past, we tend to count on his words. Hence, epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) is committed against a speaker when his words are not accorded standard epistemic authority on account of past experiences.

Testimonial Belief And The Views Of Some Philosophers

John Locke:

Locke is not very explicit on the notion of testimony as a source or knowledge. However, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he kicks against unquestionable acceptance or followership of an epistemic authority. For him, “all men are liable to error... [and] there is no error to be named which has not had each professor” (220). Truth is not a matter of popular consensus. Rather than merely floating the opinions of others in the brain without concerted effort to understand their paths, John Locke proposes embarking on an independent quest provided it leads to truth: “Truth has been my only aim; and wherever that has appeared to lead, my thoughts have impartially followed without minding whether the footsteps of any other lay that way or not” (220). Perhaps this should not be understood to mean that John Locke tried to jettison, like Descartes, all he hitherto learnt as such from others. The expression “whether the footsteps of others lay that way or not” points to independent and novel desire to break new grounds and/or question existing status quo. From this position, it is obvious that John Locke lends little or no credence to testimony of others as a dependable source of knowledge.

DAVID HUME

Hume acknowledges the place of testimony in knowledge acquisition when he says: “There is no species of reasoning more common, more useful and even necessary to human life than that which is derived from the testimony of men and the report of eye witnesses and spectators Our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony and of the usual conformity of facts to reports of witnesses” (222).

Testimonial beliefs are often accorded a status of knowledge especially when there is conformity of facts with the report given by the witnesses. However, having discovered the falsity of widely held testimonial beliefs, Hume is skeptical of testimony leading to truth: “We should never repose the least confidence in human testimony (222). This introduces the question of evidence which often could be contradictory and probable adding to the complexity of the epistemological problem of testimony. Hume lists the conditions under which testimony can be doubtful:

We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few or of a doubtful character; when they have interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation or on the contrary with too violent asseverations (223).

Although the testimony of authority or experts have often been accorded a credible status, there are also many instances in which what was widely held as true on the basis of a particular authority is falsified. Hence, “I should not believe such a story were it told me by Cato, was a proverbial saying in Rome even during the lifetime of the philosophical patriot. The credibility of a fact, it was allowed, in the first place, might invalidate so great an authority” (223). Earlier on in the 1600s the royal society (the famous scientific organization adopted and popularized the slogan “Nullius in verba” (on no man's words).

Hume also talks about believing in miracles based on the testimony of authority, scripture, tradition and eye witnesses' accounts. Details of this argument may not be necessary here. But on the whole, Hume is of the view that it is experience based on observation which gives credence or authority to human testimony otherwise everything should be considered probable information and subject to thorough examination.

Jennifer Lackey

In her article “Acquiring Knowledge from Others”, Lackey (71) begins by acknowledging that, “virtually everything we know depends on the testimony of others”. For her, the central focus of the Epistemology of testimony is not on the nature of testimony itself but instead on how justified beliefs or knowledge is acquired on the basis of what other people tell us. Testimony is often defined as the knowledge that the hearer purports to gain from the speaker. Lackey gives a sustained account of testimony as a source of knowledge and maintaining a dualist position between the speaker and the hearer, she argues that attention should be shifted from the 'speaker' and the 'hearer' to their 'words'. This is to say that P believes q not necessarily because of R but on account of q itself and by so doing one can carefully avoid the extreme reliance on the testimony of authority which often lead to epistemic autonomy and the fallacy of 'argumentum ad baculum'. It is possible to believe the testimony of a speaker

who may not himself believe in his words.

Testimony is not just mere telling or conversations. Suppose I make the assertion: “You look good today; I am merely passing a comment or somehow none inferential remarks based on subjective perception. Hence, Lackey is of the view that “The concept of testimony is intimately connected with the notion of conveying information and thus [statements such as you look good today, what a lovely day] that function as mere conversational fillers and cheers should fail to qualify as instances of testimony” (72). ... Not everything we learn from testimony of others qualifies as testimonially based. For Lackey, what is of import for distinctively testimonial justification or knowledge is that a hearer forms a given belief on the basis of the content of a speaker's testimony (73).

Paul Faulkner

In an article entitled “The Social Character of Testimonial Knowledge”, Faulkner begins by asserting that “Through communication, we form beliefs about so many things including ourselves, the world and others and some these beliefs are counted as knowledge such that if the justification upon which such beliefs are grounded is outlawed, all that would remain would be a body of ill-supported prejudice” (581). For Faulkner, testimonial beliefs can be justified for two reasons; firstly, argumentative justification which is dependent on a well-articulated argument to justify the truth of a proposition and secondly, the entitlement justification which involves inherent epistemic right to believe as true certain cognitive assertions. This is a reflection of Burge's acceptance principle which has it that all things being equal, “a person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him unless there are strong reasons not to do so”. In other words, unless a speaker possesses stronger reason to deny the speaker's assertion, he is entitled to accept it. It seems to take for granted that testimony is always from a rational source. However, the questions are, how do we determine that which is intelligible? What are the criteria for intelligibility of a testimony? Do two or more persons perceive the same testimony from a speaker as being intelligible? Does intelligibility reside in the speaker's testimony or on the judgement of the hearers? The intelligibility condition for accepting testimonial beliefs is insufficient.

Faulkner introduces the word 'warrant' as a substitute for 'justification' (which has a stronger connotation of argumentation) and summarizes the hybrid theory as follows:

An audience is warranted in forming a testimonial belief if and only if he is justified in accepting the speaker's testimony. If the audience is warranted in forming a testimonial belief, then whatever warrant in fact supports a speaker's testimony continues to support the proposition the audience believes (590)

The hybrid theory is an intermediate position between internalist and social externalist principles. It is termed internalist because the establishment of warranted testimonial beliefs is dependent on the audience's justifying arguments or reasons for believing (a subject X can know y only if X has genuine evidence for the truth of y); it is social externalist because whatever reasons the audience has for accepting a proposition depend on propositions from other agents already accepted and/or warranted as true.

As an alternative to the transmission model that for a speaker S_1 to transmit p to S_2 , S_1 must have the knowledge himself, Faulkner hybrid theory suggests there is a chain of communication of testimonial knowledge which itself is located within the community more than it is with a particular speaker. To illustrate his point, Faulkner gives a compelling thought experiment on epistemic dependence as follows:

An original speaker S_1 sees that p and tells S_2 that p , S_2 tells that p to another and so on until we get to S_n who tells that p to the audience A . Suppose that S_1 knew that p , that A was warranted in forming the testimonial belief that p , and that A did not have a knowledge supporting justification for acceptance. In this simple case, how should one characterize A 's relationship to the speakers S_1 to S_n ? (594)

According to the transmission model, A 's relation to S_1 - S_n forms a chain of testimony such that A knows that p if and only if there is knowledge in the chain, either S_n or one of S_1 - S_n in the chain has the knowledge that p . According to Faulkner, S_1 - S_n form a community of knowledge such that A knows that p if and only if the community possesses the knowledge. Knowledge is a collaborative enterprise. No one in the community can know unless someone does. The hybrid theory makes knowledge an entirely social affair; both the speaker's testimony and the audience evidence for acceptance and/or rejection are collaboratively necessary.

Justification of Testimonially-Based Beliefs: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in Brief

If testimony is a source of knowledge and knowledge ought to be justified, true, believable, reliable etc, then, the same supposedly holds of testimony. The dependence on the reliability of other sources of knowledge, the speaker's possession of knowledge of the thing spoken about as credibility are among the suggestions which have divided the camp into reductionism and anti-reductionism.

Reductionism

Reductionism holds that testimony is not on its own a fundamental source of knowledge and its acceptance and epistemic justification is dependence on other sources of knowledge. What is often called testimonial justification is inferentially reduced to the justification of other sources of knowledge – perception, reason and memory. In other words, “we properly form beliefs based on testimony only because we have seen [or noticed a conformity between reports and the corresponding facts with the assistance of perception, memory and inductive inference] other confirmed instances. Testimonially-based justification is therefore reducible to a combination of perceptually-, memorially-, and inferentially based justification” (Epistemology of Testimony, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

Reductionism also appeals to the background evidence such as past testimonial successes, (im)personal knowledge of the speaker/informant. Here, one infers the reliability of the present testimonial beliefs from the reliability of others or previous instances. I believe a piece of information 'c' from X because X once told Y and Z pieces of information 'a' and 'b' in the past and they were all confirmed to be true. It seems to assume that a reliable informant, say an

expert, who had been known to be credible and reliable in the past will always be so. But experiences have shown that most credible and dependable experts do make unimaginable mistakes both in judgement (as in the case of law) and in actions (as in the case of surgical operation).

Hume is generally taken to be the proponent of reductionism. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he makes the leading reductionist statement: “Our assurance in any argument of this kind [from testimony] is derived from no other than our observation of the veracity of human testimony and of usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses”(222) and again he says “The reasons why we place any credit in witnesses and historians is not derived from any connection which we perceive a priori between testimony and reality but we are accustomed to find the conformity between them (223). To justify testimonially-based belief on the dependence on other sources like memory, inference and perceptions or on the trustworthiness of the speaker can lead to circularity in argument or infinite regret since other sources of knowledge themselves need to be justified and guaranteed.

Anti-Reductionism

The anti-reductionist position is that the justification of testimonially based belief is not reduced from the justification of other sources. Although they acknowledge the dependence of testimony on other sources, yet it is asserted that such dependence is only psychological and causal. It may be warranted purely on the speaker's knowledge and other a priori principles. Hence we are entitled to accept what is intelligibly presented to us as true especially when it emanates from epistemic community. For the non-reductionists, so long as there are no relevant undefeated defeaters, hearers can be justified in accepting what there are merely told on the basis of the testimony of the speaker. Notable defendants of anti-reductionism include: Thomas Reid and Coady

Besides reductionism and anti-reductionism theses, another contending issue that divides the camp of Social Epistemologists is on the generative and transmissive functions of testimony. Testimony has been regarded not as a basic source of knowledge but a “source of basic knowledge” (Audi, 80). This is perhaps, as it is often asserted; testimony, like memory, only transmits rather than generate knowledge. In recent times, objections have been raised concerning the position that transmission lies at the heart of the epistemology of testimony just like preservation lies at the heart of memorial knowledge. For instance, consider a teacher a devout creationist who does not believe in the truth of evolutionary theory but however have to research and teach his students. In such a situation the teacher may reliably teach his or her student that homo sapiens evolved from homo erectus thereby imparting knowledge to her students that she fails to possess herself (Lackey, 84).

The Primacy of Testimony as A Source of Knowledge

Prior to recent time, it was often widely held especially by traditional Epistemology that testimony is an inferior source of knowledge “because the hearer believes the speaker's assertions without the hearers own autonomous judgment of its truth” (Epistemological Problem of testimony in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Testimony does not seem to fit into the traditional account of knowledge. If X knows that Y, X must believe in Y, Y must be

true and X must have reasons to justify that Y is so. Believing the assertion of a speaker (even if he is an epistemic authority or expert) does not seem to accord such an assertion an epistemic status; it only remains at the level of what it truly is – belief.

However, borrowing from the scholastic moderate realistic approach “there is nothing in the intellect which does not first passed through the senses”, it is also the position of this paper that there is nothing in the intellect and even through the senses which was not first gotten through testimony. Is there any knowledge which someone claims to possess or to have possessed which was not first directly or indirectly gotten from the testimony of others? Is there anything one can claim to have known entirely on his own? Is there any knowledge which does not have foundation in testimony either from our parents (our first teachers), peers and our teachers in school? Even the knowledge that testimony, memory, reason and perception are the sources of knowledge was first gotten from the testimony of people whether demonstrated or not.

Besides, none of the so called primary sources of knowledge on their own can guarantee epistemic certainty – the senses sometimes fail, reason too can be beclouded by so many idols and hence, prone to mistaken judgment; likewise, memory can be lost due to conditions like dementia etc. Hence if the other primary sources can fail, as it is often the case, why is the failure or the epistemic status of testimony a big issue? Judging from the foregoing, testimony should be accorded the pre-eminent epistemic status amid other sources of knowledge. What is necessary is not making testimony play a second fiddle in the community of knowledge sources but adopting a complementary option or alternative by subjecting all sources of knowledge and their knowledge claims to the rational and critical epistemic crucible in order to ascertain their veracity.

Again, the rejection of testimony as a source of knowledge can be traceable to the understanding or conception we have of knowledge itself from where we begin to categorize what fits into the epistemic template or falls outside of it. Knowledge is dynamic. Error can occur in either of the trilogy of the subject (the knower), the object (the known) and the knowing process (cognition). The individualist or subjective view (predominant in traditional Epistemology) maintains that the ideal form of knowledge is that of the autonomous knower judging the truth for itself without dependent on others. Such dependence, unlike dependence on perception, filters one's information through another interpretive mind with its own biases and infallibility. Knowledge as pinpointed in Social Epistemology, is a community property and is gotten via social relation of which testimony outstandingly occupies a pride of place even above other sources of knowledge. Hence Epistemology of testimony is highly dependent on social relations. “A strong view among Social Epistemologist is that an individual cannot be said to know, via testimony, that P unless P is known in the community” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Conclusion

The objects of human knowledge are numerous but the avenues or channels by which they are conveyed to the mind are limited. Among these channels include perception of the external worlds by the senses, reason, consciousness, memory and beliefs gotten from the testimony of

others. Testimony is the primordial source of knowledge and the epistemic foundation upon which all other sources of knowledge are based. Audi (150) rightly admits that- “If our only sources of knowledge and justified belief were perception, consciousness, memory and reason, we would be at best impoverished. We do not even learn to speak or think without the help of others” . Knowledge itself follows the tripartite dimensions of the knower (subject), the known (object) and cognition (knowing process). Knowing is not entirely subjective as was the dominant conception of traditional Epistemology; it has the social, religious, cultural and environmental dimension as well. Hence, the senses, reason, memory and consciousness are our primary individual sources of knowledge and justification, testimony from others is undoubtedly our primary social source of them without which the other sources would not have been mentioned in the first place.

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