

APPRAISING THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF TESTIMONIAL EVIDENCE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Ihejirika, Cardinal, I. C., Ph.D. (Asso. Prof.)
Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities
University of Portharcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
cardinal.ihejirika@uniport.edu.ng
+2348028279646

Abstract

This paper appraises the epistemic status of evidence as a source of knowledge. The debate over the epistemic value of testimonies has raged on between two major contending notions. On the one hand is reductionism, which makes plausible demands on what counts as a testimonial justification, but leads directly to a form of scepticism about the epistemic status of our testimony. While on the other hand, is anti-reductionism, which avoids scepticism, but at the cost of allowing our claims to knowledge to be justified on the basis of testimony even in the absence of supporting evidences. This dilemma leaves us with a pressing need for some sort of midway reconciliatory account. In any case, we observed that the failure to clearly spell out grounds for determining the justificatory condition of testimony as a source of knowledge as seen in the debate between reductionism and anti-reductionism does not rule out the fact that a great deal of many claims to knowledge are founded on testimony. Therefore, in admitting the significance of testimony as one of the sources of human knowledge, we found that the epistemic status of testimonial evidence and its capability of yielding reliable knowledge are contextually contingent upon the dynamics and relation between the speaker and the listener. Consequently, we concluded that these factors determine the justificatory condition of the listener's reliance on the testimony of the speaker. The authors adopted the textual analysis and expository methods of enquiry in this research.

Keywords: Testimony, Evidence, Reductionism, Anti-reductionismEpistemology.

Introduction

This paper is an exercise in the epistemic search for reliable sources of human knowledge. Confronted with the problem that a great deal of our claims to knowledge or beliefs are predominantly testimony-based beliefs which lack justification and sufficient grounds for making such claims, the epistemology of testimony raises a pertinent question regarding how testimonial beliefs are justified. Hence, this paper aims at resolving the problem of the determination of justificatory conditions which warrant testimony to be welcomed as a source of human knowledge.

The predominant perspectives of reductionism and anti-reductionism have brought to the fore certain challenges relevant to the reliability of testimony as a source of knowledge. Essentially then, the worry that reductionists have is that without independent evidence, there would be no reason for thinking that a particular instance of testimony is true. Put more precisely, there is nothing in an instance of testimony which of itself indicates that it tends towards the truth. On this premise, the anti-reductionists seem to be offering a recipe for widespread gullibility. The anti-reductionist accuses the reductionist model of intellectualizing testimony-based belief by denying even the possibility that such beliefs might possess an innate epistemic status. By setting the hurdle so high for testimonial justification, they maintain that the reductionist walks right into the trap set by the sceptics. However, this paper contends that the inability to delineate grounds for determining the justificatory condition of testimony as a source of knowledge as seen in the debate between reductionism and anti-reductionism does not rule out the fact that a great deal of our beliefs emanate from testimony. Thus, in admitting the significance of testimony as one of the sources of human

knowledge, the researcher arrived at a suggestion that the epistemic status of testimonial evidence as a source of reliable knowledge is contextually contingent upon the dynamics and relation between the speaker and the listener. The foregoing factors are argued as determinants and the justificatory condition of the listener's testimony-based belief.

For the purpose of clarity and flow of thought, the authors first handily attempted a detailed elucidation of the concept of testimony which enabled me to gain a bird's eye insight into what constitutes the epistemology of testimony. I proceeded to examine the justification problems and perspectival divergences of testimony as a source of knowledge before appraising its epistemic status. This research wounds up with a suggestion that the epistemic status of every testimony is contextually contingent upon the dynamics and relations between the speaker and the listener. The foregoing is therefore held by this present researchers as the chief justificatory condition of the listener's testimony based belief.

A Bird's Eye view on the Meaning of Testimony and the Nature of It's Epistemology

Testimony, has several meanings and many ways it is expressed but we explicitly use the word *testimony* to label the medium through which our claim to knowledge emanates does not change the fact such information or knowledge is derived from testimony. What then is testimony? By its etymology, the words, *testimony* and *testify* are both derived from the Latin word, *testis which refers* to the notion of a disinterested third-party witness. Ideally, this means that the testifier should say the whole truth.

Testimony can therefore be used in different senses and the proofs for belief in their claims form testimonial evidences. In the legal context, testimony as a common word in law is used to refer to a form of evidence that is obtained from a witness, who makes a solemn statement or declaration of fact. Testimony may be oral or written, and it is usually made by oath or affirmation under penalty of perjury. In religious context, especially within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the term *to testify* or *to give one's testimony* means to tell the story of how one became a Christian. Also, it may refer to a specific event in a Christian's life in which God did something deemed particularly worth sharing. Christians often share their testimonies at their baptism, worship sessions and at evangelistic events. From a secular point of view, we have testimony from experts or authority. Given that we lack some, if not many of the skills and knowledge of some professional fields such as pharmacy and medical laboratory science, architecture etc., we consult the experts and their report of a diagnosis of ailment or structural defect in a building is accepted as the testimony of the expert. That is not to imply that expert testimony is infallible. Sometimes, the fluidity of 'said things' being the immediate recollection of the meaning as imperfect and inaccurate as it could be, may puncture its air bag of safety as a source of indubitable knowledge of philosophical concern. However, in spite of these diverse contextual usages of the term testimony as highlighted above, we seek to use it predominantly within the context of epistemology as it serves as one of the sources of human knowledge. However, the term testimony and testimonial evidence are used interchangeably in the context of this paper.

In contemporary epistemology, therefore, *testimony* is used in a broad sense to refer to all those instances where we form a belief, or acquire knowledge on the basis of what others have told us (Gelfert, 2018). Whenever we believe what a trusted friend tells us, learn about world events by reading the newspaper, accept a stranger's answer to our request for directions or receive a medical diagnosis from a doctor etc., we rely on the testimony of others. Testimony, then, is like other sources of knowledge such as empiricism, memory, inference, and introspection given that it furnishes us with some of the knowledge we possess of things. At the same time, Testimony is unlike other sources of knowledge in the sense that it depends on the mental operations of another person. That is, for instance, it depends on the eyewitness's observations, the speaker's decision to



share their knowledge with us, etc – (Gelfert, 2018). Unlike the aforementioned sources of knowledge, testimony is largely a social source of human knowledge. By social source, we mean, it is basically dependent on the words of others, we are not the first or sole generators of knowledge derived testimonial evidences hence, much of the philosophical debates about testimony and its epistemic status stem from the fact that it is knowledge derived from the mental operations (observation, memory, inference and introspection) of another individual.

When a speaker makes an assertion and testifies to the effect that *p*, can we simply assume not only that they have the requisite epistemic authority as to whether or not *p*, but also that they are not abusing their authority (e.g. by trying to mislead us)? Those who prize intellectual autonomy above all will be naturally reluctant to make this assumption and will demand additional first-hand evidence that the speaker is indeed speaking the truth. At the heart of this dispute, are divergent views about the epistemic justification of knowledge acquired through the medium of testimony or testimonial evidences. Having clarified on the intended usage of the term testimony, we shall now go further to examine the nature of the epistemology of testimony or testimonial evidence.

Traditionally, epistemology as a branch of philosophy that enquires into many issues bordering on knowledge, deals with the problem of the nature, extent and the reliability of the sources of human knowing such as empiricism, testimony, memory and rationalism etc. Unlike other sources of knowledge, testimony primarily appears to be an indirect form of information and a source of human knowledge. As a source of knowledge, it can be acquired by hearing what others say or write (Giovagnoli, 2019). In religious circles, it could assume the form of public witnessing and declaration of God's or the Deity's acts of grace of deliverance. Here its belief is also based on the proofs or evidences the testifier puts forth.

Arguably, a large portion of what we know about our world whether in areas relating to that relates the natural sciences, politics, history or other spheres of life, emanate from the testimony of others. Hence, testimony as a source of knowledge “lies at the confluence of two central concerns of philosophy: the nature of knowledge and that of language” (Fricker and Cooper, 1987). If the epistemological problem of what constitutes knowledge is defined and language as a tool for communication is less ambiguous, the problem of the determination of the reliability of testimony as a source of knowledge would be partly solved. The uniqueness of testimony as a source of human knowledge lies in the facts that a good number of our beliefs have been formed only through accepting testimony (Faulkner, 1998). However, while testimony is obviously an indispensable source of knowledge, specifying exactly how it is that we are able to learn from a speaker's oral or written expressions has proven to be a difficult task. A paramount question bedeviling the epistemology of testimony is “How are testimonial beliefs justified?” (Faulkner, 1998). Also, the epistemology of testimony entails the questions such as; Is testimonial evidence a basic source of justification or can testimonial justification be reduced to a combination of other epistemic sources, like; perception, memory, and inference? Is testimony capable of generating or transmitting knowledge? How should we differentiate between genuine and novice testimonies?

Given that a great deal of our claims to knowledge is acquired by means of this second person's report, the power of testimony becomes predominantly concerned with how we should evaluate these knowledge claims. When are the testimony based beliefs justified and why? When do they amount to knowledge, and why? The questions seem endless, nevertheless, as Pritchard in tandem with many epistemologists posit, a great deal of our claim to knowledge or belief is derived from testimony and that if the epistemic status of our testimony-based belief in its entirety is challenged, then we would be faced with a predicament pertaining to the justification of testimony-based belief (Pritchard 2004, p. 326). Coady will have us believe that the major contention surrounding this epistemology of testimony is basically between reductionism and non-reductionism or anti-

reduction is perspectives (1973). Historically, within the confines of philosophical discourses, the earliest clear statements of these perspectives appear in David Hume (1711-1776) and Thomas Reid (1710-1796). On the one hand is Hume's perspective which is termed reductionism. Regarding testimony Hume has this to say: "[T]here is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and more necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports 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 the reports of witnesses" (Hume, 1748).

Hume wants us to believe that we properly form beliefs based on testimony only because we have seen other confirmed instances. Testimonially-based justification is therefore reducible to a combination of perceptually, memorially, and inferentially-based justification. (In theory, one might also include *a priori* insight among the sources to which testimonial justification is reduced, though Hume did not expressly say or do so). In interpreting Hume's stand on testimony, Paul Faulkner explicitly warns that Hume has no theory of testimony as commonly attributed to him by scholars. On the contrary, Faulkner is of the opinion that Hume only made a remark on testimony in an attempt to show the impossibility of testimony as a tool for supporting belief in miracle. In his own words: "Hume's position has been used as a foil in setting up an anti-reductive epistemology of testimony. If Hume's reductionist theory is to play this role, one must be clear about what Hume's 'theory' is. This is not straightforwardly put because Hume does *not* give a theory of testimony. His remarks on testimony are primarily to be found in the section 'Of Miracles' in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* where he deposited his concern is the impossibility of testimony supporting belief in the miraculous" (Faulkner, 1998).

On the other hand, Reid, in trying to defend a non-reductionist view of testimony argues that children properly trust others even when they lack any past inductive basis in their experience. Thus, even without any form of verification on the basis of observation or individual reasoning, children and adults alike can hold beliefs on the bases of someone else's testimony. Reid, therefore, states that, "[I]f credulity were the effect of reasoning and experience, it must grow up and gather strength, in the same proportion as reason and experience do. But, if it is the gift of Nature, it will be strongest in childhood, and limited and restrained by experience; and the most superficial view of human nature shows, that the last is really the case, and not the first. ... [N]ature intends that our belief should be guided by the authority and reason of others before it can be guided by our own reason" (Reid, 1764).

Reid was therefore of the opinion that we have an innate faculty, unconfirmed by personally-observed earlier instances, which properly causes us to trust those who testify. Testimonially-based justification flows from the reliability of this faculty, and so it is not reducible to perceptually and inferentially-based justification. The reducibility of testimonially-based justification is just a way to characterize the debate between Hume and Reid and their modern successors over the internal conditions on testimonially-based beliefs. A second way to characterize such disputes is to ask to what extent testimonially-based beliefs are implicitly inferential. A Humean approach would hold that we *infer* the reliability of a present bit of testimony from the reliability of earlier instances, while a Reidian approach holds that testimonially-based beliefs are properly non-inferential, or direct.

Apart from the traditional views of Hume and Reid which are prominent in the epistemology of testimony, there has been a host of contemporary scholars both within the reductionist (James Van Cleve) and non-reductionist camps (Coady, Burge, Foley). In any case, many ingenious attempts have been made to bridge the divide and proffer a new perspective on how testimony could be

viewed as a reliable source of knowledge. In fact, there is a third approach called *interpersonal* approach which repudiates the justificatory requirements introduced by both the reductionist and non-reductionist perspectives of testimony. This perspective is represented by personages such as: Ross, Hinchman, Moran, Faulkner, Fricker, Zagzebski (Giovagnoli, 2019).

Underlining the discourse on epistemic status of testimony and/or testimonial evidences as a source of human knowledge as raised, is glaringly the fundamental philosophical problem of the justification of knowledge claim derived through testimony. Moreover, we cannot adequately investigate the reliability of testimony as a source of human knowledge without any proper attempt at understanding the justificatory problem of testimonial beliefs or claims to knowledge derived through the medium of testimony. What is the problem with testimony as a source of human knowledge? This will constitute the main stay of our discussion in the next subsection.

Problems and Perspectival Divergences of Testimony (Testimonial Evidence) as a Source of Knowledge?

Testimony is clearly an indispensable source of human knowledge yet, specifying precisely how to rely on the words of others as a justification of our claims to knowledge seems to be a gargantuan problem. Most philosophers – reductionists and anti-reductionists alike – agree that testimony is an important source of knowledge and perhaps the only way we can claim to acquire anything like the depth and breadth of knowledge which we usually credit to ourselves. Indeed, this is why David Hume famously acknowledged that, "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 reports of eye-witnesses and spectators" (Gelfert, 2018). Just as other sources of human knowledge like, perception, memory, inference and introspection have their epistemic challenges testimony also has its own problems. However, the problem with testimony is predominantly a justificatory one. That is, how can information derived through the testimony of others qualify as knowledge (a justified true belief)? Surely, not all things we hear or read from the works of others automatically translate into knowledge of reality. If that be the case, "Is testimony a basic source of justification, or can testimonial justification be reduced to a combination of other epistemic sources, e.g., perception, memory, and inference? Can testimony generate knowledge, or does it merely transmit it?" (Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy, April 1, 2021). These look questions adequately capture the epistemological problem of testimony (testimonial evidence(s)).

Given the foregoing, anti-reductionists argue that the speaker's act of testifying in itself confers justification on the hearer's corresponding belief whereas, reductionists demand that a responsible hearer will only accept what they are told if they have at least *some* non testimonial evidence supporting the veracity of the testimony (Gelfert 2018). In any case, much of the epistemological debate about testimony, therefore, do not concern *whether* we can ever come to know on the basis of what another person tells us? But instead it revolves around the 'how' and 'when' of learning from others (Gelfert 2018). There are divergent perspectives of testimony, particularly with regards to its reliability and adequacy as a source of human knowledge. This would be discussed in details below.

Theorization about Testimony Reductonism

The contemporary discussion of the epistemology of testimony as previously noted tends to cluster around two opposing positions. The reductionists argue that the justification of an agent's testimony-based beliefs is always dependent upon that agent possessing further independent grounds—that is, at the very least, grounds that are independent of the instance of testimony in

question (Pritchard, 2004, 328). The standard story goes that this camp of theorists get their inspiration from David Hume. Hume is unique in holding a reductionist epistemic view of testimony. Thus Hume's position has been used as a foil in setting up an anti-reductive epistemology of testimony. He advances a reductionist epistemology of testimony. For him testimonial beliefs are justified on the basis of beliefs formed from other sources (Faulkner 1998). David Hume as (Coady 1998) recalls "is one of the few philosophers who has offered anything like a sustained account of testimony and if any view has a claim to the title of the 'received view' it is his" (Coady, 1998). Coady's interpretation of Hume's 'sustained account' concentrates on the following two passages taken from *Of Miracles*:

1. [Our trust in testimony derives from] no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connection together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident, that we ought not to make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connection with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. 2. And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on experience so it varies with the experience and is regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability* according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable (Hume, 1748).

From these two citations Coady interprets Hume as follows; (1) He suggests that we are justified in believing testimony only because we have observed past conjunctions between reports and reported facts. (2) He suggests that the conjunctions we observe are between types of testimony and the truth of instances of these types (Coady, 1998).

Hume therefore concluded that testimony is an indirect source of knowledge, as though we generally trust what others say, we are authorized to trust them by virtue of what we have learned by using direct forms of knowledge. Everyone can remember occasions in which we are told things that we have verified independently (by perception) or we have recognized as true. Verification through what we remember makes testimony reliable because we can inductively infer that testimony is generally reliable. Consequently, we conclude that every new instance of testimony can be true, assuming that we do not have contrary proofs. According to James Van Cleve; "testimony gives us justified belief . . . not because it shines by its own light, but because it has often been revealed true by our other lights" (Van, 2006).

This view of testimony is called "reductionism", as it reduces the force of justification to the combined forces of perception, memory and inductive inference. More precisely, this form of justification is also referred to as "global reductionism", because it allows the auditors to be justified to believe a peculiar example of testimony through the inferential reference to the general reliability of testimony. C.A.J. Coady criticized global reductionism by opining "that the basis of observation of common epistemic agents is too limited to permit the induction about the general reliability of testimony" (Coady 1992). In effect, the idea is that the epistemic status of one's testimony-based beliefs can always be reduced to the epistemic status of one's non-testimony based beliefs, and this is why the bold formulation of the reduction is thesis is often known as global reductionism. Duncan Pritchard formulates global reductionism roughly as follows: "Global Reductionism for all of one's TBBs, if one's TBB is justified, then one is able to offer sufficient non-testimonial grounds in support of that TBB" (Pritchard, 2004).

One can see the attraction of the view. Plausibly, the mere fact that someone testifies that *P* is not a reason—or at least not a reason sufficient for justification at any rate—for believing *P*. Instead, one

must be in the possession of further justifying grounds that are independent of this instance of testimony. The problem is, of course, that if those further grounds are themselves simply additional instances of testimony—e.g., someone else saying that one can trust the person making the original assertion—then the issue of one's justification for holding the original testimony-based belief, far from being resolved, simply gets moved one stage back on to the issue of one's justification for believing this further supporting testimony-based belief (Giovagnoli, 2019). The only way out of this chain of justification is to find adequate supporting grounds which are non-testimonial, for example, one's observation over time of the testimonial reliability of the agent making the original assertion when it comes to the target subject matter. Thus, if we are to have justification for our testimony-based beliefs, then that justification had better be reducible to a non-testimonial set of grounds (Giovagnoli, 2019). That is the crux of the argument from proponents of reductionism.

Anti- Reductionism

On the other side of the contemporary divide do those who maintain that epistemic status of a testimony-based belief need not depend upon the agent possess any independent grounds in favour of that belief. Just “so long as there are no grounds for doubt in this regard, then one can acquire a justified testimony-based belief even whilst lacking independent grounds in favour of that belief. The standard story goes that this camp of theorists get their inspiration from Reid” (Pritchard, 2004). Anti-reductionism maintains that testimony is fairly a primary source of evidence or justification. According to Tyler 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” (Burge, 1993).

According to anti-reductionism, we can introduce a weaker condition, namely, that the hearer would not have evidence that could affect the testimony. As we have seen, because this requirement is too weak, some authors think that we need to test the reliability and sincerity of the speaker. But, Lackey has raised doubts about the validity of such requirements. In its starkest formulation the thesis of anti-reductionism is more than just the denial of reductionism. Instead, it maintains something like the following claim; “For all of one's testimony-based beliefs, one's testimony-based belief can be justified even though one is unable to offer any supporting grounds in favour of that testimony-based belief” (Pritchard, 2004).

By allowing that one's testimony-based beliefs can be justified even in the absence of any supporting grounds in their favour, the anti-reductionist is proposing quite a radical thesis. After all, one's testimony-based beliefs do not seem to be the sort of beliefs that one would typically regard as forming part of one's basic beliefs, at least on any classical conception of that notion at any rate. Pritchard enthuses that, the idea behind the non-reductionist perspective of testimony is that despite being fallible, non-self-evident and corrigible, nevertheless testimony-based beliefs can have epistemic status which does not depend upon any further grounds that the agent possesses” (Pritchard, 2004).

The Interpersonal Approach

A third interesting view about testimony is the “Interpersonal Approach”. This approach rejects the requirements introduced by both reductionism and anti-reductionism (Ross, Hinchman, Moran, Faulkner, Fricker, Zagzebski). In this case, testimony is valid by virtue of the fact that it is a “warranty” by its nature. In this case, justification via testimony derives from the fact that the speaker assumes responsibility for the truth of the assertion or invites the hearer to trust it (Giovagnoli, 2019). This view of testimony is predominant in the works of Paul Faulkner's *Knowledge in Trust* and Benjamin McMyler's *Trust, Testimony & Authority*.

The interpersonal approach is significant in the discourse of epistemology of testimony. This is particularly due to the emphasis on a central feature of testimony as a source of knowledge. The feature being referred here is the distinctive kind of interpersonal relationship between the testifier and the audience in our everyday practices of justifying testimonial-based beliefs, a feature that is normally excluded from playing a role in epistemic discussions (Wanderer, 2013). This view of testimony calls for a reflection on the interpersonal nature of testimonial encounter and attempts to resolve the philosophical dilemma created by the reductionist and anti-reductionist perspectives through the process of domestication. Simply seeking for what constitutes the justificatory condition(s) of our claim to knowledge through the medium of testimony does not suffice in comprehending how testimony plays out in social settings as a source of knowledge. “Our everyday practice involving the justification of testimonial beliefs frequently invokes the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the listener (Wanderer, 2013). Thus, there is a need to *domesticate* the discourse of epistemology of testimony in order to better comprehend how the testiffee comes to accept the testimony of the testifier as true and reliable.

Within the framework of interpersonal view, Faulkner draws attention to the role of trust as an element in the justification of our claim to knowledge through testimony. In elaborating on the role of trust in knowledge acquisition through testimony, Faulkner distinguishes between predictive trust and affective trust as determining factors in the justification of testimonial based belief. McMyler on the other hand, draws attention to the obsession of some epistemologists with the ideal of epistemic autonomy. According to this ideal, “a rational agent is solely responsible for his beliefs” (Wanderer, 2013). Thus, McMyler argues that accepting this ideal precludes the interpersonal relationship view a substantive role in the discourse of epistemic justification. He strongly believes that there is a good reason to jettison the idea of an ideal epistemic autonomy. Our daily or ordinary experience of testimony runs contrary to the epistemic autonomy as an ideal as supposed by some epistemologists. However, Lackey criticizes the interpersonal view because the fact that a speaker invites us to trust him does not provide a distinct type of reasons to accept his testimony (Lackey, 1999). The nature of these reasons is not clear, the authors belief that there can be epistemic reasons rather than ethical or prudential ones.

Appraisal of the Epistemic Status of Testimonial Evidence

Essentially, the worry that reductionists have is that without independent evidence, there is no reason for thinking that a particular instance of testimony is true. Put more precisely, there is nothing in an instance of testimony which in itself indicates that it tends towards the truth. On this picture, the anti-reductionists are simply offering a recipe for widespread gullibility. In contrast, the anti-reductionists maintain that the reductionist model unduly intellectualizes testimony-based belief by denying even the possibility that such beliefs might possess an innate epistemic status (Pritchard, 2004). By setting the hurdle for testimonial justification so high, they argue that the reductionist walks right into the trap set by the sceptic. Of these two motivations, it is probably the reductionist rationale that fares better on initial examination. The claim that reductionism overtly intellectualizes testimonial justification is not all that compelling given that the reductionists demand that agents must possess further grounds in favour of a testimony-based belief and that this does not require any explicit inference on the part of the subject, nor even any great intellectual sophistication (the claim is not, for example, that one should run through an inference prior to forming any particular testimony-based belief).

The related claim made by the anti-reductionists regarding sceptical friendly nature of reductionism is more cogent, but it also has an ambiguous import. This objection emphasizes our widespread cognitive dependence on testimony, especially as children, to highlight the implausibility of the reductionist model and show how it is congenial to a general scepticism about justification (Lackey, 1991). After all, if the reductionist thesis is that any justification for a testimony-based belief must



ultimately rest upon non-testimonial foundations, then it is hard to see how the vast majority of our beliefs could ever be justified. Most of our beliefs seem to be ultimately or largely testimony-based, and this means that the reductionist demand, constrains the epistemic status of a large number of our beliefs and also that there are very few non-testimony-based beliefs which could serve the required supporting role. Together, these two factors ensure that only a very restricted class of our beliefs gets justified.

For instance, our belief that the earth is spherical, although this might not initially seem to be a testimony-based belief, since one is not typically aware of one explicitly being told that this is the case. However, a moment's reflection reveals that it is almost certainly a case of testimony-based belief since it could hardly have been gained in any other way (by going into outer space to determine that this is the case for oneself, for example). The problem of course is that it is difficult to see how one could go about acquiring non-testimonial grounds for believing this proposition, since whatever further support one seek (e.g., from textbooks, or from photographs that purport to have been taken from outer space) would itself owe its epistemic status, (whether directly or indirectly), to instances of testimony. The same goes for many of our testimony-based beliefs. But if that is right, and if it is also right that a good number of our beliefs in general are testimony-based beliefs, then a fairly broad and disconcerting scepticism appears to immediately ensue. Thus, making the entire quest for a justified true belief failed on arrived mission.

At the other end of the spectrum, opting for the anti-reductionist position enables us to evade this problem by allowing our testimony-based beliefs a positive epistemic status even in the absence of supporting grounds. But now one has to deal with the very different worry that afflicts this position which is, how could it be that one could be justified in holding a testimony-based belief even in the absence of supporting reasons? Perhaps more pertinently, to put it the words of Duncan Pritchard, "the worry is, in what sense we can call the default epistemic status of these testimony-based beliefs, a *justification* when there does not seem to be anything justifying the belief at all? (Pritchard, 2004). In any case, it is hardly much of an objection, in and of itself, to a particular epistemological view that it leads to scepticism, since such scepticism could well be warranted.

On the face of it, it seems that the choice is between either an epistemology of testimony of the reductionists' camp. An epistemology that makes plausible demands on what counts as a testimonial justification, but which leads directly to a form of scepticism about the epistemic status of our testimony-based beliefs; or an alternative view of the anti-reductionist camp, that can avoid scepticism, but only at the cost of allowing us to be justified in holding testimony-based beliefs even in the absence of supporting grounds. At this juncture, the dilemma of choice between the reductionist and anti-reductionist positions alongside their epistemic demerits necessitate the quest for some sort of midway remedy.

The question at this critical juncture becomes, "what can a midway account of the epistemology of testimony that seeks to bridge the divide between the two extremes be? "Considering the undesirable epistemic diseases in attempting to establish a justificatory condition for all of our testimony-based beliefs faced by the reductionist and anti-reductionist positions of testimony, we can easily observe that the epistemic status of testimony as a source of human knowledge is shaky. Testimony is a unique source of our beliefs. It is unique in the sense that many of our beliefs have been formed only through accepting testimony (Faulkner 1998, p. 1) and we cannot afford to downplay the role of testimony as our source of knowledge solely of the grounds by absence or sufficient grounds for the justification of testimony-based belief. But should a dubitable belief constitute an epistemically recognizable source of human knowledge?

We however, seek to draw attention away from the preponderance of the epistemic shortcomings and debate between reductionism and anti-reductionism to the more pragmatic perspective on how testimony actually plays out as a source of human knowledge and its justificatory condition in reality. Emphasis on how testimonial beliefs are justified should be considered within the realm of interpersonal relationship between the agent listening or reading the testimony and the speaker. Testimony largely possesses a social dimension as a source of knowledge and therefore its justificatory condition is majorly contingent upon the dynamics and nature of relation between the speaker or writer and the listener or reader. For instance, the agent listening to a testimony do not entirely pay attention to words of the speaker but also takes into consideration a good number of factors in considering the justificatory credibility of the testimony. Factors such as who is the speaker? Is he an expert or a novice on the subject matter (authority)? Previous encounter with the speaker? Is he in the habit of lying? Is the testimony from an eyewitness or hearsay? According to the interpersonal approach, in order to be justified in accepting a speaker's testimony, the hearer needs to have non-testimonially based reasons for thinking that the speaker in question is a reliable testifier on this occasion (as opposed to having positive reasons for thinking that testimony in general is reliable). Thus, the philosophical quest to establish the epistemic status for testimony as a source of knowledge once and for all is almost an elusive project which can only be determined with a singular or particular case of testimony and or testimonial evidence.

In our research so far, the authors have attempted to shed light on the meaning, nature, problems and perspectives associated with the epistemology of testimony. In any case, discourses on the epistemology of testimony can hardly be resolved entirely on a generic level of philosophical reflection but contingently on the bases of each unique case of testimony. We observed a failure to sufficiently spell out grounds for determining the justificatory condition of testimonial evidence as a source of knowledge as seen in the debate between reductionism and anti-reductionism. This is a finding which does not rule out the fact that a great deal of our claims to knowledge emanate through the medium of testimony. Thus, in admitting the significance of testimony as one of the sources of human knowledge, we arrived at the conclusion that the epistemic status of testimony as a source of reliable knowledge is contextually contingent upon the dynamics and relation between the testifier and the listener. It is these factors that determine the justificatory condition of the listener's acceptance or rejection of a testimony.

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