

Epistemic Trust, Testimonial Evidence, and Autonomy*

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When is trusting another's testimony epistemically responsible? It has been noted that trust creates a dependence relation, so another way to frame the question is: When is it reasonable to depend on the views of another? Relatedly, is *autonomy* an epistemic virtue, and what is its relation to epistemic dependence? In this paper, we approach these questions via a consideration of testimony as evidence. Specifically, we argue that testimony is best understood in a non-evidentialist sense, and we propose a historically-informed, virtue theoretic account of testimony that clarifies its epistemic role, and resolves some difficulties that arise in standard evidentialist accounts.

Our argument has three stages: (1) We first trace the historical development of the concepts "evidence" and "evidentness," showing that philosophers prior to the 18th century appreciated a richer variety of evidentiary distinctions than is typical of contemporary epistemologists. We argue that attention to these distinctions helps to make perspicuous the sense in which testimony plays an evidentiary role, and consequently when testimony that *p* does and does not count as evidence for a hearer that *p*. To this end, we explore the prospects for a "transhistorical" notion of testimony, i.e., one which does not presuppose a single concept of "evidence." We show that, in contrast to a justificatory sense of "evidence" common amongst post-Enlightenment philosophers, earlier thinkers such as Ockham and Buridan conceived of "evidence" more broadly to include the evidentness of a cognitive object or a cognition grasping that object, i.e., a thing's *being evident* or an evident cognition.¹ We use this broader notion of evidence to argue that reasonable reliance on the testimony of others is best understood through the notion of epistemic *trust*—interpreted in a virtue theoretic framework—rather than through the typical evidentialist framework in which testimony is generally discussed by contemporary epistemologists.

(2) Secondly, we consider the epistemological problem for trust posed by disagreement. Here we rely on the work of Paul Faulkner, who defends a virtue ethical theory of testimony based on the virtue of trust, utilizing to great effect Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice.² Faulkner discusses the possibility of alternative, conflicting sets of "thick" ethical concepts, which creates the "problem of disagreement," making it impossible, he argues, to give a purely epistemological account of the virtue of trust, since it is not reasonable, for various reasons, to *presume* that a speaker is trustworthy in the absence of a relationship that makes ethical demands.³ His solution to the problem involves an explanation of the way that trust as an *ethical* virtue creates the epistemic tools needed to justify trusting the testimony of others. We build on Faulkner's insight and argue that thinking of the disagreement problem in a non-evidentialist way helps to clarify the way in

¹ Robert Pasnau, *After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 32–33.

² Paul Faulkner, "A Virtue Theory of Testimony," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* CXIV, no. 2 (2014): 189–211.

³ *Ibid.*, 194–195, 202–207.

which relying on the testimony of others can be a reasonable act. Like Faulkner, we approach this from a consideration of the problem of disagreement, but with an eye to resolving a certain paradox of the evidential value of disagreement. On the standard contemporary evidentialist view, it would seem that testimony must necessarily be categorized as “evidence,” as it is often seen either as a basic source of belief analogous to perception, such that any piece of testimony, whatever the source, carries *prima facie* justification, or as a subspecies of basic sources for knowledge, such that testimony is justified by underlying evidence. This creates a problem with respect to cases of disagreement in which testimonial reports intuitively carry *no* evidential weight. We offer a virtue-theoretic solution to this problem.

(3) Thirdly, we conclude with a consideration of the relation between epistemic autonomy and epistemic dependence, arguing that one has a desirable form of epistemic autonomy to the extent that one is in the right kind of non-evidential epistemic relationship with another, exemplified by the ethical virtue of trust. We make the case that the way that one *lacks* epistemic autonomy is by relying on the testimony of others *as evidence*. In other words, if, in order to be justified in my belief that *p*, I must rely on evidence obtained via testimony, then I am not autonomous to that extent—nor would autonomy in that sense be desirable. However, if part of what makes my belief that *p* epistemically appropriate is a non-evidential trusting relationship with another person, then I may still be autonomous in that belief, insofar as I am acting freely within that relationship. In that sense, epistemic *dependence* can be autonomous, in much the same way that mutually dependent romantic partners can be autonomous when consent is present. Indeed, this sort of dependence is a mark of a healthy epistemic agent.

§ 1 - Toward a transhistorical concept of testimony

The epistemological concept of testimony is broadly understood as learning (acquiring cognitive objects or beliefs) via the utterances of other people. Since at least the rise of social epistemology in the 1970’s, scholars have begun to look for explicit or implicit accounts of testimonial knowledge in the work of major historical philosophers. C.A. Coady laid the groundwork for the contemporary testimonial framework in *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, where he identified the theories of “reductionism” and “anti-reductionism,” along with their respective fathers, David Hume and Thomas Reid.⁴ These opposing views of testimony differ primarily with respect to whether testimony is understood as a basic, or “original” source of knowledge or justified belief, or whether it reduces to a more basic source of belief, such as perception.⁵ Despite some early social epistemological works arguing that Ancient or Medieval philosophers like Augustine were anti-reductionists or

⁴ C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ For a nice overview of the epistemological issues surrounding testimony, see Jonathan Adler, “Epistemological Problems of Testimony,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d.

reductionists,⁶ the emerging consensus is that pre-Modern thinkers do not neatly populate the reductionist/anti-reductionist framework.⁷

The reason that Ancient and Medieval accounts of testimony are incongruent to Coady's framework is that the framework is fundamentally evidential. The epistemic role of evidence originally emerged in the 13th to 14th century with John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Current evidential conceptions of testimony, rooted primarily in the thought of Hume and Reid, ignore the work of earlier philosophers to their detriment. Put differently, the concept of testimony as a form of evidence built on the notion of a hearer's justification, while occasionally useful, is a somewhat impoverished framework. Testimony as an epistemological concept is bigger than any one theory of knowledge. We believe that contemporary discussions of testimony would be served by a testimonial framework that is not understood primarily in terms of evidence or evidentialism, but that remains theory neutral to as great an extent possible.

In this section we consider two levels of the meaning of "testimony": (1) testimony as a *telling*, or an instance of transmission, and (2) testimony as the epistemological process or activity which yields knowledge or belief via tellings/transmission. We offer a theory-neutral, and thereby *transhistorical*, concept of testimony as a telling, or non-evidential *reason to believe*. Since most ancient and medieval testimonial accounts disrupt the customary reductionism/anti-reductionism framework, we argue that they provide a basis with which to rethink the Modern testimonial framework.

The so-called "social turn" comprised by the rise of social epistemology in the late 20th century is often seen as following an anti-evidentialist turn in general epistemology away from the idea that *all* knowledge must accord with an "epistemic imperative" in the form of beliefs supported by evidence.⁸ Instead of focusing on evaluating whether *individuals* (isolated from their social environment) maintain justified beliefs through doxastic rules governing knowledge generation and transmission, social epistemology aims to give an account of knowledge which reflects the complex reality of social relationships and institutions.⁹

Despite this move away from the post-Renaissance Western world dominated by an "individualistic ideology," the discussion of testimony in philosophy remains largely rooted in evidentialism. As Linda Zagzebski observes:

This view [of testimony as individualistic] no doubt emerged in the early modern period because of the rise of a view of autonomy that stresses individual rather than corporate responsibility, together with the view that individual responsibility is a matter of properly handling one's own evidence. What is taken to be debatable is only

⁶ Cf. Peter King and Nathan Ballantyne, "Augustine on Testimony," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2009): 195–214; Matthew Kent Siebert, "Aquinas on Testimonial Justification: Faith and Opinion," *Review of Metaphysics* 69, no. 3 (2016): 555–82; Matthew Kent Siebert, "Augustine's Development on Testimonial Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56, no. 2 (2018): 215–37.

⁷ While scholars rarely state this explicitly, they purposefully avoid the terms. Cf. Richard Cross, "Testimony, Error, and Reasonable Belief in Medieval Religious Epistemology," in *Knowledge, Belief, and God: New Insights in Religious Epistemology*, ed. Matthew A Benton, John Hawthorne, and Dani Rabinowitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29–53; Jennifer Pelletier, "William Ockham on Testimonial Knowledge," in *Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund, vol. 2, 4 vols., *The Philosophy of Knowledge: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 145–65.

⁸ John Greco, "Transmitting Faith (And Garbage)," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10, no. 3 (2018): 86–88.

⁹ Roger Pouivet, *Épistémologie des croyances religieuses* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013).

the nature of the relevant evidence, a debate that assumes the evidence model of testimony...¹⁰

The persistence of that evidence model is largely due to Coady's influential work *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, in which he relies heavily on David Hume and Thomas Reid.¹¹ Coady says straightforwardly that testimony is "a kind of evidence," though he admits that viewing testimony as evidence is not "wholly unproblematic."¹² Ultimately, he maintains that testimony qualifies as evidence even though "this commits us to a concept of evidence such that *e* can be evidence for *b* even where *b* is, as it happens, false."¹³

Coady's reductionist/anti-reductionist framework is fundamentally evidentialist. As he says, "[Hume's] theory constitutes a reduction of testimony *as a form of evidence* or support to the status of a species... of inductive inference."¹⁴ By contrast, on the Reidean anti-reductionist view, testimony is evidence just as sense perception is evidence. On this latter view, there are two ways of understanding how testimony qualifies as evidence without itself requiring further verification: a rule of inference, or a rule of presumption. Under a rule of inference, a speaker says that *p* and the hearer infers *p*. Under the rule of presumption, one ought to accept all testimony unless there is additional evidence that the speaker is ignorant, insincere, or in some other way deficient. It is this view of testimony—as *presumed* propositional support—that has been most influential in contemporary discussions, as will become evident below. In both reductionist and anti-reductionist theories, testimony is understood as an *utterance* which in some way provides *evidence* for forming a belief.

This view of testimony has limitations. Note here an ambiguity in the concept "testimony." If testimony is to be treated as grounds for a belief, then it would be more accurate to say that *a* testimony is grounds for a belief. However, since "a testimony" is semantically/grammatically awkward in English, scholars use the phrase "a telling" to refer to the particular event where a speaker tells a hearer that *p*. On the testimony-as-evidence view, it is difficult to make sense of "a telling." This is because, as Zagzebski has observed, evidence is fundamentally third-personal. Third-personal reasons, which she calls "theoretical," are commonly available to any rational agent who can recognize, aggregate, and share them.¹⁵ On the other hand, first-personal reasons, which she calls "deliberative,"

¹⁰ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65.

¹¹ Coady, *Testimony*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79, italics added. Cf. Hume's own words, regarding the "species of reasoning" derived from testimony: "... it will be sufficient to observe that 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, *Enquiry*, 111). This can be understood as a *global* reduction of testimony, such that induction from previous cases of testimony turning out to be true reveals that testimony is generally reliable, or as a *local* reduction, in which induction must be limited to the context of *this* telling to reveal if the testimony is reliable.

¹⁵ "What I mean by *theoretical reasons* for believing *p* are facts that are logically or probabilistically connected to the truth of *p*. They are facts (or true propositions) about states of the world or experiences that, taken together, give a cumulative case for or against the fact that *p* (or the truth of *p*). They are not intrinsically connected to believing. We call them reasons because a reasonable person who comes to believe them and grasps their logical relations to *p* will see them as reasons for *p*. They can be shared with others—laid out on the table, so they are third personal. They are the reasons to which we refer in communicating with others. They are relevant from anyone's point of view. The connections between theoretical reasons and what they are reasons for are among the facts of the universe. Theoretical reasons aggregate and

are only available to an individual and cannot be shared or aggregated with theoretical reasons.¹⁶ On the testimony-as-evidence view, the fact that a telling occurred is what provides one with evidence, whether or not one experienced the telling oneself. Experiences—like the experience of hearing an utterance—are first-personal. One may of course have first-personal (deliberative) reasons to believe something, but such reasons do not automatically translate to third-personal (theoretical) reasons for others—i.e., they do not automatically become evidence for others.

Thus, testimony-as-evidence seems to be limited to the fact that a telling occurred, or that someone had the experience of a telling, but the experience itself would not qualify as evidence to form certain beliefs.¹⁷ On the plausible assumption that first-personal experiences provide reasons to believe, the testimony-as-evidence view oversimplifies the sense in which tellings provides reasons for belief. As Zagzebski says,

The evidence model of testimony is the only model that makes sense if all epistemic reasons are third personal. In that way of looking at reasons, testimony is a process by which third-person reasons are passed around. They are either passed around directly—we acquire them as we see the world around us, or they are passed around indirectly by inductive inference. There is no other alternative.¹⁸

A telling as evidence or grounds for a belief thus emerges as an entirely different kind of epistemic ground than what is typically denoted by the term “evidence.” The use of this term both outside and inside philosophy is notoriously slippery. Thomas Kelly notes that non-philosophical usage—from courtrooms to scientists to historians—covers a host of ideas typically revolving around physical objects themselves or their arrangement.¹⁹ As Patrick Rysiew points out, the situation in philosophy is no better, and may in fact be worse:

More troubling is the fact that there’s not much agreement *within* philosophy as to what evidence is: it has been variously said to consist in one’s “sense-data” (certain empiricists), “observation statements” (positivists), what one knows (Williamson 2000b), the “information a person has to go on” (Feldman 2003: 45) or whatever indicates to us that the proposition is true (Conee 2011), one’s non-factive, phenomenal states (certain epistemic internalists), whatever states or processes, etc., lead in some suitably reliable way, to a belief (e.g., Greco 1999, 2002).²⁰

In short, contemporary philosophers want the concept of evidence to do more than it is suited for. Kelly helpfully identifies four distinct roles for evidence: (1) Evidence as that which justifies belief; (2) Evidence as that which rational thinkers respect; (3) Evidence as a

can be used in calculations of probability. What we call evidence is most naturally put in the category of those theoretical reasons we can identify.” Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*, 63–64.

¹⁶ Ibid., 64–65.

¹⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹ Thomas Kelly, “Evidence,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/evidence/>.

²⁰ Patrick Rysiew, “Making It Evident: Evidence and Evidentness, Justification, and Belief,” in *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford University Press, 2011), 208.

guide (sign, symptom, mark) to truth; and (4) Evidence as neutral, intersubjective arbiter. It follows that the answer to what “evidence” is depends on the role the concept is playing in a given context.

In analyzing the four roles of evidence provided by Kelly, Rysiew notes two issues this list reveals: “... whether a single kind of thing is suited to play the various roles evidence has been thought to play; and whether we’re likely to arrive at a unified theory (a single concept) of evidence.”²¹ Rysiew is optimistic about the second issue, given certain historical considerations which we will address momentarily. However, regarding the first issue, he is skeptical that evidence can perform all the various roles assigned to it.

Rysiew is not alone here. William Alston sees the terms “evidence” and “reasons” as “too squishy” to capture key differences in justification such that he introduces the distinction between doxastic and nondoxastic grounds for beliefs. Nodoxastic grounds are primarily if not exclusively experiences. This fits the common understanding of evidence as a publicly available object or neutral guide to truth. Nodoxastic grounds are inherently non-propositional. They are raw epistemic input ready for sensory or rational consumption or processing. Doxastic grounds, on the other hand, are themselves beliefs, such that a belief is grounded by another belief.²² Since a belief is a propositional attitude about *p*, doxastic grounds are propositional by definition. They are preprocessed epistemic inputs having already been prepared as the output of another mind. So when “testimony” is considered as “evidence,” in the third-personal sense described above, what is meant is a telling in which a belief obtained from another person through their utterance serves as the doxastic grounds for one’s own belief that *p*.

We seem to intuitively or subconsciously understand this distinction insofar as in ordinary language we reserve the term “evidence” for sensory objects or facts that a subject knows to obtain, while we reserve the term “reasons” for what Alston calls “propositionally structured entities” (whether they be facts or well-supported beliefs).²³ Thomas Kelly also recognizes this distinction in grammatical function, stating that the difference between evidence and a reason is that the former is a mass term while the latter is a count noun.²⁴ Kelly appears to have in mind Jeffrey Pelletier’s work in which mass terms denote *stuff* while count nouns denote *objects*. Language, Pelletier argues, reveals ontological presuppositions by our use of mass terms vs. count nouns. As count nouns, “reasons to believe” are “entities that are distinct from each other and thus one can distinguish and count them,” while as a mass term, “evidence” is “stuff that is undifferentiated with respect to the term being used to describe it.”²⁵ Applying this thought to epistemic grounds parallels the conclusions of

²¹ Ibid., 211.

²² William P Alston, *Beyond “Justification”: Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 82–83.

²³ Ibid., 83–84.

²⁴ “Inasmuch as evidence is the sort of thing which confers justification, the concept of evidence is closely related to other fundamental normative concepts such as the concept of a *reason*. Indeed, it is natural to think that ‘reason to believe’ and ‘evidence’ are more or less synonymous, being distinguished chiefly by the fact that the former functions grammatically as a count noun while the latter functions as a mass term.” See Kelly, “Evidence.” Section 1. In a footnote, Kelly notes that “evidence” may have “something of an empirical connotation that ‘reason to believe’ lacks.”

²⁵ Francis Jeffrey Pelletier, *Mass Terms: Some Philosophical Problems* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1979), 162. He continues: “Mass terms are therefore unlike count terms in that they are *divisive* in their reference: they permit something that the mass term is true of to be arbitrarily subdivided and the term to be true of these parts as well. Taking the water in the glass to be something that *is water* is true of, it can be divided into parts and *is water* will be true of both parts. And again,

philosophers such as Zagzebski that evidence can *aggregate*, or be added to existing evidence, while reasons do not aggregate, but rather replace one another.²⁶ This division has led to questions about whether a unified evidential account can be maintained.

Returning to Rysiew, he is optimistic that a unified theory of evidence which is reliant on Thomas Reid (d. 1796) can overcome the challenges that evidentialism faces. He says:

Whether or not these problems are insuperable, there is another way of thinking of evidence that preserves its essential connection with truth. Here, instead of beginning with the abstract noun ('evidence'), we take *evidentness* as the root notion and treat the nominative 'evidence' in derivative terms, as *that which makes* something evident (manifest, etc.).²⁷

Rysiew limits himself solely to Reid's account, but this approach echoes the thought of John Duns Scotus (d. 1308), William of Ockham (d.1347), and John Buridan (d. 1358), who collectively introduced the notion of evidence and its dependence on evidentness. Scotus writes that the stronger form of knowledge (*scientia*) arose from the evidence of a scientific object.²⁸ Ockham used evidence as the factor that distinguished knowledge from belief, insofar as knowledge is defined as assent to a true proposition with evidence or evidentness (d. 1347).²⁹ John Buridan (d. ca. 1360) and his contemporaries varied the notion of evidence to allow for different levels of knowledge, whether absolute, natural, or moral.³⁰ As Robert Pasnau points out in his account of the history of epistemology, for these thinkers there are three distinguishable types of evidentness that are entwined:

- A. The evidentness of a cognitive object; that is, *a thing's being evident*.
- B. The evidentness of a cognition that grasps such an object; that is, *an evident cognition*.
- C. That which makes something be evident; that is, *the evidence*.³¹

Modern and contemporary epistemology predominately speak only of the final sense. As Pasnau says:

mass terms, unlike count terms, are also *cumulative* in their reference: putting the water contained in two glasses into a bowl yields something of which *is water* is true. But the same is not the case with a count term like *dog*. Chopping up a dog does not yield more things of which *is a dog* is true, nor do two dogs make a thing of which *is a dog* is true."

²⁶ Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*, 63–65.

²⁷ Rysiew, "Making It Evident: Evidence and Evidentness, Justification, and Belief," 214. Just as light makes manifest visible objects, evidence is the voucher for all truth (*IP* VI 5, *W* 448a). As against the argumentational view (but like the reliabilist view) there is no restricting evidence to sentence-like entities (perceptual experience, say, can vouch for the existence of some object). And as against the reliabilist view, it is not the *bare fact* of reliability that defines evidence. The connection with truth, again, is secured via the notion of evidentness: for something to be evident is for it to be manifestly true; that's why, when I say, 'It's obvious [evident, manifest] that *p*', or, 'X makes it manifest [evident, obvious] that *p*', I am thereby committing myself as to *p*. And, on the assumption of the general reliability of our faculties (see below), those things which we 'comprehend...clearly and without prejudice' (*IP* VII 3, *W* 482b) and judge it to be evident (hence, true) generally will *be* such.

²⁸ Scotus, Lect. III, d. 23, q. un., n. 19 (Vatican, XXI, 103)

²⁹ Henrik Lagerlund, ed., *Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 2, The Philosophy of Knowledge: A History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 5, https://nls.ldls.org.uk/welcome.html?ark:/81055/vdc_100063499097.0x000001.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:7.

³¹ Robert Pasnau, *After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 32–33.

The last of these senses is most deeply entrenched in epistemology today. Moreover, whether we are dealing with Latin (*evidentia*), French (*évidence*), or English (*evidence*), modern readers find it natural to suppose that we are talking about type-C evidence. In fact, however, it is not until the later eighteenth century that this third sense became prevalent in philosophical texts. Before that time, the predominant senses were A and B.³²

Cases of sense B largely trace back to cases of sense A, which trace back to metaphysical foundations. For medieval philosophers, the bridge from the metaphysical to the cognitive was typically considered to be the powers or “virtues” of human nature. Knowledge was the fruit of a causal process, or the proper use of intellectual and moral virtues. However, beginning after Thomas Aquinas, the strong metaphysical underpinning of knowledge was largely replaced with explaining cognition and how knowledge is acquired.³³

Despite the two historical types of evidentness seemingly having been lost from all but the subconscious, epistemological problems appear to be driving contemporary epistemologists such as Rysiew back to these older notions of evidentness. Analyses like Alston’s distinction between nondoxastic and doxastic grounds, the differences between “evidence” and “reasons,” and Zagzebski’s distinction between theoretical and deliberative reasons, reveal an epistemic ground for belief other than the typical evidentialist notion of publicly available facts.

The historic sense of “evidence” (type C) thus parallels Alston’s nondoxastic grounds and Zagzebski’s theoretical reasons, as publicly available facts or objects everyone can experience to make something evident or to justify beliefs. The historic sense of “evidentness” (type A) likewise parallels Alston’s doxastic grounds and Zagzebski’s deliberative reasons. Borrowing an example from Kelly, we may say that when I have a headache, the experience of cranial pain might qualify as evidence (type C), since it makes evident for me that I have headache, but since I cannot share my experience of cranial pain publicly, it cannot be evidence for anyone else. Following the historic tripartite conception of evidentness, a headache is evident (type A) to me since my experiencing of the cognitive object cranial pain is evident to me. This gives rise to the evidentness (type B) of my cognition “I have a headache” through my grasping of the cognitive object cranial pain in propositional form. Both these usages of evidentness are first-personal. Only that which makes my headache evident to someone else qualifies as evidence in the modern sense.

Two likely channels emerge as to what makes my headache evident to you in this type C sense: (1) observable signs correlated with headaches by induction (such my applying pressure to my forehead while wincing, or your learning that I exhibit lifestyle factors which often trigger headaches such as stress, poor sleep, or excessive alcohol consumption); and (2) my telling you that I have a headache. For (2), what qualifies as evidence is the utterance “I have a headache,” or perhaps the fact that the situation took place in which I performed the utterance “I have a headache.” But a telling as evidence in this form is too weak to perform the role of an epistemic ground for the belief that someone else has a headache, since it is susceptible to all sorts of error, such as insincerity, ignorance, random inaccuracy, etc.

³² Ibid., 33.

³³ Lagerlund, *Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, 2:4.

The reason the utterance does not rise to the level of evidence is due to its doxastic or propositional nature, which includes the notion of there being a *reason to believe* that *p*. But mere utterances do not automatically provide such reason—a computer programmed to produce the sounds “I have a headache” does not give one any reason to believe that anyone in fact has a headache. A telling, in the normal case, is not merely raw unprocessed facts. My telling that I have a headache is produced by my evident cognition (type B) built upon the evidentness (type A) of the cranial pain. Thus, my telling you that I have a headache does not qualify as evidence (type C) for you (or me) merely by virtue of being a third-personal utterance. Rather, my telling gives rise to the evident cognition in you that “I have a headache,” and so your belief is based on the grounds of my belief, in a way in which the justification of your belief depends on our relationship, and not merely on the existence of my utterance. Thus, my telling is a first-personal doxastic ground or reason (i.e., a “deliberative reason”) for you to adopt my belief that I have a headache, but not a third-personal nondoxastic ground or “evidence” (i.e., a “theoretical reason”).

This brings us to a clearer picture of what testimony is and is not. What is most clear is that testimony is “a telling” which can serve as an epistemic ground. It is arguably a reason to believe, but not necessarily evidence. The difference is that a telling, as a non-evidential reason to believe, is interpersonal.³⁴ We now turn to the question of what allows a telling to serve as an epistemic ground (a reason) in relation to a related problem in the epistemology of disagreement.

§ 2 - Trust and the problem of disagreement

To illustrate the difference this pre-modern conception of evidence makes to contemporary epistemological discussions, we turn to an example from the literature on the epistemology of disagreement. A prominent philosopher in that discussion, Richard Feldman, has influentially argued for the principle that “evidence of evidence is evidence.”³⁵ In other words, your believing that *p* gives me reason to believe that there is some reason for *p* (call this “meta-evidence”), which in turn gives me reason for *p*. Taken in the standard evidentialist sense of type C evidence, this principle entails that the testimony of another *always* carries evidential weight, and is therefore always *prima facie* justified (much like perceptual seemings are widely regarded to be), and is therefore always a reason to believe the propositional content of the testimony. The problem is that it is relatively easy to think of cases in which the testimony of others does not seem to be even *prima facie* justified, as we will see momentarily.

Much of this discussion centers on the relationship between evidence and justification. Plausibly, evidence typically produces justification for believing a proposition. If one is an evidentialist, like Feldman, then in fact evidence is *the only thing that can produce*

³⁴ This reading is admittedly in contrast to the traditional reductionism and antireductionism understandings of testimony which treat all testimony as evidence. HERE OR IN THE TEXT? This view is closer to the interpersonal view of testimony or assurance view, but differs from most assurance approaches to testimony in denying that hearers can (or are entitled to) assume the trustworthiness of a speaker.

³⁵ See Richard Feldman, “Evidentialism, Higher-Order Evidence, and Disagreement,” *Episteme* 6, no. 3 (2009): 294–312. See also my (Whitaker) “Disagreement and Meta-evidence,” in preparation.

justification. So on first glance, the principle seems to imply that evidence that someone else has evidence for *p* gives one *justification* for the belief that *p*. But several commentators have wondered about this implication.

For example, Earl Conee notes that the principle does *not* entail justification because justification is a “summary evaluation” of a belief.³⁶ Meta-evidence could easily be defeated by other considerations. For example, if I learn that you believe that it will snow today (despite having been quite warm yesterday), then by the principle, I thereby gain some evidence that it will snow today. However, say I also find out that the weather app you’ve been using has a known malfunction that results in false predictions of snow. Then the evidence I gained from your evidence is canceled out, and so I am not justified in believing that it will snow. Nonetheless, both Conee and Feldman suggest that evidence of evidence provides *some* defeasible evidence for a person—even if that evidence is *always* defeated. As Feldman says, “defeated evidence is evidence.”³⁷

Another commentator, Alvin Goldman, seems to demur. Commenting on Feldman’s principle, he says:

Hearing... testimony may give the hearer default justification for believing *Q*, but such default justification can be defeated by other information in the hearer’s possession. *In that case, Q does not qualify as an item of evidence for the hearer.*³⁸

Goldman seems to imply here that evidence that is defeated—i.e., evidence that cannot justify a belief—is *not really* evidence. A related objection to Feldman’s principle—and the case we’ll focus on here—comes from Hud Hudson:

Suppose that at some APA conference we’re having our yearly beer together and I say, “Hey Rich, something kind of cool... it’s my birthday today!” And I do it in that winning and trustworthy way you’ve come to trust over the years. But I’m lying and I know I’m lying. I now have evidence for the proposition that evidence exists in support of the claim that it’s my birthday today, but I don’t have evidence (not even a little bit) for the claim that it’s my birthday today.³⁹

Hudson’s point here is that if Feldman’s principle is correct, then Hudson *would* have evidence that it’s his own birthday, when he knows that it isn’t, which seems absurd.

Feldman’s response is to bite the bullet. He says, “I think that in his example Hud does get some evidence for the proposition that it is his birthday today. But this is not problematic.”⁴⁰ It isn’t problematic, supposedly, because the evidence that Hudson receives through his lie is minimal and is easily swamped by the other evidence that he has that it is not his birthday. Feldman reminds the reader, rightly, that to have some evidence for *p* is not

³⁶ Earl Conee, “Rational Disagreement Defended,” in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted A Warfield (Oxford University Press, 2010), 76-78, and Appendix 1, 84-89.

³⁷ Feldman, “Evidence of Evidence Is Evidence,” 297.

³⁸ Alvin Goldman, “Epistemic Relativism and Reasonable Disagreement,” in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield (Oxford University Press, 2010), 187–215.211. Italics added.

³⁹ Feldman, “Evidentialism, Higher-Order Evidence, and Disagreement,” 309. To be more precise, Feldman would have to *indicate* to Hudson in some way that he believes it is Hudson’s birthday in order for Hudson to gain the evidence.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

to be justified in believing p , since justification has to do with the balance of one's *total* evidence. So, since Hudson does not obtain *justification* through his lie, there is no problem.

However, this response misses the force of Hudson's objection. The objection is not that Hudson obtains a *justified belief* that it is his birthday by lying about it being his birthday, but rather that he obtains *evidence* for the proposition that it is his birthday by lying about it being his birthday.⁴¹ Surely evidence cannot be manufactured so easily. If it can, then all I need to do to obtain evidence for some view is to make a convincing show of evidence to someone else. This counterintuitive consequence follows because Feldman conceives of evidence strictly in the modernist, type C sense discussed above, as publicly available, third-personal reasons for belief.

There is, however, something right about Feldman's principle, and it highlights the importance of the type A and B senses of evidentness. I think what is right about the principle comes through in a comment that Peter van Inwagen makes about David Lewis:

Consider... the body of public evidence that I can appeal to in support of incompatibilism (arguments and other philosophical considerations that can be expressed in sentences or diagrams on a blackboard or other objects of intersubjective awareness). David Lewis "had" the same evidence (he had seen and he remembered and understood these objects) and was, nevertheless, a compatibilist. If I know, as I do, that David had these features (and this feature, too: he was a brilliant philosopher), that he had these features is itself evidence that is (or so it would seem to me) relevant to the truth of incompatibilism.⁴²

Notice that what is relevant to the justification of p here is *that Lewis had these features*—namely, he had seen, remembered, and understood the evidence, and was brilliant. If none of these obtained, the question of the evidential value of his opinions would be moot. So Feldman's principle is right in one sense: insofar as one is dealing with a perspective that is constituted by certain features of epistemic excellence, then the views of a person with that perspective may count as evidence for a disputed proposition. Note the implications here for Hudson's counterexample to Feldman's principle: if Feldman takes Hudson to have these features of epistemic excellence, then Hudson's testimony that it is his birthday does give Feldman evidence that it is Hudson's birthday. However, it does not give Hudson *any* evidence that it is his own birthday, because he knows himself to be lying, and therefore to be contravening the conditions for his own epistemic excellence, one of which is accurately representing the available evidence.

Note that this response to Hudson depends on a conception of the *epistemic virtue* of others, which determine when it is reasonable to give the testimony of others *overriding* weight. This happens only when, among other things, I take the other person to be an especially careful reasoner. In other words, I must take her testimony regarding p to be

⁴¹ Of course, it is possible—even common—that people obtain evidence through lies. If a stranger tells me he's from Detroit, I have evidence that he is, even if he's in fact from Seattle. The point is that *he* does not thereby gain evidence that he's from Detroit. The evidence he has for *that* proposition—which is presumably nil—remains exactly as it was before the lie.

⁴² Peter van Inwagen, "We're Right. They're Wrong," in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield (Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.

trustworthy if it is to be capable of defeating or compelling me to alter my own standing belief. But trustworthiness cannot be adequately explained if we limit ourselves to type C evidence. What is needed instead is an account of testimony which roots the evidential value of the reports of others in the interpersonal connection between knowers, rather than in their objective availability.

Such an account is provided by Paul Faulkner, who discusses the epistemic role of the virtue of trust, utilizing Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice.⁴³ Faulkner argues that the problem of disagreement makes it impossible to give a purely epistemological account of the virtue of trust.⁴⁴ This is because it is not reasonable, for various reasons, to *presume* that a speaker is trustworthy—as the evidentialist would have us do—in the absence of a relationship that makes ethical demands.⁴⁵ His solution to this problem involves an explanation of the way that trust as an ethical virtue creates the epistemic tools needed to justify trusting the testimony of others.

Faulkner notes that testimony does not occur in a vacuum—the partners in a conversation always have some interest in the outcome of the conversation, and thus “there are a multitude of potential explanations of any given bit of testimony, where each explanation starts from the interest the speaker has in the conversation.”⁴⁶ Note that while “an audience's basic reason for entering into a testimonial exchange is to find things out,” it is not necessarily the case that a speaker's interest is to help the audience accomplish this goal.⁴⁷ As Faulkner says,

... from the multitude of potential explanations of any given bit of testimony, there is no reason to single out ‘satisfying the audience's epistemic interest’ as the default explanation. And this is to say that a presumption of trustworthiness cannot be established as the epistemic default, because testimony does not have the proper function of servicing an audience's epistemic interests.⁴⁸

It follows from this that:

... what an audience needs, in every case, in order to epistemically rationalize testimonial uptake is some judgement that this explanation applies, that the speaker's purpose in communicating is indeed informative, and that the speaker is thereby trustworthy. More generally, what is thereby needed is some particular reason for thinking that a given bit of testimony is true.⁴⁹

We believe, along with Faulkner, that the possibility of alternative explanations of testimony serves to undermine Feldman's evidentialist assumption that testimony that *p* is *automatically* evidence for *p*. While it is possible to say, as Feldman likely would, that testimony always

⁴³ Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony.” See also Miranda Fricker, “Group Testimony? The Making of A Collective Good Informant,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXXXIV, no. 2 (2012): 249–76.

⁴⁴ Note that Faulkner is not working with our distinction between types of evidentness. His argument against an epistemological account of trust presumes an evidentialist understanding of “evidence,” and so does not necessarily apply to a more nuanced conception.

⁴⁵ Paul Faulkner, “A Virtue Theory of Testimony,” 194–195, 202–207.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

provides some (defeasible) evidence because of the presumption that it is intended to be informative, and that this evidence is *outweighed* when one finds out that it wasn't so intended—it is, we contend, both *less epistemologically loaded* and *closer to real-world experience* to say that testimony is evidentially weighty only if one is justified in thinking that the speaker's interest is to “satisfy the audience's epistemic interest.” This is less epistemologically loaded in the sense that it does not presume that the proper function of testimony is to be informative, and it is closer to real-world experience because we are all well acquainted with the experience of discovering that being informative was in fact *not* a speaker's intention in delivering some testimony.

We cannot presume that we always have a defeasible reason to think “that a given bit of testimony is true,” because in the absence of a reason to think that a speaker's purpose is informative, it is epistemically the same as chance. That is, if I do not know whether or not a speaker intends to satisfy my epistemic interests, then believing the speaker's testimony is equivalent to believing the outputs of a randomized testimony generator. One might object here that believing testimony is nearly always better than chance, which is true, but irrelevant, because in most cases, we have some *reason* to believe that the speaker intends to be informative. For example, if I get the time from someone on the street, I can trust that person's testimony (i.e., give it “deliberative” evidential weight) because *people don't normally lie about that, they're not normally mistaken about that*, and so on. This suggests that the evidential weight of testimony is domain specific, which implies that having evidential weight is not default for a bit of testimony.

Note that this implies a solution to Hudson's case: I do not gain evidence by giving false testimony, because—even though the other person testifies with the intention to inform—that testimony relies on other testimony (mine) that lacks this intention, and I am in a position to know that. The whole testimonial chain must preserve the intention to inform.

When is it reasonable, then, to believe that a speaker intends to be informative, and so is trustworthy? Faulkner's answer is that “trust, morally understood, is central to the epistemology of testimony in that it can be our ‘reason’ for testimonial uptake.”⁵⁰ In other words, we need a virtue theory of testimony. The details of such a theory need not concern us here; I want merely to suggest that one plausible way of understanding when the testimony of another should count as evidence for oneself is that this depends in part on whether it is *morally* appropriate to trust that person. The moral reason to believe a person can become an epistemic reason “because the presumption of trustworthiness in effect articulates a truth-based explanation of utterance: the speaker tells one that *p* because one visibly needs to know whether *p*.”⁵¹ Faulkner continues:

... in the good case, there is an explanatory connection between one's trusting and a speaker's being trustworthy that runs via the existence of... social norms of trust. This connection ensures that it is no accident that the truth-based explanation of utterance holds, given one's presumption that it does.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁵¹ Ibid., 208.

⁵² Ibid.

Faulkner's account of testimony is akin to other trust-based theories such as Richard Moran's "Assurance theory," or what has become known as the Interpersonal View of Testimony (IVT). Such theories deny the modernist/evidentialist connection between testimony and type C evidence. As such, if you tell me your belief, then my acceptance of your belief is based on my trusting you.⁵³ When *should* someone trust another? Or put differently, when is testimony authoritative? Zagzebski's answer is that for testimony to be authoritative, it must provide a deliberative reason, which depends on an interpersonal relationship, and is therefore non-evidential in the contemporary sense.⁵⁴ Moreover, trust in this sense is the *most basic* form of evidentiality. As Zagzebski says:

Although the notion of evidence is multiply ambiguous, I have said that I think it is most naturally put in the category of third-person reasons. ... we need trust that what we take to be indicative of truth is in fact indicative of truth, and so the evidence for *p* we think we can identify is never as basic as trust in the self, and... it is not as basic as trust in others as a reason for believing *p*. What we call evidence is not only derivative from trust in the self, it is also derivative from trust in others upon whom I rely in identifying the evidence. It follows that trust is a first-person, deliberative reason for belief that is more basic than anything I take to be third-person reasons.

Since no one has figured out how to combine the first-person and third-person perspectives into a single viewpoint, deliberative and theoretical reasons do not aggregate. There is no system of adding together both kinds of reasons for believing *p* to give a summary verdict on the reasonableness of believing *p*. Third-person evidence for *p* does not exhaust all of the reasons for believing *p*, and in fact, does not even include the most basic kind of reason for believing *p*.⁵⁵

Thus, by nuancing our understanding of evidence in a more historically-informed way, we arrive at a conception of testimony in which the relational dynamics in a specific case of trust can result in testimony playing a non-evidential epistemic role. This at once resolves the difficulties created by the modern evidentialist notion of evidence, and further clarifies the concepts of trust and epistemic autonomy.

§ 3 - Epistemic autonomy and dependence

So when is trusting another's testimony epistemically responsible? On a transhistorical understanding of testimony, the epistemology of testimony can, and will, take the shape of whatever approach to epistemology in general is applied. For reliabilism, trusting another's testimony is epistemically responsible when the testimony results from a reliable process. For internalism, it is when the listener has internal reasons for believing. For evidentialism, it is when testimony produces (*prima facie*) justification. As we have shown, freeing testimony from being defined as evidence resolves some *aporia* that has emerged in the literature. However, if testimony, as we argue here, is best understood under a virtue theoretic

⁵³ Cf. Richard Moran, "Getting Told and Being Believed," *Philosophers' Imprint* 5, no. 5 (2005): 1-29.

⁵⁴ Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority*, 131-2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

framework, then we would expect trust—and the related notion of autonomy—to follow a virtuous mean. A hearer can fall into the vice of deficiency by not being autonomous enough—e.g., by being overly reliant on authorities through blind trust or faith. Conversely, the vice of excess results from the attempt to be overly autonomous through an epistemic self-sufficiency (Locke arguably fell prey to this tendency). The virtuous mean must fit, given the listener's interpersonal relationships, each situation which determines how much trust is morally and epistemically demanded.