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## Review of Paul Faulkner's *Knowledge on Trust*

J. Adam Carter

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Faulkner, Paul, *Knowledge on Trust*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 240, US 55.00(*hardback*).

Faulkner's aim in *Knowledge on Trust* is to answer three central questions at the heart of the epistemology of testimony: (i) under what conditions are we warranted in accepting testimony; (ii) what warrants testimonial belief, and (iii) how does it do so? The product of his attempt to answer these questions is what he calls the *trust theory of testimony*. By giving trust the role he gives it in his theory, Faulkner thinks we can preserve some of the best aspects of both reductionist and non-reductionist accounts, while avoiding some of the problems that face each of these proposals.

*Knowledge on Trust* is a rigorously argued, creative and important contribution to the epistemology of testimony. Stylistically, it is an arduous read and not for the impatient or unacquainted. Substantively, despite the book's many merits—not the least being the illuminating discussion of norms of trust—the central argument leaves the epistemologically minded reader with a few worries. In what follows, I'll first summarise Faulkner's argument as it plays itself out across his 8 chapters, and then I'll raise two brief criticisms.

The first chapter introduces the *argument from cooperation*—an argument revisited at different junctures throughout the book. The upshot of the argument is that it would be irrational to trust without a reason to do so; the uptake of testimony must be *backed by reasons* if it is to be reasonable. This conclusion aligns clearly with one of the central tenets of *reductionist* views in the epistemology of testimony. Reductionists hold that (i) testimony is not (e.g. like perception) a distinctive epistemic source, and (ii) we do not enjoy a "default entitlement" to accept testimony; positive reasons to do so are required. Non-reductionists take the opposite stance on these two issues, and accordingly, view the acceptance of testimony as rationalised by entitlement that persists in the absence of any positive reasons.

Now one attractive feature of the *non-reductionist* position is that it can swiftly sidestep a certain sceptical challenge that faces reductionists. The challenge, framed famously by Thomas Reid, arises from the insight that, as Reid puts it, "Most men would be unable to find reasons for believing the thousandth part of what is told them." (Reid 1764: 197). As Faulkner sees it, the varieties of reductionist theories are carved out in response to the observational problem, to which a response involves arguing that "the limitations in what can be observed do not imply limitations in the warrant we have for accepting testimony" (32).

While Faulkner thinks reductionist theories are not done in by the observational problem (his argument in Chapter 2), they are, he argues in Chap-

ter 3, nonetheless misguided in two important respects. Firstly, the uptake principle—*viz.*, stating "when an audience is warranted in acquiring a belief on the basis of accepting a piece of testimony" (22) endorsed by reductive theories is wrong; secondly, reductive theories are wrong to reject all transmission principles—principles stating "conditions under which testimony transmits knowledge and warrant" (23). Faulkner's beef with reductivist uptake principles is, essentially, that they preclude trust as able to warrant uptake of testimony, in part because they fail to distinguish between *believing a speaker* and *believing what a speaker says*. The bulk of Chapter 3, however, concerns Faulkner's second criticism of reductivist views—that they reject all transmission principles. In doing so, they not only succumb to Moran's problem of intentionality, but also overlook what makes testimony distinctive—that when one attains knowledge (or warranted belief) through testimony, it is the *extended body of warrant* that explains an audience's acquisition of knowledge or warranted belief. Accordingly, Faulkner thinks any theory of testimony should preserve the following two transmission principles, which I combine here:

TK/TJ: Where *A* believes that *p* through uptake of testimony to *p*, *A* testimonially knows (testimonially warranted in believing that *p*) that *p* only if a prior speaker knew (testimonially warranted in believing that *p*) that *p*.

Faulkner has already in Chapter 1 argued that positive reasons (rather than mere entitlements) are required for testimonial uptake, as instituted by the argument from cooperation. In Chapter 4, he examines what he takes to be the strongest arguments non-reductivists have presented for the entitlement thesis. After (comparatively) swiftly dismissing Goldberg's (2007) and Coady's (1996) defences of entitlements (unconvincingly, in the case of Goldberg), Faulkner considers in much more depth the arguments put forward by Burge (1997) and McDowell (1994).

These arguments, respectively, are the critical focus of Chapter 5. Burge's position is characterised by the Acceptance Principle according to which "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: 467), whilst McDowell's disjunctivist view allows entitlement because "an audience can take 'at face value' that in receiving this testimony the audience is learning from a speaker that *p*" (83). There are distinctive nuances to both Burge's and McDowell's respective positions here, but no space to delve into them. It suffices to point out that Faulkner sees in these a common flaw, namely that "the idea that we are entitled to believe testimony [*ala* Burge and McDowell] simply fails to recognize how giving and accepting testimony is [via the argument from cooperation] a practical activity governed by considerations of practical rationality" (114).

Chapters 6–8 constitute Faulkner's positive proposal. He begins with an extended discussion in Chapter 6 of the Assurance Theory of Testimony, according to which, in telling someone something, the speaker offers the hearer

a kind of assurance that  $p$ —an assurance that involves taking a kind of responsibility for the truth, e.g. by responding to justificatory challenges (141). While Faulkner finds much to recommend the assurance theory, it (not unlike the non-reductivist proposals critiqued in the previous chapter) fails to preserve what Faulkner takes to be a reasonable uptake principle implied by the argument from cooperation; he calls this principle (R):

- (R) Confronted by testimony to  $p$ , an audience  $A$  is warranted in believing that  $p$  if and only iff  $A$ 's other attitudes make it reasonable for  $A$  to believe that  $p$  (119).

The other attitude Faulkner has in mind is *trust*, and without an appeal to trust, the assurance theory fails on its own to satisfy (R). The remainder of Chapter 6 involves an elucidation of the nature of trust and how trusting a speaker can provide epistemic reason for uptake. Faulkner here distinguishes between *predictive trust* and *affective trust*, the latter of which will be crucial to his proposal:

- Affective trust*:  $A$  trusts  $S$  to  $X$  in the affective sense) only if (1)  $A$  depends on  $S$   $X$ -ing; and (2)  $A$  expects (1) to motivate  $S$  to  $X$  (where  $A$  expects this in the sense that  $A$  expects of  $S$  that  $S$  be moved by the reason to  $X$  given by (1)) (146).

The attitude of affective trust involves the presumption that the trusted will prove trustworthy—that is, satisfy the expectation the hearer holds the speaker to. The act of trusting, for Faulkner, is rationally self-supporting, in that "it is based on an attitude of trust, which through implying the presumption that the trusted is trustworthy, gives a reason for trusting" (151). I'll return to the epistemic rationality of trust shortly, but first, let's look at the final stages of his argument. In Chapter 7, Faulkner skillfully discusses and critiques Bernard Williams's genealogical account of our testimonial practices in *Truth and Truthfulness*; Faulkner here is at his best in discussing the nature of social norms of trust and how they have been internalized in social-epistemic practice. Chapter 8 is simply a brief statement of the finished product:

- (A) Confronted by testimony to  $p$ , an audience  $A$  is warranted in believing that  $p$  if and only iff  $A$ 's other attitudes make it reasonable for  $A$  to believe that  $p$  (119).
- (B) Where  $A$  believes that  $p$  through uptake of testimony to  $p$ ,  $A$  is testimonially warranted in believing that  $p$  only if a prior speaker was warranted in believing that  $p$ .
- (C) If  $A$ 's uptake of testimony to  $p$  is warranted and a prior speaker was warranted in believing that  $p$ , then the extended body of warrant that supports the proposition that  $p$ , comes to support  $A$ 's belief that  $p$ .

While my overall verdict on this book is a positive one, I want to focus here on two points where I think Faulkner's argument runs into trouble. The points are connected. The first is a kind of bootstrapping problem (though not the crude bootstrapping objection he anticipates), the second a problem to do with epistemic luck. First, bootstrapping. Trusting, in Faulkner's affective sense, is (among other things) something I can *decide* to do. But it is also something that can provide me with an epistemic reason to believe what the speaker tells me. Faulkner notes, "It might seem odd that trust can bootstrap itself into reasonableness in this way." Of course, he thinks this worry is unfounded.

...in affectively trusting *S* for the truth, *A* accepts that *S* will see his, *A*'s depending on *S* for information as to whether *p* as a reason to tell *A* the truth on this matter... So trust involves *A* accepting that *S* has a reason to tell him the truth, and accepting that *S* will act on this reason, other things being equal ... In accepting these things about *S* and the trust situation, *A* thereby presumes that *S* is trustworthy, or that *S* will tell him the truth and will do so for the reason that *A*, depends on *S* for this.

This presumption, Faulkner claims, makes it probable for *A* that *p* is true given that this is what *S* tells him, and so provides *A* with an epistemic reason to believe that *p*. Now even if we grant Faulkner that trusting provides the speaker some incentive to be trustworthy, and grant that this raises for the audience the probability that *p* is true given *S* tells *A* *p*, the bootstrapping worry does not vanish. This is because the reason the speaker has for taking the audience's trusting as a reason to be trustworthy will oftentimes be subject to overriding defeaters (say, the speaker takes the audience's trust as a reason to be trustworthy but has stronger reasons to not be) or undercutting defeaters (if the speaker is—perhaps like many—simply unmotivated by norms of trust, on particular occasions).

Crucially, trusting a speaker does not provide one with any epistemic reason to think the speaker's reason to be trustworthy (in virtue of the audience's trusting) is not itself overridden or undercut, in any given particular case. So the question between non-reductivists and reductivist emerges: do we have an entitlement to such a second-order reason, or must we provide a positive justification for it? This connects with my second worry. Given that trusting provides no epistemic grounds for thinking the reason the speaker has to be trustworthy is not overridden or undercut in a particular case, it's not clear how knowledge on trust will not sometimes be unsafe. After all, forming a belief rationalised by a reason that may easily be overridden or undercut lacks the kind of modal stability knowledge requires. These worries aside, Faulkner's book is an impressive contribution to the epistemology of testimony and deserves an important place in the contemporary debate.

*J. Adam Carter*     *Eindhoven University of Technology & Edinburgh University*