

Introduction

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Along our life, we acquire most of our beliefs through testimony. Certainly, the only way of having access to many facts is through other people's words. Testimonial beliefs are widespread. Moreover, we feel extremely confident in some of these beliefs, and some of them amount to knowledge or, at least, we take them to be highly justified for us. We could not view ourselves as deprived of this very wide net of beliefs acquired through the testimony of other persons. Hence testimonies can't be considered as dispensable. But this uncontroversial fact does not address the epistemological question about whether the beliefs so acquired are justified (or amount to knowledge) *by testimony*, that is, by the very fact that the testifier makes available to the hearer a true proposition in an appropriate way.

Since the very beginning of modern epistemology, testimony has been much questioned as a valuable source of knowledge. Its epistemic import seemed to derive merely from the acceptance of authorities. And how could we be *justified* in our beliefs when they are grounded exclusively on the authority of other's words? The last years have seen a revival in the interest for testimony within the epistemological literature. But now testimony does not just raise classical questions about the justification of our beliefs or the subject's rational grounds for accepting the deliverances of our basic sources of belief; it also suggests new issues about the role of the individual knower in communicative and social settings or the special responsibility the knowers seem to exhibit in a testimonial situation. This monograph aims to broaden the range of topics recently discussed regarding the role and value of testimony in the acquisition of knowledge. Understandably, we do not intend to be exhaustive. The main interest of the participants in this volume is centered on how testimony works in communicative settings as an authoritative source of knowledge.

How the communicative context intervenes in the acquisition of knowledge by testimony is addressed in the papers by *Gloria Origgi* ("Trust, authority and epistemic responsibility") and *Paula Olmos* ("Situated practices of testimony. A rethorical approach"). The paper by Origgi tries to link the pragmatics of the communicative interactions with the acceptance of testimonial knowledge. She argues that it is the sharing of a communicative context and a practice of interpretation that explains how informant and receiver of information can share epistemic responsibilities. Testimony derives its epistemic significance from the interplay between the credibility attributed to authorities and the dynamics of interpretation of what they say and we could come to believe. Epistemic responsibilities of both speaker and hearer depend on evaluating the effects of relevance in the communicative context and the adoption of an stance of trust.



Paula Olmos' paper also addresses these issues now within the rethorical tradition. She proposes, through the study of *formal* practices of testimony, to distinguish two phases in a testimonial process: the disclosure of information by the speaker and how the audience gives authority to the testimony. Authority is analyzed in terms of the usability of this testimony in the game of asking for and giving reasons. Even what is said is shaped by expectations about possible uses of the information. The rethorical tradition teaches us about how the inherited material is put into use in many different contextual settings and treated as a source of authoritative knowledge. Olmos pleads for a change of perspective in the epistemological study of testimony, from the ideal and individualist model implicit in classical epistemology to a more communitarian and discursive approach, a more interactive model and a contextualized conception of the dynamics and use of testimonial information.

One of the hardest questions in current epistemology concerns whether we should view knowledge as an essentially individual accomplishment or as social in character. One of the common assumptions in the papers here collected is that testimony must lie at the core of a social epistemology without renouncing the autonomy of the individual subject. In a sense, testimony is halfway between the prospects of an individualist epistemology and the promises of a social epistemology. On the one hand, defenders of testimony as a mechanism for the generation and/or the transmission of knowledge do not desire to give up the centrality of the knower as normatively engaged in the task of assessing his rational resources. On the other hand, normative requirements involved in testimonial situations are not limited to *individual* commitments and evaluations. Putatively, testimony cannot exhibit its own normative status without taking into account the social interaction in which testifiers and receivers of the testimony are engaged. In a sense, the papers collected in this volume attempt to overcome the tensions between these two aspects and place the autonomous epistemic agent in a context of cooperative and social exchanges in order to explain the epistemological significance of testimony.

Testimony is a sort of cooperative behaviour in which the informational interests of the interlocutors are put into play. This could be presented as a social dilemma, such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, potentially confronting the interests of speaker and hearer. But successful testimony is better considered as a form of conversational cooperation that becomes an achievement of both speakers. The papers by *Paul Faulkner* ("Cooperation and trust in conversational exchanges") and *Fernando Broncano* ("Trusting others. The epistemological authority of testimony") aim to state the principles of cooperative behaviour that testimonial acts exemplify. *Faulkner* argues for a Gricean way to escape the dilemma, that is, by considering that both interlocutors have the presumption that, given the conversational situation, the other will cooperate. Both speakers recognize the dependence that testimony involves and they react in a trustworthy way. The trusted party, by seeing this dependence, argues *Faulkner*, have a sufficient a reason to be trustworthy.

Very similarly to this mechanism of recognizing the epistemic dependence, *Broncano* considers cooperative behavior in testimony as a case of joint action that claims a positive assent from the speakers to the end of sharing knowledge. Being conscious of

the epistemically asymmetrical perspective in which they are placed, both parties take their responsibilities in this joint action. In both papers, cooperation would therefore be a basic dimension built in the very mechanism of testimony. In testimonial situations other epistemic agents intervene, not just as instruments the hearer uses in order to get some belief, or even a true belief, but as willed persons that are engaged in mutual responsibilities. This very fact brings up new possible sources of error, not present in the acquisition of beliefs by other mechanisms. Other's insincerity can be alleged, besides unreliability, as starting point for raising skeptical threats. Again, in what sense testimony is social and how the knower *as knower* is involved in the testimonial situation are essential to account for the peculiarities of this kind of knowledge acquisition.

Less attention is paid in this volume to one of the issues that have shaped the literature on testimony in the last two decades, that is, the confrontation between non-reductionism and reductionism regarding the justification of our testimonial beliefs. Reductionism claims that the justification a testimonial belief exhibits can be reduced to the epistemic work of other more basic sources. Non-reductionism defends, on the contrary, that there is a specific epistemic contribution of testimony in the justification of the beliefs acquired and thus it can be included among the basic sources of justified beliefs. Almost all the contributions included in this volume attempt to remain equidistant between these two options. This issue is considered not so crucial with respect to the authority of testimony as other questions regarding the nature of testimony itself. Perhaps the contrast is not even essential for answering the normative question. In a sense, it is not difficult to agree that, in accepting a belief on the basis of other's words, the acceptance should be balanced against other sources of knowledge; or that other rational considerations must be in place in accepting a testimonial belief; and that maybe we do not accept a testimonial belief *just* on the basis of others' words, in a decontextualized setting. But at once, we should also be inclined to accept that testimony as such makes *a specific contribution* to the normative status of our beliefs. Nothing seems then to require the incompatibility of both ideas.

Nevertheless, the confrontation between reductionists and non-reductionists does affect central questions discussed in the papers of this volume. In a certain sense, the non-reductionist seems to assume that the epistemic work made by hearer and speaker is radically different, because whereas the speaker contributes positively to the correctness of the belief, the hearer contributes just negatively by not detecting any defeaters for the proposition that the speaker's words convey. Some of the contributors (Broncano, Faulkner, Origi, Vega) to this volume wish to make room to a more positive work by the hearer regardless of whether one accepts a reductionist or a non-reductionist account of the justifiedness of testimonies. Epistemic competences and virtues of the hearer are also involved in the cooperative situation created within a communicative setting in which both participants take themselves as engaged in a social and informational exchange.

Authors pay attention as well to the special kind of interdependence created among the participants in a testimonial situation. For what is at stake is the epistemic dimension characterizing this interdependence. And some of the papers (again Bron-

cano, Faulkner, Origgi, Vega) appeal to the notion of trust in accounting for this specificity. The hearer depends on the speaker just because she trusts him; and the speaker assumes certain burdens just because he recognizes that the acceptance of what he says is grounded on an attitude of trust.

But how trust can have any epistemological significance? Many epistemologists are skeptics about trust contributing to the epistemic status of a belief. Here the contrast between different positions seems to grow from the different significance given to evidential and non-evidential factors in the acquisition of beliefs by testimony. Recent literature has emphasized that tellings should not be taken as indicators (or evidence) in order to play a significant epistemic role in the acceptance by the hearer. But the question is: how could these tellings, while they do not work as evidence, count at once as reasons for the hearer to believe that p ? Trust could play a role in how tellings act as reasons for the hearer's belief. So it is suggested by some of the papers. Trust refers to the exhibited attitudes in many ordinary contexts where people engage with others in personal relations that ground cooperative situations. It has been argued that trust attitudes necessarily involve some vulnerability that cannot be overcome by gathering evidences without at the same time annihilating the very attitude of trust. But how can situations where uncertainty cannot be eliminated nor "domesticated" by estimations of probability be epistemically relevant? In other words, it is not easy to explain how trust could make an *epistemic* significant contribution to the acceptance of a belief. Let us explain. For trust to be epistemically significant, we seem to have only two options available: first, trust could be a very special way of envisaging the evidence for belief; second, trust is alien to any evidential consideration. But if we follow the first path, and trust is explained in evidential terms, there is nothing epistemically specific in the explanatory model that appeals to the specificity of trust. And the second option has not a clear epistemological interpretation. What kind of *epistemic* reasons are available to the person that places his trust by trusting the speaker? And if it is epistemically significant, in what sense the reasons trust provides belong to a different kind? These questions claim to account for how epistemically rational trust is possible.

One possibility explored in some of the papers is to consider trust as an affective response in concrete communicative situations. Testimony seems to inherit a kind of *rational* responsiveness from this attitude of trust that is constitutive of our sociality. It is even the fact of creating a situation of vulnerability for the trusting person that constitutes the special reason to be trustworthy and cooperate. That means again that testimonial contexts cannot be understood without taking into account our character as persons engaged in a cooperative epistemic task. So testimony exhibits necessarily a moral dimension. In some epistemic practices, one cannot be dispensed from viewing them as ethically constrained. On the one hand, testimony creates obligations and responsibilities in the participants that are both epistemic and ethical. On the other hand, this perspective on the issues helps to identify social situations where some wrongs are viewed as specific forms of epistemic injustice. There are some epistemic wrongs linked to the testimonial situations in which the hearers, for instance, are deprived of credibility. This is the central question in *Miranda Fricker's* book *Epistemic In-*

justice. The book is devoted to the significance of social and ethical aspects in the epistemology of testimony. So we have considered that the inclusion in this monograph of a short symposium on the book could be of interest (the discussion was held in almost these terms during the conference that gave rise to this volume). The debate deals with a very important consequence of taking testimony as a topic of social epistemology. Fricker's idea is that testimony confronts us with the social role of hearer. Sometimes testimony is biased due to some trait of the speaker, not attending sufficiently to the transmitted content, and this constitutes —this is Fricker's proposal— a case of epistemic injustice. This important remark is discussed from two very different points of view by *Francisco J. Gil* and *Jesús Zamora*. Gil argues from a Kantian tradition and demands some clarifications about how Fricker could integrate the Kantian maxims on autonomy into her theory of testimony. Zamora, in his turn, from a decision-theoretical tradition argues against the ethical considerations when, that is his point, much of the questions are better situated in an economic context, in this case an economy of credibility. Between two so different poles of argumentation, Miranda Fricker's position deeps into the social and ethical character of testimony.

Dependence seems to be the central notion within an epistemology of testimony that wants to be sensitive to all these constraints. No genuine testimony without the recognition of epistemic situations of dependence. One could even argue that at least part of the value of the epistemic achievement the testimonial act consists in derives from the very fact that autonomous agents view each other as *inter-dependent*. This is the main argument in the paper by *Jesús Vega* ("Epistemic merit, autonomy and testimony"). The epistemic conditions of autonomy and dependence do not exclude each other, once we distinguish between autonomy and the individualist ideal of self-sufficiency. Vega's paper argues for the attribution of epistemic merit to the respective contributions of speaker and hearer, insofar as both of them are engaged in a cooperative task as genuine agents. The core of our epistemic agency in social settings requires the exercise of our epistemic autonomy under conditions of mutual dependence. The hearer is not deprived of obligations and responsibilities, even if these cannot be modelled in terms of evidential reasons and evaluations of reliability of the sources. He has to view himself as engaged in a cooperative situation in which he claims of the speaker certain commitments and corresponding responsibilities. So testimony is deeply entrenched in our personal and social epistemic life.*

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