

Circular Testimony

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1 Internalism About Testimony

- (TI) A listener's justification for her belief that ϕ is just a matter of the reflectively accessible reasons she uses in forming her belief that ϕ .

This is borne out of the *New Evil Demon Argument* (1999).

It means that when we form justified beliefs in what people say, we do so by using the reasons that we have available to us in the form of background evidence eg., through induction.

2 Circular Testimony

CIRCLE: Agatha looks across the street from her house and sees that the building opposite, which she recognises as the Hero Cafe, is on fire. Agatha only has a quick glance in the direction of the cafe, but she nonetheless telephones her friend Francesca to tell her the news. Francesca unhesitatingly believes Agatha and then tells this to her friend Anna. Anna realises that the cafe is opposite where Agatha lives and tells her that the Hero Cafe is on fire.

The argument:

- (1) Agatha's justification isn't enhanced after she hears Anna's testimony.
- (2) Internalist theories claim it is.

Therefore

- (3) Internalist theories go wrong.

The important points:

- The listeners other than Agatha *unhesitatingly believe* what they are told.
- Agatha believes what Anna says *based on her inductive evidence about Anna as a testifier*.

3 Some Objections

Objection 1: Whatever we want to say about testimony, it's just a basic fact that justification from perception swamps justification from testimony.

CIRCLE*: Agatha tells her friend Francesca that the Hero Cafe is on fire, even though she has no reason at all for believing this. Francesca unhesitatingly believes Agatha and then tells this to her friend Anna. Anna realises that the cafe is opposite where Agatha lives and tells her that the Hero Cafe is on fire.

- If Agatha can generate a justified belief like this, it seems like a sanction for *knowledge-laundering* (MacFarlane, 2005).

Objection 2: This leads to induction-scepticism, which is really unintuitive.

It doesn't. The argument made by Lackey (2008) leads to scepticism about induction, but the response to the last objection shows that the view here *isn't* committed to scepticism about induction.

CIRCLE**: Agatha tells her friend Francesca that the Hero Cafe is on fire, even though she has no reason at all for believing this. Anna, who is walking past the Hero Cafe sees that it is on fire and then tells Agatha that the cafe is on fire.

- Importantly, this needs to be a distinction that reduces to the reasons that Agatha uses in each case.

Objection 3: Agatha's justification is enhanced – she should act as though there is a fire.

We should distinguish between reasons for acting a certain way and epistemic justification. It might be that Agatha should act as though the Hero Cafe is on fire even if her justification for this is poor by internalist standards.

References

- J. Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
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- F. F. Schmitt (1999). 'Social Epistemology'. In J. Greco (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, pp. 354–382. Blackwell Publishing, London.

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