

CIRCULAR TESTIMONY

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ABSTRACT. According to *internalist* theories of testimony, beliefs based on what others say are justified by the reasons a listener uses in forming her belief. I identify a distinctive type of testimonial situation, which I call *circular testimony* and argue that a certain type of circular testimony establishes the incompleteness of internalist theories of testimony.

Facts about science, geography, history and many other areas are epistemically off-limits to us unless believing what people say is a way of forming justified beliefs. For example, I believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus, but I haven't actually looked to establish this for myself. I also believe that Canberra is the capital of Australia, but I've never actually been there. And I believe that the Battle of Borodino happened in 1812, but I wasn't actually there to see it. These beliefs, like many others, are formed by believing what other people say. To understand how we can know about these things, or have beliefs that are in some way epistemically justified about them, we need an account of how believing what people say can yield knowledge and justified belief. Put another way, we need an *epistemological theory of testimony*.

An epistemological theory of testimony seeks to explain how beliefs based on testimony can come to be justified. Theories in the epistemology of testimony fall into one of three main categories. According to *transmission* theories, a listener's belief can be justified by a speaker's justification for what she says.¹ According to *reliability* theories, a listener's belief is justified by the reliability of the process(es) involved in the formation of the listener's belief.² According to *internalist* theories, a listener's belief is justified by the reasons that she uses in forming her belief.

In this paper, I offer an argument against internalist theories. In §2, identify a distinctive type of testimonial situation, which I call *circular testimony* and outline an argument to the conclusion that internalist theories are unable to give the intuitively correct account of a certain type of circular testimony. With an overview of the contours of the argument in hand, I then develop the argument further by considering various lines of internalist response in §3. The basic idea behind the argument I advance in this paper is that someone's overall justification might be enhanced by internalist standards even though it is highly intuitive that there is no change in her overall epistemic standing. It is natural to think that this is a familiar argumentative strategy. Whilst it is correct to think that this *kind* of argument has been made before, I argue that there are importantly distinctive features about the argument that

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¹See Burge (1993; 1997), Faulkner (2006; 2011), Owens (2000) and [author reference 1, author reference 2].

²See Dretske (1982), Goldberg (2010), Graham (2000; 2006; 2010), Lackey (2008) and Sosa (2010).

I advance here that make it altogether preferable to competing attempts at taking the same strategy. In order to demonstrate this, in §4 I compare the argument developed here to the one given by Jennifer Lackey (2008) against *reductionist* theories in the epistemology of testimony.

1. INTERNALIST THEORIES OF TESTIMONY

There are various ways in which a listener might use reasons that she's aware of in forming her belief. Possibly the most obvious way is through reasoning *inductively*. Jack Lyons (1997), Tomoji Shogenji (2006) and Richard Fumerton (2006) all argue for an inductivist account of justification from testimony. In Lyons' words 'testimonial justification is just a special case of inductive justification; testimonial beliefs are justified because firsthand experience gives us inductive evidence for the claim that people are generally accurate in their reports' (Lyons, 1997, p. 163). The basic idea behind an inductivist account is that we observe people's statements (in relevantly similar conditions) over a period of time and, when we observe a correlation between what they say and the truth, we use this correlation as evidence that the particular instance of testimony in question is true, in much the same way as we would with any other inductively-formed belief.³

Alternatively, one might claim that the inference involved in responding to a speaker's testimony is an *inference to best explanation*. Peter Lipton (1998; 2007), Elizabeth Fricker (1994; 1995) and Anna-Sara Malmgren (2006) explicitly take this approach. Lipton states that 'a recipient of testimony ("hearer") decides whether to believe the claim of the informant ("speaker") by considering whether the truth of that claim would figure in the best explanation of the fact that the speaker made it (Lipton, 2007, p. 238). Rather than establishing any kind of general correlation between what people say and the way the world is, a listener reflects on why a particular speaker made the statement that she did and from this explanation infers the truth of the speaker's testimony. As Fricker points out, 'to achieve this in any one case I need not establish any *generalities* about testimony at all' (Fricker, 1995, p. 404).

The idea is that, when a listener is confronted by an instance of testimony, she reflects on her background reasons, whatever they might be, and uses these to provide a rationale for her belief in what the speaker says. The listener's belief is then justified by the reasons that she uses to rationalise her belief. Justification from testimony is, on this internalist picture, just the same kind of inferential justification that we might get from working out that it's 17°C by looking at the reading on a thermometer, or that a particular tree is 140 years old by counting the number of rings inside it. The input is distinctive, in the form of a speaker's testimony, but the type of justification that supports the belief is just the same.

On an internalist conception of justification from testimony, there is also no difference in kind between justification from testimony based on *what* someone says and justification based on *how* she says it. As Audi observes, there might be more than one way of using my statement that I have a baritone voice to come to believe that I have a baritone voice. One way is by hearing my statement that I have a baritone voice, reflecting on the likelihood of my saying something true as opposed to saying something false in this context and thereby coming to believe that I have a baritone voice. This is coming to believe what I say based on *what* I say. Another

³Of course, if we *don't* find such a correlation, then it's highly plausible that our beliefs based on testimony aren't justified anyway.

way is by hearing the pitch of my voice and coming to conclude, on the basis of how my voice sounds, that I have a baritone voice. This involves coming to believe what I say based on *how* I said it (Audi, 1997, p. 420, n. 14).⁴

According to the internalist picture of testimony, the justification that supports your belief in either case isn't different in *kind*. Clearly, there is a difference between what justifies your belief in each case. In the case where you believe based on what I say, your justification comes from your reasons for thinking that testimony (of a particular type) is generally true. In the case where you believe based on how I said it, your justification comes from your reasons for thinking that the way my voice sounds to you indicates that I have a particular type of voice. Whilst the reasons that you use in each case are different, the idea is that in both cases, your justification comes from a set of reasons that you use to form your belief. This brings out an important feature of the internalist picture of justification from testimony.

Beliefs based on testimony get their justification not so much from the speaker's testimony and facts about it as from facts about the listener. A speaker's testimony puts a listener in a position to figure out for herself that things are the case. In forming a justified belief in what a speaker says, a listener can bring to bear her background reasons, understood either as inductive reasons or as reasons supporting a best explanation, to bear on the proposition expressed by the speaker's testimony. The listener thus uses the speaker's testimony to figure out for herself the truth of what the speaker says.

Of course, this means that listeners that are alike with respect to the reasons that they use in forming their beliefs are thus alike with respect to justification for their beliefs. Internalism can therefore be put in terms of the following *supervenience* thesis:

- (TI) Justification from testimony supervenes on the reasons that a listener uses in forming her belief in a speaker's testimony.

Here's an example that illustrates this idea: Suppose that someone is told that she has condition α by a competent doctor who has performed a thorough test and someone else is told that she has condition α by someone who merely *appears* to be a doctor performing a thorough test, but in fact isn't. Suppose also that neither listener can tell the difference between the competent doctor and the imposter and they come to believe what they are told in the same way. According to internalist theories of testimony, they are thereby alike with respect to justification. They have the same reasons for thinking that what they are told is true, because they have the same reasons for thinking that they are being told about their respective medical conditions by a competent doctor and they come to believe what they are told in the same way. This, according to (TI) makes them alike with respect to justification.

This case is a source of controversy. Schmitt (1999) advocates the internalist characterisation of this type of case. Wright (2015) argues against internalism in the epistemology of testimony on the grounds that these listeners are not alike with respect to justification. Madison (forthcoming) provides a response. The point of the example here, however, is illustrative. It illustrates what the internalist claim in (TI)

⁴See also Katherine Hawley (2010). Indeed, by forming beliefs using testimony in this way, we might come to form a justified belief in something that a speaker did *not* say, as Goldberg (2001) observes.

that justification supervenes on reasons for belief amounts to.⁵ The supervenience thesis given in (TI), applied in this way is the target of the objection developed here.

Importantly, the theory that I am objecting to here is a *pure* internalist theory of justification from testimony. Pure internalism in the epistemology of testimony takes the theory of testimony given in (TI) to be a *complete* account of justification from testimony. Some theories claim that the account of justification given in (TI) gives a *partial* account of justification from testimony. The theories developed by Burge (1993; 1997), Faulkner (2011) and Hinchman (2005) allow that (TI) gives a partial account of justification from testimony but also claim that it is incomplete without the additional claim that testimony can transmit justification from speaker to listener. Pure internalist theories, which are the subject of the discussion here, deny this, claiming that (TI) is true of all beliefs based on testimony. Hence, references to internalist theories here should hereafter be understood as references to *pure* internalist theories, unless otherwise stated.

This discussion is thus concerned with pure internalist theories. The objection here does not concern theories that incorporate (TI) as part of a complete theory. Rather, its ambition is to show that a complete account of justification from testimony cannot be given from within the framework of pure internalism.

2. CIRCULAR TESTIMONY

I think that an objection to internalist accounts of justification from testimony comes from considering a distinctive type of testimonial situation. It's obvious enough that testimony can form *chains*. I tell you that Jesus College was established in 1571 and then you tell this to someone else, who in turn tells it to a fourth person. This gives us a chain of testimony and this idea is straightforward enough. Testimonial chains can also become *circular*, though. They become circular when someone features as a speaker at some point in the testimonial chain and later as a listener. So if I tell you that Jesus College was established in 1571 and then you tell this to someone else, who in turn tells it to *me*, we have an instance of *circular testimony*. I think that a certain type of circular testimony creates a problem for internalist theories of justification from testimony. Consider the following case:

CIRCLE: Agatha looks across the street from her house and comes to believe that the building opposite, which she recognises as Jesus College, is on fire. She telephones her friend Francesca to tell her the news. Francesca unhesitatingly believes Agatha and then tells this to her friend Anna, though since Anna does not know the college, Francesca describes the building and its location to Anna who in turn unhesitatingly texts this information to Stacy. Stacy is friends with Anna and unhesitatingly believes her. She is also friends with Agatha and realises that the building in question is Jesus College. Stacy telephones Agatha and tells her that Jesus College is on fire.

Now, I think that it's intuitive that, regardless of how Agatha responds to Stacy's testimony, she has no better justification for thinking that Jesus College is on fire than she had before she told Francesca. The fact is that Stacy only said that the college

⁵Some theories that identify themselves as internalist would deny this characterisation. Epistemological disjunctivists, such as John McDowell (1994; 1995; 2002) and Duncan Pritchard (2012) deny this, as do mentalist theories, such as the one given by Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004).

is on fire because Anna said it and Anna only said it because Francesca said it and Francesca only said it because Agatha said it.⁶ But suppose that Agatha is unaware of this fact and also that she has known Stacy for some time and has previously observed her tendency to say true things on various occasions. In other words, suppose that Agatha has good inductive justification for thinking that Stacy's testimony is true. And suppose that, since Agatha is unaware of the full facts of the situation, she responds to Stacy's testimony by using her background inductive reasons, as internalist theories claim she should.

Being in receipt of Stacy's testimony and responding as she does appears to give Agatha additional justification for her belief, by internalist standards. The idea is that she has two independent streams of justification for her belief. One comes from her perception and the other comes from her inductive evidence that Stacy generally says true things. Furthermore, they do not reduce to one source of justification because her inductive evidence about Stacy has nothing to do with her perceptual justification concerning the fire. This internalist characterisation is at odds with the intuitive claim that Agatha's justification isn't enhanced when she hears Stacy's testimony.

In support of this intuitive claim that Agatha's overall justification is not enhanced, it's worth focusing on the fact that each listener (apart from Agatha at the end) *unhesitatingly* believes what she is told. This point is crucial to the intuition that Agatha's justification isn't enhanced when she hears Stacy's testimony. Instances of circular testimony are not all the same. We might compare the case in CIRCLE with the following case:

CIRCLE*: Agatha looks across the street from her house and comes to believe that the building opposite, which she recognises as Jesus College, is on fire. She telephones her friend Francesca to tell her the news. Francesca reflects carefully on the likelihood of Agatha being insincere or mistaken and having done so, come to believe what Agatha says and then tells this to her friend Anna, though since Anna does not know the college, Francesca describes the building and its location to Anna who in turn considers carefully the possibility of Francesca's testimony being false before texting this information to Stacy. Stacy is friends with Anna and carefully considers the plausibility of Anna's claim before deciding to believe her. She is also friends with Agatha and realises that the house in question is Jesus College. Stacy telephones Agatha and tells her that Jesus College is on fire.

The important difference between the CIRCLE case and the CIRCLE* case is that, in the former, each of the listeners believes what she is told unhesitatingly, whereas in the latter case, each listener reflects carefully on the plausibility of what the speaker says before coming to believe it. In the latter case, it might well be plausible to think that the internalist claim that Agatha's overall justification can be enhanced at the end of the case might well be the correct one. The idea is that, since the statement that Jesus College is on fire seems plausible to multiple individuals who are

⁶The idea that the lack of independence between Stacy's testimony and Agatha's perception prevents Agatha's overall justification being enhanced is widely endorsed elsewhere. It appears in discussions of *coherentism* as a theory of knowledge and justification in the work of Laurence Bonjour (1985), C.A.J. Coady (1992), L.J. Cohen (1982), Catherine Elgin (2005), C.I. Lewis (1946) and Erik J. Olsson (2005).

independently using their critical faculties, this might make them sensitive to more error possibilities and this might make it intuitive that there's additional justification at the end of the chain. Indeed, this may be the case if just *one* listener responds by using her critical faculties.

It is explicitly *not* the case that this happens in CIRCLE, though. In CIRCLE, the listeners respond by believing what they are told *unhesitatingly*. The result is that it's intuitive that there's no additional justification available to Agatha at the end of the story because the listeners do not deploy their critical faculties and the net result is that the fact that they all believe it no more epistemically significant than the fact that Agatha believes it. They all believe it because they would believe whatever they were told, whether it was true, false or otherwise and they would do this without reflecting on their background reasons for thinking that they should believe what the speaker says.⁷

This same point is brought out in Lackey's (2013) account of the epistemic significance of disagreement. Lackey argues the number of people involved in a disagreement might affect the epistemic significance of the disagreement even if the parties all hold their beliefs because of the same instance of a speaker's testimony. Lackey points out that, if each of the listeners forms her belief by using her critical faculties, then the fact that they *all* believe what the speaker says is more epistemically significant than the fact that any one of them individually does. The idea is that the signs of falsity that they might *collectively* be sensitive to extends beyond the signs of falsity that any one of them *individually* is sensitive to. And in virtue of this, it might be that disagreeing with multiple people is more epistemically significant than disagreeing with one person. Where the parties involved in the disagreement do not form their beliefs by reflecting carefully on the speaker's testimony, however, the number of people involved in the disagreement is *not* significant, in Lackey's view (Lackey, 2013, p. 253). Where the parties involved in the disagreement form their beliefs by believing the same instance of the speaker's testimony without employing any critical reflection, there is no potential for any additional sensitivity to the possibility of error and thus no additional epistemic significance.

Exactly the same point is true in the cases of CIRCLE and CIRCLE*. In the CIRCLE* case, where the listeners each come to believe that Jesus College is on fire by deploying their critical faculties in the formation of their beliefs, the idea is that they might collectively be sensitive to signs of falsity that extend beyond the signs of falsity that any one of them individually is sensitive to. The result is that it might be intuitive that Agatha's overall justification is enhanced after she hears Stacy's testimony in the CIRCLE* case. This isn't so in the CIRCLE case, because the listeners unreflectingly believing what they are told means that there is no possibility for additional sensitivity to error and thus no additional justification available.

Lackey's observations about disagreement illustrate a further point. If we accept that the reason that there might be additional justification available at the end of the CIRCLE* case is that there are more listeners using their critical faculties and this makes for additional sensitivity to the possibility of errors, then we should also accept that, in a case of circular testimony where the listeners respond using their critical faculties, the larger the circle—the more listeners there are involved—the greater the overall justification available at the end. Providing the critical faculties of the

⁷Goldman (2001) describes this kind of unhesitating belief as similar to treating someone as an epistemic guru.

various listeners yield a sensitivity to different possibilities of falsity, expanding the circle by adding in more listeners should make for increased overall justification at the end of the story.

It's therefore important to note that, whilst I'm not claiming that there's *never* justification available to a listener at the end of a case of circular testimony that wasn't available to her at the beginning of it, I *am* suggesting that this is the case in a situation the previous listeners all unhesitatingly believe what they are told, such as CIRCLE. And this is at odds with an internalist conception of justification from testimony, since there *are* additional reasons for thinking that what is said is true. Whilst the justification available seems to reduce into one instance of Agatha's perception, the internalist reasons do not. At the end of the story in CIRCLE, Agatha has a set of reasons to do with her own perception and a set of reasons to do with Stacy's testimony that cannot be reduced to one another. There is thus a problem for internalist theories that comes from considering a particular type of circular testimony.⁸

There is one final consideration that I'd like to bring to bear in support of the intuition in the CIRCLE case. Reflecting on an instrumental analogue of the CIRCLE case, I think, helps reinforce the intuition that Agatha's overall justification isn't enhanced by hearing Stacy's testimony. Consider the following case:

INSTRUMENTS: Charlie is attempting to monitor the temperature of some liquid in a glass. He is using two instruments to do this. One gives a reading on a screen and the other gives a reading on a gauge. Both instruments indicate that the temperature of the liquid is 19°C. Unbeknownst to Charlie, however, the instruments have been set up in such a way that the screen isn't in connected directly to the liquid in any way, but just corresponds to what the gauge says.

It is, I think, intuitive that reading the screen does nothing for Charlie's justification for his belief that the temperature of the liquid is 19°C. Even if Charlie has independent inductive evidence concerning the reliability of the instrument with the screen, this doesn't provide additional justification in the INSTRUMENTS case. The case in INSTRUMENTS is analogous to the case in CIRCLE because in both cases the important point is that one source of information (Stacy's testimony in CIRCLE, the screen in INSTRUMENTS) doesn't provide any enhanced justification because it fails to be independent of another source (Agatha's perception in CIRCLE, the gauge in INSTRUMENTS). Also, the instrument with the screen simply says what the gauge says, in the same way that the speakers other than Agatha unhesitatingly believe what they are told in the CIRCLE case.

To be clear on the dialectical significance of this intuition, it's worth noting that the claim that there's no overall increase in Agatha's justification in CIRCLE or Charlie's justification in INSTRUMENTS is one that should be endorsed by any viable theory. It's clear enough that the characterisation that I've given of the CIRCLE cases is ones that should be returned easily by transmission theories, since the idea is that Agatha's perceptual justification is just passed around the circle and then returned to her. There's no increase in Agatha's justification because all she gets is her original justification back again from Stacy. Equally, in a case where the listeners

⁸In a case where there is such an increase, internalist theories are liable to mislocate the source of the increase in justification.

reflect critically before forming their beliefs, such as CIRCLE* they might each transmit more justification than they receive because of the increase that comes from their reflection. But one might also think that this characterisation is one that's idiosyncratic to transmission theorists, rather than a point of agreement between transmission theories and reliability theories. Reliability theories typically deny that the idea of a speaker's justification being passed to a listener is one that has any explanatory indispensability in the epistemology of testimony.

If the characterisation here is idiosyncratic to transmission theories, then it would be a significant limitation of the argument that I've given here. But it isn't a transmission theorist's idiosyncrasy. The intuition supporting the claim that Agatha's overall justification isn't enhanced in CIRCLE is one that those endorsing reliability theories should endorse. It's less clear that reliability theorists should be committed to this characterisation because reliability theorists allow that testimony can *generate* justification, which is to say that the justification for ϕ made available to a listener by a speaker's testimony that ϕ can outstrip the speaker's justification for ϕ . Hence Lackey observes that we can't move directly from the observation that a speaker has a certain degree of justification for ϕ and the fact that the speaker said that ϕ to the observation that a similar degree of justification for ϕ is available to the listener. (Lackey, 2008, p. 55). On closer inspection, however, reliability theories should claim that there's no overall increase in reliability and therefore no overall increase in justification.

The fact that reliability theories should agree with the intuition that Agatha's overall justification isn't increased in CIRCLE can be brought out by considering the kinds of cases in which they think that a listener's acquired justification can outstrip the speaker's justification for what she says. One way involves the processes involved in the speaker's testimony operating independently of the processes involved in the production of the speaker's belief. This happens in cases given by Lackey (2008) and Graham (2006). But this clearly doesn't happen in CIRCLE, where each speaker is stipulated to say what she does *simply because* she heard it from a previous speaker. Alternatively, features about the environment might make it the case that the listener believing the speaker's testimony is a more reliable way of coming to believe what the speaker says than the processes the speaker used. These kinds of cases are given by Goldberg (2005) and Pelling (2013). It's equally clear, however, that there's nothing in the environment in the CIRCLE case that might render the processes involved in the production of Stacy's testimony more reliable than those involved in Agatha's perception. The net result is that it seems that believing Stacy's testimony contributes nothing to the overall reliability of the processes involved in the production of Agatha's belief. As a result, reliability theories should agree with the verdict that there's no increase in Agatha's overall justification. The same is true of Charlie's belief in the INSTRUMENTS case.

This means that the intuition that internalist theories seek to deny is one that is a significant one. It's endorsed by both transmission theories and reliability theories alike. Transmission theorists allow that Agatha's justification isn't enhanced because her justification is simply passed around and reliability theorists allow that Agatha's justification isn't enhanced because there's no overall increase in the reliability of the processes involved in the formation of her belief. The problem here is distinctively a problem for internalist theories.

3. INTERNALIST RESPONSES

The problem for internalist theories turns on the plausibility of the following two claims:

- (1) Intuitively, there's no increase in Agatha's overall justification in the CIRCLE case.
- (2) By internalist standards, there is an increase in Agatha's overall justification in the CIRCLE case.

Both of these claims are needed to falsify the supervenience thesis in (TI). In this section, I'd like to examine three lines of response that might be made on behalf of internalist theories. The first involves denying (1) by claiming that it's unclear that the sense in which Agatha's epistemic situation hasn't been enhanced is distinctively the sense to do with *justification*. This purports to defuse the objection to (TI) by showing that it is question-begging to think that the epistemic difference between the two cases is to do with justification rather than some other epistemic property. The second involves denying (2) by claiming that internalist theories can appeal to the mere fact that the case is circular in a particular way to explain why there is no overall increase in Agatha's justification, even by internalist standards. And the third response also involves denying (2), by appealing to a general principle available to internalist theories according to which justification from perception *swamps* justification from testimony. These two strategies seek to defend (TI) by showing that internalist theories need not think that *this* change in base properties makes for a corresponding change in supervenient properties. I argue that each objection ultimately fails to salvage the internalist picture of justification from testimony, but I think that understanding why this is the case illustrates the scope and the force of the problem.

Let us first consider the first line of response that involves claiming that it's far from clear that circular testimony reveals anything at all about *justification*, rather than some other epistemic property. This is not to claim, contrary to the case in (1), that there is no sense in which Agatha's overall justification is not increased. Rather, it allows that it's clear enough that Agatha's epistemic position at the end of the case in CIRCLE is the same in *one sense*, in that her belief is no more sensitive to signs of truth and falsity, but it also observes that there's another sense in which her belief is different—the sense associated with the kinds of reasons internalist theories identify with justification. The objection relies on this claim to make (2) true. But once we agree to allow these observations, one might think that it is a perfectly reasonable question as to why we should think of justification in terms of the sense in which they are the same rather than the sense in which they are different. It's crucial to the argument against internalist theories that justification is to be understood in the former sense, such that the lack of additional sensitivity to falsity makes for a lack of increase in overall justification. But the idea is that nothing in the CIRCLE case shows why we have to think in this way.

In this spirit, internalist theories might seek to characterise the case in CIRCLE as one in which justification is increased, but some other epistemic property is not.⁹ It's open to internalist theories to claim that knowledge is more than simply justified true belief and are thus able to claim that there are more features relevant to someone's overall epistemic standing than simply justification and knowledge.

⁹This is the essence of Madison's (forthcoming) response to Wright (2015).

Once this is allowed, internalist theories might claim that Agatha's overall justification is enhanced, but there is no corresponding increase in some other epistemic property, for exactly the reasons given in §2. Since internalist theories are explicitly presented here as theories of *justification* from testimony, if this characterisation is available, then the case of CIRCLE yields no counterexample to internalist theories.

Whilst there might seem to be some force to this objection, I think that it's ultimately unsuccessful. The trouble with this response is that the intuitive support for (1) is stronger than the internalist response allows. It might be correct that there's no specific intuition that *about justification* that supports the claim that Agatha's overall justificatory status isn't enhanced at the end of the CIRCLE case. But the lack of such a specific intuition is of no help to internalist theories. When we are more precise about the intuition that CIRCLE brings out, we see that it is the following:

(1*) Intuitively, there's no overall improvement in Agatha's epistemic standing in the CIRCLE case.

When we consider intuitions about the CIRCLE case, it might well be true that our intuition isn't one about justification specifically. But there is, I think, a strong intuition that Agatha's epistemic standing more generally isn't improved after she hears Stacy's testimony. This creates a further problem for internalist theories.

The idea is that the intuition in (1*) creates trouble for internalist theories because it implies the truth of (1). The idea is that (1*) is a more general thesis than (1). So the internalist observation that there is nothing specific to justification in the intuition being extracted from the CIRCLE case does not help in responding to the objection here. What is being extracted is a more general intuition that implies the specific claim about justification in (1). Insofar as the internalist allows that (1) follows from (1*), then there is still a problem because the general intuition implies a specific one about justification.

If the intuition in (1) *doesn't* follow from the intuition in (1*), however, then another problem for internalist theories emerges. The problem is that justification, as internalist theorists conceive of it, is detached from someone's epistemic situation. This is an even more serious problem for internalist theories. Any theory of epistemic justification needs to allow that someone's justification isn't independent of her epistemic status more generally. Otherwise, it becomes hard to see how the theory in question can meaningfully be called a theory of *epistemic* justification at all. The fact that the intuition about the CIRCLE case is properly understood as a general one concerning Agatha's epistemic standing rather than a specific one concerning Agatha's epistemic justification doesn't offer internalist theories any helpful resources in characterising the case.

The response to this line of objection can thus be encapsulated in the thought that, insofar as a theory of justification allows that Agatha's overall justification can be enhanced in the CIRCLE case, it cannot meaningfully be taken to be a theory of *epistemic* justification at all. There is no improvement in Agatha's overall epistemic standing and a theory of justification that claims that there is an improvement in her justification cannot claim to be identifying a distinctively epistemic notion of justification.¹⁰ This is why internalist theories cannot use the idea that the argument identifies no specific intuition about justification to reject the argument in this way.

¹⁰Something like this intuition appears in John MacFarlane's (2005) discussion of *knowledge laundering*, which is presented as an objection to transmission theories.

A second response involves accepting the intuition in (1) that Agatha's justification *isn't* enhanced by hearing Stacy's testimony, but instead seeking to deny (2), the claim that internalist theories are committed to thinking that there is such an increase. The central idea behind internalist theories described in §1 is that the listener's justification is a matter of the inference that she makes from the fact that the speaker said something to the conclusion that what the speaker says is true. Whatever form this inference takes, the central idea is that the listener's justification is inferential in some sense. An alternative strategy for defending the internalist account involves allowing that Agatha's justification *isn't* enhanced by hearing Stacy's testimony *just because the testimonial situation is circular in a particular way*.

This response has two obvious virtues. The first is that it preserves the internalist thought that a listener's justification supervenes on the reasons she uses in responding to a speaker's testimony. The second is that it maintains the thought that Agatha's overall justification is not enhanced after she hears Stacy's testimony. By claiming that the circularity in the testimonial situation means that Agatha's inference is defective in the CIRCLE case, internalist theories might hope to maintain the idea that a listener's justification supervenes on the reasons that she uses in forming her belief, as (TI) claims, and also return the correct verdict in the CIRCLE case because the claim is that the circularity prevents Agatha's overall justification being enhanced. This is exactly the intuition that I sought to extract in §2.

Unfortunately, however, the problem with this response is that it isn't clear that it's genuinely open to internalist theories. Since Agatha is unaware of the circularity involved in the situation in the CIRCLE case, the claim that the circularity prevents her belief being justified involves claiming that Agatha's justification ultimately rests on the idea that facts that she isn't aware of, such as the circularity of a testimonial situation, can determine her justificatory status. The idea that the mere fact of the circularity involved in the testimonial situation prevents Agatha's overall justification being enhanced seems to be at odds with the internalist idea that there is no difference in terms of justification between the two listeners involved in the doctor cases described in §1.

Internalist theories that take (TI) to give a complete description of justification from testimony are committed to the idea that facts that someone is unaware of do *not* determine her justificatory status. It is only because of this that they are able to claim that the listeners in the two doctor cases are alike. This point applies both in terms of someone's justification being enhanced and in terms of someone's justification being diminished. It must be not only the case that the first listener's justification is enhanced by the fact that she is told by a competent and reliable doctor, but also the case that the second listener's justification is not diminished because she is told by someone who is neither competent nor reliable. The constitutive claim of internalist theories—that justification supervenes on reasons in such a way that the two listeners are alike with respect to justification—depends on both of these claims.

It is difficult to see, however, how internalist theories can consistently maintain that the two listeners in the doctor cases can be alike with respect to justification, but also that Agatha's reasons in CIRCLE can be prevented from enhancing her overall justification by the fact that the testimonial situation is circular. If the objective facts about the epistemic situation *do* matter, then it seems that the internalist characterisation of the two doctor cases must be mistaken—it is hard to see how the objective fact that she is being told by an imposter rather than a competent doctor

could fail to diminish the second listener's justification, given that they do matter at least sometimes. On the other hand, however, if the objective facts *do not* matter, then the claim that Agatha's overall justification isn't enhanced in the CIRCLE case just because of the circularity involved in the situation isn't available to internalist theories. An appeal directly to the circularity involved in the testimonial situation as an explanation of why Agatha's overall justification is not enhanced is thus at odds with the constitutive idea behind internalist theories, as set out in (TI).

A final line of response involves appealing to the idea that, whatever we want to say about justification from perception and whatever we want to say about justification from testimony, it's a pre-theoretical fact that perceptual justification *swamps* justification from testimony. The idea is that it is a basic epistemic fact that, where someone's belief is already supported by perceptual justification, acquiring further justification from testimony adds nothing to her overall justification. Appealing to this principle allows internalist theories to deny (2) and thereby give the intuitively correct characterisation of the CIRCLE case, the idea being that since Agatha already has perceptual justification for her belief, her overall justification isn't enhanced by hearing Stacy's testimony.

Unlike the previous strategy, this line is one that may well seem to be open to internalist theories without giving up on their core commitments. Internalist theories claim that justification is a matter of an individual's reasons. This means that the finer details of an internalist theory will feature some account of what sorts of things a listener's reasons can be and how they interact with one another. And it isn't so obvious that an internalist account of a listener's reasons is unable to feature the claim that justification from perception swamps justification from testimony. As a result, we can take it that this kind of strategy is genuinely available to internalist theories, unlike the previous strategy.

The trouble with this strategy is that, whilst the claim that justification from perception swamps justification from testimony might be available to internalist theories, it is far from clear that it is in fact *true*.¹¹ Whilst I think it is intuitive that Agatha's overall justification in the CIRCLE case is not enhanced after hearing Stacy's testimony, it is not at all clear that this is *always* true of perceptual justification and justification from testimony and it is therefore not clear that the correct explanation is because of Agatha's perceptual justification. The point of the CIRCLE case is that it has distinctive features and it is these features that make it intuitive that Agatha's overall justification is not enhanced.

As I observed in §2, it might be the case that a testimonial situation could be circular and still involve the original speaker's justification being enhanced at the end of it. I suggested that it might be intuitive that the case in CIRCLE* involves the original speaker's justification being enhanced at the end of a case of circular testimony. This gives an immediate reason for doubting the claim that perceptual justification cannot be supplemented by justification from testimony. Even if the CIRCLE* case doesn't establish the falsity of the claim that justification from perception swamps justification from testimony, the following straightforward type of case seems to present good reasons for casting doubt on the idea:

¹¹There is also a second problem for this strategy. A case in which Agatha has no justification for thinking that Jesus College is on fire, but simply tells her friend it is could yield circular testimony with a similarly problematic characterisation for internalists. This cannot be explained in terms of perception swamping testimony because there is no perceptual justification in this picture.

SIMPLE: Agatha looks across the street from her house and comes to believe that the building opposite, which she recognises as Jesus College, is on fire. She only has a quick glance, but nonetheless comes to believe that Jesus College is on fire. Stacy also happens to be walking past and also sees that the college is on fire. Stacy subsequently tells Agatha that Jesus College is on fire.

Intuitively, in SIMPLE, Agatha's justification *can* be enhanced by hearing Stacy's testimony. This is so because, unlike Stacy's testimony in the CIRCLE case, in the SIMPLE case Stacy's testimony is independent of Agatha's perception. And it is particularly plausible because, in both cases Agatha's perceptual justification comes from a quick glance rather than a careful look. It might be intuitive that, if someone looks carefully at something, then her justification cannot be enhanced by someone else's testimony, but this is not the case in the situations here. In both the CIRCLE and the SIMPLE cases, Agatha only has a quick glance across the street. Agatha's perceptual justification can thus be enhanced by testimony from Stacy in both cases. In ordinary speak, by telling Agatha that Jesus College is on fire, Stacy confirms Agatha's belief.

Stacy's testimony in the SIMPLE case can enhance Agatha's overall justification for believing that Jesus College is on fire where it cannot in the CIRCLE case because, in the SIMPLE case, it seems plausible that the fact that Stacy also believes this based on her perceptual experience might add an additional sensitivity to signs of truth and falsity. In the CIRCLE case, where Stacy's testimony is ultimately the product of a process of circular testimony involving unreflecting listeners, this is not plausible. This, I think, is what is behind the intuition that Agatha's overall justification can be enhanced in the SIMPLE case, but not in the CIRCLE case. Where the facts of the situation are opaque to Agatha, though, they cannot be part of an internalist characterisation of the case. Since (TI) states that justification supervenes on the reasons a listener uses in forming her belief, pure internalist theories, which take (TI) to give a complete account of justification from testimony, Agatha's overall justification is alike in the CIRCLE and SIMPLE cases since she responds in the same way using the same reasons, by internalist standards.

It is therefore far from clear that internalist theories can seek to respond to the problem by claiming that justification from perception swamps justification from testimony. Thinking about the SIMPLE case in conjunction with the CIRCLE case yields the real scope of the problem for internalist theories. The problem isn't simply figuring out how to explain why Agatha's justification in CIRCLE isn't increased at the end of the story. It's figuring out how to explain why Agatha's justification in CIRCLE isn't increased at the end of the story in a way that also respects the intuition that Agatha's justification in SIMPLE is increased at the end of the story. This is why appealing to a straightforward principle claiming that perceptual justification swamps justification from testimony cannot yield an adequate account of why Agatha's justification isn't enhanced in the CIRCLE case that preserves the internalist (TI) claim.

4. LACKEY'S REJECTION OF INTERNALISM

One might think that the argument given above is just an argument that has been made before albeit with a distinctive type of case as its focal point. The argument given above bears a resemblance to the argument made by Lackey (2008) against *reductionist* theories. In this section, I show that the argument given against internalist

theories of testimony in this paper differs in important ways to the argument Lackey makes against reductionist theories.

Whilst the contours of reductionist and *anti-reductionist* theories are controversial, Lackey identifies reductionist theories with the view that the epistemic work in justifying a listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is done by the listener.¹² Since the kind of internalist theory I have been discussing here takes it that a listener's justification comes exclusively from the reasons that she uses and these reasons are the same between listeners who are told by speakers with differing degrees of competences and reliability, it is a reductionist theory by the lights of Lackey's taxonomy.

Lackey's objection to reductionist theories appeals to the following case:

NESTED SPEAKER: Helen tells Fred that Pauline is a reliable speaker on the subject of wild birds. Since she has generally proven herself to be reliable before, Fred believes her. Later, Pauline tells Fred that the albatross has the largest wingspan amongst birds. Pauline's testimony is unreliably produced, but Fred believes her, because Helen told him that she was generally reliable on the subject in question (Lackey, 2008, p. 149).

The argument based on the NESTED SPEAKER case is relatively straightforward:

- (4) The listener's belief in the NESTED SPEAKER case is unjustified.
- (5) The listener's belief in the NESTED SPEAKER case is supported by reasons that the listener is aware of.

Therefore

- (6) A listener's belief being justified is not simply a matter of her belief being supported by reasons that she is aware of.

The conclusion (6) is clearly at odds with the idea behind theories of testimony grounded in the internalist tradition given in (TI) and (5) is established simply by stipulation about the case. The important premise in the argument is (4). In support of (4), Lackey observes that:

Now, does Fred believe with justification or warrant that albatrosses have the largest wingspan among wild birds on the basis of Pauline's report? Intuitively, no. For, even though Helen's testimony provides Fred with excellent positive reasons for accepting the report in question, Pauline is not only a generally unreliable speaker, but she is also reporting a belief which, though true, fails to be reliably produced or appropriately truth-conducive (Lackey, 2008, p. 149).

The idea behind Lackey's argument is that the reductionist theory fails because it is unable to accommodate the idea that there is an important connection between justification and truth. And one might think that the idea behind the diagnosis of the CIRCLE case in §2 is similar—there is no increase in the original speaker's justification after hearing the final speaker's testimony because there is no increase in the truth-conduciveness of her belief. In this way, both Lackey's argument based on the NESTED SPEAKER case and the argument in §2 based on the CIRCLE case object to the idea that justification supervenes on the kinds of reasons that internalist theories might appeal to by suggesting that listeners might fail to be justified in some cases because of factors that they are unaware of, contrary to (TI).

¹²Alternative conceptions of the distinction between reductionism and anti-reductionism are given by Faulkner (2011) and Fricker (1994; 1995).

Generalising out from the NESTED SPEAKER case, Lackey observes that ‘the possession of positive reasons on behalf of a speaker’s report, even objectively excellent ones, does not necessarily put one in contact with testimony that is reliable’ (Lackey, 2008, p. 150). This is what supports the more general conclusion that theories that endorse (TI) are mistaken. The idea is that the reliability (or truth-conduciveness more generally) of a speaker’s testimony is independent of the listener’s reasons for thinking that her testimony is reliably produced. Since justification is connected to truth-conduciveness, a listener’s reasons cannot, by themselves, justify a listener’s belief in a speaker’s testimony.

This conclusion—that a listener’s reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that a speaker’s testimony is true can *never* justify the listener’s belief is an unfortunately strong one. It seems to amount to an endorsement of a wholesale scepticism about a listener’s reasons in the epistemology of testimony. In the same way that it’s one thing to think that inductive evidence in epistemology generally might *sometimes* fail to justify one’s belief, but another thing to think that they *never* justify one’s belief, in the epistemology of testimony it is one thing to think that a listener’s reasons might *sometimes* fail to justify her belief, or that there must be more to the supervenience base of justification from testimony than these reasons, but quite another thing to think that they *never* justify a listener’s belief.

Lackey’s argument based on the NESTED SPEAKER case yields the conclusion that internalist evidence never justifies beliefs based on testimony. The argument based on the CIRCLE case doesn’t yield this conclusion. Rather than claiming that internalist evidence never justifies beliefs, the objection given in this paper is that there is no way for an internalist theory to distinguish between a case like CIRCLE, in which the listener’s inductive evidence doesn’t justify her belief and a case like SIMPLE, in which the listener’s inductive evidence does provide her with additional justification. This is why the argument here is an argument against the idea that the supervenience claim in (TI) gives a *complete* account of justification from testimony. A non-sceptical commitment about inductive reasons is necessary for the idea that Agatha’s reasons can justify her belief in the SIMPLE case.

This makes the argument here different to the argument that Lackey offers. It also, I suggest, makes it altogether preferable. Scepticism about inductive reasons is not a nice position to be in. Unless we claim, however, that inductive reasons cannot justify beliefs *tout court*, it is hard to see how we can maintain Lackey’s claim that they do not justify the listener’s belief in the NESTED SPEAKER case, or in any other testimony case. Lackey’s rejection of reductionism thus doesn’t allow for the possibility of a belief being justified by inductive reasons, since it holds that a listener’s belief in a speaker’s testimony is justified only if the speaker’s testimony is reliably produced and the reliable production of a speaker’s testimony is independent of the listener’s inductive reasons for thinking that the speaker’s testimony is true. No such sceptical consequences follow from the argument that I have given here.

5. CONCLUSION

For all the above argument given here shows, the internalist account of justification from testimony might well be *part* of the story of how beliefs based on testimony can come to be justified. In other words, (TI) might be true in the sense that it might be the case that a listener’s justification *sometimes* comes from the reasons that she uses in forming her belief. Indeed, I think that it *is* part of the complete story of

how beliefs based on testimony come to be justified. Listeners who are alike with respect to reasons might sometimes be alike with respect to justification in virtue of this, but this is not always the case.

Unlike competing objections to internalist accounts of testimony, such as the one given by Lackey, the argument here doesn't argue that beliefs based on testimony are *never* justified in the way that internalist theories describe. As such, the argument here doesn't depend on claiming that the kind of reasons that internalist theories identify can't be sufficient to justify beliefs based on testimony and therefore that the internalist claim that justification can come from reasons for thinking that a speaker's testimony is true is at least sometimes true. I think that this is a strength of the argument. We shouldn't want to claim that a listener's reasons for thinking that a speaker's testimony is true *can't* confer justification on the listener's belief in what the speaker says. Endorsing such a claim would seem to amount to a general scepticism about inferential beliefs. Even if we're sympathetic to the idea that there's a problem with internalist theories of justification from testimony, we shouldn't want to go the whole way in rejecting the idea that the kinds of reasons internalist theories identify could *never* justify a belief. We can perfectly well allow that internalist theories of testimony give an account of *some* justification from testimony whilst allowing that the internalist story can't be the *complete* story. The part of the story that is missed by internalist theories is the point that a listener's reasons might be prevented from justifying her beliefs by something like the kind of circularity exhibited in CIRCLE.

This might seem like a significant concession to the internalist. Rather than claiming that the internalist account is entirely misguided, the claim here is merely that the internalist account is incomplete because the reasons that (TI) refers to can be prevented from justifying beliefs in ways that cannot feature in an internalist account. But completeness in the epistemology of testimony is important. It's important because philosophical interest in the epistemology of testimony was driven at the outset by the observation that so many of our beliefs depend in some way on believing testimony. This observation is made more forceful when we realise that testimony can take many different forms. The epistemology of testimony is philosophically important because considering the epistemology of testimony promises to give an account of how many, if not all, of our beliefs come to be justified. The fact that an internalist theory doesn't give a complete account of the justification that supports beliefs based on testimony is therefore a significant limitation of it. Furthermore, it is no concession to the *pure* internalist theory under discussion here that some justification from testimony can be explained in this way. Pure internalist theories take it that this is true of all justification from testimony, indeed, this is what makes them different from competing theories.

It might be tempting to think that the problem here generalises to all theories of testimony that don't endorse scepticism about beliefs formed through a listener using her reasons for thinking that a speaker's testimony is true. One might think that any theory of testimony that allows that the internalist conception is at least *part* of the complete story about how beliefs based on testimony come to be justified needs to distinguish between cases such as CIRCLE, where justification from testimony does not enhance perceptual justification and cases such as SIMPLE, where it does. And one might think that the prospects for distinguishing between these cases are no better for theories that allow an internalist account as *part* of the complete story than

it is for theories that claim that the internalist account is *by itself* the complete story. This would mean that the problem is not one specifically for pure internalist theories, but for any theory that takes (TI) to be true *at least sometimes*, as I suggested. The problem doesn't generalise to all theories, though, because theories of testimony that aren't formulated within an internalist framework can appeal to the fact that Stacy's testimony isn't independent of Agatha's perception in CIRCLE, but it is in SIMPLE, to support this difference. Theories that aren't formulated within a pure internalist framework aren't committed to thinking that facts that Agatha isn't aware of can't determine her epistemic status. Unlike pure internalist theories, they don't claim that the subjects in the two doctor cases are alike epistemically and as a result, they can characterise cases in a way not open to pure internalist theories.

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