

Transmission and Subject-Sensitive Invariantism

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A Case

AJ is wondering whether or not the chocolate brownie in front of her contains nuts. From looking at it, she can't see any signs of nuts in it, but it's very important to her, because she's highly allergic to nuts. Anne is also wondering whether or not the chocolate brownie in front of her contains nuts. Like AJ, she can't see any signs of nuts in it from looking at it, but unlike AJ, Anne isn't highly allergic to nuts.

According to SSI:

- (1) It's not true that AJ is in a position to know that there are no nuts in the brownie.
- (2) It's true that Anne is in a position to know that there are no nuts in the brownie.

Transmission

Transmission theorists think:

(T) It's possible for a listener to acquire a speaker's knowledge:

- (T₁) In cases where a listener's knowledge is to be explained in terms of transmission, a listener can come to know that ϕ by believing a speaker's testimony that ϕ only if the speaker is in a position to know that ϕ .
- (T₂) If a speaker is in a position to know that ϕ , then a listener can (under the right circumstances) come to know that ϕ by believing the speaker's testimony that ϕ .

The Incompatibility of SSI and Transmission (1)

Maddie has been reading Descartes' Meditations and is in the grip of sceptical concerns, to the point that she is concerned that all her experiences might in fact be dreams. Her friend Eleanor asks her whether the Queens' Lane Coffee House will be open after dinner and Maddie tells her that it is. Eleanor comes to believe this because Maddie told her.¹

¹This is based on Jennifer Lackey's (2008) case.

The Incompatibility of SSI and Transmission (2)

Verity and Hannah share a car. Verity believes that the car is on the drive since she left it there in the morning. When Hannah asks whether the car is on the drive, Verity tells her that she left it there earlier. Hannah thus infers that it's still there. When Verity subsequently asks whether the car is still on the drive, since she hasn't moved the car herself, Hannah tells Verity that it is. It's very important to Verity, that the car hasn't been stolen, though, since she has to renew the insurance. It's less important to Hannah, since she doesn't. Verity is thus concerned about the possibility of the car having been stolen since she left it in the morning, whereas Hannah isn't.²

²This is based on John MacFarlane's (2005) case.

What is it to 'acquire a speaker's knowledge'?

Transmission theorists take **(T)** to mean the following:

(T*) Under the right circumstances, when a listener comes to believe that ϕ by believing a speaker's testimony that ϕ , the listener's belief that ϕ can be supported by the speaker's epistemic grounds for ϕ .

Transmission is, therefore, first and foremost a thesis about *epistemic grounds*.

Sorting out the first case . . .

Whilst Maddie has some epistemic grounds for thinking that the coffee shop will be open in the evening, these aren't sufficient for her to know this, because the standards relevant to her knowing are high. When she tells Eleanor this and Eleanor comes to believe her, the epistemic grounds that support Eleanor's belief are just Maddie's epistemic grounds. In Eleanor's case, however, she can come to know this because the standards relevant to her knowing are low. The epistemic grounds that support Maddie's belief are thus transmitted to Eleanor and ground her belief. The difference in terms of their knowing comes from the difference in the standards relevant to them, not a difference in the epistemic grounds supporting their beliefs.

Sorting out the second case . . .

At the start of the story, Verity's belief that the car is on the drive is supported by some epistemic grounds. These are then transmitted to Hannah when Verity tells her that she left the car on the drive. When Hannah tells Verity that the car is on the drive, her testimony provides the same epistemic grounds that she has supporting her belief to Verity, since she has no grounds for thinking that the car is on the drive, other than those that Verity told her. Since Verity's belief is already supported by these epistemic grounds, her overall epistemic grounds aren't enhanced when Hannah tells her that the car is on the drive. At the start of the story, the epistemic standards relevant to Verity's belief are low, so she knows that the car is on the drive. The standards relevant to Hannah are also low, so she also comes to know based on the same set of epistemic grounds. At the end, however, the standards relevant to Verity knowing are higher, so the same epistemic grounds aren't sufficient for her to know.

Defeat

Is this the right way to characterise these cases?

- ▶ Lackey sets out the first case as one in terms of *defeat*.
- ▶ And that *would* be incompatible with transmission, since it might imply that the listener has *no* grounds.

The Compatibility of SSI and Transmission

Is defeat the *only* way to characterise these cases?

- ▶ This might be *one* characterisation of these cases that we can give.
- ▶ But establishing the compatibility of SSI and transmission only requires *one* characterisation that is compatible with both.

The Upshot

We need new transmission principles:

- (T₁^{*}) In cases where a listener's knowledge is to be explained in terms of transmission, a listener can come to know that ϕ by believing a speaker's testimony that ϕ only if the speaker is in a position to know that ϕ *according to the set of standards relevant to the listener knowing that ϕ .*
- (T₂^{*}) If a speaker is in a position to know that ϕ , then a listener can (under the right circumstances) come to know that ϕ *according to the set of standards according to which the speaker knows that ϕ* by believing the speaker's testimony that ϕ .

Conclusions

- ▶ These cases don't establish the incompatibility of SSI and transmission.
- ▶ The idea that listeners might be the same wrt epistemic grounds but differ wrt knowing is one that is familiar in nontestimonial cases.
- ▶ But transmission theorists that endorse SSI need a different set of transmission principles.