

# Rethinking the Epistemology of Testimony

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# Introduction

- ▶ I'd like to offer a new paradox about testimonial justification.
- ▶ It simultaneously moves the debate both forwards and backwards (which is really clever).

# Reductionism

**(R1)** A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if she has reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

**(R2)** Testimonial justification consists in the above reasons.

(Think about gullibility here).

# Anti-Reductionism

**(A1)** A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony can be supported by testimonial justification even if she lacks reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

**(A2)** Testimonial justification does not consist in the above reasons.

(Think about authority here).

# Dualism

**(D1)** A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if she has reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

**(D2)** Testimonial justification does not consist in the above reasons.

(Think about both intuitions here).

# What I Think

- ▶ Dualist theories of testimony have a problem.
- ▶ I don't know how to sort it out, so we have a paradox.

# The Question

*A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if her belief is **based on** her reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.*

## Answer 1: No

Suppose I have a variety of good reasons for thinking that my wife is having an affair. I find text messages on her phone that she has been unfaithful, she regularly disappears in the evenings without explanation and someone even claimed to me to be the person that she was having an affair with.

Nonetheless, I maintain my belief that my wife is not having an affair and dismiss all of the evidence as misleading until one day I meet a fortune-teller who tells me that she is in fact having an affair. At this point I come to believe, based on the fortune-teller's testimony, that my wife is having an affair.



# Is My Belief Rational?

- ▶ Surely not!!
- ▶ If a belief is *not* based on a reason, then the reason does not contribute to the rationality of the belief.

# Back to Dualism

- ▶ If I have a reason but do not base my belief on it, then I am rationally no better than someone who has no reasons.
- ▶ Which means that **(D1)** is false – it cannot be that I must merely *have* reasons.

## Answer 2: Yes

Suppose you tell me that my wife is having an affair. I consider carefully what you say and decide that, since I have known you for many years and have observed (inductively) that you generally say true things and believe that, mindful of the kind of damage that being wrong about this kind of thing would cause, you would not say this kind of thing without overwhelming evidence, I decide to believe what you say.

# Evidence

- ▶ This looks like an ordinary inferential belief:
  - (1) S said that  $p$ .
  - (2) The fact that S said that  $p$  is evidence that  $p$ .

Therefore

- (3)  $p$ .

# Inferential Beliefs

- ▶ Beliefs formed through inference are paradigmatically supported by the beliefs they are inferred from – the premises.
- ▶ This is true whether you think of justification in terms of reliability or evidence.

# Dualism Again

- ▶ Where you base your beliefs on your background reasons, your justification consists in your beliefs.
- ▶ This maintains **(D1)** but at the cost of **(D2)**.

# Objection 1—Pluralism

- ▶ Maybe we can say that a listener gets *one* kind of justification from her reasons and another from the speaker.
- ▶ Then her justification is *partly* but not *entirely* constituted by her reasons.

# Response: Still More to Say

How does this happen?

It's not respecting an important intuition...



## Objection 2—Treating a Speaker as an Authority

2 types of reasons.

1 set isn't available in an ordinary inferential pattern.

## Response: The Reasons Just Are Beliefs

Fine that these are available, but this doesn't explain why any speaker-side considerations get in.

# Rethinking the Epistemology of Testimony

- ▶ **(D1)** and **(D2)** can be motivated independently, but we have a problem with the theory that results from them.
- ▶ We thus get the following paradox:
  - (1) **(D1)** (because of gullibility intuitions).
  - (2) **(D2)** (because of authority intuitions).
  - (3)  $\neg((\mathbf{D1}) \wedge (\mathbf{D2}))$  (because of the above dilemma).