

# Rumour and Reasons for Belief

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# Testimony

- ▶ Testimony comes in a variety of forms.
- ▶ And it accounts for a lot of our knowledge about the world.

# Internalism about testimony

(T1) A listener's justification for her belief that  $\phi$  is just a matter of the reflectively accessible reasons she uses in forming her belief that  $\phi$ .

- ▶ This is borne out of the *New Evil Demon Argument*.
- ▶ When we form justified beliefs in what people say, we do so by using our background evidence eg., through induction.

# Rumour and Gossip

*Gossip and rumour are often run together in social science treatments, but they are basically different in kind [...] At any rate, I shall treat them as differing in the way suggested at the outset, namely with respect to the justificatory base of the information conveyed. Gossip may be true and known or justifiably believed to be so, rumour has by (my) definition no strong justificatory base (Coady, 2006, p. 262).*

# Circular Testimony

## CIRCLE

Agatha looks across the street from her house and sees that the building opposite, which she recognises as Jesus College, is on fire. Agatha only has a quick glance, but nonetheless telephones her friend Francesca to tell her the news. Francesca unhesitatingly believes her friend and then tells her friend, Anna, though since Anna doesn't know the college, Francesca describes the building and its location to Anna, who passes this information on to Stacy. Stacy recognises the description of the building as matching Jesus College and telephones Agatha to tell her that Jesus College is on fire.

# The important points

- ▶ The listeners other than Agatha *unhesitatingly* believe what they are told.
- ▶ Agatha believes what Stacy says *based on her inductive evidence about Stacy as a testifier*.
- ▶ Agatha isn't aware of the circularity in the situation.

# The argument

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

Therefore

- (3) Internalist theories go wrong.

# Rumour

## RUMOUR

David is aware of a job opening in his department but has nothing to do with the selection process. He knows that X has applied and guesses that he won't get the job and tells Joe that X won't get the job. Joe in turn tells this to Al, who later tells David that X won't get the job.



# Rumour and reasons for belief

The idea:

- ▶ David has no justification for his belief that X won't get the job, even after hearing it from Al.
- ▶ So internalist reasons can't (by themselves) generate justification *from scratch*.

# Gossip

## GOSSIP

Verity is on the search committee for a job. Having seen the interviews, she thinks that X won't get the job. She tells this to Mia, who tells it to Sarah, who in turn tells it to Verity.

# Gossip and reasons for belief

The idea:

- ▶ Verity has no justification for her belief that X won't get the job, other than that which she had at the beginning.
- ▶ So internalist reasons can't (by themselves) enhance pre-existing justification.

# Perception and testimony

- ▶ We might object that justification from other sources just swamps justification from testimony.
- ▶ But it doesn't. Independent testimony *can* enhance overall justification.

# Scepticism about induction

- ▶ This leads to scepticism about induction and that's really unintuitive.
- ▶ It doesn't lead to this. Lackey's (2008) argument against internalism might do this, but this argument shows that the *real* problem for internalist theories relies on scepticism about induction being *false*.

# Is this about justification?

- ▶ The argument doesn't show us anything about *justification* particularly. It just shows us something about epistemic properties *more generally*.
- ▶ This is an objection to Wright (forthcoming) but the boot seems to be on the other foot here.

# References

C.A.J. Coady (2006). 'Pathologies of Testimony'. In Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Epistemology of Testimony*, pp. 253-271.

Jennifer Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stephen Wright (forthcoming). 'Internalism in the Epistemology of Testimony'. *Erkenntnis*.