

The Transmission of Justification

Stephen Wright

University of Sheffield

Conclusion

- Any epistemology of testimony must allow for testimony to transmit justification.
- Reliabilist theories do not accommodate transmission.
- Reliabilist theories of testimony are inadequate.

Transmission and Generation

- For testimony to transmit justification a listener's acquired grounds must be a speaker's grounds.
- If testimony can generate justification then a listener can acquire justification where the speaker has none.
- These need not form an exclusive disjunction.

Creationist Teacher

- A teacher believes in the Genesis story in the face of evidence to the contrary.
- She tells her class the story of evolution.
- Surely her class can acquire knowledge even though she does not have knowledge.

Consistent Liar

- Whenever an agent sees a horse she believes she has seen a deer.
- Whenever she comes to talk about the animal in question, she lies and says that it is a horse.
- Again, surely a listener can get knowledge from her testimony— *because it is reliable*.

Lackey's View

- Assuming I can't come to know something from my own testimony, my grounds must be different to yours when I tell you that *p*.
- So testimony exclusively generates justification— the speaker's grounds are never the listener's grounds.

A rejection of transmission?

- Distinguish between *doxastic* and *propositional* justification.
- Both the CREATIONIST TEACHER and the CONSISTENT LIAR are propositionally justified.
- We can say that both cases involve *propositional* justification being transmitted and transformed into *doxastic* justification.

The indispensibility of transmission

- Circular testimony.
- Does the original speaker acquire more justification?
- Intuitively no— the latest testimony is causally connected to the listener's perception!

Securing the intuition

- What about if the speaker *is* aware of the circularity?
- Surely she wouldn't even think herself more justified.
- Why is ignorance epistemically beneficial?

Reliabilism and Circular Testimony

- Reliability theories say that justification is to do with the reliability of the statement.
- Nothing like this justifies the speaker's original belief.
- So reliabilism seems to say her belief's justificatory status seems to have increased.

Relationship to Defeaters

- What if the original speaker had reason to call into doubt her perception?
- Could the speaker's reliability underwrite her status as justified even without her perception?
- The reliabilist seems to say that it should— she heard it from a reliable speaker.

How to respond?

- Accommodate circular testimony as failing testimony.
- C.A.J. Coady offers a framework to do with failing testimony.
- The trouble is, it doesn't really seem to resemble any of Coady's *pathologies*.

Trumping

- Maybe we could say that perceptual justification simply *trumps* testimonial justification.
- This means that testimony does generate, but it fails to in the case of circular testimony.
- So the original speaker doesn't gain justification.

The problem with trumping

- When testimony isn't the result of a circle, trumping seems to give the wrong account.
- If I see that p , then you see that p and you tell me that p , it seems that my justificatory status *can* be enhanced.
- If we say that it trumps in circular cases, why not in non-circular ones?

Finally... transmission

- Can give the right account of circular testimony.
- Can give the right account of non-circular testimony.
- Without it, it's hard to give both.