

# Understanding the Epistemic Value of Testimony

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# Testimony's Epistemic Value

- ▶ Testimony gets us to know things.
- ▶ The question is how we are to explain this epistemic value.

# Evidence

- ▶ Testimony is evidence of what is said.
- ▶ Testimony can be used as evidence of what is said.

# The Question

- ▶ Is testimony evidence of what is said?
- ▶ Is there any good objection to the claim that testimony is evidence of what is said?

# Testimony's Intentional Character

- ▶ If testimony has any epistemic value it has it because of its intentional character.
- ▶ If I just appeared to be randomly saying stuff, you wouldn't think my testimony was evidence of what I'm saying.

# Evidence and Intentions

- ▶ Intentions are usually bad for evidence, though – compare a photograph and a picture.
- ▶ Moran gives an example involving a dropped handkerchief.

# The Challenge

'... if we are considering speech as evidence, we will have eventually to face the question of how recognition of its intentional character could ever enhance rather than detract from its epistemic value for an audience' (Moran, 2005, p. 6).

# Do Intentions Always Destroy Evidence?

- ▶ Suppose I set your house on fire, intending for you to see the smoke and believe that your house is on fire.
- ▶ Is the smoke evidence that your house is on fire?



## A Principled Exception?

- ▶ Obviously, if  $\phi$  is a *truthmaker* for  $p$ , then  $\phi$  is evidence of  $p$ .
- ▶ But testimony is generally *not* a truthmaker for what is said.

## But It Was Evidence Anyway...

- ▶ You might think that this isn't what Moran's getting at.
- ▶ The smoke isn't evidence *because* I intended it to be – it was evidence anyway.

## Back to the Problem

- ▶ Why is my testimony evidence of what I say?
- ▶ And how do we make sense of the idea that it's important that I *intentionally* say it?

# Testimony and Truth

- ▶ My testimony is true because testimony is generally reliable.
- ▶ This can be either mine or everyone's.

## But What if it's Not?

- ▶ If testimony isn't reliable, then I'm not sure anyone *does* think testimony is evidence of what is said.
- ▶ This idea of testimony as evidence can be set out either in internalist or in externalist terms.

# Internalist Theories

- ▶  $\phi$  is evidence of  $p$  iff I have an argument that the presence of  $\phi$  somehow indicates the truth of  $p$ .
- ▶ By observing testimony and finding it to be generally true, a speaker's testimony comes to be evidence of what she says.

## Externalist Theories

- ▶ (Harder)  $\phi$  is evidence of  $p$  iff the presence of  $\phi$  does in fact somehow indicate the truth of  $p$ .
- ▶ The fact that testimony is generally true means that a speaker's testimony is evidence of what she says.

# What About Intentions?

- ▶ Intentions make it the case that a speaker's testimony is an instance of a particular type.
- ▶ What we're interested in is the connection/correlation between intentionally produced testimony and the truth of what is said.



## In Summary

- ▶ The fact that testimony is intentionally produced does not mean it cannot be evidence.
- ▶ Indeed, it can be what makes it evidence by classifying testimony as an instance of a type that is generally true.