

# Our Norm of Trust

(Better title: "The Transmission of Knowledge"?)

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The aim of this paper is to explain how it is that testimony is a source of knowledge. This is to start from something of an assumption: that testimony is indeed a source of knowledge, and is so in the following sense. Our knowing that  $p$  can be explained merely by the fact that we were told that  $p$ . This is a substantial theoretical assumption because it has often been argued that being told that  $p$  cannot alone explain our coming to know that  $p$ , and in addition we must believe that this telling is evidence (or we must be otherwise reliable in what we accept). However, that testimony can suffice to put us in a position to know things is a starting assumption of this paper, and it describes a natural way of thinking about testimony. We surely think, for instance, that if we know who won the race, we can tell others who won and so put them in a position to know this.

In addition, this paper involves two more largely unargued for assumptions. The first of these is that the testimonial relationship can be one of trust in a thick sense. The contrast here is with trust as merely a judgement of reliability. We can trust people, and indeed things, when we depend on their doing something and expect that they will, but we often trust speakers in a thicker sense than this: we can *expect it of a speaker* that he tells the truth. As speakers, we can tell others things because we can see that they need this information, and we can expect this of others: we can expect them to similarly view our epistemic needs as a reason for telling us things. When we trust a speaker for the truth in this way we will accept what the speaker tells us simply because we believe them. Trust in this thick sense I shall call *affective* because of its connection with distinctive reactive attitudes: when we trust and are let down we feel a sense of betrayal.<sup>1</sup>

These two assumptions, that testimony functions to transmit knowledge and that the testimonial relationship can be one of affective trust are connected. This can be seen by taking first the audience's and then the speaker's perspective on a speaker telling an audience something. Trust is a credulous attitude. In affectively trusting a speaker to tell the truth an audience does not look for the support of evidence that this is what the speaker does. Up to a point, evidence that the speaker is not telling the truth can even be ignored since trust can involve giving someone the benefit of the doubt. We can trust despite the evidence, and the contrast between believing on the basis of affective trust and believing on the basis of the

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<sup>1</sup> I offer an explicit analysis of trust in Faulkner(2007).

evidence is revealed in the fact that we can make our lack of trust clear by making it clear that we *only* believe because of the evidence. However, if believing a speaker can be a route to knowledge, then it had better be the case that the speaker's telling an audience what he knows can suffice to put the audience in a position to know what is told. This is what the first assumption states.

How is it that the speaker's telling can be a source of knowledge? The second assumption then allows the following explanation. When the testimonial relationship is characterised by affective trust, a speaker's reason for telling an audience what he does – the explanation of the speaker's testimony – will be the speaker's perception that the audience depends on him for this information. In this case, if the speaker *S* tells the audience *A* that *p*, it will be because *S* believes himself to know that *p*, and assumes responsibility for letting *A* know that *p* in the following sense: *S* takes it on himself to tell *A* that *p* if and only if he, *S*, knows that *p*. In recognising that the speaker *S* intends that he *A* come to believe that *p* and trusting *S*, *A* will then take *S*'s telling him that *p* as something like a promise that *p* is true. Testimony then functions to transmit knowledge from speaker *S* to audience *A* because it transmits the responsibility for justifying belief from audience *A* to speaker *S*. This explanation is offered by Richard Moran and following his lead call it the *assurance* explanation.<sup>2</sup>

As stated, the aim of this paper is to explain how it is that testimony is a source of knowledge. Given these first two assumptions, the problem that needs address is that the assurance explanation only goes so far. Not all testimonial relationships are characterised by affective trust so the assurance explanation cannot offer a general account of testimony as a source of knowledge. A point of clarification is needed here. It is not the case that all instances of acquiring knowledge from testimony are cases where the testimony functions as a source of knowledge. We could approach testimony as we approach any other feature of the world and use it as evidence in building our inductive knowledge of the world. Indeed, sometimes we do take this approach; but cases where we do so are not epistemologically central, or at least this is an implication of the first assumption. However, even if cases of knowledge acquisition are carefully restricted to those whose explanation is simply that the audience has accepted some testimony, there are plenty of important cases where this explanation cannot proceed in the manner proposed by the assurance explanation. Here is one case: leaving my office in a hurry to catch the bus I walk past an open door where two people have their back turned to me looking out the window. One person turns to the other and says, 'We'd better run because there's the bus'. I cannot see what they see, but surely the overheard testimony has told me – or put me in a position to know – that the bus is coming. However, the assurance explanation is not possible: the speaker doesn't stand responsible for *my* coming to know what he tells since he is not addressing me. Here is another case: whilst skimming the Sunday papers I read that

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<sup>2</sup> See Moran(2006).

astronomers first accurately determined the distance to the Sun by working out the distance to Venus and then using trigonometry; and that this distance is now accurately worked out to be one Astronomical Unit or 149,597,870.69 kilometres. Again, there is no trust and no speaker to accept responsibility for my coming to know the truth the report states, but this report puts me in a position to know this fact about our solar system nevertheless.

Moreover, and as part of the starting problem, there is also the fact that alternative explanations of knowledge transmission are possible. Here are two. Testimony functions to transmit knowledge because it can create the same state of informedness in an audience as that state of informedness which the speaker enjoys. This explanation, which is offered by John McDowell and which might be called the *same-state* explanation, fits the first case just described.<sup>3</sup> In seeing the approaching bus the speaker is in a certain state of informedness, which allows him to know that the bus is approaching, and in declaring this the speaker makes his knowledge publically available in a way that puts an audience in a state of informedness, which likewise allows the audience to know the bus is approaching. Here is another explanation of transmission: evidence can justify belief if the belief is based on the evidence and testimony is a mechanism that enables belief to be based on evidence because it relates, in an epistemically appropriate way, an audience's belief to the evidence possessed by a speaker or someone else in the testimonial chain. This explanation, which is offered by Tyler Burge and which might be called the *evidential* explanation, fits the second case just described.<sup>4</sup> In reading the newspaper report which states that the distance to the Sun is such and such kilometres the audience gets to form a belief whose support is whatever evidence the scientists possess for concluding that the distance to the Sun is such and such kilometres.

The assurance explanation of transmission seems best suited to some cases, whilst other cases can be given a state-state or evidential explanation. However, in some cases clearly all three explanations are possible. With his view of the information board obscured, the husband impatiently asks his wife whether their flight is boarding yet. She tells him that it is not and that they must continue to wait in the lounge. Since the wife simply describes what she sees to be the case, the same-state explanation is clearly possible. Since the husband affectively trusts his wife and expects her to tell him what she knows because he needs this information, the assurance explanation is possible. And the evidential explanation runs: the husband gets to know because whatever evidence allows the wife to know what she says supports the husband's testimonially formed belief. Given the possibility of alternative explanation, this raises the question of whether there is a single correct explanation of how testimony functions to transmit knowledge. If this is so, what is it and why? And if this is not so, how do these different explanations fit together? This paper aims to explain how it is that testimony is a source of knowledge by

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<sup>3</sup> See McDowell(1980).

<sup>4</sup> See Burge(1993).

offering a genealogical argument for testimony being a source of knowledge in the kinds of way we presently take it to be. The conclusion will be that these different explanations can be genealogically situated in such a way that they need not conflict.

## **1. Genealogy and an Imagined Pre-History**

A genealogical account of some phenomenon explains this aspect of human life by showing how it could have come about. Evolutionary accounts are genealogies: they explain particular aspects of human life in terms of the circumstances of our Pleistocene ancestors and the forces of natural selection. Moreover, all genealogies are like evolutionary accounts in that they explain aspects of human life in naturalistic terms broadly construed. The phenomenon to be explained in this case is that testimony is a source of knowledge. However, in considering how it is that testimony has come to be a source of knowledge it also possible to ask the more basic question of how it is that our utterances could be fit to communicate information about the environment in the first place. John McDowell answers this question with the following speculation about evolution.

We can find non-intentional creatures that possess in their behavioural repertoire a propensity to visibly respond to certain features of the environment *and* a propensity to manifest a comparable reaction to the exhibition of such responses by other animals of the same species. For instance perception of danger or the perception of a behavioural response provoked by danger, such as squawking, might similarly prompt flight. This is primitive communication, and it functions like testimony to inform its recipient. Thus, with respect to this basic form of communication, McDowell says:

When the communicative process functions properly, sensory confrontation with a piece of communicative behaviour has the same impact on the cognitive state of a perceiver as sensory confrontation with the state of affairs which the behaviour, as we may say, represents; elements of the communicative repertoire serve as epistemic surrogates for the represented states of affairs.<sup>5</sup>

It is then possible to answer the question about how our utterances could be fit to communicate information by hypothesising that the assertoric use of language is “a descendent, now under intentional control” of such pre-linguistic communication:

The linguistic repertoire retains, through the alteration of nature involved in the onset of self-consciousness, a form of the characteristic that was essential to its pre-linguistic ancestor: in suitable circumstances ... its exercises are cognitive stand-ins for the states of affairs that they represent.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> McDowell(1980), p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

As stated, McDowell presents this hypothesis as a speculative proposal about the course of evolution.<sup>7</sup> What motivates this hypothesis for McDowell is that it explains the “striking fact” that “knowledge can be acquired at second hand”: another’s telling us that *p* can put us in a position to know that *p*.<sup>8</sup> However, a problem for any such explanation will be the issue of how much continuity exists between this kind of pre-linguistic communication and our putting another in a position to know that *p* by telling them that *p*. McDowell argues that there is continuity in the following sense: once we understand that this is the ancestral communicative function of assertion, we can see that only assertions that convey information are *genuinely communicative*. Now this is surely true of the imagined ancestral bird squawks: if a bird, which ordinarily squawks only when there is a predator, squawks when there is none, then something has gone wrong and at one level there does seem to be a failure of communication. Since the squawk functions “to furnish information about the environment to birds that witness it”, in this case “there has been a malfunction of a natural process”.<sup>9</sup> Once communication is under intentional control, things are remarkably different in that speech acts are now “publications of intentions” so that there is communication whenever there is mutual awareness of the intentions a speech act publicises, which may be just to say that *p*. However, irrespective of communicative success at this level, McDowell claims that “[a]t the first level, communication takes place, as before, only when information is actually transmitted about the topic of discourse.”<sup>10</sup> So if a speaker were to say that *p* and lie, there would be some failure in communication just as there is when a bird, which ordinarily squawks only when there is a predator, squawks when there is none.

The intentionality of linguistic communication cannot be so easily stripped away. Malfunction requires there be some proprietary cause. It is the fact that a bird’s squawk is *ordinarily caused* by the presence of a predator that makes it into a reliable sign of the whereabouts of the predator, which can then inform other members of the same species. Whilst a speaker might be prompted to utterance by something in his environment, a bird predator say, the resulting utterance is not a natural sign in the way that the squawk and flight of birds would be. Speakers, unlike birds, say things for reasons, and once communication operates within ‘the space of reasons’ everything is different.<sup>11</sup> It is different because utterance ceases to have a singular or essential function but serves whatever function a speaker intends. Suppose a speaker’s reason for assertion was to crack a joke – put more laboriously, suppose the speaker intended to get an audience to laugh by saying something funny, and succeeded in this. The speaker’s assertion in this case is not a

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<sup>7</sup> See *Ibid.*, note 17, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> As McDowell says elsewhere, “language, in initiating subjects into the space of reasons, puts them in possession of the world, which needs to be distinguished from the mere ability to live competently in a habitat.” McDowell(1994), p. 433.

malfunction, and nor would it be so if the speaker's intention was to misinform. This raises the question of how the intentionality of testimony changes its epistemic value as a source of information. It changes it, I suggest, in the following way: once it is allowed that communication serves many more functions than the transmission of information, there is the possibility that there can be a divergence in the reasons for communicating. This is to say that once communication is under intentional control there is a *problem of trust*: why should an audience believe what he is told when for all he knows a speaker's reason for utterance might not be to inform and when believing what he is told would leave him in a worse position than ignorance if what he is told is misleading?

This problem of trust must be addressed once communication is linguistic, and it has no counterpart within instinctive communicative behaviour. However, before considering the problem of trust, the explanatory purpose of McDowell's hypothesis should be reconsidered. The speculation about the primitive origins of testimony might not explain how testimony is a source of knowledge, but this speculation could explain how it is that testimony has certain features as a knowledge source. It is a distinctive characteristic of testimony as a source of knowledge that there are differences between the transmission of knowledge and the transmission of justified belief. That there are such differences is the third assumption of this paper, and it could be outlined and briefly defended somewhat as follows. I can put you in a position to know something simply by telling you what I know, but I cannot similarly put you in a position to justifiably believe something because what is justified for me might not be justified for you. These differences are marked in our grammar. When its object is a *wh*-clause, 'tell', like 'know' is a factive verb. 'He knows who won the race' entails that someone did indeed win the race and he knows who this person is; and 'He told me who won the race' equally entails that someone won the race and he knows who this person is. Since it has this implication, Zeno Vendler argues that it also has another implication as well: that I now know who won the race as well as him. Given that telling is factive, if one is told who won the race, one knows who won the race. However, since one need not believe what one is told, this implication should be weakened: if one is told who won the race, one is put in a position to know this fact, just as observation put one in a position to know facts. Moreover, this difference between knowledge and justification is equally apparent in the formulation of a principle of transmission. The idea that knowledge gets communicated, shared, or transmitted from speaker to audience is the idea that mere understanding can put an audience who is told that something is so in a position to know that things are so. This could then be formulated a principle of transmission for testimonial knowledge:

(1) If *S* gives testimony to *p* and *A* truly believes that *S* knows that *p*, then *A* knows that *p*.<sup>12</sup>

However, consider the parallel principle for justification:

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<sup>12</sup> This principle needs be complicated by the fact that testimony can skip a link, but it will do for making the contrast with justification.

(2) If *S* gives testimony to *p* and *A* truly believes that *S* is justified in believing that *p*, then *A* is justified in believing that *p*.

This principle is false *A* might truly believe that *S* is justified in believing that *p* but there is no inconsistency in adding that *A* is nevertheless not justified in believing that *p* himself because it is possible that *p* is false and *A* knows this fact. For the same reason *A* can know that *S* is justified in believing that *p* without being himself justified in this belief. What is required for a sufficient principle is that it must exclude *A* believing that *p* is false, so *A* must believe that *S* knows and must not believe this unreasonably, which gives the following principle:

(3) If *S* gives testimony to *p* and *A* justifiably believes that *S* knows that *p*, then *A* is justified in believing that *p*.

The difference between the transmission of knowledge and justification is then shown by the fact that (3) but not (1) is consistent with a reductive account of testimonial knowledge and justification, which is to say that (3) but not (1) is consistent with the falsity of the first assumption of this paper *viz.* that we can know things merely on another's say-so.

This feature of testimony as a source of knowledge could be explained by McDowell's hypothesis. If our communicative utterances were originally informative because they functioned as 'epistemic surrogates' and can continue to have this function, then it is the transmission of knowledge that is basic since knowledge, rather than justification, is most readily understood as a state of informedness. Correspondingly, it will be the state-state explanation of transmission, which could equally be applied to this primitive case, which is basic. Thus we are to imagine that someone's telling us something is apt to transmit knowledge, understood as some state of informedness, about our environment because its primitive communicative ancestors had just this as an essential function. How this function then survived once communication became intentional is what I consider next.

## **2. The State of Nature and Problem of Trust**

Not all genealogies need be sensitive to the evidence in the way that evolutionary accounts must be. It is possible for a genealogy to be *imaginary*. Such imaginary genealogies are nevertheless explanatory, Williams claims, because they offer a functional account of the phenomenon to be explained — showing that this phenomenon is necessary for human life being as it is — and do so by showing how it would be rational for individuals in an imagined State of Nature to aim for this state of affairs, were they able to appreciate it. In *Truth and Truthfulness* Bernard Williams offers an imaginary genealogical account of what he calls the *virtues of truth: Accuracy and Sincerity*. These are the dispositions to care about the truth of one's beliefs, and to come out with what one believes. Williams's genealogy offers an explanation of *our valuing* these dispositions or virtues of truth. It is because we

value these dispositions that we try to get things right in belief and utterance. The aim of this paper is to give a genealogy of testimony and to thereby explain how testimony is a source of knowledge. This genealogy should be related to that offered by Williams because our trying to get things right in belief and utterance offers a potential explanation of how testimony could be reliable and so offer a basis of knowledge.

Williams's genealogy starts by imagining a State of Nature consisting of a primitive social group with limited technology and no writing. Although primitive, this social group is imagined to be a real society whose members have projects and interests, and are related to one another in various ways and via various roles. As with any society, the society imagined in the State of Nature will be structured by cooperative relations and will consequently need information to be communicated between individuals. Given that an individual can only be at one place at one time, individuals will often gain what Williams calls *purely positional advantage*; that is, by virtue of their location at a time, an individual can come to possess information that would be good for another individual to share. It follows that even in the State of Nature, thus minimally characterised, Accuracy and Sincerity are desirable from the social point of view; they will be socially valued because pooled information is a social good and necessary for many cooperative endeavours. However, possessing the disposition of Sincerity need not always be in an individual's best interest. Williams gives the example of the hunter who has found prey that he would rather keep for himself and his family. Given that the State of Nature describes something approximating an actual social group not all relations will be cooperative, some will be competitive. This raises the problem that:

The value that attaches to any given person's having this disposition [Sincerity] seems, so far as we have gone, largely a value for other people. It may obviously be useful for an individual to have the benefits of other people's correct information, and not useful to him that they should benefit of his. So this is a classic example of the "free-rider" situation.<sup>13</sup>

The problem is that the collective valuing of Sincerity does not itself give an individual a reason to value Sincerity, or be sincere. Whilst it is always in an audience's interest to be informed, sincerity needn't best serve a speaker's interest and as audiences we know that this is the case. The problem that Williams thus identifies is the problem of trust just described, and it is a problem which arises once testimony is intentionally produced.

In a little more detail the problem of trust could be presented as follows. We explain a speaker's utterance, just as we would explain behaviour more generally, in terms of the beliefs and intentions that the speaker brings to the communicative situation. Consequently, testimonial error is explicable in terms of the intentions a speaker has in communicating. In particular, testimony allows the following explanation of error. An audience acquired a false belief on the basis of accepting

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<sup>13</sup> Williams(2002), p.58.



what a speaker told him because the speaker told a lie, or intentionally uttered a falsehood. There are many particular reasons why a speaker might lie, but in general a speaker might act in this way if her purpose in communicating were to influence rather than inform. Consequently, a problem of trust is encountered whenever two things can be assumed about a communicative situation. First, assume that interlocutors are guided by self-interest. This is not to assume that interlocutors are selfish but simply that it is their own individual beliefs and desires, or in economic terms their preferences, which explain their communicative behaviour. Second, assume that the audience is ignorant of the speaker's preferences generally, and specifically ignorant of what moves the speaker to communicate. These two assumptions obviously have a quite different character. The assumption of self-interest purports to be a general truth about human action. By contrast, the assumption of ignorance is a particular claim that will be true in some communicative situations and false in others. However, whenever this latter assumption of ignorance is true, the audience will not be able to assess the risk of being misinformed; for all the audience knows, the speaker might be acting from an incompatible set of interests. In game-theoretic terms, *risk* becomes *uncertainty* because the audience cannot assess the probability of acquiring a false belief.<sup>14</sup> Set against this uncertainty is a general truth the audience does know: that speakers' preferences *can* motivate them to be insincere. Thus, even though an audience might be in a position of needing to know something, since acquiring a false belief would leave the audience in a worse position than ignorance, it would not be rational to accept a speaker's offer of information.

It might be thought that there is a simple solution to this problem: ignorance of a speaker's motivations does not matter when we have the speaker's track record to go on. It then need be merely claimed that often we have this, and so we can trust testimony to be true in the same way that we trust these spots to be a sign of measles. However, this assumes that this piece of trusted testimony is of a type with those past testimonies that turned out to be true. The problem with this assumption, chance cases aside, is that those past testimonies will have been true by virtue of possessing a certain property and we are precisely ignorant as to whether this bit of testimony possesses this property. This is the property of being produced by a speaker who intends to tell the truth. Thus, the basic problem of trust – the problem as it is encountered in the State of Nature – cannot be resolved by a judgement of reliability. Our ability to treat testimony as a sign rests, in the first instance, on treating it in a different way. Though ignorant of a speaker's preferences, an audience will still know enough to be able to trust in the thicker affective sense. What is essential to identifying a thicker notion of trust is that its constitutive expectation is not merely that something will happen but is rather an expectation that is placed on the trusted individual. In affectively trusting another to do something, to turn up on time say, one's attitude is not merely that of *expecting that* they will turn up on time, it is rather one of *expecting something of* them, *viz.* that

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<sup>14</sup> See Luce and Raiffa(1957), p.13.

they turns up on time because one depends on their doing so. In a context of depending on someone this expectation involves a key presumption: in trusting someone to do something, one presumes that they will see one's dependence as a reason to do this thing. Other things being equal, one thereby presumes that they will do this thing for this reason. However, their doing so would make them trustworthy. So in adopting an attitude of trust one comes to presume that they are trustworthy, and that one's relation is of the trusting sort, and by making these presumptions one's trust goes some way to fulfilling them since acting on trust is way of creating a trusting relationship. So if an audience *A* needs to know whether *p* and trusts a speaker *S* for this information, then *A* will expect it of *S* that *S* views his epistemic dependence as a reason to tell him whether *p*. And in trusting *S* for the information as to whether *p*, *A* will thereby presume that if *S* tells him that *p*, then this is because it is true that *p* and *S* knows it.

This idea that we can be moved to act in trustworthy ways is precisely what is needed to solve the problem of trust. Similarly, Williams claims that the solution to this problem requires individuals to have internalised Sincerity as a disposition, where this is to say that individuals must be motivated to act in a sincere way simply by the description of this way of acting as sincere. Where this is true, Sincerity will have *intrinsic value*.<sup>15</sup> And the imagined State of Nature thereby shows "that no society can get by ... with a purely instrumental conception of the values of truth".<sup>16</sup> Since Williams describes Sincerity as a species of trustworthiness – it is not just a matter of saying what one believes – the conclusion is that any society must find a way of valuing trustworthy behaviour. We do so by valuing relationships structured by affective trust. Describing a testimonial relationship as trusting thereby describes a change in how things are viewed by both parties since it implies, within certain limits that a speaker *S* will view an audience *A*'s dependence as a reason and *A* will view depending on *S* as reasonable. The possibility that relations may be trusting in this sense then resolves the problem of trust in the following way. It is reasonable for *A* to accept what *S* tells him because *A* trusts *S* to tell him the truth. Trust makes acceptance reasonable because it implies the presumption that trusted is trustworthy. This implication does not amount to a belief about trustworthiness since it based on an expectation of others not an expectation that some outcome will occur. However, in so far as it cannot be equated with, or reduced to, the belief that a speaker has certain preferences the fact *A* might be ignorant of *S*'s preferences does not preclude *A* trusting *S* for the truth. This dovetails with Williams's claim about intrinsic value because what explains our willingness to extend trust is our valuing trustworthiness and relations structured by trust. At the root of this value is the fact that we identify ourselves as a group in sharing a certain way of life. In the State of Nature it the local identities found in the imagined community that allow parties to view their relationships through the presumptions that trust involves. This genealogy is justificatory in that it explains

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<sup>15</sup> That is "Sincerity will have *intrinsic value* for us".

<sup>16</sup> Williams(2002), p.59.

why any society must, somehow or other, give intrinsic value to Sincerity: it must do so to secure cooperation, and with it testimony as a source of knowledge.

When the relationship between speaker and audience is trusting, in the affective sense characterised, the following explanation of knowledge transmission is possible. In trusting *S* for information as to whether *p*, *A* expects that *S* will see his, *A*'s, need to know whether *p* as a reason to tell *A* the truth. Supposing that *S* equally sees things this way, in telling *A* that *p*, *S* assumes responsibility for *A*'s coming to know that *p* in the following sense: *S* takes it on himself to tell *A* that *p* if and only if he knows that *p*. In telling *A* that *p*, *S* thereby intends that *A* come to believe that *p* because *A* recognises that this is just what he, *S*, intends: for *A* to come to believe that *p* because he, *S*, tells *A* that *p*. In having this intention *S* equally expects *A* to view his utterance as a response to *A*'s dependence and in believing what *S* says for this reason *S*'s knowledge is transmitted in one direction as *A*'s responsibility for the truth of his belief is transmitted in the other. This is the *assurance* explanation referred to in the introduction; so named because in telling *A* that *p* *S* does not intend that *A* take his utterance as evidence for *p*, though it will be this, but as offering his assurance or promise that *p* is true.<sup>17</sup> What secures knowledge transmission in the fulfilment of the presumptions that *A* makes in trusting *S* for the truth. Thus we share knowledge with those with whom we have trusting relations. In terms of the State of Nature, we might extend trust to the family, the broader kin group or members of the local society that could be called the tribe. We do not extend trust to strangers. Local identities only extend so far, we only trust some people, and this, I take it, is Williams's point that we think some people deserve more in the way of truth than others, where he puts this in terms of our distinguishing 'friends' and 'enemies'. However, a key characteristic of our society is that it does not consist of small scale locally based and largely isolated communities. Our contemporary communities have fragmented broadened and lost their local identity. The principle that we extend trust to some but not all still holds but now 'members of the local society' are more numerous; a characteristic of our modern world is that we presume a certain relationship, 'fellow citizen' for instance, with an enlarged group of persons and can show a willingness to extend trust accordingly. Thus we feel the pull to extend the idea that credulity is occasionally justified and claim that it is default reasonable to trust or accept what others tell us. However, it still remains true that the justification we have for the attitude of trust ultimately comes down to particular considerations. General facts like the fact that the other party is a language user or possess rationality or is a knower would not allow the change in view needed to see having a trusting relation with them as valuable in its own right. However, this is what is needed for cooperation in the State of Nature and so far an account of how our society could be recognisably like it is. That said the next and final stage of this imagined genealogy of testimony must consider the implications of the fact that our a society recognisably like our own is not one based on local identities.

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<sup>17</sup> See Moran(2006).

### 3. Scientific Society

The transmission of knowledge is primitive, and conceiving of its transmission in the State of Nature as an instance of cooperation consolidates this claim. The problem of trust demands that an audience possesses reasons for accepting what is said. The idea that knowledge can be based on trust is the idea that trust is a reason giving attitude. However, it also expresses the idea that we should distinguish between the uptake of testimony and what gets passed on by testimony. The uptake of testimony is a matter of trust. What gets passed on is matter of knowledge. Knowledge can be based on trust because when things go right a speaker takes on the responsibility for justifying an audience's belief. However, once the transmission of knowledge is conceived of in terms of a demand for reasons and the demand for a justifying argument the possibility becomes open that it is the audience that could satisfy both of these demands. That is, it must be recognised that an audience could articulate reasons that justify the proposition presented by a piece of testimony on the basis of features of this piece of testimony. Once the possession of knowledge is fully social, the reasons which explain its possession could come solely from the audience. Once it is established as a source of knowledge, we can start to treat testimony as a sign like any other. Thus any principle of testimonial justification must be equivocal and compatible with a reductive view of testimony. What the move to a larger more fragmented society then establishes is a shift in how we understand the nature of the justification supporting testimonial belief, where the possibility of a reductive view of testimony is part of this shift.

One way of approaching this transformation is via the idea of an *epistemic community*, which could be defined in terms of a group of two or more individuals who share knowledge through testimony. In the State of Nature members of an epistemic community would additionally be members of a social community and connected by the many social ties that allow for a local group identity. It is this identity which ensures that the presumptions made in affective trust come out true, and so ensures that testimony is a reliable source of belief, and a source of knowledge. Thus, it is congruence between the local social community and the epistemic community which is at the heart of the explanation of knowledge transmission in the State of Nature. So what happens now we no longer live in small locally based communities? Certainly, knowledge can still be based on trust; we rely on friends and family, and those with whom we have bonds of trust, for knowledge. But we also share knowledge with a much wider group. The epistemic community becomes detached from its origin in a local social community as these themselves lose their local identity. In the State of Nature an audience would almost certainly know the speaker – and if a chain of testimony was relevant to the audience's possessing testimonial knowledge, then the audience would in all probability know the members of this chain too – now it is as frequent for us that we are at the end of a testimonial chain where *all* the other members are unknown. Take the example of reading an encyclopedia entry; for instance, the entry which states the distance from the Earth to the Sun to be one Astronomical Unit or 150 odd million kilometres. In

this case, there will probably be no social ties connecting speaker and audience, and it could be that the only connection is by the way of the truth of completely general descriptions like both know the same language. Consequently, an audience's acquisition of testimonial knowledge could not be explained in terms of the speaker's taking on the responsibility of justifying the audience's belief. The audience could only trust the encyclopedia in the sense that the audience could predict, on track record of the encyclopedia's statements, that the distance of Earth to Sun was indeed that stated. The audience could not trust in the thicker affective sense for it would make no sense to presume that the author was in anyway directing his utterance towards the audience in particular. Thus, there is a temptation to understand the audience's possession of knowledge in terms of the audience's possession of an argument for the truth of what the audience comes to believe on testimony; that is, to understand testimonial knowledge in reductive terms. However, the starting point of this paper is that testimonial knowledge should be explained in transmissive terms, and applied to this case this is the idea that the encyclopedia can put the audience in a position to know that the Earth is such-and-such distance from the Sun. Given reasonable acceptance, or epistemically appropriate uptake, this bit of knowledge gets passed on. It is not that the audience's reasons constitutes this bit of knowledge. After all how could they? This piece of knowledge was a scientific discovery, not a simple induction from past track record.

I suggest that this can be accounted for by the evidential explanation of transmission, which can also be seen as an objectification or generalisation of the assurance explanation. On the assurance account, in a one-link testimonial chain, an audience *A* gets to know that *p* on the basis of trusting a speaker *S* who tells him that *p* insofar as *S* knows that *p* and shoulders the responsibility for *A*'s knowing that *p*. In order to explain *A*'s knowing that *p*, *S* must thereby be able to articulate knowledge supporting reasons for believing that *p*. Call these reasons *e*; the assurance account of *A*'s knowing that *p* is then that *A*'s belief that *p* is backed by *S*'s willingness to articulate *e*. The evidential account objectifies this by relieving *S* of any active epistemic role: *A* knows that *p* because *S*'s testimony to *p* allows *A*'s believing that *p* to be based on *e*. This account thereby involves a shift to a third person view of reasons for belief: *e* is no longer a matter of articulated, so accessible, reasons for belief but simply what could constitute a reason for belief – in short evidence. In terms of the example, there is a body of scientific work involving bouncing radar waves off Venus and doing some trigonometry, which determines the distance of Earth to Sun to be 149,597,870.69 kilometres, which is then designated as 1 Astronomical Unit. It is this body of scientific work that the encyclopedia entry refers to and whose credential determines the epistemic status of that entry. On reading the encyclopedia entry, the audience is then put in a position to know this fact because in accepting what he reads he gets to form a belief that is based on this scientific evidence, he knows at second-hand because the scientists have worked out the sums at first-hand.

What this shift to the evidential explanation then serves to explain is how knowledge has come to possess a life of its own. What is explained is the possibility of science. We speak of scientific knowledge in objective terms; for instance, we speak about the current state of physics, and in doing so we consider current theory as an epistemological product rather than as an item of belief. This perspective on knowledge was pursued by Karl Popper who had three theses about knowledge objectively conceived, which he called 'the third world'. First thesis: *the third world is a human creation*; "the third world is a natural product of the human animal, comparable to a spider's web."<sup>18</sup> Second thesis: *the third world is autonomous in its existence*: from the moment we have produced some description or argument, some theory in short, this theory will have unforeseen consequences and generate further problems. Third thesis: *the growth of objective knowledge has a certain logic to it*, which for Popper was the logic of falsification that could be described in evolutionary terms. From the perspective of the genealogical argument being put forward there are a number of problems with this proposal. Most obviously, the problem is that knowledge is factive – on the present account originally a factive state of informedness – however what we have taken ourselves to know in the development and growth of science has changed remarkably through history. The problem is that, for some enduring state of affairs, the factivity of knowledge implies that it is contradictory to suppose that we knew that  $p$  at time  $t_0$  and knew that not- $p$  at time  $t_1$ . Consequently, where present science implies the falsity of past science, past scientific theory cannot have been known or, therefore, part of the third world of objective knowledge. However, an induction from past scientific failings then provides a reason for thinking the same of present theory and for each case where this induction proves retrospectively true, there will have been a change in our theory without any implied change in the third world. As a result, Popper's third world comes to resemble something like Williams's "absolute conception": a description of the world removed by definition from the vagaries and perspective of belief.<sup>19</sup> Yet Popper is obviously right to say that scientific knowledge is our creation: we formulate its content and articulate its justification. The point is then simply that what we are really interested in is this content and justification – scientific theory and its supporting evidence – and not its genesis in the thinking of the specific individuals. Science is knowledge that has outgrown its original knowing subject. Let me then define the *extended justification* of a proposition as that body of evidence that has been articulated for this proposition's truth. Popper's third world, I suggest, can then be conceived as body of propositions in conjunction with the extended justification of each. This conjunctive set is our creation, it is autonomous, and there is a logic to the justification of scientific claims: there are principles of evidence and reason that constitute science as a practice.<sup>20</sup> One way of knowing something in the subjective sense would then be to have a true belief

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<sup>18</sup> Popper(1968), p.112.

<sup>19</sup> See Williams(1978), p. 241 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, I argue that this construal of the third world gets around the criticisms made of it by Cohen(1980). See Faulkner(2006).

where one's believing were appropriately based on an extended justification that is knowledge supporting. The evidential explanation then simply applies this idea to testimony: testimony is a route to knowledge because it is a way of basing belief on an extended justification, or evidence for the truth of belief that someone else other than the audience possesses. The fact that audiences as well as speakers can articulate arguments for the truth of testimonially presented propositions then establishes that the extended justification can be a conjunction of the justification possessed by the original speaker for believing this proposition together with any further justification provided by the chain(s) of communicators.<sup>21</sup> This possibility is then demonstrated in the collaborative production of scientific knowledge.

#### **4. Testimony as a Source of Knowledge**

The evidential explanation of knowledge transmission has the advantage of being general enough to cover all cases of the transmission of knowledge and justification. By contrast the assurance and same-state explanation only happily cover certain cases. Assurance cannot provide a general explanation of the transmission of knowledge because not all testimony involves a speaker shouldering responsibility for an audience's justification. We can learn from illicitly reading another's diary, but the diarist doesn't intend to tell us anything. And the same could be said for overheard testimony: we can learn things by listening to what another says even though they would surely reject the claim that our eavesdropping made them responsible for our belief. Or take the example of reading that the Sun lies 149,597,870.69 kilometres distant from the Earth. It is much more natural to describe the journalist who reported this scientific result as shouldering responsibility for reporting the scientific result accurately than as shouldering responsibility for a reader's belief. But it then seems to be the evidence upon which this result was established, and which neither the reader nor the journalist possesses, that explains the reader's coming to knowing what the journalist reports, in treating the journalist's report as authoritative. This example is also problematic for the same-state explanation, which best fits cases where a speaker reports something seen. In this case, by contrast, the journalist's testimony is to a scientific result which in all probability does not originate from a single speaker but results from collaboration, so it seems wrong to represent the transmission of this knowledge in terms of testimony recreating a starting state of informedness. The evidential explanation is not similarly limited: in general, testimony can be conceived of as a way of basing belief on external evidence. In simple cases, the evidence is a speaker's, this evidence supports the speaker's belief, which is the proposition presented by the speaker's testimony, and this evidence then continues to support this proposition when it is believed by an audience. In more complex cases the evidence need not be the speaker's and the proposition presented by the speaker need not be believed by

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<sup>21</sup> Burge defines the "extended body of justification" similarly, see Burge(1993), p.486.

them. However, the same mechanism operates: *testimony enables belief to be based on external evidence or evidence one does not possess.*

The problem with the evidential account of transmission is that it fails to explain why knowledge seems to be more transmissible than belief, and why believing a speaker – which can be understood as trusting the speaker for the truth – does not seem to be a matter of gaining an evidence based belief. What the genealogical account then provides is a way of remedying these failures and showing how these explanations need not be in competition. This is because it is possible to imagine a genealogy that explains how it is that we understand testimonial knowledge to have the properties we take it to have, where these properties are those described in the three assumptions of this paper. It is possible to imagine that testimony originally, that is primordially, functioned to recreate states of informedness. That once it got tied to other communicative purposes the acceptance of testimony, and transmission of knowledge, required the backing of trust. And that once it was recognised that reasons were needed to support belief, these reasons could be considered in abstract of the actual communicative situation. This genealogy then traces the emergence of our concept of knowledge from a primitive state of informedness to a state identified by its association with an ability to justify – a standing in a social space of reasons as it were – and finally to a standing in a space of reasons more abstractly conceived. The proposal then is this. We have a way of life whereby testimony is a source of knowledge because it is a way of basing belief on the evidence. The story of how we have come to have this way of life must see believing a speaker, in the sense of trusting them for the truth, as a way of getting to know things. And it must start from the idea that communication can function, in its most basic instances, to convey information. As a consequence, it is now possible to give different and overlapping explanations of an audience's acquisition of knowledge from testimony. There is no contradiction here if the imagined genealogy of testimony is accepted because, if so, our ability to offer different explanations simply shows how our understanding of testimony has been informed by the way in which we have come to have testimony as a source of knowledge.

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