

Can Our Entitlement to Testimonial Knowledge Be Empirical?

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Conclusions

- It may or may not be the case that we enjoy an entitlement to testimonial knowledge.
- But if we do, it seems hard to see how this entitlement could be as Graham claims.
- There is a question of how the factors Graham identifies could be part of our epistemic makeup by default.

What is Testimonial Knowledge

- Sometimes we take a speaker's word for things.
- This is different to treating what she says as evidence.
- When we do (the former), we sometimes acquire available *testimonial* knowledge.

What is an Entitlement?

- Think back to the traditional Cartesian project.
- Things appear to me to be a certain way.
- But they often go wrong– I find out things are not as they seem.
- So why is (epistemically) ok for me to think things are as they appear?

Entitlements

- There are various strategies we might take here.
- Entitlement theorists think that some facts are *by default* a part of our epistemic constitution.
- We do not need to be aware of them— cf. other “entitlements” we have.
- It is these facts that get us from appearance to reality.

Philosophy to the Rescue!

- Epistemic entitlements get everyone out of the sceptical hole— whether or not they're aware of it.
- Though they are not supposed to be *in principle* undiscoverable!
- The idea is that philosophers can discover them on behalf of everybody else.

Applied to testimony...

- The sceptical problem pops up in two ways:
 - (1) Liars.
 - (2) Poor misguided fools.
- People often tell us things that are false.
- So the question is why it's ok to depend on someone's statement.

Graham's Entitlement Theory

- Peter Graham identifies two processes:
- Comprehension *neat*– where you just believe a speaker.
- Comprehension-via-filtering– where false statements set off alarm bells.

Comprehension and Reliability

- The process of comprehension-via-filtering, Graham claims, reliably flags falsehoods.
- So if we think a statement is true, this is a sign that it is true.
- It is the reliability of this process that entitles us to believe what appears to us to be true.

Graham and Burge

- Graham follows Tyler Burge's notion of what entitlements are supposed to do.
- Unlike Burge, who thinks that entitlements are *a priori*, Graham identifies *contingent a posteriori* facts with testimonial entitlement.
- It is this, I think, that makes a problem for Graham's theory.

(Not) The Epistemic Basing Relation

- The epistemic basing relation concerns reasons and when they justify beliefs.
- A similar question could be asked about when factors entitle you to a particular belief.
- These are **not** the same question (since they probably have different answers).

Reliability and Entitlement

- The factors that make comprehension-with-filtering reliable are *a posteriori* and *empirical*.
- But so are the truthmakers for a number of contingent propositions.
- These *guarantee* the truth of my belief. Why doesn't my entitlement consist in these?

What to say?

- They are not available to reflection— so Graham can't follow Burge here.
- They are “internal” to the listener’s mental life though...
- But this doesn't answer the question. Why do factors about the listener get on the list of entitlements?

But it seems so right!

- The phenomena Graham identifies might seem familiar.
- On occasion, we just *do* get struck by the idea that people have said something false.
- And when we do, we become aware of something that was going on all the time.

Justifications and Entitlements

- What makes entitlements distinctive is that they *do not* depend on someone being aware of them.
- So it's one thing to say that you might become aware of the reliability of comprehension-via-filtering and that this might yield justification.
- It's completely another thing to say that this is part of our epistemic makeup by default.

Summary

- It may or may not be the case that we enjoy an entitlement to testimonial knowledge.
- But if we do, it seems hard to see how this entitlement could be as Graham claims.
- There is a question of how the factors Graham identifies could be part of our epistemic makeup by default.