

The Epistemology of Testimony: The Generation of Knowledge and the Transmission of Justification

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The Epistemology of Testimony

- Sometimes we know/have justification for things based on what other people say.
- We can respond to what people say in two ways:
 1. By *taking someone's word for it*.
 2. By treating their statement as *evidence*.

Theories of Testimony

- Question of *what it is* that confers testimonial justification on a belief.
- Three options:
 1. Other beliefs.
 2. The factors that render the relevant process reliable.
 3. The speaker's justification.

Transmission: The Basic Idea

- Testimonial justification involves a listener acquiring a speaker's justification.
- Burge puts this in terms of the listener's *own proprietary* justification and the *extended body of* justification.
- Alternatively, we can think about this in terms of *truthmakers*.

What Transmission is Not

- The focus here is on *links* in a testimonial chain.
- It is *not* merely the claim that:
 1. A listener can only acquire know when the speaker knows.OR
 2. A listener's (acquired) justification cannot outstrip the speaker's.
- These are *consequences* of transmission theories, not *constitutive* of them.

A Problem for Transmission Theories

- Peter Graham considers a case in which a creationist schoolteacher finds a fossil.
- The idea is that the class have justification for believing that there were once dinosaurs, but the teacher does not.
- This is a problem, because transmission theories are supposed to deny this possibility.

The Transmission of Justification

- Justification, unlike knowledge, does not require belief– it can be *doxastic* or *propositional*.
- One might thus say that a speaker's *propositional* justification is transmitted to the listener and becomes *doxastic* justification.

The Transmission of Knowledge

- It seems more difficult to say that knowledge is transmitted.
- There is no knowledge to be transmitted!
- Intuitively, it also seems right to say that the audience do *know* where the speaker does not.

A Split Theory

- Audi holds that a listener can only acquire testimonial knowledge from a knowing speaker, but can acquire justification where the speaker has none.
- I suggest that a transmission theory can (and should) bifurcate on this issue, but the claims should be the opposite way around.

Knowledge Transmission and Justification Transmission: One and the Same?

- To avoid a split theory, one might suggest that the transmission of knowledge *just is* the transmission of justification.
- The same idea of transmission thus underpins both transmission theories.
- This seems insensitive to the differences between knowledge and justification though.

“I mean... REALLY!?”

- The idea is that justification transmits more easily than knowledge; but isn't this just perverse?
- If I know that you know that p , this can ground my knowledge that p . But the same isn't true of justification.
- But this just isn't an example of justification transmission. It involves inferring, which is just the opposite of transmission.

Conclusions

- Knowledge transmission requires more than justification transmission.
- Graham's schoolteacher case provides a challenge to knowledge transmission.
- So transmission theories of testimonial justification should allow that testimonial knowledge can involve knowledge generation.