

Knowing from Others: A Review of *Knowledge on Trust* and *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*

Fabien Medvecky, University of Otago

A Critical Introduction to Testimony

Axel Gelfert

Bloomsbury Academic, 2014

264 pp.

Knowledge on Trust

Paul Faulkner

Oxford University Press, 2011

240 pp.

If you are hungry for some reading on testimonial epistemology—the study of knowledge created and gained through testimony—then Axel Gelfert’s introductory text, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony* (2014), sits as a perfect entrée to Paul Faulkner’s *Knowledge on Trust* (2011). Both books are well-written and aimed at philosophers, though they are very different in style. While Gelfert’s volume is clearly aimed as an upper undergraduate or postgraduate philosophy course text, presenting the reader with a good overview of the field, Faulkner’s work delves into more specificity as it develops a rich theory of how we acquire new knowledge as a result of testimony. And while I am sympathetic to Faulkner’s views on the role of trust as the foundation for testimonial knowledge, I think his discussion on trust is a little quick.

Beginning our meal with *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*, Gelfert takes us through the main moves that have been made with regard to testimony. He opens with a discussion on testimony broadly, from the legal aspects to the everyday, and follows through to the relationship between testimony and the other sources of knowledge, namely perception, memory, and inference (introspection is left largely undiscussed). The book then proceeds to present the various theories that have been put forward about how we acquire knowledge through testimony. In a methodical way, Gelfert guides his reader through the arguments over what count as justifications for justified beliefs when considering testimonies.

In particular, Gelfert discusses the relationship between evidence and testimony (from Bayesian epistemology’s probabilistic beliefs to the internalism/ externalism debate over what justifies our beliefs); reductionism, anti-reductionism, and hybrid theories of justifications; the relationship between knowing and knowledge transmission (do I need to know something before I can let someone else know about it?); the role of trust in testimony (and its cousins, reliance and assurances). Throughout this, Gelfert makes clear and understandable what is often complex, such as Bayesian epistemology or the discussion on testimony and inference to the best explanation. He also includes a

welcomed set of questions and suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter; this is the textbook aspect.

But the tasty part of this dish is the closing chapters where Gelfert moves from pure exposition of what has been argued in the field to pushing for his own agenda. This is especially noticeable in his consideration of pathologies of testimony where he pushes for a moral (Kantian) take to testimonial epistemology, arguing that failures in our testimonial system can extend beyond solely harming the hearer and can harm third parties (think of gossip, for example) or, echoing Miranda Fricker, can also harm and be unjust to the speaker. I only wish there had been more of the argumentative Gelfert in the book; that the argument for a moral take on testimonial epistemology had been given more scope.

By contrast, Faulkner is clearly driving an argument in his engaging book. Faulkner presents both a rich and a clear theory of how we might be justified to accept testimony as knowledge. He makes his argument for what Gelfert calls a hybrid theory, a blend of reductive and non-reductive views. Faulkner guides his reader through a number of existing positions before asserting his own, the trust theory of testimony. His argument centres on cooperation and the role of trust as the foundation for testimonial knowledge; a view that is both reasonable and well put forward. In presenting his theory, Faulkner frames it by drawing on quasi-formal models of epistemology and on game-theory-like thought experiments. But these, however useful, come at a cost: they are overly individualistic in their approach to trust (as opposed to social or communal).

While I am sympathetic to Faulkner's view that trust is central to any theory of testimony, I think his individualist take on trust makes short work of the sociality of trust. Indeed, Faulkner's individualist bent is especially explicit when he discusses how breaching social norms affects trust, which he notes can affect a) the wrongdoer (e.g. shame, guilt), b) the wronged (e.g. resentment), or c) third parties (e.g. disapproval). In his discussion on how these then play out in our relations to trust, the third (social) view drops out. Yet I can't help but think that the social structure we operate in plays an important role in our assignment of trust. Given that trust is foundational to our justification for treating testimony as knowledge, then this sociality also must play an important role in what testimony we feel justified to accept, which we should doubt, and which we ought to reject. I believe this deserved more discussion.

With Gelfert as my entrée and Faulkner as my main dish, one might think my wants for testimonial epistemology would be satiated. And while I was very pleased and satisfied, I could have had a little more from both. I would have enjoyed a little more of Gelfert's argument for a moral take on testimony, and I would have liked a more thoughtful discussion on the sociality of trust from Faulkner, and how such sociality plays out with regard to testimonial epistemology. Maybe this is just me greedily asking for dessert.

Contact details: fabien.medvecky@otgao.ac.nz