

Announcements and Such

- Two Songs — By Request
 - “Sweet Virginia”, from *Exile on Main Street*, by *The Rolling Stones*.
 - “Thank the Lord for the Nighttime”, from *Classics: The Early Years*, by *Neil Diamond*.
- Today: Testimony
 - I’ll only do one (limited) lecture on Testimony.
 - I may not even get through all my slides today.
 - Make sure you read all the testimony stuff...
 - First, a leftover from last time...

Some Difficulties and Strengths of the Classical View VIII The Power of Reason & Indefeasible Justification I

- Is reason powerful enough to be able to provide what even introspection seems not to: *indefeasible* justification (the “holy grail”!)?
- There may be truths that are so simple and luminously self-evident that they *cannot* be unjustifiably believed (when properly considered)
 - For instance, that $(p) 1 = 1$.
- It’s hard to see how one could comprehendingly consider p , and yet unjustifiably believe p .
- One might believe p (in part) for bad reasons, but that wouldn’t undermine the justification reason provides, *when one adequately understands p*.
- *Not all a priori* justification is indefeasible.

Some Difficulties and Strengths of the Classical View VIII The Power of Reason & Indefeasible Justification II

- Plausible skeptical arguments might be able to defeat *a priori* justification (even in the strict sense) — even for certain logical truths.
- Moreover, indefeasible justification may sometimes occur even for *a posteriori* claims.
- Consider the proposition that-“Branden exists”. This may be the kind of proposition that *I* (cannot help but) *indefeasibly justifiably* believe.
- But, surely, “Branden exists” doesn’t express a *necessary* truth, much less an *a priori* truth!
- Whatever my justification is for believing that Branden exists (what is it?), it doesn’t seem defeasible. But, it also doesn’t seem *a priori*.
- Defeasibility & skepticism to be discussed later...

Testimony I Some Preliminaries

- Testimony is perhaps the most important *social* (as opposed to *individual*, like perception, *etc.*) source of justified beliefs and knowledge.
- We use the word “testimony” in a *broad* sense:
 - *S testifies that p* iff *S asserts p* (or *attests to p*) *with the intention* of (thereby) *conveying information* (e.g., that p) *to someone else*.
- So, all testifying is asserting (or saying), but not conversely (one may assert p ’s without intending to convey any information to another person).
- Normally, “testifying” is a rather heavy word. But, for us, it is much less formal and more general.
- Basically, it involves *telling* and *being told* (p ’s).

Testimony II

The Inferentialist View of Testimony I

- One might think testimony only grounds belief *indirectly via an inference*. I might reason as:
 - *S* testified that *p*.
 - *S* is a (sufficiently) *credible* testifier (re *p*).
 - *p* *coheres with* my background beliefs.
 - <... possibly other premises ...>
 - Therefore, *p* is true.
- With *formal* (courtroom) testimony, this may be a reasonable way to think about its psychology.
- *Inferentialism* says one *never* believes *anything directly* from testimony, but *only inferentially*.

Testimony II

The Inferentialist View of Testimony II

- An alternative is the “filtering background beliefs” approach, which says (roughly) that:
 - By default, our minds are “open” to testimony, and we *directly* come to believe it (*trust*).
 - If our background beliefs *don't cohere with* the testimony (either with *S*'s credibility or with *p*), then we are “closed” to it, and we fail to believe.
 - *S* says they are not guilty of the crime.
 - *S* says they climbed Everest without rope.
- This allows us to say that much testimonial belief is *directly* grounded by testimony.
- Most informal day-to-day testimony seems *direct*.

Testimony III

Inferential Grounds vs Constraints on Belief Formation I

- The “blocking” view requires elaboration on the ways in which background beliefs can *non-inferentially constrain* the formation of beliefs.
- This can be subtle and *dynamic*. As we listen to someone, these constraints can *evolve*. Example:
 - I meet someone on a plane. She tells me about a conference in which a speaker I know lost his temper. *Initially*, I *suspend judgment* about whether he did so, since the incident is of a rare kind and I do not know her. Then, as she describes the conference further, other details begin to fit together very well, and she notes information I already know, such as who was there. Soon I am listening in an accepting attitude, forming beliefs of each thing she says as fast as she proceeds. At the end, I find that I *now* believe that the speaker did in fact lose his temper.

Testimony III

Inferential Grounds vs Constraints on Belief Formation II

- Early on, I *suspend judgment* on what *S* says (*p*). I *neither* believe *nor* disbelieve *p* at the start.
 - I do *not infer* anything at all at the beginning.
- As *S* continues, I eventually come to *trust S*. *Trust* is a (general) *disposition to believe* a person.
- During the telling, my background beliefs relevant to *S* (credibility) and *p* (its truth) *change*.
- I don't *infer* anything during the telling. But, my background beliefs do change, along with their *constraints* on my subsequent belief formation.
- Eventually, my initially somewhat skeptical attitude toward *S*'s testimony gives way to a more lax, credulous attitude/disposition.

Testimony IV

The Direct Source View of Testimony I

- The idea: people place testifiers on an (*implicit, non-inferential*) “credibility scale”, and it can *change (non-inferentially)* w/background beliefs.
- Thus, beliefs (that *p*) can be *based on* testimony (*without being inferred*), and this can happen *long after* the original testimony (that *p*) is given.
- Analogy: I vividly recall a scene I saw a year ago, and form a belief about it. This is *based on* perception, even though it’s formed *long after*.
- Unlike perception, however, testimony *depends on* another source of knowledge (perception).
- Perception & memory *can work together*, but perception doesn’t *always depend on* memory.

Testimony IV

The Direct Source View of Testimony II

- So, testimony is *not* a *basic* source of belief — it depends on perception to be able to form beliefs
- I cannot believe something on the basis of testimony, unless I *hear* (or *read, etc.*) it.
- This does *not* imply that testimony depends on perceptual *belief* (or any other kind of belief)
- I don’t need to have a particular perceptual belief in order to form a testimonial belief, but I (at least) have to have (some) *perceptual experience*.
- However, testimony can yield *basic beliefs* (these are beliefs that don’t depend on other beliefs).
- Testimony is a *non-basic source* of beliefs that can (nonetheless) generate *basic beliefs*.

Testimony V

The Epistemology of Testimony I

- How does testimony yield *knowledge* and/or *justified belief*. We’ll start with knowledge.
- Knowledge can be transmitted by testimony, but only under the right circumstances.
- Key Requirement: *S*’s testimony that *p* cannot yield knowledge that *p unless S knows that p*.
- Obviously, if *p* is *false* (and *that’s why S* does not know that *p*) then *p* can’t be known.
- *Even if p is true*, knowledge of *p* can’t be gained from testimony *unless the testifier knows p*
 - I (*truly, but luckily*) *guess* that (*p*) the winning lottery number will be *n*, and you believe *p* on the basis of my testimony that *p*. You *don’t know p*.

Testimony V

The Epistemology of Testimony II

- The relationship between *justification* and testimony is much different (and more subtle)
- *Even if S* is not justified in believing *p*, *S*’s *testimony can* “produce” justified beliefs.
- You *trust me* (give me a high “credibility score”), and you have no reason to doubt *p*. You thus come to believe *p* from my testimony that *p*.
- Here, you *can be justified in* believing that *p*.
- But, you’re not *getting* said justification *from me if I don’t have it*. Rather, in such cases, you’re getting it from background beliefs/conditions.
- Contrast: knowledge is *transmitted through* testimony; justification is *gained from* testimony.

Testimony V

The Epistemology of Testimony III

- You might still worry that in such cases the justification is not really *testimonial-based*. But,
 - Analogy: *S can't memorially know that p, unless S already knew p. But, S can be memorially justified in believing that p, even if p S didn't already* JB *p.*
- Another knowledge/justification asymmetry:
 - For *S* to be *justified in believing p* on the basis of *T's* testimony, *S* must (sometimes) have *some justification* for believing that *T* is credible with respect to *p*.
 - Imagine cases in which *S* has *no evidence at all* regarding *T's* credibility (or the truth of *p*).
 - But, to *know p* on the basis of *T's* testimony, *S needn't know* that *S* is credible (or that *p*).
 - *No reason to doubt either p or T's credibility wrt p.*

Testimony V

The Epistemology of Testimony IV

- We can say a bit more about the nature of testimonial justification. It has two *facets*:
 - *Sincerity*: the attester is being *honest* (about *p*). If they *attest to p*, then they *believe that p*.
 - *Competence*: the attester has experience or knowledge sufficient to make it *likely* that if the attester holds a belief that *p*, then *p* is true.
- One can *justifiedly* regard *S* as credible (with respect to *p*), if one has good reason to believe *S* is both sincere and competent (with respect to *p*).
- One can think of “credibility scores” (concerning *p*) as some weighted average of “scores” of sincerity and competence (with respect to *p*).

Testimony V

The Epistemology of Testimony V

- Two Epistemic Principles for Testimony:
 - **Principle of Testimony-Based Justification:** At least normally, a belief (that *p*) based on testimony (that *p*) is thereby justified (that is, justified on the basis of the testimony) provided the believer is adequately justified in taking the attester to be credible regarding *p*.
 - **A Principle of Testimony-Based Knowledge:** At least normally, a belief (that *p*) based on testimony (that *p*) thereby constitutes knowledge (that *p*) provided that the attester knows *p* and the believer has no reason to doubt either *p* or the attester's credibility wrt *p*.
- Neither principle is unqualified, of course, but the exceptions (“bad cases”) are unusual.

Testimony VI

The Twofold Epistemic Dependence of Testimony I

- We have seen that testimony is *not a basic* source of knowledge/belief, although it can ground *basic beliefs*. This can be clarified in various ways.
 - First clarification: testimony can *incidentally (directly) generate* knowledge. Let *p* = Branden can speak. If assert (and I mean *speak*) “2 + 2 = 4”, this (act) could *generate* knowledge that *p*.
 - But, this is *not a transmission* of *my* knowledge that *p by testimony*. [It's *perceptual* knowledge.]
 - What if I *said (spoke)* “I can speak”? This *could transmit* my knowledge that *p*, but it could *also generate* such knowledge in a hearer *indirectly (e.g., if they didn't understand what I said)*.
 - Also, I may not *intend to convey p* (see below).

Testimony VI

The Twofold Epistemic Dependence of Testimony II

- All chains of testimonial knowledge/justification must *bottom out* in *non*-testimonial stuff:
 - *A* knows *p* on the basis of *B*'s testimony, and *C* knows *p* on the basis of *A*'s testimony, *etc.*...
 - Such chains have to end in *someone* having *non*-testimonial grounds for believing that *p*.
 - Knowledge that is directly and wholly based on testimony for the *recipient* cannot be *ultimately* based wholly on testimony for the *giver*.
- While *S* needn't non-testimonially *believe* that *T* attested to *p* in order to know *p* on the basis of *T*'s testimony, *S* must have *some non*-testimonial grounds for believing that *T* attested to *p*.
- This is *operational*, not *inferential* dependence.

Testimony VI

The Twofold Epistemic Dependence of Testimony III

- Testimonial justification is similar:
 - I cannot acquire justification for believing *p* on the basis of *T*'s testimony unless I have justification for believing that *T* is credible.
 - I also need to have justification for other *p*'s (*e.g.*, that I heard the testimony correctly).
 - *These justifications cannot come entirely from testimony itself* (again, no infinite regress).
 - Suppose Jane assures me about Bert, but I am not justified in taking Jane to be credible. Juan now tells me that Jane is utterly reliable. How can this help, unless I'm justified in trusting Juan?
 - At some point, I must have *some non*-testimonial grounds for believing that *someone* is credible.

Testimony VII

The Indispensability of Testimonial Grounds I

- Puzzle: if testimony depends on other sources of belief, then how do *children* learn by testimony?
- Children (we shall assume) do not *possess the concepts* of credibility, *etc.*, required to gain *justified beliefs* from the testimony of adults.
- First, note that this *is* consistent with *knowledge* being transmitted (*that doesn't* require having any justified beliefs involving credibility, *etc.*).
- So, we'll focus on *knowledge* transmission here.
- Second, we must distinguish two pairs:
 - Conceptual *versus* propositional learning, and
 - Demonstrative *versus* propositional testimony.

Testimony VII

The Indispensability of Testimonial Grounds II

- When we're teaching children concepts (like "red"), we might *say* things like "that (*o*) is red".
- But, when we do this, we are *not merely* intending to convey the information that *o* is red.
- Our aim is to *demonstrate* red objects, in order to help the child *acquire the redness concept*.
- Therefore, we are not engaged in *propositional* testimony, but *demonstrative* testimony.
- The sort of learning that children do in this setting is called *conceptual* learning, as opposed to *propositional* learning (learning *that o* is red).
- The child *needn't* learn that *o* is red, *even if* they have finally grasped the redness concept. But, normally, they will learn *p*'s once they learn *C*'s.

Testimony VIII

Non-testimonial support for testimony-based beliefs I

- Two questions concerning testimony:
 - **Focal Justification Question (FJQ):**
For each proposition one justifiedly believes (wholly) on the basis of testimony, does one have a justification from other sources?
 - **Global Justification Question (GJQ):**
Could one fashion an *overall* justification of the *entire set T* of the propositions one believes, or originally believed, on the basis of testimony?
 - The *conjunction* of all propositions in T.
 - The *collection* of beliefs in T (individually).
- Hume seemed to think that at least one of these questions should be answered in the affirmative.

Testimony VIII

Non-testimonial support for testimony-based beliefs II

- Example:
 - Consider a radio news program announcing an earthquake in Indonesia (on the basis of which I come to believe the *p* in question). I have — though I may never have articulated it — a sense of the track record of the network in question and of the geological situation in Indonesia, a sense of how often errors of that kind are made, and so forth.
- Could this be a legitimate way to get non-testimonial support for my testimonial belief?
- Circularity problem? I rely on some beliefs acquired through testimony (but *that* may be *independent* of the credibility of the network).
- This won't be *conclusive* support, but it seems that it could provide non-trivial support.

Testimony VIII

Non-testimonial support for testimony-based beliefs III

- What about the *global* justification question(s)?
 - The *conjunction* of all *p* in T seems *impossible* even to *contemplate*, much less *justify*.
 - It also does not seem possible to provide non-testimonial justification for the proposition that *all* (or most) members of T are justified.
 - It does seem, however, that we can obtain non-testimonial justification for *many individual* members of T from *basic* sources.
 - *E.g.*, sometimes one person can confirm another's testimony by *observing* (perception) the scene described in the testimony.
- This is *not* true for beliefs grounded in the *basic* sources. Think about perception and memory...