Inference to the Best Explanation and the Receipt of Testimony: Testimonial Reductionism Vindicated

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ABSTRACT

I develop a local reductionist account of what is required for testimonial beliefs to be justified, and argue that human recipients of testimony typically form their beliefs in accordance with these requirements. Recipients estimate the trustworthiness of a speaker’s assertion by constructing a mini-psychological theory of her, arriving at this by inference to the best explanation, and accept what they are told only if this theory has it that the speaker is expressing her knowledge. The existence of a social norm governing assertion, the knowledge norm, is a key factor making such an explanation accessible to recipients. This local reductionism supports explanationism as a general account of the justification of empirical beliefs.

KEYWORDS. Testimony ; assertion ; social norm ; justification; inference to the best explanation/explanation

1. Explanationism and Testimonial Justification

Philosophers are perennially interested in the status of one’s everyday beliefs about one’s world, formed from perception and inference. Is one rationally justified in holding these beliefs? If so, what confers this justification? Explanationism offers a distinctive answer to this question: ‘...what justifies...the formation of any new belief ...is that the doxastic move in question ...increases the explanatory coherence of the subject’s global set of beliefs. In particular, the explanationist holds that some beliefs are ...justified by inference to the best explanation.’ (henceforth IBE) ((Lycan 2002) See also (Harman 1986), (Lipton 1991).)

Explanationism so specified is a theory in epistemic dynamics, about what justifies one in forming a new belief. But it can also be formulated as a theory in epistemic statics, about the support relations that must hold between one’s beliefs for them to be justified overall. Static and dynamic Explanationism are complementary theses, but one might plausibly hold dynamic but not static Explanationism.

1 This essay develops a talk I gave at the May 2015 Orange Beach epistemology conference, and later in Bled in June 2015. My thanks to audiences at those events for valuable comments, especially to Susanna Reinhardt, Blake Roeber, Ernie Sosa, and Brad Westlake. Sandy Goldberg read my draft and made valuable comments. Thanks above all to Ted Poston and Kevin McCain, who organized a thoroughly enjoyable and stimulating conference, and gave me valuable comments as well as exercising great patience, as editors of this volume.
Epistemically basic beliefs are justified, but not in virtue of support from other beliefs. (See (Audi 1998)). Both Static and Dynamic Explanationism can be formulated to allow basic beliefs.

**Static Explanationism:** Every empirical belief is either basic or justified in virtue of relations of explanatory coherence in which inference to the best explanation plays a central role.

**Dynamic Explanationism (DE):** All cases of justified formation of a new non-basic belief in response to an evidential input – either a new basic belief, or an experience or ‘seeming’ or some kind - are instances of IBE.

DE presupposes that IBE is itself a legitimate form of non-demonstrative inference. I adopt this presupposition. My present project is a case study which, I shall argue, supports DE. DE is to be understood as a contingent thesis, about the status of matters of epistemic justification of belief for creatures broadly like us, and in a world sufficiently like our own in its main epistemic features.

DE implies a normative and a descriptive thesis. First,

**Normative Dynamic Explanationism (NDE):** All legitimate forms of non-demonstrative inference to new beliefs from one’s present belief base plus one’s experiences or seemings are identical with, or reduce to, IBE.

Second, **Descriptive Dynamic Explanationism (DDE)** comprises two theses:

**DDE 1:** A cognitively normal adult human, in worlds broadly similar to the actual world, is often placed to make inferences to new beliefs by means of IBE–her evidence base, together with new experiences and new basic beliefs, often provides epistemic basis for such new belief formation.

**DDE 2:** When such individuals properly\(^2\) form new non-basic beliefs by general cognitive capacities they have, it is on the basis of IBE.

NDE claims that other supposed methods of non-demonstrative inference, or epistemic principles for belief formation, that do not reduce to IBE, are not legitimate. So for NDE to be tenable, it must be shown how any apparently diverse methods of non-demonstrative inference that are legitimate reduce to IBE. This is the explanationist’s tactic in relation to enumerative induction – where inductive inferences are well-founded, it is claimed, they are so in virtue of a tacit IBE. (Harman 1965), (Lipton 1991) The explanationist may also maintain that certain other supposed epistemic principles or methods are not in fact legitimate. To do so without embracing skepticism, she will need to show how the domain of beliefs in question can be acquired justifiedly without recourse to any such special principle. Our enquiry below in our case study testimony will instance this strategy.

\(^2\) Of course people sometimes form beliefs via irrational procedures such as wishful thinking. For DDE2 to be non-trivial requires we have a positive account of how people’s cognitive apparatus is designed by evolution to function; and an independent account of what are justified methods of forming beliefs. DDE maintains that these roughly coincide. It is familiar from various classic studies – e.g. of confirmation bias – that they do not do so perfectly. But this illustrates that DDE can be filled out so as to be a plausible, while non-trivial, truth.
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A constructively-minded explanationist will not want her theory to end up entailing skepticism about the justificatory status of one's empirical beliefs. Thus she will want more generally to show, regarding various domains in which humans form bodies of belief and act on them, that these beliefs can be exhibited as justified on the basis of the resources provided by explanationism. This leads her into the territory of descriptive dynamic explanationism. Rather than formulating the issues here in somewhat opaque abstract terms I will illustrate them by means of the case study that is my topic.

Testimony – the spoken or written word of another on some matter – is an indispensable source of knowledge and justified belief for each one of us in the conditions of division of epistemic skill and labour that characterize modern societies. For most of what each one of us believes, we do so only because we have trusted what we have been told – by our parents and carers, our school teachers, our friends and colleagues - or have read in a book or some other testimonial source – newspapers, radio and television, the internet. It is not possible for one now to separate out, in one’s system of empirical beliefs, those which one acquired through reliance on trusted testimony, versus those for which one had once some non-testimonial evidence. This is so because, as finitely cognitively resourced creatures, we generally operate so as to let beliefs in when the source is apparently reliable, and then keep the information thus acquired while throwing away the record of how one acquired it. (Cf. the ‘clutter-avoidance principle’ in (Harman 1986).) Moreover one’s background beliefs, including many acquired via testimony, influence and inform the content of current perceptions. This being so it would be an epistemological disaster if investigation concluded that beliefs acquired from testimony and still epistemically dependent on that source are never justified. So it is imperative that one’s general account of epistemic justification combines with one’s account of how beliefs are acquired by a recipient of testimony (a T-recipient) to yield these results:

First, that epistemically justified belief from testimony is humanly possible:

**EJTBPoss**: The nature and general epistemic circumstances of testimony, including the cognitive capacities possessed by recipients, allow for the acquisition of justified beliefs in what one is told;

Second, that in normal social conditions T-recipients frequently acquire justified belief through their receipt of testimony, hence that:

**EJTBAActual**: In normal human societies, T-recipients frequently operate the suitable cognitive mechanisms they possess, which allow for justified acquisition of T-beliefs in response to the instances of testimony that they typically encounter.

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3 More strictly, our concern is with beliefs acquired from taking the speaker's word for what she states, trusting her testimony. There are other ways in which one may justifiedly form beliefs as the upshot of witnessing testimony, but which do not instance the core process that testimony serves - which is its function in society to serve. These other ways are not cases of knowledge at second hand, epistemically dependent on the speaker’s knowledge or other positive epistemic status with respect to what she states. See Fricker (2015a).
EJTBPoss is necessary for a non-skeptical account of testimony. EJTBAActual is a vaguer and less strictly binding constraint. While it is an imperative that one’s account show how justified testimonial belief is within the reach of human capabilities it is, I suggest, an open question at the start of theorizing to what extent people are sufficiently discriminating in their receipt of testimony, so as to always and only acquire justified beliefs from that source. A crucial point here is that what precisely is required of T-recipients depends on what precisely is provided by T-givers – recipients need to be adequately discriminating in their response to the types of testimony they in fact receive, but need not be to other types they might possibly but would not easily receive. (See (Fricker 2016)).

We can now see clearly the task of the proponent of non-skeptical Dynamic Explanationism, normative and descriptive (NDE plus DDE1 and DDE2) in relation to testimony: she must show how the sole resource for non-demonstrative inference that she allows – IBE – can, conjoined with a correct account of the nature of acts of testifying, and of the capacities of speakers and recipients, account for the truth of both EJTBPoss and EJTBAActual. To do so her first task is to show how, on many occasions of aptly truthful testimony, the T-recipient has an evidential base available from which a well-supported inference to the truthfulness of the testimony, as part of the best explanation of why it was offered, can be made. This vindicates EJTBPoss. Her second task is to vindicate EJTBAActual by making a convincing case that typical recipients of testimony are cognitively equipped to make the needed explanatory inferences, and that they in general manage their doxastic response to testimony by doing so - they construct an explanation of the speaker’s utterance, why she offered her word on her topic to one, and take her word only if this explanation entails the accuracy of the testimony. My central section 3 addresses this first task for the explanationist, sections 4 and 5 then address the second task.

With this pair of tasks achieved dynamic explanationism accounts for how actual human testimonial beliefs are justified, when they are so: explanationism provides a convincing non-skeptical account of testimonial belief formation. This being so the case of testimony provides corroborative support for global dynamic explanationism, and conversely, the antecedent plausibility of global dynamic explanationism provides support for this ‘reductive’ account of testimonially justified belief. A happy coincidence of interest – coherence being a relation where justificatory support can run simultaneously in both directions - epistemic double-counting is OK!

This first project – providing support for global dynamic explanationism by showing it provides a convincing account of how humans justifiedly form new testimonial beliefs – overlaps with another that has been one main focus of discussion in regard to testimony since the publication of Coady’s classic innovatory treatment of what was up till then a neglected topic. (Coady 1992). The issue is whether a ‘reductionist’ or ‘fundamentalist’ account of justifiedness in testimonial beliefs (‘testimonial justification’) is correct. The dynamic explanationist account of testimonial justification I develop and defend below

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4 I follow Graham in using this aptly descriptive positive term rather than the negative mouthful ‘anti-reductionism’ Graham, P. (2006)
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builds on the 'local reductionist' account of testimonial justification that I developed some years ago in 'Against Gullibility' (AG). (Fricker 1994).

One’s testimonial beliefs (T-beliefs) are beliefs that were acquired via accepting as true what one was told, thereby incurring epistemic dependence on the speaker, and whose basis has not subsequently been changed or augmented by the acquisition of further confirming evidence. Reductionism about testimonial justification is the thesis that testimonial beliefs are justified in virtue of domain-general epistemic principles and methods of inference that confer epistemic justification, applied to beliefs from other sources such as perception and memory. A global reductionist account requires that one suspend belief in all one’s previously-acquired beliefs that depend epistemically on testimony, whether directly or indirectly, and reconstruct the entitlement to hold them using only such general justificatory principles and non-testimonial beliefs. A local reductionist account does not require this, but merely insists that, with regard to a fresh instance of testimony, the recipient should accept what she is told as true and form belief through trusting the speaker regarding her utterance only if she has a sufficient, and sufficiently independent empirical basis to believe this speaker’s testimony on this occasion about this topic to be trustworthy. This local reductionism is what Lipton calls a ‘rule-reductionism’: one’s entitlement to accept a fresh instance of testimony is exhibited as holding in virtue of general principles of non-demonstrative empirical inference, applied to one’s background of independently available evidence (Lipton 1998). It is a tricky matter to give a more specific account of what constitutes enough confirmatory independence to avoid epistemic circularity in this empirical basis to trust the speaker. Clearly if someone tells one ‘I am very trustworthy’, and one accepts this as true, this past accepted testimony does not, intuitively, give one non-circular warrant to trust the next thing the speaker says. But I am confident there is in practice a range of rationally discriminating doxastic response to fresh instances of testimony to be found somewhere between the one extreme of unattainable global reductionism and the other extreme of uncritical acceptance of whatever one is told. My present concern is with epistemic dynamics and so the question in virtue of what one’s entire belief system, with its unredeemed global dependence on past trusted testimony, qualifies as justified is not urgent for my current dual-purpose project: first, to vindicate dynamic explanationism by showing it can give a non-skeptical account of the justified acquisition of new testimonial beliefs by ordinary recipients in their customary social circumstances; second, in doing so, to vindicate a local reductionist account of testimonial warrant, and see off fundamentalism.

One way in which testimonial justification would be fundamental, is if T-beliefs were themselves epistemically basic beliefs – beliefs that are justified, and not in virtue of support from other beliefs. This option has not been seriously advocated in the literature, with the exception of Tyler Burge’s writings, which

5 Both the terms ‘global’ versus ‘local’ reduction, and the theoretical distinction they label, were introduced in Fricker 1994. Lipton (1998) makes a similar distinction between ‘premiss-reductive’ versus ‘rule-reductive’ accounts of testimony.
can seem to suggest this (Burge 1993). Writers investigating the epistemology of testimony, myself included, have assumed that a T-recipient’s position can be modeled thus: she knows that she has observed a certain audience-directed speech act, a telling; the central epistemological question is what licenses her in inferring from this epistemic given to belief in the proposition thereby asserted. This model assumes first, that T-beliefs are not basic; second, that beliefs about the content and force of the understood speech act, call them U-beliefs, are typically epistemically basic.7

Sadly space does not permit me here to give a full defence explaining why T-beliefs are not basic, and so I content myself with two remarks. First, one must distinguish between a belief’s being normatively inferential, versus it being formed by a real-time conscious psychological process of inference. The latter is not required for the former. Thus the undeniable fact that on many occasions a T-recipient may just straightforwardly form belief in what she is told is consistent with holding T-beliefs to be normatively inferential. This epistemic status is a matter of what justification she needs to be able to offer for her belief if challenged, not of the phenomenology of its formation. Second, the deep reason why it is right to see everyday perceptual beliefs, but not T-beliefs, as basic, is to do with a contrast in the manner in which a certain state of affairs is present to a subject’s consciousness when she on one hand sees that something is the case; and on the other enjoys the kind of representation of a state of affairs distinctive of grasping the truth condition of an assertoric utterance. It is right to regard U-beliefs as basic precisely because understanding an utterance – grasping its content and force – is a special sui generis type of representational state, a quasi-perception of this content and force. But this quasi-perception of content and force is not at all like a perceptual experience of the state of affairs which is its truth condition.8

Once treating T-beliefs as basic beliefs is ruled out fundamentalism about testimonial justification assumes the form of this thesis: the denial of rule-reductionism. It amounts to the positing of an epistemic principle along these lines:

**Fundamentalist Acceptance Principle (FAP):** A recipient of testimony is entitled to accept as true what she is told, trusting the speaker’s word on his topic, so long as this entitlement to trust is not overridden by other beliefs of hers that defeat the presumption of trustworthiness of the speaker with respect to her utterance.9

Hume famously observed that there is ‘no a priori connection between testimony and reality’ (Hume 1975). Lipton (Lipton 1998) aptly interprets Hume as meaning by this simply that ‘says P does not entail P’ – there is no contradiction in supposing, of any instance of testimony, that what is said is false (barring

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6 (Some writers hold it crucial whether she herself is the intended audience. (See (Hinchman 2005, McMyler 2011) My own view is that this makes no essential difference to her epistemic position. See (Fricker 2006))
7 (For a defence of this view see (Fricker 2003))
8 See (Fricker 2003), (Fricker 2006).
9 Burge’s ‘Acceptance Principle’ is such a fundamentalist principle. (Burge (1993). Other fundamentalists about testimony include Welbourne (1986), Coady (1992).
certain peculiar propositions for which the fact of its assertion suffices to render true what is asserted). More than this, everyday knowledge of human nature reveals how easily there can be, and often is, false testimony. Humans are entirely psychologically capable of lying, making assertions with deliberate deceptive intent, and there is very often motive for one person to mislead another (see (Sperber 2010). And deceptive intent is not the only risk for false testimony. Honest error, whether due to bad epistemic luck or simply to carelessness by a speaker in belief formation and in what he offers his word on, also poses an endemic risk to the accuracy of testimony.

This being so there is indeed no a priori link between the observed fact of someone’s telling one that P, and P. Instead there is a significant possibility of false assertion. So how is a T-recipient confronted with a telling that P to respond? Specifically, what epistemically justified route is available to her from the fact that she has been told that P to accepting as true P? Fundamentalists bridge this evidential chasm with a dedicated epistemic principle, FAP. Their motivating intuition is that there is something special about testimony that makes it epistemically justified to respond to encountered testimony by accepting it as true, unless one has clear doxastic defeaters, despite the significant possibility of false testimony.

A local reductionist in contrast maintains that one is justified in accepting what one is told on some occasion only if one has sufficient empirical grounds, on that occasion, to believe the speaker to be telling the truth on that occasion – this comprising that she is neither lying, nor careless as to the truth of what she asserts, nor honestly deceived. (Antecedent grounds to believe the speaker trustworthy are not sufficient for justified trust since there must also be no contrary testimony, nor other strong counter-evidence to what is stated.)

One’s commonsense appreciation of the nature of human acts of testifying makes local reductionism the prima facie correct account of its epistemology. Why ever would one be entitled to form belief in what one is told absent any evidence of the speaker’s credentials when we all understand how easily it can happen, and all too often does happen, that a speaker lies or make an honest error? The burden of proof is on fundamentalists to make a positive case why reductionism is wrong. Fundamentalists have risen to this task and offered various distinct

10 Lipton rejects Coady’s stronger interpretation of Hume’s dictum as entailing that it is a metaphysical possibility that there be a society that has the institution of testimony and all the testimony offered in that society is false. As Lipton observes, this clearly is not possible since there will be instances of contradictory testimony – A asserts P, while B asserts not-P.

11 Ordinary language has this verb for the core case of testimony, face to face giving of one’s word through linguistically mediated assertion to an intended audience. ‘Telling’ in ordinary language also has some other uses – ‘tell me that story about the little boy who found a magic ring, again’ – but this is its core usage, and I adopt it to denote the speech act whose nature and epistemic force I am concerned to theorise.

12 I am concerned with the normative structure of evidential support for her T-belief that a T-recipient needs to have for it to be justified. My somewhat metaphorical talk of an ‘epistemic route’ invokes such a normative structure. There is no implication that the real-time psychological process through which a T-recipient forms her accepting belief in what she is told is usually a sequential process of inference that starts with a belief that she has been told something and infers to the truth of what was asserted via ancillary premises about the speaker.
arguments. This is not the place to review and rebut all the arguments that have been or might be offered for Fundamentalism.

These arguments are mostly persuasive rather than compelling. But there is one argument that, if it went through, would be compelling for anyone committed to providing an anti-skeptical account of testimonial justification. This is the transcendental argument that is central to Coady’s case for fundamentalism (Coady 1992). It goes thus: there is justified belief from testimony; on a reductionist account there could not be, since the independent empirical basis to trust testimony that reductionism requires is not available; hence reductionism is false. Coady maintains we must accept FAP as a correct epistemic principle on pain of espousing a disastrous skepticism about all of our beliefs that have epistemic dependence on testimony – which in modern conditions of division of epistemic labour is most of them. In AG I formulated and – in my view – rebutted this transcendental argument for fundamentalism about testimonial justification. I did so by showing how, on many occasions of testimony, a recipient has available to her an adequate independent empirical basis to trust the present speaker, on her present topic.

In AG I maintained that the epistemology of testimony is part of the epistemology of other minds. The epistemic means a recipient has available to assess a speaker for trustworthiness is to construct a mini-psychological interpretation of him. One should trust what he tells one just if one’s best explanation of his utterance, as afforded by this mini-theory of his psychology, entails the fact that what he states is true. In my central section 3 I elaborate the detail of such a typical folk-psychological explanation of the speaker’s act of telling revealing its truthfulness. The epistemology of testimony is indeed part of the epistemology of other minds, but it has as a further component the nature of the socio-linguistic speech act of telling. In telling that P a speaker offers his word that P to his intended audience. Correlatively, telling is aptly governed by a social norm: tell that P only if you know that P. The social-norm-constituted force of the speech act of telling enables the distinctive content-type of an IBE entailing the truth of what is told that is often available to a T-recipient. This IBE entails that what was told is so as an inference from the confirmed explanatory hypothesis that the speaker, in telling as she did, was conscientiously conforming to the social norm for telling – she knew what she stated. I thus show that the means to attain justified testimonial beliefs is often available on a local reductionist account of what this requires. In sections 4 and 5 I consider whether it is empirically plausible that actual T-recipients manage their response to received testimony via the IBE strategy described in section 3. I argue this empirical hypothesis is plausible and well-supported. The transcendental argument for Fundamentalism is thus refuted and room is made to espouse the plausible local reductionist account of testimonial justification. The local reductionist account of testimonial justification I provide is an explanationist account, corroborating the correctness of global dynamic explanationism. So I trap two philosophical birds with one argument.

Fundamentalism about testimonial justification is inconsistent with dynamic explanationism: NDE entails there are no dedicated epistemic principles such as FAP. But the denial of fundamentalism does not entail the truth of explanationism. There could be a different, non-explanationist reductive account
of testimonial justification. In the next section I examine and reject such an alternative reductionist account. The brutely-Humean account posits that one’s reliance on testimony is empirically grounded in enumerative induction from observed correlations of past instances of testimony with the obtaining of the asserted fact. I agree with Coady’s verdict that this account is untenable. Coady (1992) makes several arguments against it. I give a further, crushing argument: there are no correlations to observe between pre-theoretically available utterance types and observed situations. To identify the speech act types made, as opposed to purely phonological types, a T-recipient must engage in some psychological interpretation of the speaker, recognizing his utterance as an intentional act aimed at communication made by another thinking, socially-interacting agent. Even for these types the needed correlations will be scarce. And once one has got that far, why not go further and assess the likely truth of what is asserted with a bit more of the same psychological assessment of the speaker?

2. The Failure of Brutely Humean Reductionism

Hume states that our basis for accepting as true received testimony is the correlation we find between testimony and fact. ([1975]. But there are very different possible choices when we specify what exactly the testimonial events are with which one is to seek factual correlations.

Imagine a Martian arriving on earth and seeking to gain information about the earthly world via inference going beyond what she can observe for herself. How must she go about things to glean information from human activity? It is helpful to start with a contrast. The Martian (assume she has perceptual capacities that enable her to detect and discriminate a range of states of affairs through observation similar to those that humans can detect) might observe the activities of a type of gregarious bird. She might discover through observing correlations that birds of the flock will make a certain distinctive kind of loud call when a predator is within perceptual range of the bird (but perhaps not of other birds); and that on hearing this call all the birds simultaneously take off and fly away in a flock. The Martian, having observed this correlation, could exploit what she has observed to herself infer that a bird-predator is present, whenever she hears the distinctive bird call. She might also infer that this call is a simple communicative signal that has evolved within bird ecology to function as a warning call, and serves to help the flock avoid being killed and eaten by predators. But she does not need to make this inference about the function of the call in order to exploit its informational value to her. She would not even need to realize that the birds are animals in order to exploit and benefit from the information carried by the bird call.

Human language is not at all like this. Consider the ways of typing human linguistic utterances that would be available to the Martian before she realises that these utterances are communicative signals: these would be confined to phonological types. At this point we must make a large assumption about Martian perceptual capacities in relation to sounds: that these are sufficiently similar to human sound-perception ‘similarity spaces’ so that the Martian can come to perceptually discriminate the same phonological types that underlie the
differences between distinct human syntactic utterance types. So: allow that the Martian comes to be able to discriminate the relevant phonological types. What informational use can she make of these? Not much. She will be unable to find any significant degree of correlation between the discriminated phonological types and types of state of affairs observable to her. This is due to two combining factors.

First, ex hypothesi, the Martian can only access pre-interpretively available phonological types - ones that can be discriminated before recognising that what is going on is communication, effected by means of a very sophisticated sign-system that also needs contextual resolution to access the intended message. But, as the scientific study of human language has made clear, phonological types have only a poor level of correlation with intentional speech act types. (Sperber and Wilson 1986, Sperber 2002). So even if speech act types correlate with types of observable states of affairs, phonological types will not as a result do so.

Second, in any case, specific speech act types will mostly fail to correlate much with specific states of affairs observable by the Martian for several cumulative reasons. As Sperber and Wilson (2002) observe, a shared language enables users successfully to convey information about an enormous and finely-discriminated range of states of affairs. Most of these will not be observable within the shared environment of speaker and listener - why tell someone about something she can see for herself already? So even if there were correlations between speech act types and states of affairs, the latter would not typically be epistemically accessible to the Martian. But there will not be much by way of such correlations. For there to be a correlation between a particular specific utterance type and a particular type of state of affairs there must be many occurrences of the utterance type. But the prior probability in human language use for any particular speech act type (by this I mean a specific force and a particular content, not broad classes of contents) of it occurring is typically very low (see Sperber and Wilson 2002).

It might seem that the claim just made, that phonological types do not correlate with states of affairs observable in the context of utterance, cannot possibly be right, since such correlations are what make it possible for a human child to learn her first language. This is indeed so, and of course there are certain settings in which such correlations are available to be picked up on, namely those in which child language learning is being enabled by adult teachers who aptly hone their utterances to this end. So a Martian who happens upon a group of carers and small children in a park will find some such correlations – e.g. between utterances of ‘duck’, and the presence of ducks. Will other conversational settings afford similar opportunities? As observed above, most adult conversation is about absent states of affairs, and is hopefully not too repetitive! - But would a Martian who found herself co-present with, say, a group of enthusiasts at a football match, commenting on the game progressing in front of them find some correlations? She would not find reliably projectible correlations without coming to grasp syntactic structure and its significance – ‘kick’ may correlate with observable kicks, but not when prefixed with ‘not’, or featuring in a conditional construction. Nor will she find projectible correlations until she comes to appreciate the sophisticated social nature of the activity, and appreciates that some utterances are jokes, not to be taken literally, that many
involve hyperbole or sarcasm, and so forth. In short, in fully sophisticated human linguistic exchange, even when the talk is about the observable scene there will not be many correlations of observable states of affairs with syntactic types, since these can effect many different types of speech act, identifiable only by a process of contextual resolution dependent on shared background information and social knowledge between speaker and intended audience.

These considerations show that there is no possibility to exploit the institution of human language use to extract fine-grained informational value from utterances without appreciating what is going on – that this is a broadly cooperative system of intentional communication by intelligent agents with beliefs and purposes. Phonological types, as occurring in language use generally, simply do not carry much information in the Dretskean sense. They are not at all like bird calls or tree rings. ((Dretske 1981). Neither do syntactic types, since what speech act they effect is highly dependent on context.13

So the brutally-Humean strategy for underwriting our basis to trust testimony does not work if the utterance types are phonological or syntactic types. Are its prospects any better if we take the types to be fully-fledged speech act types: asserting that P, for some specific proposition P? They are not.

Human linguistic communication is pervaded by context-sensitivity in determination of the specific message whose communication is intended by an assertoric linguistic act.

“An utterance is a linguistically-coded piece of evidence, so that verbal comprehension involves an element of decoding. However, the decoded linguistic meaning is merely the starting point for an inferential process that results in the attribution of a speaker’s meaning. ... the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding vastly underdetermines the speaker’s meaning. There may be ambiguities and referential ambivalences to resolve, ellipses to interpret, and other indeterminacies of explicit content to deal with. There may be implicatures to identify, illocutionary indeterminacies to resolve, metaphors and ironies to interpret. All this requires an appropriate set of contextual assumptions, which the hearer must also supply.” (Sperber and Wilson 2002, p.3)

The exact psychological mechanisms that enable T-recipients successfully to identify what exactly the speaker is trying to tell them by his assertion are a matter for psycholinguistic study. (See Sperber and Wilson 1986, 2002) It may be that fast-track interpretation of utterances is effected by ‘quick and dirty’ heuristics that get the correct answer in usual conditions.14 But for these to get it

13 “But surely, for instance, utterances of the syntactic type ‘It is raining’ carry the information that it is raining?” No: this sentence constitutes an assertion that it is raining only when not embedded in some longer construction, e.g. negation or a conditional; and when not being uttered for vowel practice, to rehearse a play, purely to annoy someone, etc. And even when it is being used literally to make an assertion, saying it is raining somewhere, contextual resolution is needed to identify where it is said to be raining.

14 For instance it is well confirmed that direction of gaze of the speaker’s eyes is tracked by infants to identify what the gazer is attending to; and also that this is used as an automatic heuristic to assign reference to demonstratives in a conversation. See (Apperly 2015)
right the net effect must be that of arriving at an interpretation of the utterance that conforms with the contextual constraints on conversation regarding fixation of reference etc., and is consistent with a plausible folk-psychological interpretation of what the speaker is up to: why she is acting to tell one just this fact on this occasion. So fast-track heuristics should be, and in normal comprehension they are, correctible by higher-level conscious deliberation sensitive to overall psychological plausibility, when they yield a counter-intuitive and incorrect result. (Sperber 2002)

All this means that in order to have the capacity successfully to identify what speech acts are made in ongoing language use, a recipient needs a lot more than just knowledge of the ‘code’ that links lexical items with conventionally associated semantic features. On any particular occasion she must have the required contextual background information and be able to deploy it correctly, and she must have a tacit grasp of the various norms and rules that govern conversation – such as the Gricean maxims of relevance etc. (Grice 1989). On top of all this, or as part of it, she must have sufficient grasp of ‘theory of mind’, folk psychology, to be able to construct a mini psychological theory of the speaker sufficient to identify what she is likely to be saying in the context, and given the beliefs and purposes ascribed in this mini-theory.

This fact already suggests IBE-reductionism as preferable to Humean reductionism. If one has to construct a psychological interpretation of the speaker, or stand ready to do so, simply to find out what she is saying, then why not do a bit more of the same, and evaluate whether what she says is likely to be true by reference to her motives and competences as posited in one’s psychological mini-theory of her?

In fact evaluating the likelihood that what a speaker tells one is true by the method of constructing a psychological mini-theory of her is the only method widely available to T-recipients. We saw that phonological and syntactic utterance types do not carry much information. But, as our considerations showed, neither do specific assertoric speech act types. A research project setting out to discover whether there are significant correlations between various specific types of assertions and certain states of affairs, would struggle to get started due simply to the lack of incidence of the speech act type, for most assertible contents. As already noted, most speech act types have very low probability of occurrence. True, there may be a limited range of assertoric speech acts that are made quite often, and one could establish how strongly these correlate with what is asserted. Assertions that it is raining would likely be amongst these. So the situation is not as hopeless as it was with phonological types. But – here one can agree with Coady’s pioneering critique of Hume – the evidential base is not going to be enough to establish, for most possible speech act types, that their occurrence correlates with the states of affairs therein asserted to obtain. (Coady 1992) I conclude that our second kind of Humean reductionism, which seeks to ground acceptance of testimony on some topic in the fact that in the past testimony on that topic has correlated with what is asserted, i.e. has been true, founders for lack of an adequate evidential base.

Maybe we have not yet found the best way to explicate Humean reductionism. The problem, we just saw, with specific assertoric utterance types is that there
are not enough instances of them to provide an empirical base to look for correlations. Maybe we need to consider a less brutal version of broadly Humean reductionism. Suppose instead we take broad classes of speech act, such that these do occur frequently, and see how these do for accuracy. For instance: everything Joshua tells me. Coady has already argued effectively against there being an adequate evidential basis for establishing the reliability of testimony through such broader classes of speech act types: maybe one can gather enough instances for a trial, but there are not enough cases where one can independently confirm their truth or falsity to carry it through. Also note that, in this case, one is not confirming correlation with any one type of state of affairs, the correlandum is just the artificial one: whatever the truth-condition of said utterance is.

In AG I maintained that establishing the general reliability or otherwise of testimony, or even of various broad classes of testimony, is irrelevant to the question: should I trust this speaker on this topic on this occasion? What matters for this is not the statistical reliability or otherwise of testimony as a general category\textsuperscript{15}, but whether this speaker is honest and competent on her topic. Now a speaker’s track record on a topic can play an evidential role here. Suppose that all the things that Josh has told me on many past occasions about how cars work and how to repair them have been subsequently independently confirmed to me as true. This surely can justify me in expecting what he next tells me about cars also to be accurate. So is there not some truth to broadly Humean reductionism? Not really. Josh’s track record of accuracy about all things mechanical is projectible to future cases only insofar as it is evidence of relevant characteristics of Josh - that he is both honest, and knowledgeable about all matters mechanical. Evidence from track-record can help empirically to ground trust in a specific person’s testimony about some topic. But this method does not contrast with grounding trust in testimony via an assessment of the speaker’s psychology - it is a part of it. It is only because, and to the extent that, I infer Josh’s past flawless track record to be grounded in his character and expertise, that I have a basis to extrapolate it to future occasions on which he tells me things about cars. If instead I knew that in the past he got everything right because his boss told him it all, and this boss has now left, then I would have no basis to be confident in the accuracy of his future assertions about what is needed to repair my car. For all I know he is totally incompetent left on his own to make a diagnosis.

The first moral of this section is that one cannot extract much information at all out of human communicative language-use without recognizing it as what it is, intentional sharing of knowledge -or sometimes, intentional deception. And there is a second moral.

Distinguishing brutally-Humean reductionism from my explanationist local reductionism is crucial to avoid reductionism about testimony getting a bad press, and fundamentalism thereby gaining spurious currency. Reductionism is sometimes accused of failing to recognise speakers as what they are, agents acting intentionally to communicate, instead treating their testimony merely as a

\textsuperscript{15} As I maintained in AG, testimony in general, with no restriction on type of subject matter or speaker, as regards its likely truth is not an epistemically unitary projectible category at all.
particular kind of natural sign or evidence. This is true of brutally Humean reductionism, which we have shown to fail precisely due to this feature. It is the very opposite of the truth about the explanationist local reductionism I set out in the next section.

My explanationist reductionism does not neglect, but absolutely highlights and invokes, the fact that there is a difference of metaphysical kind between the intentional communicative acts of testifiers, persons aiming to share their knowledge with others (or to mislead them); versus mere instruments such as fuel gauges, and natural signs such as the rings of a tree indicating its age. My account shows how this metaphysical difference between mere non-intentional ‘natural meaning’ versus Gricean (Grice 1957) ‘non-natural’ or, as I prefer to call it, agential meaning, translates into an epistemic difference of kind in the means by which we may come to know things through accepting the offered word of others, as opposed to relying on the non-volitional correlations found in nature, and in instruments. It also puts the nature of the norm-governed socio-linguistic transaction between a teller and her audience, two people cooperatively interacting, at the centre of the epistemology. Humean reductionism might aptly be accused of failing to see others as persons offering their word, instead treating them merely as bits of the natural world that happen to make noises carrying information.16 My explanationist reductionism rests on the very opposite. It is through one’s appreciation of acts of intentional communication by other cooperating agents as being just that, that one is able to learn from them; but in a manner that involves apt empirically-based discrimination between trustworthy and untrustworthy such acts.17

My account shows how one can obtain information from others’ assertoric utterances aimed at informing an intended audience, in an empirically-backed, suitably discriminating fashion. One does this not by ignoring the speaker’s nature as an intelligent cooperating agent, but on the contrary by appreciating and exploiting that fact to gain the information she offers one. My account also shows that treating speakers with respect as what they are, intelligent agents offering their word on some topic, does not entail that one must take their word for what they tell one as an empirically ungrounded act of faith. A T-recipient often has available to her empirical evidence of the speaker’s epistemic competence on her topic and good will in making her honest utterance. This gives empirical basis to trust her regarding her telling.18 Where there is such evidence of a speaker’s relevant moral and intellectual virtue there is ground to

16 I think much of the discussion as to whether testimony is ‘evidence’ involves confusion over this issue. My explanationist local reductionism sees apt doxastic response to testimony as based in evidence as to the speaker’s trustworthiness, a broadly psychological feature of an intelligent agent. This does not entail neglecting his status as an intelligent agent, or of his act as intentional norm-governed interpersonal communication. It affords empirical grounds regarding his motives and capacities, giving a basis in his intentional psychology to accept his word on the matter; not to ignore the fact that his act is an intentional offering of his word.
17 Moran (2006) explores this contrast.
18 In Fricker (2016) I give an analytic account of trust. This shows that the idea that trust, to be such, must be empirically ungrounded, resting only on epistemic faith, rests on a conceptual confusion. Rational trust is based in an empirically-grounded estimation of the trustee as worthy of trust.
trust her. Where the evidence is of ill will or incompetence there is not. Being distrustful of a particular speaker’s utterance does not issue from a failure to recognize her status as an agent acting intentionally, but on the contrary from a recognition of this, and of the specific motives that the epistemically best available psychological interpretation of her ascribes.

3. Explanationist Reductionism: The Inference from Trustworthiness

How should a T-recipient manage her doxastic response to testimony? Well, where does she start from? When responding to testimony from a trusted friend one may immediately and effortlessly understand her speech act, and equally effortlessly and immediately add the information shared into one’s stock of beliefs, perhaps at once adjusting one’s course of action in light of it. In such a situation one may not, as it were, bother to pause to form an explicit belief that, say, Sara has told one that the lecture venue has changed. One apprehends the content and force of her utterance, and this transmits smoothly and directly into laying down of a belief in the told fact. But this instant smooth phenomenology of immediate belief formation is consistent with the thesis that T-beliefs are normatively inferential. The latter requires not that T-beliefs are formed by a real-time process of conscious deliberation about the likely trustworthiness of the speaker’s testimony with positive conclusion, before it is accepted; but only that supporting justificatory beliefs about this must be available to support the acceptance of the testimony, if challenged. I will also argue in section 4 that such beliefs are present in the recipient’s cognitive background, switching her into acceptance mode, when this kind of smooth laying down of T-belief in response to testimony is ongoing.

Central in the needed support of any newly acquired T-belief is this explanation of how the recipient came to know the fact in question: I was told it. So belief about the content and force of the speech act must always be able to be formed, even if, when there is no challenge, it is not actualized. I think it is very plausible that any normal adult forming belief in response to testimony is epistemically and cognitively placed to form such a belief. If she could not, then her own new belief would be absurd to her – she would have no explanation of how she came to believe it, cogent in the context of her general theory of the world and her own means of epistemic access to it; and it would be hard for the belief to survive this realization.19

Beliefs about what speech act was made – U-beliefs - are basic beliefs. When, as is usual, the hearer achieves effortless, phenomenally immediate comprehension of the content and force of the heard utterance, she enjoys a distinctive kind of phenomenal state: she hears its meaning, its truth-conditional content, in the utterance itself. She enjoys a quasi-perception of its meaning. Her U-belief, if

19 It is important to remember that we are considering how new beliefs are formed and made sense of, epistemically supported, at that time. Of course we humans are built to then discard information about how we came by the belief, once it is established.
formed, is grounded in this quasi-perception, and is justified in virtue of it. (See Fricker 2003.)

There is a tension to be resolved between the thesis that U-beliefs are basic beliefs, and the point noted earlier, that to arrive at correct understanding the hearer must deploy processes that utilize information about context in accordance with principles of relevance etc., and that make sense of the utterance in relation to the speaker’s postulated psychology. The tension is resolved by noting that, when understanding is achieved effortlessly, these processes are deployed automatically at a pre-attentional level, and the conscious result is a phenomenally ‘given’ quasi-perception of the computed content and force. When understanding cannot be so achieved, conscious puzzling out of, say, which item the speaker was referring to, deploying principles of conversational relevance, is carried out via conscious attention. This is consistent with U-beliefs being, in the usual case, basic beliefs; but defeasible by contrary information. Language use would not be possible without the effortless phenomenology that goes with basicness of U-beliefs. (See Fricker 2003)

In considering how a T-recipient should manage her doxastic response to received testimony we may thus assume she starts from the epistemic given: ‘I have been told that P’. Our question is what normative route is available to her from this U-belief to justified acceptance of what she is told in that speech act. Or to put it non-metaphorically: what other beliefs are needed for justified acceptance of what she has been told?

The fundamentalist reply to this question is: nothing – the belief that she has been told is sufficient. The fundamentalist must acknowledge that a T-recipient who trusts what she is told is thereby rationally committed to holding also that the speaker was honest and competent on her topic. But on the fundamentalist view she is entitled to assume these facts about the speaker on no evidence, in the absence of defeaters. While these are commitments of her acceptance of the testimony, evidenced belief in them does not play a positive role in supporting her belief. The burden of this paper is to show that we do not need to espouse fundamentalism to explain how justified T-beliefs are often available to speakers, and to offer an alternative explanationist account of how this is so. This is offered as preferable to fundamentalism on various grounds, including the fact that it coheres with global dynamic explanationism, an independently plausible account of how human empirical beliefs are justified.

In the previous section we examined and rejected the view that an empirical basis to accept what she is told is often provided to a T-recipient by means of enumerative induction from observed past regularities: correlation of past instances of certain types of testimony with the obtaining of what is asserted to

\[20\] There are important details here which I gloss over due to space constraints in this discussion. All the recipient is rationally committed to by her acceptance of the testimony is that the speaker spoke truth. But the usual basis for this being so is that she spoke honestly and out of competence. See Fricker 2016.

\[21\] I do not attempt to offer a full refutation of fundamentalism in this paper. This would involve expounding and countering various other persuasive arguments for fundamentalism.
be so in that testimony. We acknowledged that a good track record on a certain topic by a particular testifier is an empirical basis sometimes available to trust fresh tellings by her on that topic. But, we noted, this regularity in accuracy of past testimony is only projectible to future instances when it serves as evidence of the speaker’s relevant psychological and character traits: evidence that she is knowledgeable about that kind of matter and also honest. This being so, the fact that a good track record can justify reliance on someone’s testimony does not count against but supports the general theory set out in the rest of this paper.

I shall argue first, that ordinary human T-recipients both can and do manage their receipt of testimony by empirically-based assessment of speakers for honesty and competence about their topic; second, that this is effected by means of the construction of a fragment of a psychological interpretation of the speaker; and third, that this exercise in ‘mind-reading’ is an instance of IBE. In this section I argue first, that ordinary T-recipients possess the general cognitive capacities needed aptly to infer this sort of psychological interpretation of the speaker; second, that they often have access to enough suitable evidence to deploy this method to achieve a correct and well evidenced explanation of why the speaker told one what she did. In section 4 I review the broadly empirical case to think that T-recipients usually do in this manner monitor speakers for trustworthiness, and conclude there are good reasons to think they do. All this being so, the case of testimony supports global dynamic explanationism, while GDE in turn supports my explanationist reductionism about testimony.

My present account builds on ideas I first put forward in AG. The new feature is my emphasis on the nature of the speech act of telling, in particular the fact that it is governed by a social norm: Tell that P only if you know that P. This social fact, I argue, affords the primary basis to expect a speaker to tell one things only if she is honest and competent – only if she knows what she is talking about. I now spell out how this works in detail.

It is useful to define a property of testifiers:

\textbf{Trus}(T, P, O, R): A testifier T is trustworthy with respect to a proposition P on occasion O as regards an intended audience R just if she has this property: not easily would T tell R that P on O unless she knew that P.

A T-recipient has an epistemic route to justified acceptance of what she is told if she has a basis to know these two premisses: ‘T told me that P’, and ‘Not easily would T tell me that P on this occasion unless he knew P’. These two premises allow a highly probable inference to: ‘T knows that P’, from which it is an obvious entailment to: ‘P’. Our definition of trustworthiness captures the property of the testifier invoked in the second key premiss in this basis for trusting a speaker. Let us call this inference to the truth of what is told the \textbf{inference from trustworthiness}. The inference from trustworthiness is not the only possible basis on which one can infer to the truth of what is asserted by a speaker on an occasion. But it is the usual way, and the way such that testimony as a social
institution for the transfer of knowledge has evolved, and persists, because it serves it. See (Fricker 2015)\textsuperscript{22}

In what follows I will show how deployment of everyday folk psychological understanding and knowledge of others, including everyday social knowledge about the nature of speech acts and communicative practices, often renders a T-recipient placed to know the relevant instance of the key second premiss, that the person telling her something is trustworthy with respect to her current telling. So she is evidentially equipped to make the inference from trustworthiness. The inference from trustworthiness to the truth of what is told is a case of IBE employing folk psychology. Trustworthiness is a character property of the testifier (albeit not always a stable one), and establishing that he has this property enables one to infer that the correct explanation of why he said what he did includes the fact that he knows what he asserted. In favourable cases this explanation is both correct, and well-evidenced for the recipient by her relevant social and personal knowledge. Thus we see how explanationism can supply a positive account of how justified belief can be and often is obtained from testimony.

A T-recipient accepts a speaker’s testimony when she forms belief in what the speaker tells on his say-so – she takes his word for it that P. It is apt to describe this as trusting the speaker with respect to his utterance. Why so? Because, when I take your word for it that P, I rely on you to have told me what you know (not deceived me or erred through epistemic carelessness), in virtue of relevant epistemic and character virtues of yours. But trust is to be distinguished from what I call epistemic faith – belief in or reliance on some fact in the absence of evidence that it obtains. One should not trust a speaker with respect to his assertion unless one has good evidence of his trustworthiness regarding it.\textsuperscript{23}

The thesis that T-recipients have the general cognitive capacities required to construct an explanation of a testifier’s utterance invoking her motives and beliefs is not controversial. This is an exercise is ‘mind-reading’, ascribing mental states to others that explain their observed actions, and all cognitively normal humans can do this to some extent. I next illustrate one way in which we can get knowledge about the world from observing others’ non-communicative actions, via constructing explanations of them in terms of motives and beliefs; and will then contrast this with how one is able to learn from another’s acts of testifying, telling one things.

We all – cognitively normal adult humans – are to some extent masters of ‘mind reading’, the deployment of folk psychology (FP) to ascribe beliefs and motives to others. We have at least a tacit appreciation of how beliefs and desires

\textsuperscript{22} Trustworthiness as defined is not an esoteric concept. It features in ordinary T-recipients’ evaluations of whom to trust – ‘T told me, and she would not do so unless she knew’ is exactly the kind of justification someone might offer for having trusted T’s testimony.

\textsuperscript{23} (See (Fricker 2014), (Fricker 2016) for my analytic account of trust that explains how it relates to reliance, and contrasts it with epistemic faith. See (Fricker 2015) for my full account of the speech act of telling, and different possible responses to it.
produce action: intentional action is the pursuit of one’s most pressing desire or goal, the apt action being selected in the light of one’s beliefs. Schematically:

**Rational Action Schema:** If A wants that P, and believes by phi-ing she can bring about P, then A has a (defeasible) reason R to phi; and if R is undefeated, she will do so if she is able.

Tacitly appreciating this schema of rational action, by deploying it we often impute beliefs and desires to others. Consider this example:

COAT: I see you reach for your warm coat before leaving, and infer that you believe it is cold outside, and wish to stay warm on your walk. In ascribing to you the belief that it is cold, and the desire to stay warm, to explain your action, I somehow infer to the correct and best-evidenced explanation of your action.

Clearly an extensive background of facts about what are normal human desires and beliefs, and other folk-psychological, social and environmental knowledge is required, to select this particular rationalization as the best explanation out of an enormous number of possibilities consistent with the Rational Action Schema. That Schema itself is a deeply embedded platitude of folk psychology.

Having come to know by means of a cognitive process equivalent in its outcome to IBE that you believe that it is cold outside, I may further infer, again via an IBE regarding your mental states, that your belief is very probably knowledge. What best explains why you believe that is it cold outside? Answer: that you have by some means come to know this. A non-knowledgeable belief would need a very different, less likely kind of explanation – for instance that you had been tricked by a practical joker who wanted you to be overdressed for the weather. But once I know that you know that P, I am epistemically equipped to come to know P myself, via an obvious entailment. COAT instances a way in which one can very frequently acquire knowledge oneself, through ascribing mental states including knowledge to others, via IBE from their observed actions to the explaining cause of this, their knowledgeable beliefs and desires.

The inference from trustworthiness to acceptance of what one is told goes via ascribing knowledge of what she tells to the speaker. So is the way one gets knowledge from accepting testimony just another instance of the mechanism described in COAT – inference to the correct explanation of another’s action by reference to established lawlike generalizations of FP? If so, then there would be

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24 More cautiously: we deploy cognitive mechanisms by some means aptly sensitive to this schema in what results they produce. See section 4.

25 So it is a datum that our actual methods of ‘mind-reading’ approximate genuine IBE in their outcomes. In the next section I defend the thesis that these mechanisms are in fact tantamount to the deployment of IBE, and can be described as such.

26 Of course there are other less outlandish explanations of a non-knowledgeable belief: you misheard the weather forecast. But knowledge, for such everyday matters, is the default explanation of belief.

27 Actually one may move directly to ascribing knowledge, not going there via the route of ascribing belief. There is a lot of evidence that knowledge is a more easily dealt with concept than belief, and is acquired earlier. See Nagel (2013). This is helpful, not harmful, to my overall argument.
nothing special about learning from what others tell us, as distinct from this broader pattern. The epistemology of testimony really would be just part of the epistemology of other minds, with possibilities for learning about the non-mental world oneself no more than a beneficial side-effect. No: there is something special and distinctive about the act of telling, and correlative of how we are able to learn from others’ testimony, as I will now show. What is special about how one can come to know things about the non-mental world from observing others’ actions of telling, addressed to oneself or another, is the detail of why precisely it is that the best explanation of S telling one that P is that she knows what she states.

We saw that brutally-Humean reductionism does not work. Looking for correlations between utterances typed in ways available to an observer who does not realize these are intentional communicative actions is hopeless. Unlike our hypothesized mechanism that signals presence of a predator among a species of birds, there are no such correlations to be found.28

Gaining information from what others tell us requires appreciating that language use is intentional action and inferring to the best explanation of this. But, you object, this is already true of COAT! Indeed it is. But, as will be revealed below, there is a further key distinction between COAT and this contrasting case:

COAT-TELLS: I am about to leave our warm apartment and go out into the night to walk to a friend’s house to deliver something she needs. You say to me: ‘It’s cold out tonight, you had better wear your coat’.

Putting on one’s coat is an action. But it is not, in itself, an action made with communicative intent.29 Telling is an action of a very special type. It is, qua type, an intentional act aimed at communication. Moreover, unlike one-off non-conventionally mediated acts of Gricean communication, as an act of communication it is a folk-socio-linguistic type regulated by a social norm.30 This last feature in particular gives rise to and allows this phenomenon:

TELLING: Someone who tells that P to an intended recipient R offers to R her word that P; she offers to R the right to believe P on her say-so.

One can marry someone by uttering suitable words only when the needed surrounding institutions are in place. Similarly, one can effects a performance with the upshot that one has offered one’s word that P to an intended recipient, thereby enabling her rightfully to rely on one’s word as to P, only when the needed institutions are in place. In the case of telling, the main institution

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28 Of course there will be some - for instance between raised volume and pitch, and emotional arousal of utterer. My thesis is that this method has no chance at all of tapping into the rich informational content that language as intentional communication in fact offers up to the fully cognitively equipped receiver, who understands what is being offered.

29 Of course putting one’s coat on could be the pre-arranged signal between myself and my co-conspirator to set off the fire alarm. Or it could be the mechanism of an entirely one-off non-conventionally mediated act of Gricean communication.

30 Fricker (2012) argues for an important contrast between these non-linguistically mediated acts, versus tellings. On social norms see (Bicchieri 2006, Graham 2015).
enabling such performances is the existence of the socio-linguistic speech act type of telling in the community of the shared language of teller and recipient. Telling is governed by this social norm:

**T-Norm:** One must: tell someone that P only if one is epistemically so placed as to properly guarantee to them the truth of P.

In telling that P one gives one’s word that P to one’s intended audience, enabling them properly to rely on it. It is coeval with this fact that telling, in a community that contains this socio-linguistic type, is governed by the T-norm. That the T-norm is a social norm in a community C does not require explicit knowledge of the norm by participants in C. What matters is that it is tacitly appreciated, so that sensitivity to it influences their responses to tellings by others and controls their own tellings. For tellings in all but some unusual contexts\(^\text{(31)}\) this T-norm equates with the norm:

**K-Norm:** One must: tell someone that P only if one oneself knows that P.\(^\text{(32)}\)

Exploiting this institution of telling, a teller is able intentionally to undertake a performance by means of which she renders herself responsible, to her intended audience, for the truth of what she asserts in her utterance to be so.\(^\text{(33)}\) Telling is a performative act-type which, like promising, creates an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. The occurrence of an act of telling adds to the normative landscape. It has the upshot that the teller binds herself, giving her word that P to her intended audience. By her act of telling she renders herself responsible for the truth of P to her audience. The ‘bottom line’ of this responsibility is that she can be criticised and complained to if what she tells is not something she can properly vouch for the truth of - that is, she does not know it. In some circumstances more serious sanctions result from norm-violating tellings, the offence of perjury being the strongest.

We have articulated this dual fact about telling: it is intentional communication; and it is governed by the K-norm, so that the teller is answerable to her audience for the truth of what she tells. This dual fact is essential to the specifics of a type of explanation that is very often correct, of why someone told something to someone – an explanation that is, moreover, often epistemically accessible from the recipient’s standpoint. Consider again our example COAT. Suppose it is not cold tonight, and you never thought it was, but you needed to take your coat with you because it was likely to be cold tomorrow, and so you wore it as the easiest way to carry it even though you knew you would be too hot. So I made a mistake in inferring from your putting on your coat to its being cold, via the hypothesis that you knew it was cold. This was bad luck for me. But I have no basis to complain to you. You did not mislead me by putting your coat on in my presence. You had no communicative intentions at all in doing so. I made an over-ambitious inference, and have only myself to take to task for it.

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\(^{32}\) Contextualism about standards for knowing messes this up. This is a powerful argument against it. Our T-practices are inconsistent with it, which shows it to be false as a descriptive account of our ordinary language concept ‘knows’.

\(^{33}\) See Fricker 2015 for a fuller account.
In contrast if, as in COAT-TELLS, you say to me: ‘It is going to be cold tonight, you had better wear your coat’, and it is not cold at all – then I have a basis for complaint. Certainly I can complain to you, and about you, if you lied. But I can also complain if you were sincere, but had jumped to a conclusion about the temperature on inadequate evidence. Part of conscientious conforming to the K-Norm for telling is that one must be epistemically conscientious – at least, one must be so as regards the things one tells to others. One must do one’s best to keep an accurate check on what one does and does not know, and only tell people things one knows. It is not just lying, but epistemic carelessness, that the social K-Norm sanctions.

In both COAT and COAT-TELLS folk psychological knowledge is deployed to ascribe motives and knowledge that explain action. But a further feature sets COAT-TELLS apart from COAT and other cases where one infers from someone’s observed action to an item of their knowledge, but where this action was not aimed at communication. The further feature is our dual-fact about telling: it is an intentional communicative act governed by the K-Norm, and hence with the normative upshot noted – the speaker renders herself responsible for the truth of what she asserted to her intended audience. What difference does this dual fact make to the IBE that is sometimes available from the fact that A has told that P to the truth of P?

As we have seen, a T-recipient will typically justify her belief in what she is told via the inference from trustworthiness: ‘S told me that P, and not easily would he do so unless he knew that P; so P.’ How is a T-recipient often able to know, have adequate grounds to believe, that a speaker is trustworthy with respect to his utterance? When someone tells one something one can deploy one’s psychological knowledge – both general and about that particular person – to form an explanation of why he was motivated to do so. There will be specifics in particular cases. There are also general precepts, such as the Gricean norms of conversation, (Grice 1989). And even if one does not have a positive theory about precisely why someone was motivated to tell one something one can, even so, often know that he is very probably trustworthy as regards his utterance. One can often know this due to the holding of the K-norm.

Tellings are regulated by the social norm ‘tell that P only if you know that P’, and so it features as the default stance in one’s explanation of a speaker’s telling, that he satisfies this norm. One needs only to rule out the various ways in which the norm may be violated, to have grounds to expect the speaker to be trustworthy as regards his utterance. This itself requires doing some psychology. The epistemically vigilant T-recipient must construct a fragment of an explanation of why the speaker made his utterance, enough to be sure that whatever in fact led him to say what he did, the explanation rules out the speaker’s violating the K-norm. That is to say it rules out epistemic-cum-assertoric carelessness, bad

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34 This covers both carelessness in formation of beliefs, leading one to fail to know that one does not know something, and carelessness in speaking, failing to regulate one’s tellings to state only what one believes oneself to know. This includes what is now sometimes unattractively described as ‘bullshitting’.
epistemic luck, or a deceptive intent. Whatever the full positive explanation is, so long as these three ways in which the K-norm may be violated are ruled out by one’s theory of the speaker and his circumstances, then it is safe to infer trustworthiness and to accept what one is told.

In short: because the K-norm holds as a social norm governing tellings, one can safely infer that a particular telling is trustworthy, so long as the several particular manners of violation of it have been ruled out. Thus the holding of the K-norm as a social norm sanctioning non-knowledgeable tellings plays an essential role in the empirical basis often available to a T-recipient to expect the speaker to be trustworthy as regards his utterance.

This point is reinforced by a contrast. Suppose someone utters the words: ‘I wonder whether P’. Does this type of utterance, as a rule, give its audience any basis to accept as true P? Of course it does not. Expressing one’s wondering whether P is not subject to the K-norm, nor any similar epistemic norm. So the fact that someone has expressed their wondering about P has no epistemic significance. There is normally no reason at all to expect someone S to have the property: Not easily would S wonder whether P, unless P. But when someone tells that P, this does have epistemic significance, because the sanction of the K-norm means that, special circumstances such as deceptive intent or chronic epistemic carelessness aside, one does not easily tell that P unless one knows that P.

A certain regularity in behavior that is ongoing in a community C reflects a social norm obtaining in C just if violations of this regularity are sanctioned by participants, and these sanctions maintain the regularity. Sanctions include the external sanctions of disapproval and sometimes further punishments, plus the internal sanction of conscience. A social norm does not exist in C unless the sanctions are sufficiently motivating to ensure conformity to the norm, except in situations where there is an even stronger motivation to violate it.\(^\text{35}\)

This is why conformity to the K-Norm is the default stance in explaining a teller’s utterance. This default stance is overridden, in inferring the best explanation of the speaker’s utterance, when circumstances indicate he has a motive to lie, or indicate he may have been misinformed or misled, or when his reputation based on track record is for epistemic carelessness. There are many likely human motivations to lie, on many occasions, and all of us are subject to bad epistemic luck, or lack of vigilance, from time to time. So the default stance of trustworthiness needs empirical work to vindicate it, and will often be overridden. But the fact that in telling one that P a speaker assumes to one responsibility for the truth of P, and that there is a social norm sanctioning doing this when one is not properly placed for it, gives prima facie reason to expect a speaker – so long as he has no motive in the circumstances to deceive - to be trustworthy, allowing the inference from trustworthiness to the truth of what he tells.

\(^{35}\) Compare: it is against the law in the UK to drive a car at above 70mph. But this law is widely disregarded by the vast majority of drivers, with no disapproval from other drivers. It is the law, but it is not a social norm.
We have set out how our dual fact about the speech act of telling underwrites the possibility of a distinctive kind of inference to the best explanation from the fact of being told something to the truth of what one is told, via the ascription of trustworthiness to the speaker. Moreover this special kind of explanation of the speaker’s action that exists, when it is a telling, is often epistemically accessible to a recipient. Thus she is placed to know, and to supply, this justification for accepting what she was told: ‘S told me that P, and he would not have done so unless he knew.’

The reader I hope has been convinced by the first part of my thesis here: that there is a distinct style of explanation for tellings due to the dual fact. But more needs to be said, to vindicate my claim that such an inference to the truth of what was told via the hypothesis of trustworthiness is often epistemically accessible to T-recipients. I have explained above why the default stance is for trustworthiness – it can be ascribed, in the absence of evidence indicating a source of norm-violation. But given the many human motives and risks for violation, there needs to be an empirical basis for detecting motives and tendencies for norm-violation, and for checking that these trust-defeating circumstances are absent, when they are. I have written elsewhere about the empirical grounds often available to a T-recipient to assess a speaker for trustworthiness, and space prevents more than briefly mentioning some resources available. I suggested in AG that there is a general default in favour of sincerity, as part of the principles that constrain psychological ascription generally; and, for reports of everyday facts that the speaker has witnessed, a presumption of competence. These presumptions are not a priori, but are deeply embedded principles of folk psychology. (Of course these would not be so, except in the context of our dual fact about telling. There is no default in favour of competence for wonderings.) Often one does not need personal knowledge of the individual speaker, general social knowledge about social roles and associated competences suffices – the receptionist in one’s hotel can be expected to know about what the latest checkout time is, but not about how to make the best soufflé au Grand Marnier. See (Fricker 2002)

I finish this section by dealing with two likely objections. First, has the theory just given not proved too much? Surely our dual fact about telling gives the fundamentalist exactly what she wants - an argument showing it is epistemically permissible to trust what one is told without any evidence of trustworthiness, so long as this presumption is not defeated by other beliefs one has?

This worry misunderstands the sense in which our dual fact licenses a default stance in favour of trustworthiness. This is not an entitlement to believe what one is told without engaging one’s cognitive resources in assessment of the speaker for trustworthiness, but instead a principle that constrains this project. Moreover the default stance for trustworthiness is empirically grounded in the nature of telling as socio-linguistic act. My thesis is that appreciation of the nature of telling informs a recipient’s aptly discriminating assessment. It is not that the nature of telling underwrites a special epistemic principle dispensing a T-recipient from any requirement to assess the speaker as part of the process of accepting what she tells, and from any need to appreciate the nature of telling.
The second objection pushes in the other direction: just because there is a norm in force in a community, this does not entail that one can presume it is conformed to, as one’s default interpretative stance. The remarks made above concerning the contrast between a social norm and a law provide the basis to rebut this objection. A social norm does not exist unless its sanctions are largely effective – unless they have psychological motivating force influencing what participants do, and how they react to violators. This does not entirely see off the objection, since a social norm will be violated when there are strong enough motives for violation, these overcoming the force of the internal and external sanctions against violation. So the default stance in favour of trustworthiness is an empirically backed presumption in interpretation that flows not just from the existence of the norm, but from that together with contingencies in a particular community about the effectiveness of sanctions, and the fact that violaters are likely to be found out. This theme is pursued in the next section.

I have shown how the epistemic circumstances of a recipient of knowledgeable testimony often equip her to infer to the correct explanation of the testifier’s utterance, namely that he spoke from knowledge out of a desire to share what he knows. The recipient is able to conclude this because she has evidence indicating the trustworthiness of the speaker as regards his utterance. Such an inference can be made from the available evidential base by IBE deploying general folk psychological and socio-linguistic knowledge. So I have shown that my explanationist account account satisfies our constraint JHTBPoss. In the next section I consider whether it also satisfies JHTBAActual: do ordinary T-recipients usually invest the cognitive resources to make an assessment of testifier trustworthiness and, if they do so, is the means they employ IBE?

4. Defending JHTBAActual

I have shown how a T-recipient often has available to her the evidential resources to estimate the trustworthiness as regards her telling of a speaker, through inference to the best explanation of the speaker’s utterance by reference to her motives and capacities. So justified testimonial belief is often available to a T-recipient within the constraints of DE-style local reductionism. But to show that dynamic explanationism explains how actual human T-recipients in fact often acquire justified T-beliefs, it must also be shown that actual T-recipients manage their receipt of testimony using something like the local reductionist strategy outlined. This breaks down into two questions. First, do ordinary T-recipients usually invest the cognitive resources to make an assessment of testifier trustworthiness? Second, if indeed they do so, is the means they employ IBE?

This is an empirical matter. Here I merely make some remarks in light of which JHTBAActual is plausible given the requirements of explanationist local reductionism. Remember that, unlike JHTBPoss, JHTBAActual is not a tightly binding constraint. It is not a datum that actual human practices of testimony reception, however empirical research reveals them to be, are epistemically faultless. This is extremely unlikely. Casual empiricism suggests there are endemic human tendencies to gullibility. Epistemology should show this up as
bad policy in belief formation needing improvement, not rubber-stamp it as epistemically fine. But my optimism inclines to the view that ordinary T-recipients apply an effective filter to the testimony they receive, in many circumstances. I first sketch a benign picture of human T-reception practices, and then offer an argument indicating things are approximately like that.

There is a huge contrast in how human T-recipients respond to testimony, according to the circumstances. At one extreme one just ‘drinks in’ what is being told to one and lays down belief in it. One is switched into this receptive mode when, for instance, one is listening to a BBC news broadcast on a factual topic, or listening to an account from a trusted friend of how she has just spent her day. At the other extreme one responds to testimony by thinking explicitly about whether the source is to be trusted. In these conscious reflections one will articulate and bring to bear considerations of motive and competence of the kind discussed in section 3 to answer the questions: Why is he telling me this? – What is he up to?– Is he sincere?– Does he ‘know what he talking about’? Deliberations of this kind are exercises in IBE deploying folk psychology, everyday social knowledge, and ad personam knowledge about the particular speaker.

But what about when one is unreflectively drinking in what one is told? Such phenomena need not and typically do not instance pure gullibility – that is, a recipient who would believe absolutely anything she was told, whomsoever it was that told her it. There are two ways in which drinking-in can depart from this. First, the recipient can be monitoring the T-inputs, so that if the speaker were to say something implausible this would trigger a critical reaction. This monitoring is switched on all the time, although it produces a double-take only if something unlikely interrupts the smooth acceptance of testimonial input to lay down belief (See AG). Second, the recipient may be in drinking-in mode in the first place only because this is a testifier she has good empirical basis to trust. Background beliefs about the speaker – often not about him personally, but about his social position and hence stereotypical competences and motives – function as enabling or inhibiting switches that determine the flowpath that the T-inputs take into the recipient’s cognitive organization.36

Fine, it may be objected, allow that this sort of process occurs; it does not vindicate dynamic explanationism because this pre-attentional T-filter process, while broadly adaptive, does not instance IBE. Reinforcing this worry are some results from cognitive psychology about our human capacities for mind-reading. It seems we are built sometimes to use ‘quick and dirty’ heuristics for ascribing mental states to others. These, in the situations in which they are used, approximate what genuine IBE mind-reading would result in, but via a cognitively much less costly shortcut. One example: ascription of what is seen by another, and hence what they know, is ascribed via a simple heuristic of

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36 These sub-attentional filtering processes are approximations to the evidentially most-justified conclusion, and are not always accurate. They can lead to systematic biases, which may have socially negative side-effects, including inducing systemic testimonial injustice. This phenomenon is powerfully highlighted and theorized in Fricker, M.(2007).
extrapolation from direction of gaze. If these sorts of heuristics are how humans actually assess testifiers for whether they know what they are talking about, this is surely a problem for the IBE account of section 3 – how does it fit with HJTB? Actual? I think the tension here can be eased. I emphasized earlier that portraying a belief as normatively inferential is a matter of what justifying premises a believer must be able to offer in defence of her belief, not a claim about real-time processes of belief formation. This is why it is not a problem for my explanationist local reductionism if we often ascribe mental states to others – including, on occasion, the supposed fact that a speaker knows what she is talking about – via a simple quasi-behaviourist heuristic: a rule that takes one from a certain type of observable situation directly to a particular mental state ascription. What matters, for the IBE account of testimony management is first, that T-recipients are epistemically sensitive in their belief formation to the considerations that would feature as evidence in an inference to the best explanation of the speaker’s telling. But the active-monitoring proposal above achieves this. Second, that T-recipients are able, if the matter is raised, to construct a fully-fledged folk psychological inference to the best explanation of the speaker’s utterance. And this they clearly can do, since they actually do it on some occasions.

That is the benign picture. Why should we think it actual? Here I argue by an appeal to authority. Sperber et al (2010) articulate a strongly persuasive case that human T-recipients generally engage in effective monitoring of speakers for trustworthiness. There is good reason to think they must do so, they argue, since first, while it is almost always in recipients’ interest for speakers to speak knowledgeably, speakers often have motives to deceive. But testimony would not persist as a social institution unless it was useful. It would not be useful if recipients were deceived a lot. So recipients must have, and employ, effective methods to detect untrustworthy testimony. Second, since recipients are often able to detect the falsity of false testimony, this successful ‘epistemic vigilance’ provides a motive for speakers to be trustworthy – they are likely to be caught, and sanctioned, if they are not. This postage-stamp resume does not do justice to the full case offered by Sperber et al., who provide a sort of transcendental argument-from-social-evolution for the effectiveness of testimonial monitoring by human recipients. There I must leave the matter on this occasion.

5. Two Objections Defused

Two objections are salient regarding the account of human justified T-beliefs that I have offered, which is both normative and descriptive. First, that it is descriptively too sanguine about actual humans’ management of received testimony. Second, that it is too restrictive as to what is required for someone to gain knowledge from testimony. I finish by briefly explaining and then doing something to defuse these objections.

See (Apperly 2011)

See however Shieber (2015) and Michaelian (2013) for a more pessimistic view. Fricker (2016) examines how what is required for effective filtering by a T-recipient depends on her testimonial environment, which can also be tuned and constrained to be more or less benevolent.
The account of the previous section, which claims humans generally operate an aptly discriminating\(^{39}\) response to received testimony, is at odds with this fact: on what we may call theoretical matters, as opposed to easily established observational facts, there is within human culture the wide circulation of different and mutually inconsistent views. At most one of such contrary opinions can be true, yet more than one is widely circulating, each believed by large groups of people. Almost all of these people hold these theoretical beliefs – whether about economics, about religion, about climate change, about politics, etc. – on the basis of testimony. This entails that, on theoretical topics, some testimony management is not aptly discriminating. Here I can only note a couple of pointers in the direction an explanation of this phenomenon must take.

The account of the previous sections certainly needs to be nuanced to deal with this recalcitrant datum. Either the idea that T-recipients engage in effective monitoring at all must go; or alternatively – the more plausible option I suggest – we must explain why monitoring is more effective in some subject domains than in others. As already noted, T-recipients’ ability to screen out false testimony is relative to a domain of likely T-inputs. So we must ask: is there more dishonest, or more incompetent testimony in theoretical domains? Motives for deception may be different, but seem unlikely to be more prevalent in theoretical domains: there are many likely motives for deception about personal and everyday matters. But it may be easier to effect a deception when the testimony is received through, say, the internet, rather than in a face-to-face interaction. And deception on difficult-to-establish theoretical topics is less likely to be subsequently found out through independent discovery of the falsity of what is testified to. Insofar as the fear of discovery is a motive for honesty, it may operate less powerfully on theoretical topics. The threat of sanction is less, and hence deception may be more endemic.

But I think the main contrast is more likely to be regarding competence: both its possession by testifiers, and the resources effectively to assess for it. As with deceptive intent, honest but frequently mistaken testifiers on everyday topics will tend to get found out, often very quickly. (‘You told me we had enough petrol left to get to Scotland without filling up the tank...!’) They will lose their credibility and not be trusted in future; and/or learn to be more epistemically conscientious before they give their word to others on some practically important fact. But it is much harder conclusively to establish that, say, a socially-recognised expert on the topic of global warming has empirically unjustified false beliefs. On most important large theoretical issues like this, the layperson is confronted with a bewildering array of diverse opinions from various self-styled or socially certified experts. There are two cumulative problems that obstruct the lay T-recipient in establishing who is right in these sorts of matters: the impossibility of independent checking on which preferred theory is correct, plus the difficulty of effective monitoring for competence – defined as likely correctness of opinion on the topic.

Necessarily one does not check directly for competence, if this means: truth of the proffered testimony. If one knew, independently of the testimony, whether

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\(^{39}\) Though see previous footnote.
what is told is true, one would not need to rely on the testimony regarding it. I have defined speaker trustworthiness, which incorporates competence, as the speaker’s possession of this modal property: ‘Not easily would she testify that P, unless she knew that P’. This property of a speaker is also not one that one can check for directly; one must assess for it via what are hopefully reliable proxies for its presence. Very often the best available indicators of competence are social certifications of an individual as qualified and so competent in a certain subject. For instance, one will trust a qualified doctor to diagnose the cause of one’s symptoms and recommend a suitable treatment. This suggests a general explanation for why false testimony from incompetent sources is frequently offered, and its content circulates accepted and unchallenged, in certain kinds of areas, such as political and religious belief. First, in these areas there are not reliable observable proxies for genuine competence; second, the falsity of testimony in these areas is unlikely to be discovered. (This unlikelihood of discovery is time-relative of course: future generations will find out, to their cost, whether human activities are causing global warming, with disastrous consequences for the planet!) I tentatively conclude that the datum that contrary testimony on many theoretical topics circulates widely does not put in doubt my account of effective monitoring by T-recipient of testimony on everyday topics, where competence is more able to be assessed, and lying is likely to be quickly discovered.

Our first objection was that our account is too optimistic about the effectiveness of human filtering out of non-knowledgeable testimony. The second objection pushes in the other direction: that it is too stringent in what it requires of T-recipient, in order for them to get knowledge from accepting what they are told. An ideal T-filtering process would be tuned to ‘let in’ all and only tellings made by knowledgeable testifiers. This ideal is clearly unattainable. How nearly it can be approximated is relative to the domain of likely testifying a recipient must be equipped to respond aptly to - that is, with apt sensitivity to whether the offered testimony is knowledgeable. What, as a recipient, one would aspire to, is to tune one’s filtering so as to let in only a few false testimonies, while not sacrificing too many opportunities to gain knowledge. We can think of an account of conditions for justified acceptance of offered testimony as articulating what makes for such an apt policy of testimony reception, the nearest approximation achievable to the ideal T-filter. In this discussion I have approached the issue within an internalist framework, looking at the type of grounds a recipient should have, when she accepts what she is told. But the idea of an aptly-tuned policy of T-reception can be spelled out also in externalist terms.

So: one has a justified T-belief just if that belief is formed via an apt general policy for T-reception. How does this relate to gaining knowledge from testimony? On the classic view justification is necessary for knowledge. But we can divorce the two distinct ideas of having, and exercising, an apt general policy, and gaining knowledge. Maria Lasonen has made this theoretically liberating suggestion in relation to understanding whether knowledge can survive the acquisition of misleading defeaters. (Lasonen-Aarnio 2009) And I have elsewhere suggested we may need to do something like this, to explain knowledge from testimony. (Fricker 2016) There is a strong intuition that if someone tells one something, expressing her knowledge, and one believes her,
one gets knowledge oneself thereby. This intuition is one driver of fundamentalism. In Fricker (2016) I suggest one gets knowledge if someone tells one something, expressing his knowledge, and one believes him with epistemic propriety, even if one’s belief fails a modal reliability test – a non-knowledgeable speaker might easily have told one something similar but false, and one would have believed him also. One gains knowledge, one gets the goods, even though one might easily have been fooled instead. So I there suggested that modal reliability may be too strong a condition on testimonial knowledge. Our review here suggests the further thought: perhaps justification, theorized as an apt general policy for T-reception, is not required to obtain knowledge from testimony on a particular occasion. Even if you should have been more wary in whom you believed about some topic, if you through luck hit upon a knowledgeable testifier, then you gained knowledge from him. If this is right, then while I have argued against fundamentalism about testimonial justification - the conditions under which one should accept what one is told as part of an apt general policy - maybe there is room for fundamentalism about how knowledge can be acquired from testimony. One should seek to avoid gullibility; but even the gullible may get knowledge when they hit a lucky streak. The fact that one would wrongly accept non-knowledgeable testimony does not mean one can never acquire knowledge from testimony, even when the speaker one believes with undiscriminating trust is a benevolent and highly competent expert expressing her knowledge.

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