

# A Virtue Theory of Testimony

There are two kinds of virtue theory in epistemology. There are those that trace their lineage to Aristotle's conception of 'intellectual virtues', where virtues are conceived as *excellences*, like the sharpness of a knife.<sup>1</sup> And those that trace their lineage to Aristotle's *Ethics*, where virtues are conceived to be like character traits – such as kindness or generosity – that are manifested in judgement and action.<sup>2</sup> Guy Axtell refers to these theories respectively as 'virtue reliabilism' and 'virtue responsibilism'.<sup>3</sup> The concern of this paper, is solely with the latter, and all references to virtue theory should be understood with this restriction. The issue this paper investigates is whether it is possible to give a virtue epistemology of testimony.

The short, if slightly cryptic, answer is that a virtue epistemological theory of testimony is possible, but not for us. However, things do not end there for virtue theory. Trust and trustworthiness, I will argue, should be regarded as ethical virtues. And trust is the epistemologically fundamental grounds for our uptake of testimony. So while we cannot model *our* epistemic engagement with testimony on virtue ethics, we can give a virtue ethical account of trust, where trust is then fundamental to the epistemology of testimony.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, one, I outline Miranda Fricker's virtue epistemology of testimony. In section two, I consider a problem for virtue ethical theories and argue that this is crippling for any attempt, such as Fricker's, to give a virtue epistemology of testimony. The problem is one of disagreement and error; and what is of interest is that Fricker is sensitive to these matters with her concern for epistemic injustice. In essence, I argue that our recognition of the phenomenon of epistemic injustice makes a virtue epistemological of testimony impossible for us. In section three, I then proceed to develop a virtue ethical theory of trust. And conclude in section four with some remarks on how epistemology and ethics interact in this domain.

## 1. Fricker's Virtue Epistemological Account

What justifies our uptake of testimony? That is, when our acceptance of a bit of testimony to  $p$  is the acquisition of the belief that  $p$ , what justifies this

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<sup>1</sup> For instance see: Sosa (1991), Goldman (1993), Greco (1993) and Sosa (2007).

<sup>2</sup> See: Zagzebski (1996) and DePaul and Zagzebski (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Axtell (2000), p.???

acceptance?<sup>4</sup> There have been two dominant answers to this question. According to one, our grounds for acceptance are all the things we believe about the testimonial situation. Acceptance is then justified because and insofar as our beliefs about the testimonial situation overall support the conclusion that the piece of testimony is true. The alternative view is that we do not need grounds to be justified in the uptake of a bit of testimony. Rather, we have a general defeasible entitlement to accept what other people tell us. The problem with these answers, Fricker observes, is that our uptake of testimony is frequently immediate and non-inferential and yet informed and supported by our background of belief. The epistemological challenge is thereby to account for these two facts, and, she suggests, virtue ethics shows how this challenge can be met.

What virtue ethics shows is how perception can deliver judgement. Take for example kindness. The kind person does not go through any calculation or appeal to principle, thinking ‘this situation is one whereby I ought to show kindness ...’. Rather, the kind person is one who is reliably sensitive to situational features that she will see as reasons for acting a certain way – a way that a third person would describe as kind. The perception of these situational features as reasons thereby delivers a judgement about what ought to be done in this situation. Thus the epistemological challenge can be met: one need merely suppose that as hearers we have a *testimonial sensibility* whose operation takes in features of the testimonial situation and results in the hearer seeing a piece of testimony as trustworthy or not. There are then five points of parallel, Fricker observes, “between the virtuous agent’s moral perceptual capacity and the virtuous hearer’s testimonial perceptual capacity”.<sup>5</sup>

First, in the testimonial situation, as in the ethical case, “the model for judgement is perceptual, and so non-inferential”.<sup>6</sup> Where this is to say that judgement “is spontaneous and unreflective; it involves no argumentation or inference”.<sup>7</sup> Of course, this judgement will be informed by the subject’s background of belief but only because this background is necessary for seeing things a certain way. By analogy: one needs to know about cars and fuel gauges to see that one needs petrol in seeing the needle nudge ‘E’, but there is no inference or reflection in this perceptual judgement. Second, in both the testimonial and ethical domains “good judgement is uncodifiable”.<sup>8</sup> The virtuous subject’s judgment is not a direct inference from a rule or generalization because no rule or generalization, or sets thereof, could adequately describe the virtuous subject’s sensitivity. Here Fricker quotes

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller definition of uptake see Faulkner (2011), pp.19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

<sup>6</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

<sup>7</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

<sup>8</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

McDowell: “If one attempted to reduce one’s conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong.”<sup>9</sup> These two points of parallel might then be put in terms of a metaphor: in being perceptual and uncodifiable, the operation of reason in the virtuous subject’s judgement is *black-boxed*.

The remaining points secure the parallel but are of less epistemological importance. Third and fourth, in both spheres “the judgement is intrinsically motivating”, and, “intrinsically reason giving”.<sup>10</sup> In the ethical case, these claims substantively define the virtue theory as a form of cognitivism. In the testimonial case, the claims are more straightforward: all that is said is that a judgement of trustworthiness gives a hearer a reason for belief and should thereby prompt testimonial uptake. Though this presupposes that trustworthiness is either factive or implies knowledge, since one could judge a speaker both sincere and justified in belief and yet not be justified in accepted what the speaker said. Finally, fifth, the judgement “typically contains an emotional aspect that is a proper part of cognition”.<sup>11</sup> Again this matters to virtue ethics: since conative states are motivating, if judgement has an emotional aspect, there is no puzzle as to how judgement itself could be motivating. Applied to the testimonial domain, the judgement of trustworthiness has an emotional aspect because it implies the speaker should be trusted, and “an attitude of trust contains a *feeling* of trust”.<sup>12</sup> This implication, however, only holds sometimes. It holds if trust is given a more normative interpretation – what Fricker calls “ethical trust” – since then trust is tied to certain reactive attitudes. But testimonial uptake is not limited to such occasions of trust – think of reading the papers or listening to a broadcast of train times. And I might judge that you are right in what you say, and so trustworthy in the sense of being right, even though I equally judge you do not know what you are talking about and say what you do merely for effect. There is what Fricker calls “epistemic trust”, and there is testimonial uptake but there is no feeling of trust. But these qualifications can be put aside until later because what matters now is Fricker’s characterisation of our testimonial sensibility, and it is the first two points of parallel that are crucial since these define the operation of this sensibility. By contrast, these latter three points turn on the nature of the judgement output.

What justifies our uptake of a bit of testimony? The virtue theory answer is: the reason provided by our testimonial sensibility, *viz.* the perceptual judgement that the bit of testimony is trustworthy. To give a complete

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<sup>9</sup> McDowell (1998), pp.57-8, quoted Fricker (2007), p.74.

<sup>10</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

<sup>11</sup> Fricker (2007), p.72.

<sup>12</sup> Fricker (2007), p.79.

epistemological theory of testimony, some statement is then needed of how justified uptake can result in testimonial knowledge. Here Fricker, again, appeals to McDowell, who states:

The idea of knowledge by testimony is that if a knower gives intelligible expression to his knowledge, he put it into the public domain, where it can be picked up by those who understand the expression, as long as the opportunity is not closed to them because it would be doxastically irresponsible to believe the speaker.<sup>13</sup>

To which Fricker responds:

Supposing we agree that quietism is in order on the question of what constitutes the transaction whereby a speaker uses language to put a piece of knowledge into the public domain so that another speaker might pick it up. It might be that having expressed the puzzle in the right way ... there is no longer any cause for puzzlement here. Agreed.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite wrong to say there is “no longer any cause for puzzlement”. What McDowell proposes is a substantial explanation of how justified uptake can result in testimonial knowledge: it can do so because testimony can function to transmit knowledge. And there is the question of how testimony can do this.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the general shape of the resulting theory of testimony, I think is correct: testimony allows one to acquire transmitted knowledge provided one’s uptake is backed by reasons. The question is whether a virtue theory provides the best account of the rationality of testimonial uptake. Its key feature is that it explains how uptake can be rational even when non-reflective, but epistemic problems start once one recognises that this lack of reflection is not always a good thing. I will develop this problem in the next section, but first Fricker’s recognition of it.

The problem is the phenomenon of error, which Fricker recognizes as that of *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*, which is a species of *epistemic injustice*.<sup>16</sup> For Aristotle, our ethical sensibility is acquired by habituation into a way of life. And our testimonial sensibility is acquired similarly in that this habituation is our individual starting point. As a consequence of this our testimonial sensibility comes infected with identity prejudice and can deliver perceptual judgements that reflect this in giving certain kinds of speaker a credibility deficit. Fricker illustrates this with a scene from *The Talented Mr. Ripley* where Herbert Greenleaf, the father of the missing Dickie, unjustly ignores Dickie’s fiancée Marge Sherwood rejecting her view of things with the

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<sup>13</sup> McDowell (1994), pp.437-8, quoted in Fricker (2007), p.68.

<sup>14</sup> Fricker (2007), p.68.

<sup>15</sup> In Faulkner (2011) I identify three different explanations of transmission: one proposed by Burge, one by McDowell and one by Moran; see p.76, p.108 and p.141 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Fricker (2007), p.28.

put down “Marge, there’s female intuition, and then there are facts.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, Marge is correct in her suspicions and Greenleaf’s testimonial sensibility has epistemically misfired.

Given that our testimonial sensibility can be infected in this way, it can be in error in systematic ways. As such, the mere operation of the testimonial sensibility cannot be an epistemic virtue in that the reasons it outputs, in the form of credibility judgements, can fail to be truth conducive in systematic ways. To be an epistemic virtue there must, at the very least, be some principled truth connection, where typically the requirement would be reliability. What this requires, at least, is that the background of belief that feeds into the testimonial sensibility be weeded for identity prejudices. The ability to do this is, in Fricker’s terms, a virtue in itself: it is the virtue of *testimonial justice*.<sup>18</sup> So the operation of the testimonial sensibility is the operation of an epistemic virtue only insofar as it is under the control of the virtue of testimonial justice.

The fully virtuous hearer, then, as regards the virtue of testimonial justice, is someone whose testimonial sensibility has been suitably reconditioned by sufficient corrective experiences so that it now reliably issues in ready-corrected judgements of credibility.<sup>19</sup>

Fricker acknowledges that “the virtue of testimonial justice ... is bound to be hard to achieve, owing to the psychologically stealthy and historically dynamic nature of prejudice”.<sup>20</sup> But this is not a theoretical problem. Theoretically we have our complete virtue account: a testimonial sensibility operates like a virtue in outputting perceptual judgements of credibility, which rationally ground our testimonial uptake, but these grounds are truth conducive and this is the operation of an epistemic virtue only when corrected by the virtue of testimonial justice. In the fully virtuous individual this happens seamlessly.

## 2. Reflection on Disagreement and Error

According to virtue ethics, our ethical thinking is characterised by the use of thick ethical concepts, or concepts that characterize actions and attitudes in ways that are both descriptive and evaluative. What distinguishes the virtuous ethical sensibility is then the reliable application of a given set of thick ethical concepts where, as Fricker stressed, this application will result in perceptual judgement, or the virtuous subject seeing things in a distinctive way. A problem for a virtue approach to ethics is then posed by the possibility

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<sup>17</sup> Fricker (2007), p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Fricker (2007), p.92.

<sup>19</sup> Fricker (2007), p.97.

<sup>20</sup> Fricker (2007), p.98.

of alternative ethical views – the possibility of working with a different set of thick ethical concepts. This problem has been presented by Bernard Williams as the idea that *reflection destroys ethical knowledge*.<sup>21</sup>

Williams’s argument starts by asking us to consider a *hypertraditional society* or “a society that is maximally homogeneous and minimally given to general reflection”.<sup>22</sup> According to virtue theory, members of this society possess ethical knowledge; they do so “when they employ their concepts carefully, use the appropriate criteria and so on”.<sup>23</sup> That is, when they possess a reliable sensitivity to those situational features to which their thick ethical concepts apply. The ethical knowledge possessed is then expressed by the judgements made with these thick concepts. This knowledge is not a reflective judgement about the correctness of these concepts – and there is a lack of reflection in the hypertraditional society generally – it is merely the correct use of these concepts in judgement. Judgement, again as Fricker stresses, is perceptual and non-reflective.

Now consider how things are changed by reflection. Suppose a member of the hypertraditional society encounters someone from another society with a different set of thick ethical concepts. Since thick ethical concepts are partly descriptive, what is thereby confronted is disagreement over what to say about various situations. Where the member of the hypertraditional society judges that some situation is to be described in terms of some thick ethical concept  $x$  – kindness or chastity, say – it is now hard to maintain the claim that agreement in judgement comes down to being sensitive to truths about  $x$ . Rather, agreement is now shown to be a cultural artefact, since what is needed for it is living in the social world that has the concept of  $x$ . But this explanation of agreement, prompted by reflection on disagreement, in no way vindicates beliefs about  $x$ , or beliefs involving any other thick ethical concepts. It does not show that these beliefs are held because true. And once it is realized that ethical disagreements cannot therefore be objectively settled, whatever knowledge that was had simply through the exercise of these thick ethical concepts is lost on reflection. So Williams concludes “that in ethics, *reflection can destroy knowledge*”.<sup>24</sup>

John McDowell’s response to this problem, which is found in his defense of external reasons, is that the virtuous person – Williams’s hypertraditionalist – merely needs to have *confidence* in his ethical outlook. This debate about external reasons connects because McDowell gives a virtue account of external reasons. To say that S has an external reason to  $\phi$ , or a reason to  $\phi$  irrespective of S’s subjective motivational set, is to say that if S

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<sup>21</sup> See Williams (2006).

<sup>22</sup> Williams (2006), p.142.

<sup>23</sup> Williams (2006), p.142.

<sup>24</sup> Williams (2006), p.148.

were to consider the matter rightly, then S would realize that he has a reason to  $\phi$ . And considering the matter rightly is just to consider it as the virtuous person would consider it. Thus, McDowell says:

Nothing more would be in question, in any particular appeal to a determinate conception of how relevant matters are rightly considered, than confidence in some part of an ethical outlook.<sup>25</sup>

So what Williams's hypertraditionalist needs, when confronting the fact there are different sets of thick ethical concepts, is *confidence* in his own set of ethical concepts.

To further explain McDowell's notion of confidence, it would be helpful, I think, to give a concrete illustration. The illustration I give centres on the two conceptions of trust that will be needed for later discussion. Consider then the case of the Lieutenant-Colonel and merchant Trifonov from *The Brother's Karamasov*.<sup>26</sup> The Lieutenant-Colonel as commanding officer of an army division received government money, with which he speculated.

During the past four years the money, every time after the authorities had been through the accounts, used to disappear for a time. The Lieutenant-Colonel used to lend it to a merchant of our town, an old widower by the name of Trifonov, a man with a big beard and gold spectacles, whom he trusted implicitly. Trifonov used to go to the fair, do some business there and on his return immediately return the whole sum to the Lieutenant-Colonel, bringing with him a present from the fair and with the present the interest on the loan.<sup>27</sup>

Russell Hardin's description of the Lieutenant-Colonel's trust is that he is willing to depend on Trifonov in this way because he rightly believes that Trifonov has an interest in their scheme continuing. So the Lieutenant-Colonel trusts because his interest lies within Trifonov's interest, and trust, on Hardin's definition is a matter of such *encapsulated interest*: "I trust you because I think it is in your interest to attend to my interests in the relevant matter."<sup>28</sup> In my view, trust can be a matter of just this: it can be merely an act of depending – in this case the Lieutenant-Colonel's depending on Trifonov to return the monies – coupled with the judgement that that the dependence will work out. Hardin gives one grounds for this judgement – a calculation of interest – but others are possible.<sup>29</sup> The obvious limitation with Hardin's grounds for trust is the Lieutenant-Colonel should have seen the following

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<sup>25</sup> McDowell (1995), p.109.

<sup>26</sup> This example comes from Hardin (2002), p.2.

<sup>27</sup> Dostoyevsky (1958), p.129 (from chapter four, part one, "The Confession of an Ardent Heart in Anecdotes").

<sup>28</sup> Hardin (2002), p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Trust, as I define it, can be *predictive*: A trusts S to  $\phi$  (in this sense) iff A depends on S  $\phi$ ing and believes that S will  $\phi$ . See Faulkner (2011), p.145.

coming: when Trifonov learns that the Lieutenant-Colonel's command is to be replaced and the Lieutenant-Colonel is to be recalled to Moscow, he promptly keeps the final loan of four thousand five hundred roubles. In response,

The Lieutenant-Colonel rushed to his house, but all the reply he got from him was: "I've never received any money from you, and couldn't possibly have received any."<sup>30</sup>

This reply makes sense if Trifonov's reason for returning the monies is, as Hardin proposes, his interest in the ongoing scheme since this scheme finishes with the Lieutenant-Colonel's departure. But then if the Lieutenant-Colonel's grounds for trust were his judgement that this is Trifonov's reason, he should never have made the final loan.<sup>31</sup> He should curse his naivety, but he is in no position to blame Trifonov.

The story continues with the Lieutenant-Colonel being hauled over the coals by the authorities, attempting suicide and losing his status in the town. However, I would like to imagine the following continuation, which is based on giving a different interpretation to the Lieutenant-Colonel's "implicit trust". Suppose the Lieutenant-Colonel trusted Trifonov as one would trust a friend. In this case, it would be quite appropriate for the Lieutenant-Colonel to blame Trifonov for his theft, and to feel thoroughly betrayed by this action. In this case, I suggest, the Lieutenant-Colonel's trust consists of the act of depending on Trifonov, as before, but is marked by a quite different attitude towards this dependence. Rather than merely be an expectation that some outcome would occur, the Lieutenant-Colonel's expectation would be a normative expectation; it would be the expectation of Trifonov that he regard the Lieutenant-Colonel's loaning him the monies *as a reason to return the monies*.<sup>32</sup> On this continuation of the story, the Lieutenant-Colonel and Trifonov have quite different views of their exchange. Trifonov regards their scheme in a business-like fashion as nothing more than an engagement of their mutual interests. And were the Lieutenant-Colonel to regard it similarly, he would trust merely in the sense that he depends because of a judgement about outcome. But the Lieutenant-Colonel does not regard their scheme in this way because he regards Trifonov as a friend. His trusting Trifonov thereby has a normative dimension: he depends but does so because he presumes that Trifonov has certain motivations, and expects it of Trifonov that he have these motivations. This difference in attitude is shown by the Lieutenant-Colonel's feeling of being betrayed, and it is a difference in ethical outlook, which can then illustrate and explain McDowell's notion of confidence.

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<sup>30</sup> Dostoyevsky (1958), p.129.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, one must assume the recall came out of the blue, or a *backwards induction* would threaten.

<sup>32</sup> Trust, as I define it, can be *affective*: A trusts S to  $\phi$  (in this sense) iff A depends on S  $\phi$ ing and expects this to motivate S to  $\phi$ . See Faulkner (2011), p.146.

For the sake of argument, take the perspective of the Lieutenant-Colonel. What Trifonov's action shows is that he does not think about your relationship in the same way as you do; he does not think about it in trusting terms, or in terms of friendship. What his action and statement makes manifest is that your relationship history has been merely a series of economic transactions. What you took to be indications of friendship are now revealed to be no more than a social smoothing of a fundamentally economic exchange. Trifonov, it is now clear, has formed the relationship he has with you solely with his eye on the profits to be made from it. This, you think, is the *wrong way to look at things*. It is hurtful, given that you have not been looking at things this way. But more importantly, it misconceives various facts about your relations. Crucially, it misconceives your loaning him the money. In your view, your doing this gives Trifonov a reason to return the monies loaned him. That he be sensitive to this reason is what you expected of him in loaning him the monies. Of course, what Trifonov's actions and statement now show is that he is not sensitive to this reason. And, you realise, there is probably nothing that you can say that would get him to grasp it. No amount of deliberation, from Trifonov's motivational set, which is clearly driven by his desire for economic profit, could get him to see that he has this reason. In Williams's terms: this reason is for Trifonov an *external reason*. Trifonov's failure to grasp this reason is then not a failure of reason: it is perfectly rational to look at your relationship in cold economic terms; and, as Williams remarks, a claim of rational failure is mere "bluff".<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it is a failure to look at your relationship in the way it should be looked at. So, you might think, following McDowell, that "the shape of his [Trifonov's] motivations reveal that he has not been properly brought up".<sup>34</sup>

What, then, would be needed to get Trifonov to grasp that he does have this reason for returning the monies? What would be needed to get him to see things the way you saw them in trusting him with the loan? McDowell's answer is that what Trifonov needs in order to see things properly is a *conversion*.<sup>35</sup> A conversion would be needed for him to recognise both that your past engagements were conducted under the auspice of friendship not interest, and that this is the right way to think about them. This, then, is what confidence amounts to: the view that it is Trifonov with his alternative ethical outlook that needs a conversion in order to consider matters rightly.

This characterisation of confidence may now be put more abstractly. Suppose that there are two sets of thick ethical concepts – call them Trust and Interest. From the perspective of the possessor of set Interest, descriptions of what one has a reason to do that are expressed in terms of concept set Trust do not speak to one's subjective motivational set: they do not articulate

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<sup>33</sup> Williams (1980), p.111.

<sup>34</sup> McDowell (1995), p.103.

<sup>35</sup> McDowell (1995), p.102.

internal reasons. That is, all the while one thinks in terms of concept set Interest, deliberation will not lead one to the conclusion that one should do these things. So if the possessor of concept set Interest does have a reason to do something, the reason had is an external reason. Confidence for the possessor of concept set Trust is then confidence that the reasons articulated in terms of concept set Trust constitute external reasons for anyone, including the possessor of concept set Interest; it is just that this individual needs a conversion to think about things rightly. Or, to put things the other way round: nothing that the possessor of the concept set Interest can say will cause one to doubt that the right ethical view is expressed in terms of Trust. Thus, confidence in one's own ethical outlook is the belief that despite the fact that there are different sets of thick ethical concepts, there is really only one ethical world, which is the one that one inhabits.

Is it possible or reasonable to have this kind of confidence in one's ethical outlook? I leave this question open though observe that Williams – who similarly draws the conclusion that it is 'confidence' that is needed in the face of the destabilizing effects of reflection – would argue not: the plurality of ethical views must be taken more seriously.<sup>36</sup> I leave this question open because my concern is with the epistemological analogue of this problem, and in the epistemological case the assumption that there is only one correct way of looking at the world – or one set of truths about the world – is far less contentious.<sup>37</sup> The analogue is that just as in ethics there can be cases of epistemic disagreement. One party might think that an observation is a reason to believe one proposition, and another party might think that the same observation is a reason to believe a contrary proposition. To take one of Fricker's cases: someone with a virtuously corrected testimonial sensibility would regard Marge Sherwood's testimony to  $p$  as a reason to believe that  $p$ , while Herbert Greenleaf merely regards it as evidence that Marge is too involved with Dickie to think clearly.

What should one say about such cases of disagreement? Here I want to suggest, for the sake of argument, that *in some cases* McDowell's response is correct: one should give the confident response, where this is to claim that the disagreement itself shows the other party to have the wrong view. The following are two cases where confidence is arguably the right response. First, suppose the disagreement is with the sceptic. You form the belief that there is a vase of purple irises on the mantelpiece. The sceptic convinces you that the grounds of this belief is things visually appearing a certain way, and then outlines how this appearance is consistent with your being a brain-in-a-vat.

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<sup>36</sup> "We can go on, no doubt, simply saying that we are right and everyone else is wrong ... but if we have arrived at this stage of reflection, it seems a remarkably inadequate response." Williams (2006), p.160, and for his discussion of 'confidence' see p.170ff.

<sup>37</sup> Though not wholly uncontentious given the claims, inspired by Quine, that scientific theory is underdetermined by observational data. See ???

The disagreement is whether your (apparently) seeing things gives you a reason for belief. Here McDowell's response seems plausible: if we start from an assumption parallel to that made in the discussion of the hypertraditional society – namely that your perceptual belief is virtuously formed even though you have no judgement on this matter – then it seems plausible to claim that these reflections do not destroy the knowledge you perceptually possess. Rather, the doubt the sceptic raises is merely 'philosophical' in the sense that you would not be led to it by deliberating from other things that you believe. So the sceptic's reason for suspending judgement is 'external', as it were, and you should maintain your confidence in your view that there are irises on the mantelpiece. Here, it might be added, it is reasonable to think that it is the sceptic, rather than yourself, that needs a 'conversion'.

Second, consider a case that has figured prominently in recent discussion in the epistemology of disagreement.

Suppose you and I are standing by the window looking out on the quad. We think we have comparable vision and we know each other to be honest. I seem to see what looks to me like the Dean standing out in the middle of the quad. (Assume that this is not something odd. He's out there a fair amount.) I believe that the Dean is standing on the quad. Meanwhile, you seem to see nothing of the kind there. You think that no one, and thus not the Dean, is standing in the middle of the quad. We disagree. Prior to our saying anything, each of us believes reasonably. Then I say something about the Dean being on the quad, and we find out about our situation. In my view, once that happens, each of us should suspend judgment.<sup>38</sup>

Again if we start from the same assumption that my perceptual belief is virtuously formed – again regardless of whether I have any judgement on this matter – and given that, as may be reasonably assumed, "the quad is small and sunlit, and the dean sports a bright blue jacket just fifty feet away", then Feldman seems to draw the wrong conclusion.<sup>39</sup> That is, this does not seem to be a case where reflection destroys knowledge. Rather, as with your disagreement with the sceptic, the worry that I am hallucinating seems 'philosophical' in that I would not be led to it by deliberation, even deliberation that starts from my belief that you are a credible speaker and have as good a view of the quad as me. For consider these two explanations of your utterance denying the Dean's presence: the explanation that starts from the Dean not being there and proceeds to hypothesize a hallucination on my behalf; and the explanation that starts from the Dean in fact being there and proceeds to hypothesize an unusual error on your part. It overly epistemologizes my situation to require that I put my experience of (apparently) seeing the Dean to one side and treat these explanations as on a

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<sup>38</sup> Feldman (2011), p.151.

<sup>39</sup> Sosa (2010), p.293.

par since I am much more certain of the truth of this experience than I am of the equality of these explanations.<sup>40</sup> So deliberation would lead me rather to conclude that there must be something “wrong with my friend”.<sup>41</sup> As such, any reason there is for my suspending judgement is ‘external’, as it were, and again it seems that I should persist in my confident view that the Dean is in the quad.

It might be allowed then that McDowell’s response to doubts raised by disagreement is plausible in some cases. However, the point of allowing this, for the sake of argument, is that there are *other cases* where this response is not plausible at all. In particular, the confident response is not possible when doubts are raised about testimonial beliefs, or beliefs formed through the operation of one’s testimonial sensibility. And this remains the case even if it is supposed that one’s testimonial sensibility is functioning virtuously. Rather, the testimonial case is one where reflection destroys the possibility of conceiving of knowledge in virtue terms.

The source of doubt in the testimonial case, as for the ethical case, might originally come from a instance of disagreement in outlook. Herbert Greenleaf, for example, might have been certain in his prejudiced judgements until a member of his coterie raised the possibility that maybe Marge Sherwood might be correct. But the source of the doubt is less important than its shape, which is the thought that *one might be wrong*. What makes McDowell’s confident response plausible in the two cases just considered, if indeed it is plausible in these cases, is that there is something to counterbalance this thought. The counterbalance is provided by the certainty of one’s epistemic position.<sup>42</sup> In cases where one sees that *p* – the irises on the mantelpiece or the Dean in the quad – the fact that *p* visually impresses itself on one.<sup>43</sup> So it can seem plausible to give a confident rejection of doubt because it is not clear what could be a better reason for believing that *p* than the reason one possesses in these cases. However, in the testimonial case there is nothing that provides an equivalent counterbalance. Even if Greenleaf were a different man than he is and virtuous in his judgements, the fact of Marge Sherwood’s trustworthiness would not similarly impress itself on him. And this is just to say that there is room for the doubt raised by the thought that one might be wrong. This doubt is not merely ‘philosophical’. Rather, what deliberation on the possibility of error leads to is a generalized and

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<sup>40</sup> Compare Moore (1959).

<sup>41</sup> Sosa (2010), p.238. And here Sosa makes a parallel point: just as Moore asserted on some everyday perception, that there must be some wrong with the sceptic’s argument, so on such a basis, namely my seeing the Dean in the quad, I assert that there is something “wrong with my friend”. (Though, before asserting this, charity requires I eliminate the possibility that what you are saying is a joke etc.)

<sup>42</sup> I’ve tried to explain this in terms of there being a *transparency* to one’s warrant for belief in these cases. See Faulkner (2012).

<sup>43</sup> In McDowell’s terms, seeing that *p* makes the fact that *p* manifest. See McDowell (1982).

grounded worry: that one's testimonial sensibility might be systematically in error. What it leads to is the possibility of *epistemic injustice*.

The virtuous response to the possibility of error is then not to affirm the rightness of one's way of seeing things but to recognise that error might take this systematic form – it is to recognise the phenomenon of epistemic injustice – and to try to correct for it. What is needed Fricker comments is “specific, critical reflective tools”.<sup>44</sup> After this observation, Fricker then considers Herbert Greenleaf's epistemic position.

In the case of Herbert Greenleaf, we see this historical contingency played out in respect of the absence of a critical awareness of gender prejudice in the society in which his ethical and epistemic second nature were formed. While the Herbert Greenleafs of this world were always at fault in failing to exhibit the virtue, I suggest they were not *culpably* at fault until the requisite critical consciousness of gender became available to them.<sup>45</sup>

Greenleaf's position here is parallel to the pre-reflective position of a member of the hypertraditional society: he has a testimonial sensibility that operates in virtue terms – i.e. it delivers perceptual judgements; it is just that the operation of this faculty is not epistemically virtuous. This description is fine, but the question is what should happen, if it could, once Greenleaf recognizes the phenomenon of epistemic injustice and acquires the relevant critical and reflective tools to counter it?

Here is what I think should *not happen*: Greenleaf's testimonial sensibility absorbs these new reflective skills so that it “now reliably issues ready-corrected judgements of credibility”.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, the operation of the testimonial sensibility, which was black-boxed in the pre-reflective state cannot become black-boxed again. To model our more critical and reflective responses to testimony on the model of virtue ethics, as Fricker does here, is to suggest that ultimately we will be able to give a confident response to the worry that our testimonial judgements are in error. But this is not plausible: once reflection has raised this worry, and focussed our attention on the phenomenon of epistemic injustice, there is no returning to our pre-reflective, or ‘hypertraditional’, state. Reflection has destroyed this as a possibility for us. And this is how it should be: working out who to believe, in such difficult matters as the disappearance of one's son, should be a careful, critical and reflective matter. Greenleaf is at fault in that this is not true of him. And what

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<sup>44</sup> Fricker (2007), p.99.

<sup>45</sup> Fricker (2007), p.100.

<sup>46</sup> Fricker (2007), p.97 quoted above.

this shows is that believing correctly in the epistemic domain, unlike the moral domain, is never merely a matter of being brought up correctly.<sup>47</sup>

In sum and in short, Fricker identifies a theoretical possibility that takes middle route between reductive and non-reductive accounts of testimonial uptake. It is, she suggests, possible to model testimonial uptake on virtue ethics and hypothesize a testimonial sensibility that delivers a perceptual judgement of trustworthiness. This then explains how our testimonial uptake can be non-inferential and yet backed by reasons. So much I think is correct. But this theoretical possibility cannot capture our epistemic position. Once the phenomenon of epistemic injustice has been acknowledged, it must be acknowledged that the operation of our testimonial sensibilities need correction. And once this acknowledgement is made it is no longer possible to conceive the epistemology of testimony in terms that black-box the operation of reason. It is no longer possible to conceive the epistemology of testimony by analogy with virtue ethics.

### 3. A Virtue Theory of Trust

The problem with Fricker's virtue account of testimony is that it models epistemic virtues too closely on ethical virtues. However, trust is central to the epistemology of testimony in that it can be our reason for testimonial uptake. And trust, or what is properly described as 'trust', should be thought of as an ethical virtue. So it is possible, indirectly and to this extent, to give a virtue account of testimony, which is modelled on virtue ethics. There are three steps in arguing this. First, it is important to distinguish between two senses of trust – what Fricker calls *epistemic trust* and *ethical trust*. Second, it needs to be recognized that both kinds of trust can give a reason for testimonial uptake. Third, it needs to be argued that trusting and being trustworthy in the ethical sense are virtues.

First, take the case of the Lieutenant-Colonel and Trifonov described above but suppose that the Lieutenant-Colonel is fully aware of Trifonov's attitudes; that is, he knows Trifonov cooperates only because of his interest in their scheme continuing. In this case, there is cooperation and, after a fashion, there is trust.<sup>48</sup> So there is something that might be called 'epistemic trust': the Lieutenant-Colonel's belief that Trifonov has an interest in their scheme continuing gives him a reason for thinking that Trifonov's testimony is true when he assures he will return from the market with loan shortly (there being no prospect of a recall to Moscow at this point). And it is possible

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<sup>47</sup> One might add: it should never be, as in the moral domain, that some reasons are *silenced*. Compare McDowell (1998), p.56.

<sup>48</sup> There is trust in Hardin's sense of encapsulated interest and in my predictive sense. See footnotes 28 and 29.

to define an epistemic sense of ‘trustworthiness’: S is trustworthy in this sense if and only if, given S’s testimony to  $p$ , it is probably true that  $p$ .

According to Fricker, “epistemic trustworthiness incorporates one kind of moral trustworthiness: namely, sincerity”.<sup>49</sup> But if epistemic trustworthiness is as thin a notion as that just defined – and nothing stronger is necessary for a belief in trustworthiness to justify testimonial uptake – then this is wrong on two accounts. One might believe what someone says, judging that their testimony to  $p$  is evidence that  $p$ , even if one believes them to be insincere.<sup>50</sup> So sincerity is not necessary for trustworthiness in the epistemic sense. And someone might tell the truth and so be sincere but lack sincerity; this would be the case if they told the truth only insofar as doing so was in their interest.<sup>51</sup> So the epistemic concern for sincere utterance is not the moral concern for sincerity. Thus talk of trustworthiness in the epistemic sense is merely talk of truth telling or probable truth telling and implies no ethical judgement; and likewise talk of trust in the epistemic sense is merely talk of a belief about truth or probable truth.

To then elucidate the ethical sense of ‘trustworthiness’, consider why it is that Trifonov is untrustworthy. The answer, I think, is that Trifonov is untrustworthy because the Lieutenant-Colonel’s need to have his loan repaid is not Trifonov’s reason for repaying it, and does not figure as a reason for Trifonov. To return to the example as describe in the previous section where the Lieutenant-Colonel trusts Trifonov as a friend and is ignorant of his motivations. In this case, the expectation the Lieutenant-Colonel has of Trifonov is precisely that his need to have the loan repaid will be Trifonov’s reason for repaying it. The expectation is that Trifonov will act trustworthily, and that is what the Lieutenant-Colonel expects in trusting him with the monies. So, I suggest, the moral sense of trust might be defined thus: A trusts S to  $\phi$  if and only if A depends on S  $\phi$ -ing and expects this to motivate S to  $\phi$ .<sup>52</sup> This gives a paired notion of trustworthiness: S is trustworthy if and only if S sees A’s depending on his  $\phi$ -ing as a reason to  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ s for this reason.

Second, suppose then that Trifonov tells the Lieutenant-Colonel that  $p$ , or that he will return from the market with loan shortly. The belief that Trifonov is ‘trustworthy’ in the epistemic sense clearly gives the Lieutenant-Colonel a reason to believe that  $p$ : it amounts to no more than the judgement that  $p$  is probably true given Trifonov’s testimony. But what about the belief that Trifonov is trustworthy proper, or trustworthy in the moral sense, as the Lieutenant-Colonel mistakenly believes? Applied to this testimonial interaction, this belief in trustworthiness amounts to the belief that

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<sup>49</sup> Fricker (2007), p.76.

<sup>50</sup> For instance, Coady’s master criminal case, Coady (1992), p.45.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, Williams’s mail opener, Williams (2002), p.96.

<sup>52</sup> Trust in this ethical sense I call *affective*, see footnote 32.

Trifonov's reason for telling the Lieutenant-Colonel that  $p$  is the Lieutenant-Colonel's need to know whether  $p$ . So short of the belief that Trifonov is not in a position to address the Lieutenant-Colonel's need to know whether  $p$ , this belief is a reason for the Lieutenant-Colonel to believe that  $p$  when this is what Trifonov tells him.

Third, are trust and trustworthiness, then, ethical virtues? Here is MacIntyre.

From an Aristotelian standpoint to identify certain actions as manifesting or failing to manifest a virtue or virtues is never only to evaluate; it is also to take the first step towards explaining why those actions rather than some others were performed.<sup>53</sup>

To say an action is trustworthy is then both to explain it and evaluate it because a trustworthy act is an act done for certain reasons, in a context – that of trust – where there is the expectation that the act should be done for those reasons. That this expectation is normative is shown by the reactive attitudes the trusting party is susceptible to were the expectation not met. Thus the Lieutenant-Colonel will feel betrayed when Trifonov fails to repay his final loan, and would be susceptible to similar feelings were he to learn at an earlier date that Trifonov has throughout only been guided by interest. The content of this feeling of betrayal is then that Trifonov should have acted on certain reasons, namely the reason supplied by the fact that he, the Lieutenant-Colonel, depended on Trifonov. The claim that Trifonov had this reason, even if deliberation would not lead him to it, is then the claim that there is a *social norm* dictating that we ought to be trustworthy.<sup>54</sup> It is this norm that gives content to the Lieutenant-Colonel's reactive attitude, and structures the evaluative practices that the Lieutenant-Colonel engages in when blaming Trifonov.

A consideration of these evaluative practices shows the divorce between third personal ascription and first personal deliberation characteristic of thick ethical concepts. In trusting Trifonov as a friend, the Lieutenant-Colonel would have made the final and fateful loan simply because Trifonov's business ventures required it. And in trusting Trifonov to return the loan he expects Trifonov to similarly be moved by his need. So deliberating in trusting and trustworthy ways does not involve these concepts, which only enter with third personal ascriptions. From the first person deliberative point of view the focus lies on the other's parties need. When the Lieutenant-Colonel blames Trifonov and judges him untrustworthy what is thereby judged is that he is not appropriately moved by the Lieutenant-Colonel's need. In Fricker's terms he fails to *see* this dependence as

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<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre (1997), p.136.

<sup>54</sup> See Faulkner (2011), pp.179-88 and Faulkner (2010).

a reason. Insofar as we think in these terms, ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness’ are then virtues because they are “*goods which are internal to practices*”; that is, our cooperative practices and practices of describing and evaluating cooperation.<sup>55</sup> And this was the point made with the case of the Lieutenant-Colonel and Trifonov in the last section: insofar as Trifonov operates only with the set of concepts designated by Interest, he cannot possess the virtue of being trustworthy because he moves in a different ethical universe.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. Ethics and Epistemology

It is not possible to give a virtue epistemological account of testimony insofar as the virtues are modelled on ethical virtues. However, testimonial uptake can be based on trust and trust is an ethical virtue. So, in this respect, it is possible to give a virtue ethical account of testimony. This raises a couple of questions. First, Fricker’s ambition in giving a virtue epistemological account of testimony was to provide an account of how testimonial uptake is epistemically justified (which satisfied a couple of desiderata). A virtue ethical account of testimony does not seem to address this issue insofar as the kinds of consideration that go into deliberation over whether to trust are not epistemological. Moreover, to the extent that these considerations are not epistemological, uptake based upon trust would seem to be epistemologically unjustified. So the first question is, what are the epistemological implications of the claim that testimonial uptake can be based upon trust? Second, a theoretical attraction of Fricker’s account is that it makes plain how epistemic injustice operates: when the testimonial sensibility has biased input beliefs the result is incorrect judgements of credibility and some people who ought to be believed are not. However, if uptake is based on trust, and so not the assessment implicit in the operation of a testimonial sensibility, how is it that epistemic injustices come about? Let me take these questions in turn.

The question of the epistemological implications of the fact that uptake can be based on trust is one I have attempted to address in *Knowledge on Trust*.<sup>57</sup> A sketchy answer, and an unsatisfactory one because of this, runs as follows. First, the scope of trust should be noted. We have, I think, two distinct attitudes towards testimony. Sometimes we treat a piece of testimony as just one more bit of evidence. Other times we cede authority to speakers and trust them for the truth. So an account of how testimonial uptake can be

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<sup>55</sup> MacIntyre (1997), p.128.

<sup>56</sup> Trust and trustworthiness are ethical virtues: this is not to form a moral judgement of trusting and trustworthy acts. The evaluation of the morality of an act can be complex, and it is possible for an act to be morally bad and still demonstrate ethical virtue. One can trust others to do bad things, and show one’s trustworthiness by one’s willingness to do bad things.

<sup>57</sup> Faulkner (2011).

based on trust can never be a complete epistemology of uptake. However, the concern raised is legitimate: when testimonial uptake is based on trust it isn't based on an attitude whose adoption is epistemically determined. Indeed, it is a hallmark of trust that the considerations that motivate it pull in a different direction to, and can run counter to, epistemological considerations. One can, for instance, trust a speaker who has a poor track record, or even when one's better judgement suggests that one ought not to. Nevertheless, trust provides a reason for testimonial uptake, I've argued, because it is constitutive of trust that one take a positive view of things. In trusting a speaker for the truth one expects them to tell the truth because this is what one needs, and the positive view one adopts is the presumption that they will be moved by the reason to tell the truth one thereby takes them to have. This presumption is that they are trustworthy and in presuming this one thereby has a reason to believe what they tell one. This reason, I have then argued, is an epistemological reason, or a reason for belief, and not merely a practical reason, because various background conditions hold. The availability of trust as an attitude – our ability to think in terms of this thick concept – requires the existence of a community that possesses this thick ethical concept, where this possession is marked by the existence of norms of trust that structure the evaluative practices that embody trust-based deliberation. So, in the good case, there is an explanatory connection between one's trusting and the truth of the belief that one acquires through trust-based uptake, a connection that runs via the existence of social norms of trust, and this is enough for the reason trust provides to be a reason for belief.

What, then, of epistemic injustice? We can fail to give a piece of testimony the credence that its reliability deserves. And this failure, Fricker points out, can be a consequence of beliefs that are false in systematic ways. It can be the result, in short, of prejudice. The failure here is epistemic: our reasons for testimonial uptake fail to track which bits of testimony are true. False bits of testimony get to regarded as true, and true bits are taken as false. This is illustrated by Herbert Greenleaf and Marge Sherwood: he has his reasons for rejecting what she tells him but their prejudiced grounds result in his rejecting a piece of credible testimony. How is this disbelief, which is clearly an epistemic failing, also an injustice or ethical wrong? Fricker suggests that it is in two ways. First, the speaker who is disbelieved because of prejudice will suffer other privations because of this same prejudice. Since these other deprivations will wrong the person, disbelief, when it has this same ground, equally wrongs them.<sup>58</sup> Second, if one knows something, one can tell it to other. So disbelief constitutes a denial of the speaker's status as a knower. To deny that someone has this status when they do is to wrong them.<sup>59</sup> Neither of these arguments is clear, in my view. The first rests on a

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<sup>58</sup> Fricker (2007), p.???

<sup>59</sup> Fricker (2007), p.???

contingent matter: what if the speaker didn't suffer other privations? The second requires a substantial metaphysics: denying that someone is a certain height doesn't wrong them, why isn't denying that someone is a knower comparable to that?

Without commenting further on these two arguments, the idea that trust is an ethical virtue offers a straightforward explanation of the wrong of disbelief. If trust is an ethical virtue, its being so requires that we think about trusting and being trustworthy in certain ways. These ways of thinking are encoded in norms of trust. These norms state that one *ought* to trust and be trustworthy: that we ought to see another's need for information as a reason to tell them what we know; and that we ought to see another's telling us something as a reason to believe them (since we ought to presume it comes from a desire to inform us). But if there are such norms, then belief is owed to speakers, and to this extent disbelief wrongs them. Thus, an epistemic failing can also be a wrongdoing. So there can be a distinctive wrong that is part epistemic (a prejudice based failure of reasons to get to truth) and part ethical (a failure to give the trust that is owed). As Fricker observes, there is thereby a domain where ethics and epistemology intersect. This is the domain of epistemic injustice, and, so I propose, it can also be the domain of trust.

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