

***Knowledge on Trust*, by Paul Faulkner, Oxford University Press 2011.**

Review by Katherine Hawley, April 2012

Epistemological theories of testimony are usually divided into two categories: nonreductive, and reductive. According to nonreductive theories, testimony is a *sui generis* source of knowledge, to be ranked alongside perception, memory and reason. Moreover, as (arguably) with perception and memory, we have default entitlement to the beliefs we acquire this way: you are entitled to believe what others say, unless you have positive reason to think otherwise. In contrast, according to reductive theories we need positive reasons to believe what others tell us, and ultimately these positive reasons must be derived from another, more basic source of knowledge such as perception, memory or reason. For example, we might rely on inductive inference from past instances in which a speaker turned out to be a reliable source of information.

In his *Knowledge on Trust*, Paul Faulkner develops a third type of account, which combines elements of both standard types, and makes central use of a notion of trust which typically goes unremarked by both reductionists and nonreductionists. Like the nonreductionists, he believes that testimony is a *sui generis* source of knowledge, in that it alone is transmissive. When you acquire some knowledge from testimony, your epistemic warrant for your new belief derives from the epistemic warrant possessed by the speaker, whether that is perceptual, memorial, or testimonial in its turn. The speaker's warrant is transmitted to you.

But, like the reductionists, Faulkner believes that you need positive reason to believe what the speaker tells you, to justify your initially taking on board the belief which can then be warranted for you by the warrant possessed by the speaker. These two views are reconciled through the claim that, in at least some situations of testimonial exchange, there are *sui generis* reasons to believe what's said, reasons which do not boil down to perception, for example. In particular, interpersonal relations of trust give us reason to believe what others tell us; no such reasons are available in the case of perception or memory.

Faulkner has all sorts of interesting things to say about what trust is, and how it can give us reason to believe what we are told; his book has a great deal to offer to anyone interested in the social aspects of knowledge, the ethics of lying and deception, the nature of assertion, and the moral psychology of trust. But his key argument in this area hinges on what he takes to be a contingent fact about our epistemic community, i.e. the fact that we have internalised social norms of trust and trustworthiness.

That is, when you and I are engaged in information-exchanging conversation, you expect of me that I be trustworthy, and moreover you expect of me that I trust you. (Likewise, of course, *mutatis mutandis*.) This ‘expecting of’ is distinct from any prediction that I will be reliable, and from any prediction that I will predict that you will be reliable. Rather, expectations of this kind are normative, bound up with liability to reactive attitudes such as resentment. Thus you are liable to feel cross, not just disappointed, if I do not prove trustworthy; moreover you are liable to feel insulted if I do not trust you, even if this doesn’t come as a surprise. And typically we prefer not to be the targets of other people’s anger or resentment.

The empirical fact that we are engaging in a practice which is bound by these norms of trust and trustworthiness can be conceived of in at least two ways. First, it can be thought of as evidence. In coming to believe what I tell you, you may note the prevalence of these norms, and calculate that this sufficiently increases the odds of my trustworthiness. This provides you with a reductionist-friendly reason to accept what I tell you, and thus avail yourself of the warrant I already possess. Second, however, when you do indeed trust me, that attitude itself gives you reason to believe what I tell you. As I understand Faulkner, this counts as an epistemic reason primarily because your attitude of trust and my trustworthiness both have a common cause, i.e. the society-wide internalisation of norms.

Although *Knowledge on Trust* has much to reward the persistent reader, especially the reader who is already immersed in the epistemological debate about testimony, it is no place for a beginner. Fine distinctions abound, between uptake, acceptance, belief, and presumption; between various kinds of justification, various kinds of warrant, and entitlement; between different types of reason; between different types of trust and trustworthiness; between different types of expectation; and so on. No doubt much of

this is necessary, and indeed it is part of Faulkner's case for his third way that the two more standard positions sometimes gloss over differences which merit our attention. But this demanding style does make it difficult to read both slowly enough to grasp the essential details, and quickly enough to keep a grip on the overall argument. And I cannot resist mentioning that, on page 201 of 204, when Faulkner is at last in a position to give a full official statement of what he calls the 'trust theory of testimony', he provides us with a three-part, ninety-seven-word thesis which nowhere mentions trust!

More seriously, this raises the question of how far we can follow Faulkner without accepting that it is trust, as opposed to some other attitude or fact, which plays a special role here. The third way results from emphasising the distinctiveness of transmission (like the nonreductionists), arguing (like the reductionists) that testimony must be accepted for a reason if it is to support transmission, then searching around for some reason to accept testimony which is not reducible to perception, memory or the like (unlike the reductionists). It is a substantive question whether adopting Faulkner's rich and complex characterisation of trust is the only good way to achieve this. But, at the very least, he has put a compelling new option onto the table.