

Trust me: News, Credibility Deficits, and Balance Carrie Figdor

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Abstract. When a society is characterized by a climate of distrust, how does this impact the professional practices of news journalism? I focus on the practice of balance, or fair presentation of both sides in a story. I articulate a two-step model of how trust modulates the acceptance of testimony and draw out its implications for justifying the practice of balance.

Introduction.

When a democratic society is characterized by a climate of distrust, how does this impact the practice of journalism? This paper considers a special case of the question: the society in question is the contemporary United States, the type of journalism is objective news journalism, and the impact considered is with regard to the practice of balance.

Balance is a norm as well as a practice of objective news: it is the professional method in which a reporter presents both sides in a news story, and its use is prescribed by a professional norm of fair treatment or neutrality (Kovach and Rosensteel 2001; Mindich 1988).¹ Balance is also presumed to provide an epistemic contribution towards the social goal of democratically legitimate public policy in the public interest: it supports each citizen's reason to informed conclusions based on all the relevant evidence. This epistemic role and its social end are neatly expressed by synthesizing two of the Fox News Network's slogans, "Fair & Balanced" and "We Report. You Decide.": we report in a fair and balanced manner, and you make informed decisions. Of course, coming from a partisan

news outlet such as Fox, the recently retired “Fair & Balanced” slogan was widely considered a cynical nod (at best) to the norm of balance. Nevertheless, it reflected the traditional adherence to the norm in the U.S. mainstream media. The synthesized slogan could well be adopted by *The New York Times* and other leading media to encapsulate their approach to news.

Notably, Fox retired “Fair & Balanced” in favor of “Most Watched, Most Trusted” as extreme sociopolitical polarization was becoming the dominant mode of U.S. public discourse.ⁱⁱ “Most watched” is a statistical issue. But “Most Trusted”? How does trust figure into the epistemic relationship between news reporting and public decision-making? And within this relationship, how do balance and trust interact? My first aim in this paper is to clarify the role of trust in this relationship. In more familiar terms, I aim to clarify the role of trust in the acceptance of testimony. My second aim is use this account to clarify the epistemic role of balance in objective news.

In Part 1, I present research showing that a common-sense view of the justification of balance cannot be correct. The core inference from “We report” to “You decide” has “You believe” as a middle premise, but problems with balance in science reporting show how the inference from “We report” to “You Believe” is anything but straightforward.ⁱⁱⁱ I call the issue of explaining this inference the problem of acceptance of testimony, contrasting it with the more traditional problem that centers on justifying the acceptance of testimony. In Part 2, I articulate a two-step account of acceptance in which trust modulates both steps via its impact on various cognitive mechanisms. In Part 3, I reconsider the justification of balance in the light of this account. I argue that balance is of direct epistemic benefit only to those individuals who are already able to accept testimony in an epistemically virtuous way. It is through such individuals that balance can indirectly contribute to better decision-making at the social level.

Part 1. Problems with Balance and Belief in U.S. News Journalism

The practice of balance "aims for neutrality (and) requires that reporters present the views of legitimate spokespersons of the conflicting sides in any significant dispute ... with roughly equal attention" (Dixon and Clarke 2013, p. 360).^{iv} Balance was also U.S. public policy since 1949 in the form of the Fairness Doctrine, under which media with U.S. government licenses to use publically-owned airwaves were required to cover controversial issues of public importance and to present both sides of a story (Matthew 2011). This doctrine (along with an equal time rule) was dropped in 1987 following challenges to its constitutionality as a restriction on broadcasters' free speech. Some trace the current sociopolitical polarization in part to the demise of the Fairness Doctrine; in any case, right-wing talk radio took off shortly afterwards.

Epistemic problems traced to balance first began to emerge strikingly in science reporting. Balance began in political reporting and migrated to science reporting along with other elements of the objectivity norm. The practice served to compensate for journalists' inability to check whether scientists' claims were true or false (Dunwoody 2014, p. 33). The aim was provide neutral but accurate testimony of scientists' claims. In the 1990's major U.S. news outlets began presenting nonconsensus views on the issue of climate change as a matter of balanced reporting. However, despite accumulating scientific evidence of and consensus regarding its existence and human causes, the public responded with increased uncertainty about its reality and causes and with the perception that the scientific evidence is mixed (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). Similar divergence between scientific and public opinion was found in other science news domains (Dixon and Clarke op.cit., Stocking and Holstein 2009), but climate science beliefs remain a primary focus of research.

The media's role in this divergence was labeled balance as informational bias (Boykoff and Boykoff op.cit.) or false balance, "when a perspective supported by an overwhelming amount of evidence is presented alongside others with less/no support and context – where the strength of evidence lies – is excluded" (Dixon and Clarke 2012, p. 359). Correspondingly, a *prima facie* reasonable

journalistic response to the problem is to do balance better: present the sides along with information about where the weight of scientific evidence and scientific consensus opinion lie (Dixon and Clarke op.cit.). This response correctly rejects an overly simple, if common, way of implementing balance in science news. Unfortunately, it does not overcome the problem of the divergence of scientific and public opinion about climate change. While providing scientific consensus information can help promote acceptance of science claims (Lewandowsky et al. 2012), social scientific and psychological research into climate change beliefs has revealed just how complicated the passage from “We report” to “You believe” is.^v

The mechanisms involved are often grouped together as forms of motivated reasoning, in which information that challenges one’s prior beliefs is discounted or ignored while information that is consonant tends to be uncritically accepted.^{vi} Basic subtypes of motivated reasoning include confirmation bias (seeking out confirming or avoiding disconfirming information) and evaluation bias or biased assimilation (being selectively sceptical in evaluating evidence). The “motivated” part of “motivated reasoning” refers to the non-epistemic (that is, non-truth- or knowledge-oriented) goals of reasoning, such as protecting one’s social relationships or maintaining one’s self-image. As a result, it is incorrect to say that “the whole point of appealing to the testimony of others is that they know things we do not” (Hardwig 1991, p. 698). That is certainly one point of appealing to testimony. But another point, which may dominate, is to further our social goals, which we also value.^{vii}

When the goal of reasoning is not (or is not strongly determined by) our interest in truth, motivated reasoning serves what is called cultural cognition, when people fit their risk perceptions to their cultural worldviews (Kahan 2010; Kahan et al. 2011, 2012). Acceptance of climate change testimony has become dominated by reasoning that aims at non-epistemic goals. For example, when presented with the same information about scientific consensus opinion regarding global warming, participants’ perceptions of the trustworthiness of various scientists modulated their processing of this information so that it conformed with their prior social views

(Kahan et al. 2011). Among participants with more individualistic and hierarchical worldviews, 56% judged that most scientists were divided on whether global warming is occurring and 55% judged that most scientists are divided about whether humans are causing global warming. Among those with more egalitarian and communitarian views, 78% judged that most scientists were in agreement about whether global warming is occurring, and 68% that most scientists agree that humans are causing global warming. Lewandowsky et al. (2018) provide textual evidence of contradictory assertions in the climate change denial literature, suggesting that prominent climate change deniers selectively downgrade the credibility assigned to various bits of scientific evidence in order to maintain their political views. In other words, scepticism is a tool that can be wielded for non-epistemic and epistemic ends alike. An increase in scepticism about science might stem from epistemically justified assessment, or from fear of what acceptance might entail for one's political beliefs.

Moreover, higher levels of education do not mitigate motivated reasoning, at least not with regard to polarized issues. To the contrary, they can exacerbate the gap between what the scientific evidence counsels and what people accept. For example, greater understanding about climate change science among Democrats was correlated with greater belief that it is a threat in one's lifetime, while Republicans with similar levels of understanding were less likely to believe it is a threat (Hamilton 2010). Greater science literacy and numeracy has also been correlated with greater polarization in climate change beliefs in line with different cultural views (Kahan et al. 2012; Hart and Nisbet 2011; Drummond and Fischhoff 2017). These results make sense: education as such does not alter the non-epistemic goals that prompt the motivated reasoning. Adding weight-of-evidence facts to balance will fail to overcome motivated reasoning for the same reason.

Communication scholars have long recognized this complexity in acceptance of testimony. For example, when an official makes a statement in a timely and voluntary fashion, it is more likely to be accepted at face value. If not, she may say the same

thing, but the message received is that the official is hiding something, and may even amount to the negation of what she says: "What is said is not necessarily what is heard, and what is 'correct' is not necessarily what is believed" (Fessenden-Raden et al. (1987, p. 101). The epistemological moral, in short, is that hearers of testimony are neither passive nor featureless recipients of messages.

An adequate model of acceptance of testimony should reveal the factors that modulate the active process of acceptance.^{viii} Such a model will aid in figuring out what makes it more likely that acceptance will be driven by epistemic goals rather than non-epistemic ones. Even if we were to grant that "culture is prior to facts" (Kahan and Braman (2003, p. 570) or that "solidarity precedes accuracy" (Earle 2010, p. 570), we can try to identify the contexts or conditions enable our interest in truth to strongly constrain (if not wholly determine) acceptance. The subsequent journalistic question is to understand how balance figures into efforts to bring about or maintain those contexts in the interest of effective public policy.

In the next section, I address the general epistemic question in part by arguing that trust is a key factor modulating the goals of reasoning, which in consequence determines the mechanisms of acceptance. I offer a model of acceptance that conceptualizes trust as the outcome of risk assessment. This risk-based model naturally builds source and hearer features and differences in reasoning goals into our understanding of acceptance. I consider the journalistic question in Part 3.

Part 2. Trust, Risk, and the Social Modulation of Acceptance

Trust in a source is a known factor in acceptance of information (Kahan et al. 2006, p. 2072; Fessenden-Raden et al. op.cit.; Pornpitakpan 2014). This includes trust in the scientific enterprise (Drummond and Fischhoff 2017; Siegrist 2000).^{ix} Empirical research on climate change beliefs in particular shows relationships between trust and acceptance of scientific evidence.^x Malka et al. (2009) found that increased knowledge was correlated with more concern among participants who trusted scientists to provide

reliable global warming information, and less concern among those who did not trust them. Lewandowsky et al. (2013) found that strong believers in free markets lowered trust in scientists when consensus information was presented – after all, consensus can be evidence of collusion. Belief polarization (or contrary updating) is when two people respond to the same evidence by updating their beliefs in opposite directions (Jern et al. 2014). In a basic Bayesian model, this would make one of the two people irrational. However, by including variables for trust in scientists and worldview (e.g., more or less individualistic, more or less hierarchical) in a Bayesian model of belief updating, Cook and Lewandowsky (2016) showed how contrary updating can be rational within the Bayesian framework.

Of course, trust has long been recognized in philosophy as an important factor in testimony, prompting inquiry into why trust is needed when we obtain justification via testimony (Hardwig 1991) and when we are justified in trusting (e.g., Faulkner 2007). In addition, the traditional problem of acceptance of testimony is that of justifying acceptance – that is, determining when it is reasonable to accept testimony given that we always risk acquiring a false belief via testimony (Faulkner 2007, p. 875; Faulkner 2011). These theoretical starting points also direct inquiry into trust in testimony. If our starting point is why we ever accept testimony and when we are justified in doing so, and if trust plays a role in testimony, it makes sense to go on to ask why we ever trust and when we are justified in doing so.

But the justification questions for acceptance and trust presuppose the possibilities of acceptance and trust, which in turn presuppose understanding how and when we accept and trust, and how trusting figures in accepting. The problems regarding public beliefs about climate change reveal that accepting is relative to various goals of reasoning, including but not limited to truth. The possibility of acquiring a false belief via testimony entails the prior independent possibilities of hearing it and then processing it in such a way that it is accepted in the way intended by the source. These prior possibilities are actual in what I think of as epistemically

optimistic conditions: their actualization presupposes that the goal of reasoning is truth (or knowledge). That the goal may not be reached is a later concern. But to understand acceptance of testimony in the general case, we need a model that is epistemically neutral in that it does not take for granted that the goal of reasoning is truth (or knowledge).

Such a model can be based on work in risk assessment. The field of risk perception is concerned with understanding how the public forms beliefs about various hazards and policies. From the perspective of risk analysis, a hearer's contribution to a testimonial exchange goes well beyond passive reception of what a source says, with its concomitant risk of exposure to and acceptance of a lie. She actively assesses the risks to her epistemic and non-epistemic goals of any information from a source, and modulates first whether she listens and second, if she does, her processing of what the source says.

Testimony is information, and information is risky in a lot of ways. It might conflict with prior beliefs, values, or goals one is loathe to give up. We accept testimony in the light of these perceived risks. Information filters (bubbles) and echo chambers are external means of reducing informational risk: what isn't heard or what is guaranteed to be confirmatory is not risky, at least not in the short term (which can be long enough). Research into climate change beliefs reveals internal means by which, even if information is not straightforwardly blocked or ignored, it is processed in ways that eliminate or significantly reduce risk. For good reason, our common reaction of generating reasons for discounting the relevance of, or ignoring, threatening information is considered "akin to a flight response" (Lupia 2013, p. 14050). The suite of methods in motivated reasoning reduce informational risk and thereby modulate acceptance. From this perspective, the risk of *acquiring* a false belief is not nearly as great as the risk of *maintaining* a belief that is not (or no longer) evidentially justified or true.

The simplest way to assimilate goal-relative risk assessment into a general model of acceptance of testimony is to use the social scientific consensus definition of trust, which is linked to risk

perception: a psychological state comprising an intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another (Earle 2010, p. 542; Rousseau et al. 1998; Baier 1986, p. 238 fn. 5).^{xi} That is, in trusting someone, one accepts risk in exchange for an uncertain future benefit, such as cooperation – or useful information. Social relationships generally are risky in various ways in relation to various goals. As a subspecies of communication, testimony simply inherits the role of goal-relative risk assessment in acceptance from the general case.^{xii}

This general definition of trust admits of two basic subtypes, depending on whether the expectations are based on intentions or behaviour. Relational trust is based on a close relationship between the trusting person and the other, and the role of intentions is paramount. One relationally trusts the other to have good intentions towards one, with the expectation that these intentions will be borne out in future behaviour. This type of trust is resilient or hard to undermine; it is more likely to be maintained in the face of behaviour that may seem to violate expectations about intentions. Calculative trust (also called confidence) is based on actual past behaviour of the other or constraints on their future behaviour, such as by legal contract. This type of trust is fragile or more easily undermined. Both types operate in relation to individuals (including groups) and properties (see also Kruglanski 2010, p. 945 on general and specific epistemic authorities). One can trust an individual directly, or a role that may be filled by different individuals. Finally, the familiar idea of an asymmetry between the establishment and maintenance of trust – i.e. that trust is hard to establish and easy to destroy – is more characteristic of calculative trust. However, the asymmetry between trust and distrust – i.e. that distrust is harder to dislodge than trust – appears to hold for both types of trust.^{xiii}

With the possible exception of Hardin's (1993) encapsulated interest account – which at best captures only calculative trust, as it is based on iterated prisoner's dilemmas – risk assessment is not explicit in many philosophical definitions of trust. Nevertheless it is a consistent background feature by way of references

to vulnerability (Pettit 1995), reliance on freely cooperative behaviour despite the unreliability of others (Simpson 2012), accepted vulnerability despite the possibility of harm (Baier 1986), or other themes of dependence and expectation of future benefit despite unreliability (Nickel 2017). Philosophers also distinguish kinds of trust that track the relational/calculative distinction (e.g., Baier's non-contract-based/contract-based distinction, Faulkner's affective/ predictive distinction). The above definition captures this common core of many philosophical definitions and is also apt for an epistemically goal-neutral model of acceptance.

Note that risk here is a subjective assessment (i.e. perceived risk), but it can include objective components: for example, when risk is defined as a combination of uncertainty (the objective chance of an outcome), and exposure (the extent to which the outcome matters) (Holton 2004).^{xiv} To illustrate, the risk of whether you should accept the testimony of a friend who says her home-baked cookies don't contain peanuts depends in part on whether your child has a severe peanut allergy (an objective matter) and how much the possible outcomes of acceptance matters (a subjective matter – in this case, a lot). Of course, probability itself has objective and subjective definitions; the point is that perceived risk is itself complex and does not rule out an objective component. This is epistemically important in that a perceived-risk-based model of acceptance must have room for acceptance to be determined (or strongly constrained) by the goal of truth.

Besides relegating truth to the position of being just one of various, possibly competing, goals of acceptance, the risk-based account makes source features and source-hearer relations, both of which are involved in assessing risk, an essential element in the hearer's active engagement in the testimonial relationship. For example, in calculative trust we may assess risk by investigating someone's track record or seeking evidence of her expertise. In relational trust we often use cognitive shortcuts, such as a similarity heuristic (A is like B in respect R, where R may be a group identity, shared value, facial similarity, or other cue) or an affective response (positive or negative feelings). Perceived risk is relative to the

variable levels of vulnerability one has in relation to others, and these levels depend on varying features of individuals.^{xv} For example, white males tend to see the world as much less risky than people with other gender/race combinations (Slovic 1999, p. 694). Such individual differences are intrinsic to the risk-based model of acceptance; I will argue below that they are essential for understanding the epistemic role of balance in news reporting. Finally, we also make risk assessments in context. For example, in conditions of high need for cognitive closure (that is, judgment-formation), judgments tend to be driven more by prejudices and stereotypes than individualizing information (Kruglanski 1990).^{xvi}

To flesh out the proposed model of acceptance and the role of trust in it, consider Hardwig's (1991) discussion of the role of trust in testimony. In his discussion, trust is required for "modern knowers" in research teams given their epistemic reliance on other knowledge workers. In his analysis, A's having good reasons to believe a proposition said by B depends on A's trusting B, since A does not have B's evidence (by assumption). For trust, A can know B personally or rely on someone else who does, setting up a chain of trust. In this way justification for a research result may be distributed among members of a collaboration via chains or a network of trust connections.

But notice: source credibility, and hence risk assessment of a potential source of information, is built into Hardwig's case: a scientific research collaboration. This hides from view, and from deeper understanding, the role that goal-directed risk assessment has already played in making acceptance of collaborators' testimony possible. The academic credentialing system diminishes the risk of each collaborator qua potential source, as faked credentials make vivid; in Becker's (1967) terms, the scientists are roughly equal in the collaboration's hierarchy of credibility, although fine-grained junior and senior academic statuses can matter. Each scientist also has roughly the same degree of vulnerability relative to the others. Finally, all collaborators share the goal of obtaining truth; cases of research misconduct makes vivid the presence of non-epistemic goals even if in this case the risk is presumed to be

low. In sum, the problem of acceptance of interest of interest here has already been resolved. The role of trust in acceptance has been to allow a collaborator's testimony to be heard in the first place, and then to enable the hearer to process what is heard in a way determined (or strongly constrained) by the goal of truth. What's left is just the traditional problem the justification of knowledge by accepted testimony given that one lacks one's own justification. Collaborators trust that the source has justification – a separate issue from the role of trust in acceptance.

Conversely, consider Fricker's (2008, 2009) notion of testimonial injustice, when a speaker is given less credibility than she deserves – she suffers from a credibility deficit – because of an identity prejudice held by the hearer. An identity prejudice is a prejudice based on an identifiable social group to which the speaker belongs, such as race, religion, or occupation. As a result of this injustice, "the flow of knowledge is blocked, truths fail to flow from knower to inquirer".^{xvii} As I might put it, passage from "We report" to "You believe" is blocked by the inquirer's identity prejudice towards the knower.

Cases of testimonial injustice display the risk-based model of acceptance at work. Fricker's cases show what happens when trust is difficult and non-epistemic goals of reasoning dominate acceptance. In testimonial injustice, the knower is deemed not credible by the inquirer because the knower belongs to a social outgroup relative to the inquirer – she represents a perceived social risk and hence an information risk. Motivated reasoning is primed by this risk assessment, although the exact mechanisms by which testimonial injustice may result can differ. The inquirer may seek to reinforce her in-group relationships by blocking information from the knower that might threaten those relationships if taken at face value. For example, the personal experience of perceiving a mayor drink a glass of water with gusto and declaring "there's nothing wrong with this water" will highly influence reasoning about the safety of a town's water supply (Fessenden-Raden op.cit.). Citizens have more relational trust in their mayor than in outside experts who test the water, and this trust modulates acceptance – they hear

the mayor and ignore the expert, or they also hear the expert but heavily discount the credibility of her testimony in subsequent processing.^{xviii} In other cases, an inquirer may simply raise the bar for the establishment of calculative trust via a biased assessment of the knower's track record. The number of actions needed to reach calculative trust may be raised, and actions that might count towards it are downgraded in assessed competence. Alternatively, in cases where calculative trust might otherwise have led to relational trust over time, the amount of time needed may never quite be long enough.

Fricker's notion of an identity prejudice can also easily be expanded to include many (perhaps any) social categories not usually considered prejudices. A trust deficit due to any group membership – "is a government official", "works for Monsanto", "is liberal" – can suffice for acceptance to be blocked or subject to some form of bias in processing. Fricker considers news outlets "indirect" testimony – presumably on the assumption that direct testimony is an individual-to-individual affair – but this metaphysical position is not essential to testimonial injustice. One can distrust groups or institutions directly – whether these are scientists or private industries (Siegrist 2000) or, in the cases of interest here, *The New York Times*, Fox News Network, or the mainstream media ("MSM"). Trust in media is itself complex, since it involves trust in various features of news: selectivity of topics, selectivity of facts, accuracy of depictions, and journalistic assessment (Kohring and Matthes 2007). For example, "the more an issue does not relate to personal experience, the greater the role that trust plays in the relationship between journalists and recipients" (Kohring and Matthes op.cit., p. 248). Acceptance of testimony thus varies by content: it matters what *that p* expresses.

This model of acceptance – in the sense of 'model' used in science (Weisberg 2013) – does not take a particular kind of trust or trust-based testimonial relationship as standard. Instead, acceptance can be thought of in terms of the outcome of a reasoning process characterized in terms of the goals of reasoning and features of sources and recipients and their relations that affect the

latter's risk assessment. Different cases (and predictions) of acceptance are generated by setting the relevant variables to various values. For example, in Hardwig's case of a scientific collaboration, the goal variable is set to truth, and variables for the features of sources and recipients (e.g., elite academic credentials, equal standing in the collaboration, white men) yield a low-risk context in which acceptance of the source's intended message is highly probable. The risk of acquiring a false belief arises, but acquiring one in a context defined by these settings is improbable. In comparison, in Fricker's cases of testimonial injustice, the goal variable may be set to maintain social ties, and variables for source and hearer features and relations yield a context in which acceptance is improbable. In this case, the risk of acquiring a false belief doesn't even arise.

It follows from this view that it is not quite right to say that we trust speakers to be truthful (when we do trust them). That way of putting the matter connects the role of trust in testimony directly to the goal of truth. What we should say instead is that we trust someone as a result of a process of risk assessment, and what that person says is (or will be) perceived as truthful *because* we trust them. As Faulkner (2007) argues, the audience's trust in the source of testimony can be reason enough for accepting that testimony. But trust is at work before the speaker opens her mouth (the first stage in acceptance), and what is accepted is a weighted version of what comes out when she does (the second stage). In terms of the journalistic concern of this paper, "You trust" precedes and modulates *both* "We report" (who is able to listen?) and "You believe" (what do they accept?). Trust makes passage from "We report in a balanced and fair manner" to "You decide" possible.

Thus, when Fox News Network declared itself as "Most Trusted", it trumpeted this role of trust in its testimony precisely when it is worth doing so: in a social context characterized by distrust. In epistemological terms, a climate of distrust is a defeater-environment. Given the above analysis of acceptance, it is a communication context in which the thresholds for establishing or maintaining relational and calculative trust between members of

different social subgroups are high. Testimonial failures across subgroup boundaries are likely. In orthodox Bayesian terms, the only way that a hearer can resist new evidence for a conclusion p is if the hearer already firmly believes p is false. But given the role of trust in acceptance, the hearer can resist the new evidence for p , even without being committed to not- p , just because the hearer distrusts the source.^{xix} In general, anything that primes non-epistemic goals of reasoning has potentially epistemically suboptimal consequences, since the more reasoning aims at non-epistemic goals the less it aims at forming true beliefs. A lack of trust is one such prime.

Part 3. The Practice and Justification of Balance

This leaves the question of the epistemic role of balance, given the trust-modulated passage from "We report" to "You believe." The science communication research shows that balanced science news, even with weight-of-evidence information included, does not entail public belief that matches scientific consensus, at least not in a climate of distrust. In such a climate, acceptance is blocked or diverted away from truth (or justified belief, such as scientific consensus opinion) even when reports are balanced and information about scientific consensus information is provided. In short, presenting both sides, in itself, is epistemically neutral as a means of leading to evidentially justified beliefs. So what good is it? It is a separate issue that different political and social values will yield different policy recommendations even when opposing sides believe the same facts. Does balance do nothing to contribute to the acceptance of those facts?

From the fact that balance is not a cure for epistemically suboptimal reasoning, it does not follow that it plays no essential epistemic role. In any form, balance offers news consumers distinct perspectives, whether or not they weigh these perspectives in justified ways and end up with justified beliefs. The epistemic value of balance derives from the fact that risk assessment differs between individuals. Balance provides those who are able to accept more informational risk with distinct perspectives. They can reason to

justified beliefs and use those beliefs in the light of their values to arrive at policy suggestions. Such people can act as multipliers within their respective subgroups, thus spreading the epistemic value of balance to those who are not able to accept the same information directly from the original source of the testimony.

As Hardin (1993, p. 525) notes, we have different capacities for trust, depending on a number of factors, such as a stable upbringing, keen assessment of other peoples' motives, or being a member of a dominant social group. The risk-based model of acceptance of testimony entails that there will be individual differences in acceptance. Less vulnerable individuals will have less need to engage in self-protective reasoning. For example, Kruglanski (2010, p. 941) notes that political conservatism is positively related to need for cognitive closure, but it does not follow that each political conservative is equally in need of closure. Many conservatives respond to scientific consensus information about climate change with contrary updating, but not all do.

Some can even flip. A famous recent case is former Cato Institute climate change denier Jerry Taylor, who was able to critically assess the positions of scientists arguing against taking action and begin to argue for policies to mitigate the effects of climate change (Inquiring Minds podcast 2017). Taylor is a white man of stable, high socioeconomic status. These features alone do not determine why the possibility of acceptance *for him* of climate science results conflicting with his political views was greater than that of other conservative white men in similar circumstances. They do explain why his perceived risk of flipping was lower than it might be for many other conservatives. Another critical factor was his ability to give sufficient weight to the goal of truth over other goals, such as his personal interest in being a regular and well-paid pundit on conservative television. *For hearers who have this constellation of features*, balance can contribute to good decision-making more or less in the way traditionally assumed -- even in a general climate of distrust and polarization. But this is a special case, and the model of acceptance given above shows why.

Such individual differences can then make a social difference via amplification of the voices of such individuals within their epistemic communities. Taylor now works for a think-tank in which he develops libertarian-consonant policy positions in response to anthropogenic climate change. The facts are not in dispute; the responses depend on values, as was always the case. His position magnifies his individual reasoning so that the epistemic benefits of balance at the individual level can be made available to those within the community for whom taking the same information risk is not possible and so for whom acceptance is not possible. Whether such individuals choose to play this amplifying role is not up to the media, but the media can provide the raw material.

There is of course nothing new in noting that testimony from individuals within a social group is more likely to be accepted (heard and processed in an epistemically virtuous way) by others in the group. Katherine Hayhoe, a climate change scientist who is also an evangelical Christian, is a prominent case of this type. In-group relations are likely to be characterized by relational trust, which de-incentivizes defensive reasoning and thereby increases acceptance. It follows, however, that there will be fewer such individuals in a climate of distrust, blunting the epistemic contribution of balance to democratic decision-making.

This is why journalistic measures to address distrust must also play a role. A frequent suggestion along these lines is more careful attention to framing. Frames are "interpretive storylines that set a specific train of thought in motion, communicating why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible for it, and what should be done about it" (Nisbet 2009, p. 15). How issues are framed in a news story "can have an effect on how it is understood by audiences" (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, p. 11). The elements of framing involve identifying a problem, the cause, a moral interpretation, and a proposed remedy (Huttunen and Hilden (2014). Each of these elements are not necessarily said (or expressible easily in propositional form) but they are critical to what is communicated. Various frames for climate change are those which involve social progress, economic development and

competitiveness, morality and ethics, and scientific and technical uncertainty (see also Nisbet 2009, p. 18 Table 2). For example, a moral frame communicates the message "Our way of life is unethical", while other frames deny this message even if they accept a need for a policy response. The suggestion is that journalists or in-group communicators can try to neutralize the effects of worldview and distrust of scientists by framing stories in "world-consonant" terms (Cook and Lewandowsky 2016; see also Kahan and Braman op.cit.).

Conclusion.

I've argued for a more adequate understanding of acceptance of testimony – the route from "We report" to "You believe" – as a way of clarifying the epistemic value of balance in new journalism. The goal-relative, risk-based model of acceptance reveals a role for truth at the start of this route and in the middle. Trust determines or constrains the possibility of taking the initial informational risk of consuming a news report and in how what is reported is processed to result in what is believed or accepted. It follows that "We report in a fair and balanced manner" will depend on trust, and that balance cannot compensate for a climate of distrust.

Nevertheless, different individuals have different capacities for trust or different tolerances for informational risk. A climate of distrust will decrease the proportion of such individuals within a society. But because balance presents *these* individuals with opposing viewpoints, *they* can accept and process balanced news in the way that was assumed to be the norm across consumers of news. The account of acceptance provided here shows in what way they are exceptions. As in-group members, their acceptance can be leveraged to amplify acceptance at the social level of public discourse and public decision-making. In addition, framing can help reduce distrust among those who are less willing or able to take informational risks, lowering barriers to acceptance for everyone.^{xx}

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ⁱ I set aside issues of how many voices should be included and how they are selected. The cases of interest here involve gaps between scientific consensus and public opinion and the role of balance in creating or mitigating these gaps.

ⁱⁱ The old slogan was reportedly dropped to separate the channel to some extent from right-wing political operative Roger Ailes, its founding chairman. Ailes, who adopted the slogan, died in May 2017. Even if true, this reason does not explain why “Most Watched, Most Trusted” was the chosen replacement.

ⁱⁱⁱ While some in the philosophical literature distinguish acceptance from belief, I will use them as synonyms. It's unlikely the folk systematically distinguish between these states, and the empirical studies discussed below don't either. For example, standard social science surveys present a proposition and ask whether participants agree or disagree on a 7-point scale anchored by "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree". There is no clear motivation for mapping "agree" to one of either "accept" or "believe".

^{iv} False equivalence is when a behaviour (usually egregious) by one side or person is "balanced" by mention of a similar but inequivalent act by an opposing side or person on the other – a variant of the Tu Quoque fallacy. Obviously judgments of when such comparisons are falsely equivalent will vary (in ways that the text helps illuminate).

^v Misinformation, easily found on the Internet, also plays a role (Lewandowsky et al. 2012, Lewandowsky et al. 2013). Lewandowsky et al. 2012: 623) define rejection of science as "dismissal of well-established scientific results that are not scientifically grounded", but (as other studies show) those who understand more about science don't necessarily accept science. See also Kobayashi 2018 on the roles of beliefs about scientific consensus and social consensus in the acceptability of a scientific claim.

^{vi} Kruglanski and colleagues (Kruglanski 1990; Kruglanski et al. 2010) theorize that motivated reasoning is rooted in the need to achieve cognitive closure, or to form a judgment based on the information available. Closure is theorized to be a fundamental motivation for constructing knowledge (or belief), and is modulated by context-specific and individual variation in the need to achieve it. For example, we may seek closure in order to attain perceived non-epistemic benefits, such as esteem or material welfare for oneself or significant others, or avoid corresponding perceived losses. Individual differences in the need for closure will consequently affect individual acceptance.

^{vii} The Principle of Charity (by which one should interpret another's utterances so that they optimize agreement in terms of their meaning or at least truth conditions) rests on social relationships: President Trump's literal lies are interpreted by supporters in a broader light in which he's expressing something true, just not in propositional form.

See Daukas 2006 on a principle of epistemic charity extended within social groups.

^{viii} The sender's side of the relationship matters -- for example, in terms of how intended messages should be framed to raise the probability of acceptance. I consider news senders in the final section, since in this context the role of the sender is the specific question of what the practice of balance in journalism contributes to acceptance.

^{ix} Lupia (2013: 14051) suggests two variables are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for source credibility: the listener's perception of common interests and perception of relative expertise (p. 14051). For example, in conditions in which external forces for preventing or punishing lying are high, the extent to which perceived common interests are required for credibility decreases (p. 14052). As this example implies, assessment of common interests will itself involve risk assessment (e.g. risk is low when breaking a contract incurs severe penalty), although it is an open question exactly how these variables are related to others in the risk-assessment literature.

^x The Quine-Duhem thesis already implies that the conclusion one accepts in hypothesis testing depend on auxiliary hypotheses, or prior background beliefs. The empirical results reveal that a broader range of psychological attitudes, in particular trust, also play a role.

^{xi} On this view, trust is distinct from reliance, which may involve inanimate objects. Since my focus is on testimony from people, this difference will not matter here.

^{xii} The status of testimony as a form of communication is noted (e.g. Lackey 2008: fn. 9; Faulkner 2000), and (as Slovic 1999: 697 puts it), "if trust is lacking, no form or process of communication will be satisfactory."

^{xiii} Relational and calculative trust no doubt interact in complicated ways and can be difficult to distinguish (and research to date is sparse: Earle *op.cit.*, p. 571). Ascriptions of intentions and predictions of behaviour are often intertwined, and relational trust may be the long-run outcome of calculative trust (e.g., a married couple) but not necessarily (e.g., children and their parents). However, these complications don't play a role here.

^{xiv} Subjective features associated with risk assessment include uncertainty, dread, controllability, and other factors (Slovic 1999).

^{xv} Given Dunbar's work on the number of personal relationships one can have that involve trust (and obligations) – about 150 – it is likely that trust is a limited resource. Group membership can expand this circle, but a second-order limit may also appear.

^{xvi} Thus, the explanation of why we trust isn't necessarily what might count philosophically as a reason (see also Hawley 2017: 233). A trusts B just because B is a member of A's church; A distrusts C just because C makes A feel uncomfortable. The rationality of such reasons is important for the question of whether trust is justified, but not for the question of how it comes about.

^{xvii} It is not quite the case that in testimonial injustice truths do not flow from knower to inquirer. More precisely, A's intended message is not accepted because A communicates (perhaps, but not necessarily, non-propositionally) that she belongs to a particular group, B distrusts that group, and A's intended message is assigned low credibility.

^{xviii} Consistently with this model, Marsh (2011) argues that testimonial injustice is one of a broader class of "trust injustices", or injustices in our credibility judgments whether or not these involve testimonial relationships. Information risk is one kind of risk we assess.

^{xix} Thanks to Sean Sullivan for this point.

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