COUNTEREXAMPLES TO TESTIMONIAL TRANSMISSION

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It is natural to think that we learn (come to know) many things by believing what other people tell us. This is a perfectly ordinary way to learn new things. If we don’t already know ourselves, it must be that we learn *because* the speaker has the knowledge we’re after. Testimonial knowledge is then knowledge arrived through believing another’s testimony because the sender had knowledge to transmit. *Testimonial* knowledge is *transmitted* knowledge.

From these ordinary observations, two highly plausible principles follow. First, modulo certain qualifications, when a recipient believes a sender’s testimony that P, if the sender knows that P, then the recipient comes to know—or is in a position to come to know—that P as well. The sender’s knowledge *suffices* for the recipient’s knowledge, much like when you run up a tab at a bar but don’t have any money and someone else kindly offers to pay. Call this SUFFICIENCY.

Second, when a recipient believes a sender’s testimony that P, if the sender doesn’t know that P, then there is no way the recipient can come to know that P through believing the sender. That would be like relying on someone to pay your tab, but they are just as broke as you are. That’s no way to pay your bill. Call this NECESSITY.

Here are some authors endorsing NECESSITY. Michael Dummett says testimonial knowledge “is the transmission from one individual to another of knowledge.” He goes on to say that the “original purveyor ... - the first link in the chain of transmission - must himself have known it... or it cannot be knowledge for any of those who derived it ultimately from him” (1994: 264). Angus Ross writes “your telling me that P can only be said to provide me with knowledge if you know that P” (1986: 62). Michael Welbourne writes “it is necessary, if there is to be a successful process of testimonial transmission, that the speaker have knowledge to communicate” (1994: 302). And Robert Audi says, “my testimony cannot give you testimonially grounded knowledge that P without my knowing that P. (…) Testimony transmits knowledge but does not, as such, generate it” (1997: 410).

Here are some authors endorsing SUFFICIENCY. C.A.J. Coady says, “if S knows that P then (given the satisfaction of certain conditions relating to S's sincerity, the willingness of S's audience to accept what S says as an honest expression of what he knows etc.) S can bring his listeners to know that P by telling them that P” (1992: 224). Elizabeth Fricker says when “a belief of S’s gives rise to an utterance by him, which utterance produces in his audience H a belief with the same content; and all this happens in such a way that, if S’s belief is knowledge, then we may allow that title to H’s belief too” (1987: 57). One can also find endorsements hedged with the expression ‘normally’ or qualified in other ways. For example, Timothy Williamson writes “in normal circumstances, a speaker who asserts that P thereby puts a hearer in a position to know that P if (and only if) the speaker knows that P” (1996: 520). Robert Audi writes “concerning knowledge, we might say that at least normally, a belief that P based on testimony constitutes knowledge ... provided that the attester knows that P and the believer has no reason to doubt either P or the attester's credibility concerning it” (1997: 412). Tyler Burge writes “if one has acquired one's belief from others in a normal way, and if the others know the proposition, one acquires knowledge” (1993: 477, fn. 16). And Gareth Evans claims “if the speaker S has knowledge of x to the effect that it is F, and in consequence utters a sentence in which he refers to x, and says of it that it is F, and if his audience A hears and understands the utterance, and accept it as true (and there are no defeating conditions), then A himself comes to know of x that it is F” (1982: 310).

Given the obvious pull of our two principles and their widespread endorsement, they must form a part of our intuitive, folk epistemology. And our “folk epistemology,” Fricker writes, “cuts out epistemic situation at its true joints” (2015: 194).

Even so, various thinkers have concocted prima facie counterexamples to both. Our purpose in this chapter is to catalog many of these cases. We find them interesting in their own right, not only because they challenge what might otherwise appear to be the orthodox view of testimonial knowledge as transmitted knowledge, but because reflection on these cases holds out the promise of discovering deeper principles that explain why our two folk principles seem so compelling, and exactly why and when they might fail. We will point in the direction of some of this work to date as we conclude, but for the most part our goal here is to categorize and catalog the counterexamples. We will not, regrettably, consider other grounds for challenging the orthodox view. We hope readers find this chapter a useful resource as they engage in further philosophical detective work on their own, whether primarily case-based or based on other considerations.

1. COUNTEREXAMPLES TO SUFFICIENCY

In a counterexample to SUFFICIENCY, a sender knows that P but the recipient does not come to know that P; knowledge does not transmit. We isolate three categories of counterexamples to SUFFICIENCY, three categories of cases of transmission failure:

1. Cases where the cause of failure *resides in the sender*;
2. Cases where the cause of failure *resides in the environment*;
3. Cases where the cause of failure *resides in the recipient*.
4. Transmission Failure Due to the Sender

We begin with a case from Fred Dretske:

**Dretske’s Drinker**

George…is especially fond of [Bordeaux wines] from the Medoc region of Bordeaux. He …unerringly identifies a genuine Medoc as a Bordeaux, and specifically as a Medoc, when he tastes one. Strangely…George is confused about Chianti. He has no trouble distinguishing a Chianti from a Medoc…or in identifying a Chianti as a Chianti, but he thinks Chianti is a Bordeaux wine. He has never studied the labels very carefully, but he has the vague idea that 'Tuscany' is the name of a wine-growing region in southern Bordeaux....[At a dinner party he has a Medoc wine. He tells his friend the next day that he had Bordeaux at the party].

From Dretske 1982: 109-110. Discussed by Welbourne 1983; Coady 1992: 224-230; Adler 1996: 104-105; and Graham 2000b: 136-138.

Dretske takes this case to show that even if a speaker knows that P when asserting that P, it does not follow that the recipient can learn that P from believing that P on the basis of understanding and accepting the speaker’s assertion. *In this example, the problem is that the speaker has a false background belief*, that Tuscany is a region of Southern France (the way many people think that New York is a part of New England). This belief does not rob his knowledge that the wine he drank was a Bordeaux, for just as one can know that Vermont is in New England without knowing that New York is not, one can know that Medocs are from Bordeaux without knowing that Chianti are not. That’s why George would easily say that the wine is a Bordeaux, even when it is not. And that’s why Dretske thought you can’t learn from George’s testimony, even if he speaks from knowledge.

We now turn to a different kind of case from Jennifer Lackey.

**Almost a Liar -1**

Phil … trusts those whom he has good reason to trust-or at least those whom he has no clear reason to distrust-and distrusts those whom he has good reason to distrust. Yesterday…Phil ran into Jill…and she…told him that she had seen an orca whale while boating... Phil, having acquired very good reasons for trusting…her, …accepted her testimony. .. Jill did in fact see an orca. [She] is very reliable [about whales]…[and] Phil has no reason to doubt [her]. However, in order to promote a whale watching business…, she would have reported … that she had seen an orca whale even if she hadn’t.

From Lackey 2006: 91, 2008: 69.

In this example the speaker, we can stipulate, *speaks from her knowledge* (she says what she does because she knows), but it is also clear that *she would easily assert that she saw an orca even if she did not*. She would easily assert that Peven if not P., Here is a related example from Christopher Peacocke:

**Astrologist**

Mary sometimes comes to believe that it is raining by looking, and sometimes by deduction from astrological principles. [When she looks], she knows it is raining; [she she “reads the stars”], she does not. … [So] if she tells her friend that it is raining [even when she looks], he does not come to know that it is raining.

From Peacocke 1986: 149-150. Endorsed by McDowell 1994: 222, fn. 33. Endorsed by Graham 2000b: 149, fn. 20; Graham 2016: 175-6. We can describe this case the same way, where Mary speaks from her knowledge on the occasion but often, nevertheless, does not; she would easily assert that it is raining even when she does not know it is.

Nozick’s case of a grandmother in a hospital can be framed as an analogue of these cases. The first two sentences are from Nozick (1981: 179). The rest concocts the analogue:

**Grandmother’s Call**

A grandmother sees her grandson is well when he comes to visit; but if he were sick or dead, others would tell her he was well to spare her upset. In the former case, when she tells her friends on the phone that her grandson is well, she speaks from her knowledge. But in the latter case, when she tells her friends on the phone that her grandson is well, she speaks from what she thinks is knowledge, but is not. She would easily tell her friends that her grandson is fine when he is not.

Compare also Graham 2016: 175. We turn to a similar, but even so different kind of case:

**Almost a Liar -2**

A speaker knows that p and tells a listener that p. However, the speaker says that p not because she knows that p but because having the listener believe that p is in the speaker’s interests. So even if the speaker didn’t know that p, or even didn’t believe that p, she would still have told the listener that p. The listener comes to believe that p by taking the speaker’s word for it.

This example is from Wright 2016a: 69. (See also Wright 2018, ch. 7) Wright says his example is just Lackey’s example, above. However, **Almost a Liar-2** differs from **Almost a Liar-1**. In Lackey’s case, we stipulate that the speaker speaks from her knowledge. In Wright’s case, the speaker does not speak from her knowledge. So the proximal causes differ in the two cases. Wright himself would argue that this difference makes a difference. We simply hereby *note* the difference.

Here is a summary of the underlying causes of transmission failure due to the sender:

* **Dretske’s Drinker**: Though the speaker speaks from knowledge, *because of the speaker’s relevant false background belief*, the speaker would easily assert that P even if not P.
* **Almost-a-Liar 1**: Though the speaker speaks from knowledge, she would easily assert that P even if not P *because of a background motive to deceive.*
* **Astrologist, Grandmother’s Call**: Though the speaker speaks form knowledge, she would easily assert that P even if not P *because of nearby, unreliable, but unused belief-forming methods*.
* **Almost-a-Liar 2**: Though the speaker knows, *the speaker does not speak from knowledge but instead because of her operative motive to deceive* in asserting that P, and would also thereby easily assert that P even if not P.

We now turn to putative counterexamples caused by features of the recipient’s local environment.

1. Transmission Failure Due to the Local Environment

**Newspaper:** A political leader is assassinated. His associates, fearing a coup, decide to pretend that the bullet hit someone else. On nationwide television they announce that an assassination attempt has failed… However, before the announcement is made, an enterprising reporter on the scene telephones the real story to his newspaper, which has included the story in its final edition. Jill … reads the story of the assassination. … Jill has justified true belief…. But she does not know that the … leader has been assassinated. For everyone else has heard about the televised announcement.

From Harman 1973: 143-144. Harman thinks the recipient does not acquire knowledge; a speaker’s knowledge can fail to transmit to the hearer because the hearer lacks “accessible” but misleading evidence that would defeat her justification. Take away the misleading evidence, and knowledge transmits. The problem is with the environment.

Lycan 1977 is a classic reply to Harman; Lycan thinks the recipient acquires knowledge. For further discussion as the case applies to testimony, see Adler 1996: 100.

Reflecting on Harman’s newspaper case, Graham devised a variant that he says is structurally similar to Alvin Goldman’s thermometer case (Goldman 1986: 45-6; Graham 2000b: 148, n. 15). In Goldman’s case, someone reaches in to a box of thermometers and grabs the only working thermometer. All the rest are broken and would read 98F regardless. When the agent uses the one working thermometer, it reads 98F. Can the agent learn that his temperature is 98F in such a case? Goldman thinks not. Here is Graham’s analogous case:

**Assassination:** The military of a small country hopes to stage a successful coup and threatens all of the reporters in the country to report that the President has been assassinated regardless of what happens…. All but one of the reporters gives in. Adler will report what really happens, no matter what. … [The] assassination is successful and Adler is the only eyewitness. The other reporters…simply report that the President was assassinated. When Harman walks down the street and just happens to read Adler’s newspaper among all the others on the stand, Harman does not learn (come to know) that the President was assassinated, for Harman would easily rely on the other newspapers.

FromGraham 2000b: 134-136; Graham 2016: 179. The speaker knows; would not assert that P unless she knows; would not assert that P unless P; but even so the hearer does not acquire knowledge. The presence of the other unreliable but (on this occasion) accurate newspapers undermines knowledge, for Harman would easily rely on an unreliable newspaper. (The case where Harman would only read Adler’s report is a different case.) But take away the surrounding unreliable reports in the other newspapers, and knowledge transmits. The problem is with the local environment.

We now turn to a case somewhat like **Assassination**, except that the other “reporters” would say something false:

**A Lucky Choice**

… in Chicago for the first time, Pierre asks the closest passerby…, Zoe, for directions to the Sears Tower and she reports that it is six blocks east. … Zoe knows that this is the case, and Pierre has no reason to doubt … her … [But] she is the only reliable speaker in this part of Chicago, completely surrounded by incompetents and liars. Because of this, the fact that Pierre chooses a reliable testifier … is entirely … good luck.

From Lackey 2008: 68. See also her structurally similar Case #5 (Lackey 2003: 714-5) involving Marvin who travels to a town full of villagers hostile to outsiders and luckily talks to the one villager willing to help outsiders. In both of Lackey’s cases the speaker speaks from her knowledge, would not easily not speak from her knowledge, would not assert that P unless P, but even so the hearer does not acquire knowledge. Remove the surrounding incompetents and hostile villagers and knowledge transmits. Again, the problem is the local environment.

1. Transmission Failure Due to the Recipient

We now turn to a case from Lackey that purports to isolate the case of transmission failure in the recipient:

**Compulsively Trusting**

Bill is a compulsively trusting… [of] [Sue]... …He is incapable of distrusting her when he has very good reason [not to]. … [W]hen he has … overwhelming evidence for believing that she is … deceitful, Bill cannot come to believe this…. Yesterday… Bill ran into [Sue], and she told him that she had seen an orca whale…that day. [Sue]… did in fact see an orca…[and] she is very reliable [and] Bill has no reason to doubt [her] testimony. Given his compulsively trusting nature with respect to [Sue], however, even if he had had massive amounts of evidence available to him indicating, for instance, that [she] did not see an orca whale, that she is an unreliable epistemic agent, that she is an unreliable testifier, that orca whales do not live in this part of the country, and so on, Bill would have just as readily accepted [her] testimony.

From Lackey 2006: 88-89; Lackey 2008: 66-8. See also Lackey 2003: 711 for a structurally similar case involving someone who would ignore defeating evidence of a sender’s testimony because the recipient is so “good-natured.”

One might doubt that this case undermines SUFFICIENCY insofar as proponents of SUFFICIENCY hold that irrational uptake blocks knowledge transfer. (Proponents don’t, after all, generally think knowledge transfers when a recipient’s other evidential grounds rationally defeat acceptance.) In this case, though lacking defeaters for the sender’s testimony, the recipient is still prone to irrationality when relying on this recipient. So though knowledge does not transfer, that’s no objection to the underlying motivation for SUFFICIENCY.

1. COUNTEREXAMPLES TO NECESSITY

We now turn to putative counterexamples to NECESSITY. In a counterexample to NECESSITY, the sender does not know that P, but the recipient comes to know that P nonetheless. Knowledge is thereby generated. We isolate five categories, five types of cases of knowledge generation:

1. Cases where generation is due to a “gap” in belief;
2. Cases where the generation is due to defeated belief in sender;
3. Cases where the generation results from partial support from the recipient;
4. Cases where the generation is due to features of the environment;
5. Cases where the generation is due to content inversion.
6. Generation Due to a “Gap” in Belief

**Creationist Teacher**

Suppose that a Catholic elementary school requires…teachers include…evolutionary theory in their science classes and … conceal their own personal beliefs [on evolution]. Mrs. Smith, a teacher at the school…, researches [evolution] from reliable sources…and develops a set of reliable lecture notes... Mrs. Smith is…a devout creationist and…does not believe …evolutionary theory, but…none the less follows the requirement to teach [it]. …[I]n this case it seems reasonable to assume that Mrs. Smith’s students can come to have knowledge via her testimony, despite the fact that she [does not believe evolutionary theory] and hence does not [know]. … [S]he can give to her students what she does not have... … I take it that similar considerations apply in cases where a Kantian teaches utilitarianism, a dualist teaches physicalism, an atheist teaches Christianity, and so on.

From Lackey 1999: 477, 2008: 48-53. Paul Faulkner independently suggested cases like these: “Suppose a teacher propounds a theory he does not believe. The teacher’s rejection of the theory seems to imply that he does not have knowledge of it. However, if the theory is known, then it seems likely that the students could be in a position to acquire this knowledge” (Faulkner 2000: 595). For discussions, see Audi 2006, Burge 2013; Fricker 2006, Graham 2006, Lackey 2008, Kletzl 2011, and Wright 2016. Graham argues that the case does not undermine NECESSITY, for there is knowledge of evolutionary theory in the chain of sources. Knowledge is not generated by the chain, but only skips a link in the chain. This point is also made by Faulkner 2000: 595; 2011: 61, 73. It was also anticipated by Burge 1993.

To get around this obstacle, Graham imagined the following variant:

**Fossil**

Mr. Jones, a devout creationist, teaches second grade…[and is] required to [teach evolution]. He [keeps] his personal views to himself. He develops a reliable set of notes…and even…a sophisticated understanding of fossils and the fossil record…. He “accepts” the theory for the purposes of teaching his students, fulfilling his duty to the schoolboard... [On] a field trip…he discovers a fossil. [He] rightly deduces that the fossil is of a creature now long extinct, and tells his students that the extinct creature once lived right where they are, millions of years ago. Given his understanding of the theory, and his commitment to teach evolution…, he would not easily say that the extinct creature lived there millions of years ago …if it did not. But he does not believe it, in part because he does not believe the earth is a million years old, among other things. The children accept his report, and come to believe that the creatures once lived right where they are, millions of years ago…[The] children learn (come to know) by accepting Mr. Jones’ report.

From Graham 2000a: 377. This version is from Graham 2006: 112. See also Graham 2016: 176. In **Fossil,** the teacher is the first link in the chain of communication regarding the particular fact in question. If anyone is the first to know the fact, it is the children, for the teacher does not believe it. For some critical discussion, see Burge 2013: 256-8. Burge argues that knowledge is dispersed in the chain—different parts of the chain have different pieces of knowledge. This explains the recipient’s knowledge. The point is anticipated by Graham 2006: 111, n.4: collaborative work in the sciences often involves distributed knowledge.

Other cases followed on the heels of these two. Adam Carter and Philip Nickel worry that **Fossil** is not strong enough, for “Mr. Jones is not a practicing scientist and does not follow valid scientific methods” (2014: 148, n.9). They propose a new case (“Grant Scholars”) involving scientists with world-class training and expertise who are, nonetheless, religiously committed to the denial of a certain finding. Even so, when they make the discovery, they share it with the world, privately suspending judgment. (Carter and Nickel 2014: 150-151).

Once you see how a commitment to creationism can create a “gap in belief” where a scientist “accepts” a proposition well-supported by the evidence but does not believe the proposition (so does not know the proposition), “schoolteacher” type cases are easy. You should also see how “belief-gap” cases might generalize. Here is another example:

**Distraught Doctor**

A doctor understands that all of the scientific evidence indicates that there is no connection between vaccines and autism. However, after his child was diagnosed with autism shortly after receiving her vaccines, the doctor’s grief causes him to abandon his belief that there’s no connection between vaccines and autism. When asked by one of his patients, however, about whether or not there’s a connection between vaccines and autism, the doctor tells her that there is [no] connection. He does this because he realizes that this is what the evidence best supports and takes himself to have a duty to say whatever the evidence best supports.

From Lackey: 2008, 110–111.

Belief-gap cases are straightforward cases where the speaker has what she needs to know—and so it is no surprise that a hearer can learn from her testimony—but the speaker does not form the required belief, and so the speaker does not have *knowledge* to pass along. For criticism, see Audi 2006. For extended discussion, see Wright 2018, chapters 2 & 7.

1. Generation Due to Defeated Belief in the Sender

Lackey has offered a number of cases where the speaker would otherwise have knowledge to transmit but for a defeater. In her examples the defeater is a believed undercutting defeater that the relevant belief-forming mechanism is unreliable, or insufficient for knowledge. Rationality would then ordinarily lead to suspension of judgment. But the sender does not suspend judgement (and so believes anyway, on what turns out to be reliable mechanisms, ordinarily sufficient for knowledge) and goes on to assert what she believes. The recipient (ignorant about the sender’s irrationality) thereby comes to know what the speaker asserts. But the speaker does not know, for the speaker’s warrant or justification for her belief is defeated by the undercutting defeater. Hence the recipient acquires knowledge, even though the sender does not have knowledge to transmit.

**Persistent Believer**

Millicent in fact possesses her normal visual powers, but she has cogent reasons to believe that these powers are temporarily deranged. She is the subject of a neurosurgeon’s experiments, and the surgeon falsely tells her that some implants are causing malfunction in her visual cortex. While she is persuaded that her present visual appearances are an entirely unreliable guide to reality, she continues to place credence in her visual appearances. She ignores her well-supported belief in the incapacitation of her visual faculty; she persists in believing, on the basis of her visual experiences, that a chair is before her, that the neurosurgeon is smiling, and so on. These beliefs are all, in fact, true and they are formed by the usual, quite reliable, perceptual processes. As Millicent is walking out of the neurosurgeon’s office, she is the only person to see a badger in Big Bear Field. On the basis of this visual experience, she forms the corresponding true belief that there was a badger in this field, and then later reports this fact to her friend Bradley without communicating the neurosurgeon’s testimony to him. Bradley, who has ample reason to trust Millicent from their past interaction as friends, forms the corresponding true belief solely on the basis of her testimony.

From Lackey 2008: 59 (cp. Goldman 1986: 53-4). See her structurally similar case in Lackey 1999: 487, and her 2003: 710.

In cases like these, the speaker has what she needs for knowledge, but for a defeater. She can’t pass along what she doesn’t have (knowledge), but for all that she has what the hearer needs to come to know.

1. Generation Due to Partial Support by the Recipient

Both Lackey and Graham imagine cases where a sender does not know that P because there is a relevant alternative possibility in the environment (think the barn cases from Goldman 1976) that the sender cannot rule out (that is why the sender does not know). On the other hand, the recipient has background knowledge that the relevant alternative possibility does not obtain. So when the sender truly asserts P on good evidence, the sender does not know because of the relevant alternative possibility that Q, incompatible with P. But the recipient knows that not-Q. Even though the recipient need not bring this background knowledge to consciousness, this background knowledge explains why the recipient learns (comes to know) when the recipient believes the senders’ assertion. That’s the “partial support” . Lackey’s example is from Lackey 1999: 487-488. Here is Graham’s example:

**Judy and Trudy**

Judy and Trudy are clumsy twins who work in a library. Almost everyone in the library … can tell them apart. Susan works in a section of the library with Judy. Though Trudy sometimes works in Susan’s section of the library, Susan has not met Trudy, nor does she know or even believe that there is someone named ‘Trudy’ who works in the library…. If Susan were confronted with Trudy, she would mistake her for Judy. Bill also works in the library… One afternoon both Judy and Trudy are at work in adjacent sections of the library re-shelving books. Judy is in plain sight of Susan and Trudy is in plain sight of Bill. Judy knocks over a statue in plain sight of Susan. After hearing the crash, Bill calls Susan and asks what happened. Susan tells him that Judy knocked over a statue….In the circumstances, Trudy might have very well knocked over the statue if Judy had not [for Trudy just walked past this section for the first time, while re-shelving books herself]. [Susan thus does not know it was Judy…But from Susan’s testimony, Bill knows it was Judy. For he] knows that it was not Trudy. He was looking right at her when he heard the crash [and can easily tell the twins apart].

From Graham 2000a: 371-2. For some discussion of this case, see Keren 2007: 370-1.

In these kinds of cases, the sender does not have enough to know the target proposition herself, but the hearer’s “partial support” makes up for that. So when the hearer relies on the speaker, the hearer has enough to know, even though the speaker doesn’t..

1. Generation Due to Features of the Environment

Sanford Goldberg (2005) concocted a case where a recipient comes to know that P by believing a sender who does not know that P, where the recipient’s knowledge is due to support of the recipient’s belief by another agent in the environment. Here’s the case:

**Milk**

Frank [has] a strange habit. Every morning at 7:30…he … dumps out whatever [milk is] left [in the fridge], but places the empty [opaque, cardboard] carton back in the fridge... [He remains in the kitchen until noon], as that is where he [works] [He the throws away] the…empty…carton... [His friend] Mary is unaware of Frank’s milk dumping practice. One morning, having spent the prior evening at Frank’s house with Frank and her son Sonny, she awakens at 7:40 and goes to the kitchen with Sonny. Upon entering (Frank is already there) she [opens the fridge and] casually observes a small carton of milk. She [tells] Sonny … there is milk in the fridge. As luck would have it, there is indeed milk in the carton on this day (Frank failed to remember that he had bought milk yesterday). When Frank observes Mary’s testimony, he realizes that he forgot to dump the milk; when Sonny observes her testimony, he forms the belief that there is milk in the fridge.

This is from Goldberg 2005: 302-4.

Goldberg goes on: if there had been no milk, Frank would have spoken up and thereby stopped Sonny from believing milk is in the fridge. Hence, Goldberg argues, Sonny’s belief that there is milk in the fridge is both sensitive and safe. So it is intuitive and theoretically plausible that Sonny learns there is milk in the fridge, although Mary doesn’t know.

This case involves a number of tricky temporal factors. At the time of her assertion, Mary does not know there is milk in the fridge (very easily there is no milk in the fridge). At the time of first hearing the assertion, Sonny might form a belief that falls short of knowledge. But then at the time Frank would intervene but doesn’t (for he recalls there is milk in the fridge), both Mary and Sonny come to know, for Frank’s counterfactual intervention makes a difference not only to Sonny, but Mary as well. For extensive discussion of the case, see Lackey 2008: 79-91; Pelling 2013: 210-213; Wright 2018, ch. 7.

Here’s another example emphasizing environmental features:

**Territorial Farmer**

Farmer Fred is highly territorial. He worries continually that Randy may be trespassing on his land. Fred hears a rustle in the bushes. In his agitated state of mind, he jumps straight to the conclusion that it was Randy who made the rustle. On that basis, Fred shouts ‘Randy, you’re trespassing on my land’. Although the rustle might easily have been made by something else (there are many wild animals in the area), it so happens that Randy did make the rustle and he is indeed trespassing on Fred’s land. On hearing Fred’s words, Randy comes to believe that he is trespassing on Fred’s land.

From Charlie Pelling 2013: 213. Pelling argues that Fred’s belief is not safe (he’s easily wrong on his evidence), but Randy’s belief is safe, for he would only easily form the belief that he’s on Fred’s land through testimony when he’s on Fred’s land. Another case of knowledge generation, but this time due to environmental factors.

These cases are importantly different from the first three kinds cataloged so far. In these cases, the speaker is not in a position to know, for the speaker doesn’t have what is required for knowledge, never mind a gap of belief or the possession of a defeater. And it is not obvious that the hearer relies on additional information in his possession.

1. Generation Due to Content Inversion in the Channel

We now turn to even less prosaic cases that involve two stages of content inversion along the information channel, from the relevant fact to the sender’s cognitive system, to the sender’s assertion, to the recipient’s comprehension and uptake. The first stage takes an accurate representation and forms an inaccurate one. The second stage then inverts the inaccurate representation back to an accurate one. Accuracy (reliability) flows through the information channel, just as it does in normal, non-inversion cases. We will present three content inversion cases.

**Consistent Liar**

Bertha…suffered a head injury…and…became…prone to telling lies…about her perceptual experiences involving wild animals. …[Her] parents became…distressed and... took her to…a neurosurgeon, Dr. Jones. …Dr. Jones [diagnosed] a lesion in Bertha’s brain [as] the cause of her behavior, and [decided upon surgery]. Unfortunately, Dr. Jones discovered during the surgery that he couldn’t repair the lesion – instead, he decided to…create another one so that her pattern of lying would be extremely consistent and would combine in a very precise way with a pattern of consistent perceptual unreliability. Dr. Jones [kept] the procedure that he performed on Bertha completely to himself.

[After the surgery], nearly every time [Bertha] sees a deer, she believes...it is a horse; nearly every time she sees a giraffe, she believes that it is an elephant; nearly every time she sees an owl, she believes that it is a hawk, and so on. At the same time, however, Bertha is also radically insincere, yet highly consistent, testifier of this information. For instance, nearly every time she sees a deer and believes that it is a horse, she insincerely reports to others that she saw a deer; nearly every time she sees a giraffe and believes that it is an elephant, she insincerely reports to others that she saw a giraffe, and so on. …Yesterday, Bertha…insincerely though correctly [told Henry] that she saw a deer…nearby…. Henry…accepted her testimony.

From Lackey 2006: 82-83. See also Lackey 2008: 53-58. It is structurally similar to an earlier case from Lackey involving color inversion and pathological lying (Lackey 1999: 480-481).

In Lackey’s inversion cases the speaker does not believe P but reliably asserts that P. It’s the reliability of the assertion, Lackey argues, that explains why the recipient, in coming to believe that P, acquires testimonial knowledge through believing the speaker. Graham offers two kinds of inversion cases. Here is the first:

**Inverted Alan**

Alan lives in Malibu Beach, California. Eddie is a good friend from college who lives in Chicago. Eddie regularly calls Alan on weekends and asks about the weather. “Blue skies for miles” Alan reports. But Alan is not an ordinary perceiver and reporter. Alan’s color experience, color concepts, and color words are inverted. When he looks out the window from his Malibu Beach apartment, the sky looks yellow to him and he believes it is yellow. But when he reports the color, he says it is “blue” (meaning, and so asserting, that it is yellow). Alan has no idea that he’s any different from anyone else. Alan does not know the skies are blue (he believes they are yellow). He does not mean that they are blue (he means they are yellow), and so does not state (assert) that they are blue. Eddie relies on (his representation of) Alan’s assertion, and so comes to believe that the sky in Malibu is blue. Though Alan does not know that the skies are blue, they are, and Eddie would not take him to state they are blue unless they are.

From Graham 2016: 180. See also Graham 2000a: 379-381.

In **Consistent Liar** the speaker asserts P and the hearer rightly takes the speaker to have asserted that P, and thereby comes to believe that P. In **Inverted Alan**, the sender does not assert that P and the hearer wrongly takes the speaker to have asserted that P, but nevertheless comes to believe that P, exactly as if the speaker had asserted that P. So believing, Graham argues, the hearer even so comes to know that P. The hearer is in exactly the same position vis-à-vis relying on a reliable channel as if everything were as ordinary as could be. But since the speaker does not know (for he does not believe) that the skies are blue, but the hearer comes to know that they are, knowledge is generated through the communication channel.

In **Consistent Liar** the canceled-out inversion occurs within the mind of the sender; a false belief is cancelled out by a lie. In **Inverted Alan**, there is inversion within the mind of the sender that is cancelled out by the inversion at the stage of the utterance. Graham (2016: 179-180) imagines a further case modeled on **Consistent Liar** where there is inversion in the sender that is then cancelled out by inversion in the recipient*.*

1. SOME CRITICAL REACTIONS

Having categorized and cataloged a number of the putative counterexamples to the commonsense view that testimonial knowledge is transmitted knowledge, we now conclude with a brief summary of some of the better-known responses to these cases.

There has been little explicit discussion of the counterexamples to SUFFICIENCY. Perhaps that is not so surprising, as there are a number of things that might go wrong in the transfer from sender to receiver. But if the counterexamples go through, the falsity of SUFFICIENCY suggests the possible falsity of NECESSITY. For if something *more* than the speaker’s knowledge is required for the recipient to come to know, then perhaps that something more *supplants* the need for the speaker to have knowledge in the first place. In other words, perhaps something *other* than the speaker’s knowledge explains testimonial knowledge. So if one’s critical reaction to the putative counterexamples to NECESSITY is to deny them, one might also need to deny the putative counterexamples to SUFFICIENCY.

We now turn to critical responses to the counterexamples to NECESSITY. Here we find that there has been a good deal of discussion of these cases.

We begin with a critical reaction to those counterexamples that, though once common, now seems to have fallen out of favor. This reaction is to deny all of the counterexamples on the grounds that the orthodox view already allows for cases where a hearer observes an assertion that P, comes to know that P as a result, but the speaker did not know that P. These are cases where the hearer has sufficient background knowledge to reason as follows: S asserted that P; S’s assertions are reliable guides to reality; hence P. In these cases, the hearer’s background knowledge does not refer to the speaker’s knowledge. Here the hearer has correlated the speaker’s assertions with reality, like the way one might learn to correlate an animal’s behavior with a pending change in the weather. And so here the hearer simply treats the speaker’s assertion as a reliable sign of the reality it represents. In these cases, it clearly does not matter whether the speaker knows that P. In these cases, the hearer need not believe, or even be disposed to believe, that the speaker knows that P. In fact, the hearer may even believe that the speaker does not know that P. Just as long as the speaker’s reports correlate with reality, and the hearer has figured that out, the hearer can come to know something from a speaker’s report, regardless of the speaker’s state of mind when making that report. The counterexamples, then, are not really counterexamples. In those cases, the hearer isn’t really relying on the *speaker* for knowledge. Rather the hearer is just treating the speaker’s assertion as a *reliable sign*. The counterexamples are then not cases of testimonial knowledge, knowledge where we rely on another person for knowledge. For this reply, see Audi 2006, Fricker 2006, Wright 2018. This reply was anticipated in Graham 2000a; 2000b.

Those offering the counterexamples reply as follows (e.g. Graham 2000a: 372-3, 2006: 114-115, 2016: 77-178; Lackey 2008). Sure, there are cases where a hearer does not rely on the speaker, but only *makes use* of the speaker’s report as one might make use of an animal’s behavior to predict the weather. But both sides agree that there are cases where the hearer lacks such background beliefs and the hearer indeed relies on the speaker—when the hearer takes the speaker’s assertion at face value, and relies on the information channel, not on background beliefs about the channel. Those offering the counterexamples argue that in the cases they imagined, the hearer indeed relies on the speaker. Consider a case where the hearer relies on the speaker, and the speaker believes and knows what she is asserting. Then imagine a psychological duplicate of that hearer. The duplicate is then also relying on the speaker. But change the speaker. The speaker, for example, might be Mr. Jones as in **Fossil**. Changing the psychology of the speaker does not ipso facto change the psychology of the hearer. The first reaction is thereby blocked. The cases really are cases of testimonial knowledge, of knowledge through reliance on the speaker, not on background knowledge about the channel.

The second critical reaction goes as follows. Sure, the putative counterexamples to NECESSITY are cases where the hearer relies on the speaker and not on background knowledge about the channel. And yes, in some of the cases, knowledge is generated. But even so they are not cases of *testimonial* knowledge, for the phrase ‘testimonial knowledge’ just means knowledge from someone else’s knowledge, knowledge that is transmitted through testimony. So if the hearer learns (comes to know), but the speaker did not have knowledge to transmit, then as far as the meaning of the phrase ‘testimonial knowledge’ goes, the hearer’s knowledge is *not* testimonial knowledge. Maybe it is knowledge *through* testimony (knowledge *through reliance* on the channel and not through background knowledge about the channel), but for all that it is not *testimonial knowledge*. Semantics immunizes NECESSITY to counterexample.

Some readers will find this reply compelling. Some will find it uninteresting. Lackey (2008: 101-2) provides an interesting response: Why not group so-called *testimonial knowledge* and *knowledge from testimony* into the same epistemological category? If we can provide a unified account of both kinds, then all else being equal, we should treat them as just one epistemological kind.

A third critical response has been to deny the counterexamples on theoretical grounds. Fricker 2006 and Faulkner 2011 argue that since the “no false lemmas” theory of knowledge is correct, and since to rely on a speaker to believe P when the speaker asserts that P entails believing that the speaker knows that P, it follows that the recipient cannot acquire knowledge if the speaker does not know that P. The recipient falsely believes the sender knows that P, and this robs the recipient of knowledge that P.

One reply is to deny the no false lemmas theory. After all, it has its problems. Furthermore, it currently does not count as a leading proposal in the debate about the analysis of knowledge. Second, there seem to be clear cases where one can come to know through believing a falsehood (Warfield 2005, Klein 2008, cp. Graham 2000a: 390-1). There is clear evidence against the theory.

A fourth critical response was already hinted at. This response grants the counterexamples, but aims to restrict their force, as they do not show that the spirit behind NECESSITY is mistaken. One need only weaken the principle while retaining the core insight that it is knowledge, or the materials required for knowledge, in the chain of sources,which explains why recipients acquire knowledge through reliance on that chain.

One version of this idea says that the hearer can acquire testimonial knowledge that P only if the speaker is in a position to know that P. Surely the various teachers in the belief-gap cases are in a position to know that P (they have all the warrants and evidence they need to know). And surely someone who already knows is in a position to know.

Another version of this idea says that the hearer can acquire propositional knowledge that P only if the speaker has propositional justification for the belief that P (even if the speaker does not believe P or does not believe P on that basis). In all the belief-gap cases, for example, it does clearly seem that the speaker has propositional (even if not doxastic) justification for the belief that P. Stephen Wright (2016, 2018), for one, argues for this analysis of these cases. Wright argues that if the sender has a propositional justification to believe P, and asserts on the basis of that justification, then that justification transfers to the recipient. The recipient knows because the sender has knowledge supporting justification for believing that P, even if the sender does not know that P. And for Wright, justification transmission is the main issue, for it sees it as more fundamental than knowledge transmission.

A third version of this idea says that the hearer can acquire testimonial knowledge that P only if knowledge supporting P (perhaps of other propositions that support P) is in the chain of sources, where the supporting knowledge might be distributed across the chain of sources. In **Fossil**, for example, others know what fossils show. Mr. Jones can “read” the fossil because of that knowledge, and so knows that evolutionary theory would say about the fossil. All of that knowledge combined supports the knowledge that the children acquire. The children learn that P because sufficient supporting knowledge of other propositions exists in the chain. Tyler Burge (2013) suggests this reply in his discussion of **Fossil**. It should also be obvious that all three versions of this idea would say similar things about the partial support cases, and maybe even the defeated speaker’s belief cases.

A possible shortcoming of this approach is that it does not easily cover all the cases, especially the environmental case **Territorial Farmer** and the inversion case **Inverted Alan**. The **Consistent Liar** and **Consistent Miscomprehension** cases provide challenges as well. Wright (2016) is aware of this issue.

One critical response we haven’t mentioned to **Inverted Alan** and **Consistent Miscomprehension** argues that these are not cases of testimonial knowledge that P because in these cases the speaker does not testify (does not assert) that P. Testimonial knowledge that P, this reply asserts, is knowledge that P from *testimony* that P. Since the senders in these cases did not *testify* that P, the recipient’s knowledge that P cannot be *testimonial* knowledge that P. Again, Semanticsto the rescue.

Graham is aware of this issue (2000a: 380; 2015; 2016: 181-182). One may categorize testimonial knowledge this way, if one chooses. But if psychologically the recipient in these cases is no different from a “normal” case where the sender did assert P, why insist that there are two different epistemological kinds? Compare: color perception, shape perception, and auditory perception are all different kinds. But they all fall within the same epistemological category: perceptual knowledge. If the recipient in Inverted Alan is psychologically identical to another recipient talking to a “normal” sender about the weather, and both know for both receive what they need for knowledge, why not categorize them as both possessing the same type of knowledge? Paraphrasing Lackey (2008: 102), why not prefer a *unified* account?

Lackey and Graham reacted differently to the counterexamples to SUFFICIENCY and NECESSITY. Independently, they both took them to show that what matters for testimonial knowledge is not the sender’s knowledge (or position to know, or propositional justification), but rather the reliability of the information channel. Lackey focused on the reliability of the speaker’s statement (viz. assertion) that P (1999, 2006, 2008) and Graham (2000a, 2000b, 2006, 2016) focused on the reliability of the hearer’s state (or event) of comprehending the speaker’s assertion. Lackey shifted focus from the speaker’s state of belief and whether it measured up to knowledge to the speaker’s assertion and whether it provided the goods required for the hearer’s knowledge. Graham shifted the focus further, from the speaker’s assertion to the hearer’s representation of the speaker’s assertion, and whether it provided the goods required for the hearer’s knowledge. Lackey (2008) labels the traditional view the “Belief View of Testimony” and calls her view the “Statement View of Testimony.” Following her nomenclature, we might call Graham’s view the “Comprehension View of Testimony.” Despite her appeal to unity when defending her Statement View, Lackey would reject Graham’s view, which classifies **Inverted Alan**, **Consistent Misinterpretation** and **Consistent Liar** together as all cases of the same epistemic kind. For Lackey, the speakers in Inverted Alan and Consistent Misinterpretation do not *testify* that P, so the hearer’s knowledge that P is not *testimonial* knowledge that P.

Elizabeth Fricker is perhaps the best-known defender of the orthodox view. Not only has she argued that the speaker must know for the recipient to know (compare also Faulkner), she has offered cases of her own designed to establish that the reliability of the speaker’s assertion, when not backed by knowledge, isn’t enough for the recipient to come to know. She has set out, in other words, to turn the tables on analyses like Lackey’s and Graham’s (Fricker 2015, 2016). We invite the interested reader to follow up on her cases on their own.[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

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1. \* We are greatful to Stephen Wright for very helpful comments on the penultimate draft. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)