

# In Defense of Non-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony

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**Abstract:** Almost everyone agrees that many testimonial beliefs constitute knowledge. According to non-reductionists, some testimonial beliefs possess positive epistemic status independent of that conferred by memory and induction. Recently, Jennifer Lackey has provided a counterexample to a popular version of this view. Here I argue that her counterexample fails.

Almost everyone agrees that many testimonial beliefs constitute knowledge. But where does the positive epistemic status of testimonial beliefs come from? What is its source? Following Hume (1975: pp. 111f.), “reductionists” hold that:

*Reductionism:* No testimonial beliefs possess positive epistemic status independent of that conferred by perception, memory, and induction.<sup>1</sup>

They reject a thesis associated with Reid (1997: pp. 192-6) that:

*Non-Reductionism:* Some testimonial beliefs possess positive epistemic status independent of that conferred by perception, memory, and induction.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, Jennifer Lackey has provided a counterexample to a popular version of *Non-Reductionism*. Here I argue that her counterexample fails.

### 1. *Non-Reductionism and the Alien Counterexample*

According to non-reductionists, some testimonial beliefs possess positive epistemic status independent of that conferred by perception, memory, and induction. Now we can distinguish such views in terms of their scope and degree. *Non-Reductionism* is consistent with *some* testimonial beliefs being reduced but not all. Let us call ‘*Maximal Non-Reductionism*’ the view that *all* testimonial beliefs possess positive epistemic status independent of that conferred by perception, memory, and induction. Additionally—as Gettier taught us—a belief can have some positive epistemic status but fall short of being knowledge. Let us call ‘*Strong Non-Reductionism*’ the view that the positive epistemic status conferred to testimonial beliefs that is independent of perception, memory, and induction is sufficient for such beliefs to be knowledge. Many contemporary non-reductionists are maximal, strong non-reductionists.<sup>3</sup> (Henceforth,

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the chief contemporary defender has been Elizabeth Fricker (1994, 1995) (though see also Van Cleve (2006)). (Strictly speaking, Fricker’s endorsement of *Reductionism* is more nuanced on two counts. First, she distinguishes between “global” and “local” reductionism, where (roughly) on the former the positive epistemic status of testimony reduces to one’s knowledge of global facts—e.g. “testimony is generally reliable”—whereas on the latter it reduces to one’s knowledge of more local facts—e.g. “Ed is reliable regarding tax codes” (see, *inter alia*, her (1994: pp. 133ff.)). She only defends the latter. Second, she seems to suggest at places (e.g. (1995: pp. 403f.)) that whether or not a testimonial belief reduces depends upon whether the hearer is in a “mature” or “developmental” phase. However, these subtle distinctions will not matter for what I argue below. (Thanks to an anonymous review for urging more clarity here on Fricker’s view.))

<sup>2</sup> For contemporary defenders, see Audi (1997), Burge (1993, 1997), Coady (1994), and Plantinga (1993).

<sup>3</sup> On my characterization of this debate, Jennifer Lackey (2006, 2008) is a non-reductionist—she thinks testimony provides some positive epistemic status—but she rejects *Strong Non-Reductionism*—she does not think it provides enough for knowledge. But note that Lackey characterizes the debate between reductionists and non-reductionists differently than I have. On her characterization (modulo some qualifications), non-reductionists hold that “positive reasons” are not necessary for testimonial knowledge (2008: pp. 156, 167) and reductionists hold that they are necessary and sufficient (2008: pp. 148-9). I have not used this characterization for three reasons. First, it seems slightly *ad hoc*—allowing Lackey to claim a middle, moderate view, “dualism” where (roughly put) positive

unless otherwise noted, I'll use 'non-reductionism' and its cognates to refer to *Maximal, Strong Non-Reductionism*.)

Now, according to non-reductionists, the positive epistemic status testimonial beliefs possess can be defeated, and testimonial beliefs will have such status only under certain conditions (and what specific conditions are required might depend upon the general theory of the non-reductionist). Nevertheless, the non-reductionist *does* hold that a person may know something on the basis of testimony, independently of memory and induction, e.g. independently of whether or not the person can put together a strong inductive argument by citing (via memory) past occasions of reliable testimony. This is the key way that the non-reductionist earns her name. Thus, if it is possible that people can completely lack any inductive evidence for a piece of testimony,<sup>4</sup> then the non-reductionist is committed to holding that perhaps some of them know the relevant testimony.

Jennifer Lackey considers this a problematic implication. She claims that a person must have some "positive reason" to accept the testimony of another.<sup>5</sup> She has provided a powerful counterexample to show that *Maximal Strong Non-Reductionism* is false and that a person must have some inductive evidence in order to know something on the basis of another's testimony.

Here is Lackey's counterexample, *Alien*:

Sam, an average human being, is taking a walk through the forest one sunny morning and, in the distance, he sees someone drop a book. Although the individual's physical appearance enables Sam to identify her as an alien from another planet, he does not know anything about either this kind of alien or the planet from which she comes. Now, Sam eventually loses sight of the alien, but he is able to recover the book that she dropped. Upon opening it, he immediately notices that it appears to be written in English and looks like what we on Earth would call a diary. Moreover, after reading the first page of the book, Sam forms the corresponding belief that tigers have eaten some of the inhabitants of the author's planet during their exploration of earth.<sup>6</sup>

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reasons are necessary but not sufficient (2008: 177-8). Second, and more significantly, I do not think it reveals as well as mine the range of possible views. Third, and most significantly, my characterization better tracks the debate, which is best characterized as over the sources of knowledge (see, e.g., Reid (1997: pp. 11-2, 195), Plantinga (1993: p. 77), Fricker (1994: p. 125), Audi (1997: p. 405), van Cleve (2006: p. 60)) not positive reasons, even though some authors use this latter notion to explicate the former.

<sup>4</sup> It is not obvious that Lackey thinks this is possible. Citing some empirical studies (2008: pp. 216-20), she claims that young children and infants are able to appreciate positive reasons. It is not clear, though, if she thinks this holds of *all* young children and infants or not. Regardless, assuming her view here is correct, it is not problematic for the non-reductionist. For the non-reductionist does not claim that there are some testimonial beliefs that constitute knowledge where the cognizer has *no* inductive evidence; at most, the non-reductionist claims that there are some testimonial beliefs that constitute knowledge *independently* of whatever inductive evidence that cognizer might have. (Thanks to an anonymous review for urging more clarity here.)

<sup>5</sup> Lackey (2006, 2008, pp. 168-75). I will use the locutions "positive reason for *p*" and "evidence for *p*" interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Lackey (2008, pp. 168-9). Lackey's scenario is marred by two things. First, the book appears to be a diary. But—as Christina Van Dyke and Japa Pallikkathayil have pointed out to me—a diary does not simply include reports of a day's activities, but a variety of other things that should not be taken as factual reports. Consequently, even if one found a diary, it does not follow that one should accept what it says, even if one knows the author is generally reliable. Second, as Martin Kusch points out (2012: pp. 261-2), it is not obvious in this case that Sam is even entitled to regard the alien as being a person who could even be eligible to produce testimony, in which case Lackey has failed "to properly isolate and test the non-reductionist view" (2012: p. 262). However, making these points will not help the non-reductionist escape Lackey's counterexample. For we could easily modify it so that it is

Lackey stipulates that various other conditions are met that a maximal, strong non-reductionist might require (e.g. it is diary; it is written in English; it is both true and reliably written that tigers have eaten some of the inhabitants of the author's planet during their exploration of earth, etc.). Now, is it true that Sam knows that tigers have eaten some of the aliens who were exploring earth? Here is Lackey's response:

... it seems plainly irrational epistemically for him to form the belief in question on the basis of *the alien's testimony*. For it may very well be accepted practice in alien society to be insincere and deceptive when testifying to others... Or the language that the aliens use, though superficially indistinguishable from English, may really be Twenglish, where Twenglish uses the "negation" sign for affirming a proposition. Or, "diaries" in the alien society may be what we on Earth regard as science fiction...<sup>7</sup>

We can thus formulate the following "Main Objection:"

- (1) If *Maximal Strong Non-Reductionism* is true, then in *Alien* Sam knows (by the alien's testimony) that tigers have eaten some of the aliens who were exploring earth.
- (2) But Sam does not know this.
- (3) So *Maximal Strong Non-Reductionism* is false.

## 2. *Rejecting (1)*<sup>8</sup>

In this section I explain my response. I claim, first, that the non-reductionist is not committed to holding that Sam knows that tigers have eaten some of the aliens exploring earth; she can reject (1). This is because, I argue, Sam has a defeater for the relevant belief. I will then consider two possible objections that Lackey might press: that Sam does not have a defeater and that claiming he does have a defeater is inconsistent with non-reductionism and the motivations for it. I argue that both objections fail. Finally, I conclude by considering whether my response is consistent with Tyler Burge's well-known account of testimony. I argue it is.

I begin by pointing out that most human adults have a wealth of experience in giving and receiving testimony and hold a large number of beliefs about it. We hold beliefs (e.g.) about which newspapers are reliable on which topics, which friends are less biased, how one can be deceived or misled, how to determine the reliability of a source, how to check the truth of a testimony, how to balance divergent or incomplete testimonies, etc. (Cf. Lackey (2008: pp. 181-2)) With all these acquired experiences and beliefs, we know various ways in which testimony can go well and, importantly for my purpose, the ways in which it may be inaccurate and go awry.

Further, this background information gives us a powerful resource for dismissing, in many cases of human testimony, the skeptical hypotheses that Lackey raises for the case of *Alien*. In many cases of human testimony, we do not take seriously (e.g.) that another human person is speaking a language superficially indistinguishable from English because we know, from our experience, that the probability of this skeptical hypothesis occurring in human testimony is incredibly low. In saying this, I do not mean to say that our background information allows us to always dismiss these skeptical possibilities—sometimes the right response is to take them more seriously (as I'll indicate below). (Further, the background information might be relevant to dismissing some of the possibilities but not all of them—not all skeptical hypotheses are created

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not marred by these features and would still serve Lackey's purposes (e.g. when instead of a diary the book is a captain's log, etc.).

<sup>7</sup> Lackey (2008, pp. 169-170), emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> This section has been greatly improved due to comments from two anonymous reviewers.

equal.) I am also not claiming that this background information frequently provides us with inductive evidence that could satisfy the requirements a reductionist might impose. I'm merely pointing out that we are entitled, in many cases, to dismiss certain skeptical hypotheses because we've learned, through acquired experience, that the likelihood of any of them obtaining in various instances of testimony is very low.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that these beliefs are acquired, and it is not necessary that all cognizers that gain information through testimony acquire this information. Young children and infants will frequently lack this wealth of experience, and in so far as they do have beliefs about these subjects those beliefs will be fewer in number and much more particular in content (e.g. just about specific people or topics on particular occasions). Further, it is plausible that certain kinds of animals communicate with one another, but also lack sufficient cognitive ability to have a large number of beliefs about the practice of communicating with one another. However, most human adults are not in either of these situations.<sup>10</sup>

With this point in hand, we are now in a position to see my response to Lackey's counterexample. Sam, "an average human being," most likely believes that he has never faced the testimony of an alien before; he is facing a radically new source of testimony.<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that Sam has certain higher-order beliefs like "my belief that some of the aliens who were exploring earth were eaten by tigers originated in the testimony of an alien." We rarely form beliefs like that. Rather, it is merely to point out that Sam believes the contents of the diary, believes the diary was dropped by an alien, and (presumably) believes he has never interacted with an alien before!<sup>12</sup>

Now, according to the non-reductionist, the fact that Sam is facing a radically new source of testimony that he never has before is, by itself, no barrier to him knowing things on the basis of that testimony. (See the two cases below.) What's important is that he is aware of this fact *and* knows many of the ways in which testimony can go awry. To be sure, he has a wealth of testimonial experience and beliefs, but those are all with *human* testifiers. He can rely on these experiences and beliefs to reject Lackey's skeptical scenarios in the case of human testimony, but in *Alien* he is not facing human testimony. Thus, he should (even if he does not) take more seriously these skeptical hypotheses and be in doubt as to whether they obtain.<sup>13</sup> (Imagine a friend of yours reported events similar to *Alien* without expressing any doubts as to their beliefs formed on the basis of the alien's testimony. I doubt you would give them an epistemic free pass!)

But if Sam should have these doubts, then his belief that tigers have eaten some of the aliens who were exploring earth has a defeater—a belief or doubt a person has (or *should* have) that disqualifies the relevant belief as knowledge. And recall that, while according to the non-

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<sup>9</sup> It is possible that some sympathetic to non-reductionism would resist the idea that our experiences and background beliefs do allow us to dismiss these skeptical hypotheses as very improbable—in fact this might be part of their reason for being sympathetic to non-reductionism. Let me note here that I find this to be an overly pessimistic version of non-reductionism and will delay discussion of it for another time.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, this is a degreed matter. It is possible that there be adults who lack a wealth of experiences regarding testimony. Further, the character of these experiences and beliefs will be different for different people.

<sup>11</sup> I assume that Lackey intends these features of the case. After all, if Sam didn't believe these kinds of things—if he were not an average human person but believed himself to be an ambassador for the aliens to earth awaiting instructions from an alien diary—then Lackey's claim that he is being epistemically irrational in accepting the testimony would be more dubious (given, of course, that he is not unreasonable in believing himself to be an ambassador, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> Comments from an anonymous reviewer were helpful here.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plantinga (2000, pp. 224-5).

reductionist, testimonial beliefs have positive epistemic status that is both independent of memory and induction and also sufficient for knowledge, such positive epistemic status can be *defeated*. In other words, a belief that might otherwise be knowledge can fail to be if a person has a defeater. So, in this case, because Sam has a defeater, the non-reductionist is not committed to Sam's belief constituting knowledge. (1) is false. So, the Main Objection fails.

Lackey might press two kinds of objections to my response. First, she might question whether or not Sam really does have a normative defeater. Here is her account of normative defeaters: "a normative defeater is a doubt or belief that S ought to have and that indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being doubts or beliefs that S *should have* (whether or not S does have them) given the presence of certain available evidence" (2008, p. 45). She might claim that Sam does not have a normative defeater because *given the available evidence* Sam should not believe either that his belief is false or that his belief is unreliably formed or sustained.<sup>14</sup> After all—the thought goes—given Sam's current evidence, he should not believe either (i) that some of the aliens exploring earth *weren't* eaten by tigers or (ii) that the (apparent) diary is unreliable. But then he does not have a normative defeater. So, my response fails.

In response, I agree that given Sam's evidence it is not the case that he should believe either (i) that some of the aliens exploring earth *weren't* eaten by tigers or (ii) that the (apparent) diary is unreliable. But conceding this is not enough to show that Sam does not have a normative defeater. For even on Lackey's own account one can have a normative defeater if one should have a *doubt* as to whether or not a source of testimony is reliable, and it is possible that one's evidence is *not* sufficient to show that a given source is *unreliable* but that, nevertheless, one should be in doubt as to its reliability. And this is exactly what I am urging—Sam should be in doubt as to whether or not the source of his belief is reliable. One might respond that Sam's current evidence does not include information about this particular alien being unreliable. But my response did not, and does not, require this. The reason why Sam should have certain doubts is not that he has evidence about *this* particular alien. Rather, it is that he knows both how radically new this source of information is and many of the ways in which testimony can fail to be truth-apt that he cannot plausibly eliminate in this case, for (as he knows) he lacks any experience with alien testifiers.

A second possible objection is more promising. Lackey might object that by claiming that Sam should have such doubts, the non-reductionist is (so to speak) "giving up the game" and merely abandoning the view. For if one holds that Sam should have such doubts, then one must hold this because one thinks that Sam needs *some* inductive evidence that the relevant source of the testimony is truth-apt in order for Sam's testimonial beliefs to count as knowledge. But that is exactly what the non-reductionist is committed to denying! In other words, *Maximal, Strong Non-Reductionism* is inconsistent with the claim that Sam has a normative defeater in *Alien*. So, Lackey might press, my response that Sam has a normative defeater simply abandons the view.<sup>15</sup>

However, this response does not abandon the non-reductionist position nor is it inconsistent with some of the philosophical motivations for that position. If this response held that Sam has a defeater because he has no inductive evidence regarding the truth-aptness of the alien's testimony, then it *would* be to abandon non-reductionism. In other words, I agree with Lackey that if one accepted, as a sufficient condition for a defeater for testimonial knowledge, the

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<sup>14</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing to me the role "given the available evidence" plays in Lackey's account of defeaters.

<sup>15</sup> See Lackey (2008, pp. 171-2). An anonymous reviewer has also pressed this kind of objection.

lacking of any inductive evidence about the reliability of the testimony, then one would not be a non-reductionist. But this is not my response. The response holds that Sam has a defeater because (A) he believes the diary was dropped by an alien and lacks any inductive evidence one way or the other regarding the truth-aptness of alien testimonial practice, *and* (B) Sam has a wealth of background beliefs and experiences regarding testimony and the ways in which it can go wrong. If we were to modify the case so that one of these did not hold, I hold that Sam would know the relevant proposition. Thus, this response is not abandoning the view.

Further, this response is consistent with some of the philosophical motivations for the non-reductionist position. To see this latter point, it will be useful to consider cases where either (A) or (B) does not hold. Let us first consider a case where (A) does not obtain, in particular where Sam does not realize that his testimonial source is radically new. Consider *Alien\**:

Sam, an average human being, is taking a walk through the forest one sunny morning and, in the distance, he sees a book. Upon opening it, he immediately notices that it appears to be written in English and looks like what we on Earth would call a diary. Moreover, after reading the first page of the book, Sam forms the corresponding belief that tigers have eaten some individuals during their exploration of some portion of Asia. As a matter of fact, the diary was written by an alien, who was recently exploring earth.<sup>16</sup>

Let us suppose, as before, that various other conditions are met that a maximal, strong non-reductionist might require (e.g. it is diary; it is written in English; it is both true and reliably written that tigers have eaten some of the aliens exploring earth, etc.)

Non-reductionists—including maximal, strong non-reductionists—would like to say that, in this case, Sam knows the relevant proposition. My response is consistent with that intuition. Nothing I've said implies that Sam does not know the relevant proposition in this case. My response retains some of the motivation for non-reductionism. (Further, though this is independent of the point I'm currently arguing, the non-reductionist's intuition in this case seems to me the right one. The kinds of skeptical hypotheses Lackey raises for *Alien* do not show that Sam is epistemically irrational in *Alien\**. After all, Sam would be reasonable in believing that the diary is written by a human person, and is reasonable in rejecting those skeptical hypotheses in that case, since his wealth of experience makes those skeptical hypotheses, in the case of human testimony, so incredibly improbable.)

Let us now consider a case where (B) does not obtain, *Alien\*\**.

Sam, a four year old, is playing in a forest one sunny morning and, in the distance, he sees someone drop a book. The individual's physical appearance resembles aliens that Sam sees on his television programs, and he believes this individual to be an alien. Although Sam eventually loses sight of the alien, he is able to recover the book that she dropped. Upon opening it, he sees it is written in English and is a diary. Moreover, after reading the first page of the book, Sam forms the corresponding belief that tigers have eaten some of aliens who were exploring earth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In order for this to be a case where (A) does not obtain, further deviations from Lackey's origin case are required than what I've written above. For instance, in the original case, the diary contained content that implied that there were aliens from another planet that were visiting earth. I assume that we can easily construct, at the cost of more specificity, a case where there are enough of these minor deviations from *Alien* so that (A) obtains.

<sup>17</sup> As with the previous case, one may feel free to modify various features of the case (e.g. the age or cognitive capacities of Sam) to make it more plausible. Such modifications (within reason) will not affect the purpose of the case.

Non-reductionists would like to say that, in this case, Sam knows the relevant proposition. (And, again, this seems to me the right result.) My response is consistent with that intuition. Nothing I've said implies that Sam does not know the relevant proposition in this case. After all, lacking the wealth of experiences and beliefs that adults possess, Sam is not familiar with all the ways that testimony can go awry and so does not need to consider and eliminate them. My response to Lackey's Main Objection retains some of the motivation for non-reductionism.

Furthermore, not only is this response consistent with certain intuitions of the non-reductionist, it can easily be incorporated into a maximal, strong non-reductionist picture of testimonial knowledge. On such a picture, testimony is an irreducible source of knowledge. But, as a matter of contingent fact, human cognizers learn more about testimony as they age, gaining an incredibly large and rich set of beliefs and experience around the human practice of testimony. This background information can play a positive role,<sup>18</sup> reinforcing and even increasing the positive epistemic status of testimonial knowledge, and a defensive role, giving us the resources to dispel certain skeptical hypotheses. As Burge writes, "the default position is justified acceptance. Often we need empirical reasons to defeat reasonable doubts that threaten our right to acceptance. But sometimes empirical reasons simply reinforce and overdetermine the default entitlement" (1993, pp. 484-5). But having this wealth of experience and belief can (and should) make us more sensitive to certain possibilities that cognizers lacking such a wealth of information need not be concerned with. This is not to say that as we gain information about testimony it becomes a reducible source of knowledge. On this picture, even for (normal) adults, testimony is an irreducible source of knowledge. Rather, because normal human adults do, as a matter of fact, have so much more information about testimony, the epistemic standards for them are higher than for those who lack that information.<sup>19,20</sup>

Let me conclude by dispelling a final worry. I intend my response to Lackey to be general in nature—any non-reductionist should (generally speaking) be able to accept it. One might worry that this is not the case. In particular, one might worry that Tyler Burge's well-known account of testimony is inconsistent with this response.<sup>21,22</sup> At the heart of Burge's account is what he calls the "Acceptance Principle," which he states, at first approximation, as "a person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so" (1993, p. 467). On Burge's view, if the entitlement is not overridden by defeaters, then "application of the Acceptance Principle often seems to provide sufficient entitlement for knowledge" (1993, p. 485). One might worry that the Acceptance Principle is inconsistent with my response that Sam does not know the relevant proposition in *Alien*. In particular, one might worry that the Acceptance Principle entails that Sam *does* know the relevant proposition, and since I reject that claim, I must reject the Acceptance Principle and thus Burge's view.

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<sup>18</sup> Reid, arguably the father of modern non-reductionism, was explicit on this point (1997: p.195).

<sup>19</sup> Burge even concedes that we are not frequently in cases where his Acceptance Principle (see below) applies; see (1997: p. 23), cf. (1993: p. 468).

<sup>20</sup> Let me note that, on this picture, there need not be anything special about testimony as an irreducible source of knowledge. As we learn more about *any* of our irreducible sources of knowledge, the epistemic standards increase.

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to both anonymous reviewers for pressing me on this point.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, one might read Martin Kusch as thinking that Burge's view would require (to use my formulation) accepting (1) and rejecting (2) of the Main Objection; see his (2012, pp. 265ff). (Though there are ways of reading his critique that do not require this; see fn. 26.)

I have two responses. First, suppose that the Acceptance Principle is inconsistent with my claim that Sam does not know the relevant proposition in *Alien*. Even then, it does not follow that my response is wrong or that it fails to be consistent with some version of non-reductionism.<sup>23</sup> Further, Lackey's counterexample is meant to show that *no* version of non-reductionism is true.<sup>24</sup> Even if my response is inconsistent with *a* version of non-reductionism, as long as it is consistent with, and retains some of the motivation of, some version of non-reductionism, then that position will be vindicated.

Second, and more importantly, I do not think that the Acceptance Principle *is* inconsistent with my response. The Acceptance Principle implies that Sam has an entitlement to accept as true the contents of the alien's diary but also that such an entitlement *can be defeated*.<sup>25</sup> I agree that Sam has such an entitlement.<sup>26</sup> But I also claim that the entitlement is defeated, and thus that the Acceptance Principle does not imply that Sam knows the relevant proposition. Furthermore, my reason for thinking that the entitlement is defeated is consistent with the Acceptance Principle. The Acceptance Principle *by itself* does not specify a theory of defeaters; it does not specify different kinds of defeaters or when one has a defeater. Of course, one could attach to the Acceptance Principle a theory of defeaters such that Sam does not have a defeater. But such a theory would be implausible and, more to the point, it would be the theory of defeaters, not the Acceptance Principle, that would be incompatible with my response.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

According to maximal, strong non-reductionists, testimonial beliefs can have sufficient positive epistemic status for knowledge, where that positive epistemic status is not reducible to other sources of knowledge such as induction and memory. Jennifer Lackey argues that this view cannot handle a (intended) counterexample, the case of *Alien*, where (lacking any inductive evidence) Sam forms an irrational testimonial belief that does not amount to knowledge. I argued that the non-reductionist can handle this case by claiming that Sam, as an average human adult, has a wealth of background information that ought to make him skeptical in this case. Thus, *contra* Lackey, the maximal strong non-reductionist is not committed to claiming that Sam knows the relevant proposition and thus the case is no counterexample to *Maximal, Strong Non-Reductionism*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, one non-reductionist—Plantinga—has a similar (though less developed) response to a similar kind of case; see his (2000, pp. 224-5).

<sup>24</sup> I remind the reader that I mean here *maximal strong* non-reductionism.

<sup>25</sup> In his formulation of the Acceptance Principle, Burge does not use the term 'defeater.' But this is the effect of his clause "unless there are stronger reasons not to do so." Further, in latter work, he does use the term when discussing this clause (see, for instance, (1997, p. 45 fn. 4)).

<sup>26</sup> In his criticism of Lackey, Kusch seems to think the dispute is over whether "Sam has a defeasible prima facie entitlement to his testimony belief" (2012, p. 265). Kusch claims that Lackey thinks not, while Burge thinks so (Kusch sides with Burge here). If this is how the dispute is characterized, then (as should be clear) I agree with Burge and Kusch against Lackey. However, in this paper, I am responding to Lackey, and she is characterizing the debate in terms of knowledge not entitlement. On this characterization, I agree with Lackey that Sam's belief does not constitute knowledge, but *contra* Lackey think this is consistent with non-reductionism.

<sup>27</sup> According to Burge, the entitlement is *a priori* in nature, where this means that "neither sense experience nor perceptual belief constitute or enhance its justification force" (1997: p. 21). Earlier I claimed that our background beliefs can provide us with reasons for accepting testimony. That claim is consistent with the entitlement being *a priori* (understood in Burge's sense). As Burge himself notes (in the case of preservation memory), a belief can have an *a priori* entitlement and empirical warrant (1997: p. 40).

<sup>28</sup> Thanks to Dave Fisher, Derek Jones, Mark Kaplan, Adam Leite, Luis Oliveira, Harrison Waldo, and audiences at Wuhan University and the 36<sup>th</sup> annual Midsouth philosophy conference. Special thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their instructive feedback.

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