Our epistemic dependence on others: Nyāya and Buddhist accounts of testimony as a source of knowledge

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Abstract: This paper argues that philosophical debates between Nyāya and Buddhists on the nature and acquisition of testimonial knowledge present contrasting images of the role played by the epistemic agent in the knowing process. According to Nyāya, an individual can acquire testimonial knowledge automatically—and with little epistemic work—from a trustworthy speaker's say-so. On the other hand, Buddhist epistemologists, who claim that testimonial knowledge is a species of inferential knowledge, argue that, in order to acquire knowledge from a speaker's statements, an epistemic agent must possess non-testimonial evidence for the reliability of the testimony in question. This disagreement regarding the division of epistemic labour in testimonial exchanges demonstrates how differently Nyāya and Buddhist philosophers view the prevalence and practical importance of testimonial knowledge. For Nyāya, the ubiquity and easy acquisition of testimonial knowledge help explain the success of our daily actions. However, for Buddhist epistemologists, despite the regularity with which we successfully act based on what others tell us, testimonial knowledge is, in fact, less common, and more difficult to acquire, than we might think.

1. Introduction

The debate over whether, and the conditions under which, testimony (*śabda*) is a source of knowledge has been critical to the history of Indian philosophy.[1] While virtually all Indian philosophical traditions accepted perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*) as sources of knowledge, one of the central disagreements in Indian epistemology (*pramāṇavāda*) concerned whether testimony was an independent source of knowledge, or, whether it was reducible to more basic sources of knowledge, primarily, inference. While this question is one about taxonomy, it underscores a more fundamental issue regarding the division of epistemic labour in testimonial exchanges.

In particular, given that testimonial exchange involves two central participants—the speaker and the hearer—how do we analyse the epistemic role played by each participant? Is testimony a well-functioning epistemic instrument because of the competence of the hearer, or, the cognitive accomplishments of the speaker? Do both participants play a role in ensuring the reliability of testimony and if so, what might this look like?

This paper looks at philosophical debates between Naiyāyikas—philosophers within the tradition of Nyāya—and Buddhist epistemologists around the second half of the first millennium[2] on the nature of testimony and the acquisition of testimonial knowledge.[3] In particular, it analyses two different portrayals of the role played by the epistemic agent in acquiring knowledge from the statements of others. On the one hand, Nyāya argues that testimony is an independent source of knowledge. This means that, so long as the speaker is trustworthy, an epistemic agent can acquire testimonial knowledge in the absence of confirmatory evidence derived from perception or inference. On the other hand, Buddhist epistemologists argue that testimonial knowledge is reducible to inferential knowledge. As a result, in order to acquire knowledge from the statements of others, an epistemic agent must first acquire additional, inferential evidence demonstrating the reliability of the statement in question. I argue that these different presentations of the division of epistemic labour in testimonial exchange have important implications for both the prevalence and practical importance of testimonial knowledge. The next section of the paper examines Nyāya's account of testimony and testimonial knowledge by looking at the *Nyāyasūtra* and some of its earliest commentaries. The third section discusses Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's alternative analyses of testimonial knowledge, as well as the challenges they present for Nyāya's account. The fourth section considers Nyāya's counter-response to Buddhist objections. The paper concludes by looking at the link between knowledge and successful action. In particular, it considers the practical import of our concept of knowledge and suggests that Nyāya's account of testimonial knowledge is better equipped to explain the general success of actions we take based on the reports of others.

2. Nyāya on testimony and testimonial knowledge

Nyāya is an Indian philosophical tradition that is centrally concerned with the nature, number, and operation of the sources of knowledge, or, epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa*). Its foundational text, the *Nyāyasūtra* (NS), dates to around the second century. Like most Indian philosophical traditions, Nyāya developed through a tradition of commentaries on its foundational text. One of the goals of commentaries is to unpack and clarify the ideas and terminology in the foundational text. Doing so allowed commentators to defend and correct misinterpretations of their tradition's central philosophical insights in light of challenges posed by rival traditions.[4]

This section examines early Nyāya's view on testimonial knowledge, that is, the knowledge that we acquire from the statements of trustworthy speakers. In particular, I look at the NS's definition of testimony, along with the analysis provided

by some of the earliest commentaries. However, before doing so, I make a few preliminary points about Indian epistemology that will help clarify the subsequent discussion. Indian epistemology deals with the sources of knowledge, or, epistemic instruments. While Nyāya believes that there are four types of epistemic instruments, one of which is testimony, other philosophical traditions argued for the existence of more or less epistemic instruments. For example, the Buddhist epistemologists discussed below only accept the existence of two types of epistemic instruments, perception and inferential reasoning.

A crucial point about epistemic instruments is that they are factive. That is, by definition, epistemic instruments produce true belief.[5] This is explained well by the tenth-century polymath Vācaspati Miśra. In discussing Vātsyāyana's commentary on NS 1.1.1., Vācaspati explains that 'a knowledge source does not deviate from its object' and 'there will never be a disagreement, anywhere, anytime, in any condition, between the nature of the object and what we are taught by the knowledge source'.[6] This means that a belief produced by an epistemic instrument cannot, by definition, be false. If it were false, this would imply that, rather than having been produced by a genuine knowledge source, the belief was in fact produced by a knowledge imitator, or, an aberrant process that falsely appears to be a genuine knowledge source. One of the central tasks of Nyāya epistemology is to distinguish between processes that are genuine knowledge sources and those that are knowledge imitators.

This way of speaking about the knowledge sources is different from our ordinary ways of speaking, which allow reliable yet fallible belief-forming processes to yield knowledge. However, for Indian epistemologists, the knowledge sources, just like knowledge itself, are defined in terms of their epistemic success. Therefore, when speaking of testimony as an epistemic instrument, it is important to recognise that while there can be false statements, there cannot be false testimony. Below, when Indian philosophers speak of testimony, it refers to the epistemic instrument that, by definition, produces testimonial knowledge.

A second important point is that for Indian epistemologists, the primary object of epistemic analysis is cognitions, or, episodes of awareness (*jñāna*). While the term 'cognition' includes beliefs, it covers a much broader range of mental events, such as dream states, hallucinations, memories, and states of doubt. Any episodic state of awareness that contains an object can be evaluated as either in accordance with its object or not in accordance with its object. Knowledge is a type of presenting awareness event[7] that is in accordance with its object by virtue of having been produced by a well-functioning epistemic instrument. Below, while the focus will be on knowing cognitions that arise from testimony, other types of cognitions, specifically cognitions of doubt, will also be considered.

The NS defines testimony as the assertion of a trustworthy person.[8] However, the task of unpacking the meaning of 'assertion' and 'trustworthy person' fell to the commentarial tradition. The first known commentator on the NS was Vātsyāyana around the fourth/fifth centuries. In his *Nyāyabhāṣya* (NBh), Vātsyāyana defines

trustworthy people as instructors who have direct knowledge and a desire to faithfully communicate their knowledge to others.[9] In other words, trustworthy people are both competent in their beliefs and sincere in their statements. Later commentators generally accept Vātsyāyana's analysis of what it means to be a trustworthy person, however, a few clarifications were made. For example, the late ninth-century Naiyāyika Bhaṭṭa Jayanta states that we should not limit the term 'trustworthy' to those speakers who have direct knowledge, because trustworthy speakers can also possess indirect knowledge that they faithfully communicate to others.[10]

What about the term 'assertion?' Jayanta seems to be the first commentator to unpack this term. He explains that when trustworthy people make an assertion, they make a statement which, as a result of someone hearing it, produces knowledge of its content, or object (*artha*).[11] Provided certain additional conditions, upon hearing a speaker's statement, the recipient, that is, the epistemic agent, will acquire testimonial knowledge about the object of that statement. We have already discussed one of those conditions, namely, the condition that the speaker be trustworthy. The second and third conditions pertain to the hearer and the utterance, respectively.[12]

In order for testimonial knowledge to arise for some hearer, the speaker's utterance should be well formed. To be well formed, three conditions must be met: syntactic expectancy (*ākāṅkṣā*), semantic fitness (*yogyatā*), and proximity (*saṃnidhāna*). While the first two conditions state that a speaker's utterance should be syntactically and semantically appropriate, the condition of 'proximity' ensures that the interconnections between the individual words of the utterance are clear. Additionally, the hearer should be a competent user of the relevant language of the testimony in question. This means that the hearer must be able to recognise syntactically and semantically appropriate sentences and have the ability to move from individual word meanings to a unified sentence meaning. So long as these speaker, hearer, and utterance conditions are in place, testimonial knowledge will arise for some recipient.

However, noticeably missing from this account is any sort of epistemic work performed on the part of the hearer. Aside from possessing the relevant linguistic abilities, does the hearer need to do anything to secure the reliability of testimonial belief? For example, does she need evidence that the speaker is trustworthy? As will be seen below, Nyāya distinguishes testimonial knowledge from the confirmatory knowledge that arises after one ascertains, through perception or inference, that their testimonial belief is in fact reliably formed and thus, knowledge. Another way of saying this is that for Nyāya, testimony is an *independent* source of knowledge. Testimony, that is, a trustworthy person's assertions, can produce knowledge for some recipient *without any epistemic aid* from the other epistemic instruments.

The idea of testimony being an independent source of knowledge was not accepted by all Indian philosophical traditions. Against Nyāya's position, Buddhist epistemologists argued that testimonial knowledge is a species of inferential knowledge. In subsuming testimonial knowledge under inferential knowledge, Buddhist thinkers require the epistemic agent to possess additional evidence, usually inductive in

nature, confirming that their word-generated belief has in fact been reliably formed and thus amounts to knowledge. The next section examines this idea through the lens of two of the most important Buddhist epistemologists: Dignāga in the sixth century and Dharmakīrti in the seventh century.[13]

3. A Buddhist challenge

Buddhist philosophers have a complicated relationship with testimonial knowledge. Until the end of the fifth century, intellectuals belonging to the Yogācāra text tradition, which is the tradition of Dharmakīrti and Dignāga, generally accepted three independent sources of knowledge: perception, inference, and testimony. However, starting with Dignāga in the sixth century, testimonial knowledge was viewed as epistemically dependent upon inferential knowledge.[14] This section will first look at Dignāga's analysis of testimonial knowledge and show how, in contrast to Nyāya, Dignāga requires the epistemic agent to engage in more epistemic work before acquiring knowledge from a speaker's statements. I will then look at Dharmakīrti's commentary on Dignāga, which, while also reducing testimonial knowledge to inferential knowledge, disagrees with Dignāga on what types of inferences are legitimate. Ultimately, Buddhist epistemologists argue that unless the epistemic agent can confirm the reliability of a piece of testimony through an independent epistemic instrument, that is, through either perception or inference, knowledge cannot arise from a speaker's testimony.

In the second chapter of his magnum opus, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS), Dignāga, responding to an opponent who argues that inference can have a non-universal as its object, distinguishes between two types of inferential cognitions, those that have empirical objects, and those that have non-empirical objects.[15] An example of the former would be an inference from smoke to fire. I am able to infer the presence of fire from the presence of smoke because I have previously experienced, on multiple occasions, that whenever there is smoke, there is fire. An example of an inference containing a non-empirical object would be an inference to the existence of heaven based on a trustworthy speaker's testimony. In this latter case, since I have never directly experienced heaven, all I come to know from a speaker's statement about heaven is a mentally constructed object. However, the connection between the generic object 'heaven' that I mentally construct, and the particular external[16] object 'heaven' is unclear. How do I know whether the object I construct based on another's words refers to a distinct external object, 'heaven'?[17]

An interlocutor raises this very objection and questions how a cognition whose particular object has never been seen (*na viśiṣṭārtha pratītiḥ*) can be considered inferential knowledge. After all, it seems to contain an object that is merely conceptual (*arthavikalpamātram*). However, Dignāga responds that words like 'heaven' do not refer to the mere conceptual object. Then, in PS 2.5ab, Dignāga explains that the statements of trustworthy people are equally reliable with respect to their object; thus, the cognition produced by their words is inferential knowledge.[18] However,

Dignāga does not discuss with what the statements of trustworthy people share their reliability. Helmut Krasser (2013) shows that there is good evidence to suggest that what Dignāga meant was that the statements of trustworthy people are equally reliable with respect to both perceptible objects, which we can verify, and imperceptible objects, which, like many religious objects, we cannot verify.[19] Thus, in response to the original objector, Dignāga argues that when credible people inform us of objects that we have not, and possibly cannot, verify, those objects are not mere conceptual constructions that fail to link up with distinct external objects. We know that they link up with distinct external objects because such statements are reliable, just like the statements uttered by those same credible people that we can verify. Additionally, in claiming that the knowledge we acquire from a speaker's statements amounts to inferential knowledge, Dignāga is claiming that the only way an epistemic agent can acquire knowledge through the words of others is through the exercise of their own inductive reasoning skills. It is only after I ascertain that a speaker is trustworthy that I can then use this as evidence (the inferential mark, *hetu*) of the truth of the speaker's statement.

On the other hand, for Nyāya, knowing that a speaker is trustworthy is not a necessary condition for acquiring testimonial knowledge. In fact, so long as no counterevidence is present, an epistemic agent can acquire testimonial knowledge from a trustworthy speaker's say-so without engaging in positive epistemic work. However, Dignāga's analysis raises a legitimate concern: without evidence of the speaker's credibility, what guarantees that our testimonial beliefs will not be false?[20] Before looking at Nyāya's counter-response, I first turn to Dignāga's most famous commentator, Dharmakīrti, and his challenge of Dignāga's inference from trustworthiness. In particular, Dharmakīrti questions how exactly we can know for sure that a speaker is trustworthy. Dignāga had argued that the epistemic agent infers the speaker's present credibility on the basis of past instances of verified credibility. However, Dharmakīrti rejects this inference and argues that a speaker's past instances of credibility are not a reliable indicator of that same speaker's present credibility. Dharmakīrti claims that being credible results from the presence of virtuous mental qualities. However, these virtuous qualities are imperceptible and not inferable. Dharmakīrti explains:

> People engage in truthful or deceitful actions based on virtues or flaws, which are mental properties. Those mental properties, which are supersensible, would have to be inferred on the basis of bodily and verbal actions that originate from them. However, these actions, for the most part, are able to be performed intentionally and in a manner that belies their true intentions. This is because people can perform those actions at will and according to different motives.[21]

Dharmakīrti's argument is that, while people can be trustworthy, it is nearly impossible for an epistemic agent to know when a person is trustworthy. On the one hand, we might think that we can infer a person's trustworthiness from their current

verbal and bodily cues[22]; however, Dharmakīrti points out that people can easily manufacture these cues for various reasons.[23] On the other hand, like Dignāga, we might think that we can infer a speaker's trustworthiness, not based on inscrutable bodily and verbal cues, but rather, from past verified instances of a person's trustworthiness. Dharmakīrti also rejects this, claiming:

> Just because we have experienced a person being trustworthy at one time, does not mean that that person is always trustworthy. This is because we have seen people who are trustworthy in certain situations, err in other situations, and because there is no necessary connection between a person's statements and the truth of those statements.[24]

Thus, neither behavioural cues, nor past instances of a speaker's reliability, are able to serve as inferential markers of a speaker's trustworthiness. Why? Because neither can rule out the possibility that the speaker is presently lying or misinformed.[25]

What then, according to Dharmakīrti, can we know based on what others tell us? Unless we directly verify a speaker's statement, or find some other legitimate way to infer its truth, all we can infer from a speaker's statement is that speaker's expressive intent.[26] Dharmakīrti's view comes out most effectively in his commentary on PS 2.5ab and his analysis of its implications for scriptural knowledge. Dharmakīrti claims that while Dignāga, out of necessity, argued that our scriptural beliefs can be considered, in certain cases, inferential knowledge, since scriptural claims about transcendent objects cannot be verified through a genuine source of knowledge, scripture itself, and this includes Buddhist scripture, is not source of knowledge.[27] Oddly enough, Dharmakīrti's view of speech and the possibility of acquiring knowledge about real particular objects from it ends up being more similar to Śabara and Kumārila's views than to Dignāga's view.[28]

To review, both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti have argued that the knowledge we acquire from the statements of others is reducible to inferential knowledge. However, while Dignāga thinks it possible to infer the truth of a particular piece of testimony based on the credibility of the speaker, Dharmakīrti argues that, unless we directly verify the speaker's statement, all we can really infer from a speaker's statement is that speaker's intention to express a particular content. According to Dharmakīrti, we cannot rely on the inference from trustworthiness since trustworthiness is a mental property that is very difficult to ascertain (*durbodha*).[29] While Dignāga and Dharmakīrti might disagree on the type of evidence needed to support the reliability of a speaker's statement, they both agree that the epistemic agent must acquire additional non-testimonial evidence in order to acquire knowledge from a speaker's statement. This means that, according to Buddhist epistemologists, in testimonial exchanges, it is the recipient who carries the primary epistemic burden. In particular, the recipient must possess the skills, resources, and time to gather independent evidence demonstrating the reliability of the testimony in question.

What Nyāya will try to show is that these stringent requirements placed on the epistemic agent are not only unnecessary, given that much of the knowing process occurs outside the reflection of epistemic agents, but also, extremely demanding. In particular, Nyāya argues that Buddhist epistemologists have failed to distinguish between testimonial knowledge and a higher order, reflective, or confirmatory knowledge. While confirmatory knowledge is necessary in cases of doubt and disagreement, it is not a necessary condition of first-order knowledge, which arises on account of a well-functioning epistemic instrument. Additionally, if confirmatory knowledge were necessary for testimonial knowledge, this would entail that we acquire a lot less knowledge from other people than we might think that we do. It would also cast doubt upon the widely accepted practice of acting based on what others tell us.

IV. Nyāya's counter-response

As stated earlier, one of the tasks of the commentarial tradition is to respond to objections raised by rival philosophical traditions. In this section, I look at two Nyāya responses to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, namely, Uddyotakara's response in the sixth century, and Bhaṭṭa Jayanta's response in the late ninth century. In response to the Buddhist concern that without additional evidence, we could never know whether our testimonial beliefs were actually true, Uddyotakara and Jayanta distinguish between testimonial knowledge and the confirmatory knowledge that one acquires after verifying that one's belief amounts to testimonial knowledge. In the secondary literature, this distinction is referred to as the distinction between first-order, non-reflective knowledge (*pramā*) and second-order, reflective (confirmatory) knowledge (*nirṇaya*).[30] This distinction allows Nyāya to assert that testimony is an independent and irreducible source of first-order knowledge that does not epistemically depend upon either perceptual or inferential knowledge. Another way of saying this is to say that the statement of a trustworthy person is a well-functioning epistemic instrument that, by itself, can produce knowledge for an epistemic agent. Whether an epistemic agent reflects on the reliability of this instrument is irrelevant to its ability to produce knowledge. Moreover, Jayanta argues that not only do our daily experiences demonstrate that higher order confirmatory knowledge is not needed for first-order knowledge, but additionally, were it to be always required, doubt would be rampant and rational epistemic agents would never act.

Uddyotakara is the first Naiyāyika to respond to Dignāga's assimilation of testimonial knowledge into inferential knowledge. In his *Nyāyavārttika* (NV) ad NS 1.1.7., Uddyotakara discusses an objection raised by an opponent who argues that testimonial knowledge can be explained in terms of either inferential or perceptual knowledge. In particular, the interlocutor questions whether, in defining testimony as the assertion of a trustworthy authority, the NS intends to convey that the epistemic agent must know either that the speaker is trustworthy or that the assertion is in fact true. If the former, then testimonial knowledge reduces to inferential knowledge,

since it arises as a result of an inference from a speaker's trustworthiness to a statement's truth. If the latter, then testimonial knowledge reduces to perceptual knowledge, since it arises from direct experience with the object of testimony.[31]

In response, Uddyotakara argues that the interlocutor has misunderstood the meaning of NS 1.1.7. Uddyotakara clarifies by distinguishing testimonial knowledge from the verifying inferential and perceptual knowledge mentioned by the interlocutor. According to Uddyotakara, the NS states that testimonial knowledge is knowledge of an object that is produced by a trustworthy person's words. This knowledge does not need to be accompanied by an inference to the trustworthiness of the speaker or a perceptual experience that confirms the veracity of the assertion itself. Additionally, this holds true whether the object is empirically accessible, through sense experience, or, like many religious objects, not.[32] This suggests that Uddyotakara distinguishes testimonial knowledge from the confirmatory knowledge that is acquired after epistemic agents verify the trustworthiness of the speaker or the truth of the assertion itself.

The question of whether confirmatory knowledge is required for first-order testimonial knowledge is distinct from the question of whether confirmatory knowledge is required for action. This latter question, which probes the link between knowledge and action, is discussed in the opening words of the NBh, where Vātsyāyana explains that successful action is preceded by knowledge.[33] The idea seems to be that if we want to engage in successful action then we must know, prior to acting, that we do in fact have knowledge. In other words, we need to ascertain that our cognition is in fact true, or, put differently, produced by a well-functioning epistemic instrument. The question of whether this confirmatory knowledge is necessary for undertaking an action (*pravṛtti*) is helpfully discussed in Taisei Shida (2004). Shida shows that while Uddyotakara provides a limited response to this question it is not until Jayanta, responding directly to the 7th century Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila's theory that the truth of all cognitions is self-evident (*svataḥprāmāṇyavāda*), that a more comprehensive and elaborate response is given.

In his commentary on Vātsyāyana's opening words, Uddyotakara has an interlocutor formulate the problem regarding the link between knowledge and successful action. If successful action towards an object only occurs when the object has been correctly apprehended, and if we can only ascertain that an object has been correctly apprehended after successful action, then it seems as if these two—successful action and correction apprehension of the object—remain unestablished since they are mutually dependent. Uddyotakara seems to dismiss this objection after mentioning that the beginning-less nature of time seems to support the mutual interdependence of successful action and the correct apprehension of objects.[34] Shida (2004, p. 119) takes this to mean that Uddyotakara believes that all cognitions in this life have been ascertained to be true in previous lives; thus, we ascertain that an object has been correctly apprehended prior to successful action. This ascertaining cognition seems to be an instance of confirmatory knowledge but it seems distinct

from the sort of confirmatory knowledge that relies on explicit perceptual or infer-
ential evidence. One immediate problem with Uddyotakara's response is that it fails
to explain unsuccessful activity based on incorrect cognitions. Assuming begin-
ning-less time and unsuccessful activity in former lives, it would appear that, in
many cases at least, an individual would, prior to action, have doubts about whether
a particular cognition is in fact true. This is because, in the past, different cognitions
of seemingly the same object have sometimes led to successful activity and other
times, unsuccessful activity. For example, sometimes an object that appears to be
silver is in fact silver, but other times, it is a piece of tin.

Regardless of the success of Uddyotakara's response to the objection, he affirms
that Vātsyāyana did not mean to focus on the question of which came first—suc-
cessful action or the correct apprehension of objects—rather, Vātsyāyana meant
to emphasise the *capacity* of epistemic instruments to lead to effective action and
the capacity of effective action to accomplish one's aims.[35] At the very least, this
response seems to show that even if Uddyotakara distinguished between first-order
testimonial knowledge and confirmatory knowledge, this question of whether con-
firmatory knowledge is required prior to action was not a focal point for earlier
Naiyāyikas. This changes after Jayanta, who, in his magnum opus, the *Nyāyamañjarī*
(NM), distinguishes between situations where we do need to ascertain the truth of
our cognitions and those where we do not. This distinction allows Jayanta to carve a
middle path between his Mīmāṃsā interlocutors on the one hand and his Buddhist
interlocutors on the other hand. Against the former, Jayanta argues that confirma-
tory knowledge is not intrinsic to the cognition in question but rather, is obtained
by a separate and subsequent cognition (*parataḥprāmāṇya*). Against the latter,
Jayanta argues that confirmatory knowledge is distinct from, and not necessary for,
testimonial knowledge.

The NM is a 'selective' commentary on the NS.[36] The third chapter, which
unpacks and clarifies the definition of testimony provided in NS 1.1.7, directly
quotes PS 2.5ab[37] and indirectly references Dharmakīrti's argument in PV 1.213[38].
In delineating and responding to these two positions, Jayanta underscores the
primary Buddhist concern, namely, the gap between what the epistemic agent
becomes aware of upon hearing a speaker's utterance and actual states of affairs.
Both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti argue that, in order to close this gap, the epistemic
agent needs to confirm, through a legitimate source of knowledge, that the aware-
ness state produced by a speaker's linguistic expression reflects actual states of
affairs. In response to his Buddhist interlocutors, Jayanta distinguishes between
testimonial knowledge and the confirmatory (inferential) knowledge that arises
upon verifying the speaker's credibility. Jayanta states, 'One confirms that one's
testimonial belief is knowledge only after verifying the speaker's credibility, how-
ever, verifying the speaker's credibility does not convert one's testimonial belief
into knowledge'.[39] Instead, testimonial knowledge arises automatically from the
statement of a trustworthy person, which, by itself, is a reliable epistemic instru-
ment. While the inference from the speaker's trustworthiness to the truth of the

speaker's statements *confirms* the presence of testimonial knowledge, it does not *produce* testimonial knowledge.

What about the Buddhist concern that without confirmatory knowledge our testimonial beliefs might be false? Jayanta dismisses this qualm and argues that our daily experiences validate the notion that we obtain knowledge of real objects through the reports of others, even when we do not confirm the presence of this knowledge.[40] The idea is that we are generally successful in navigating reality based on what others tell us, despite the fact that for many of our ordinary testimonial beliefs, we lack the higher order evidence that Buddhist epistemologists seem to think we require. According to both Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers, a successful action is predicated upon knowledge.[41] If most of our beliefs were false, we would expect to be frustrated more often in our daily endeavours. However, since this is not the case, we have no reason to doubt that we possess many true and reliably produced beliefs, testimonial beliefs included, even without having confirmed that those beliefs are in fact true and reliably produced. While confirmatory knowledge allows us to *determine* that our beliefs amount to knowledge, it is not a prerequisite for knowledge itself.

Additionally, in the introduction to the NM, Jayanta argues that if first-order knowledge always required confirmatory knowledge, epistemic agents would be constantly encountering doubt and, as a result, be less inclined to act. One of the central ideas in the NM's introduction is the distinction between mundane testimony and religious testimony.[42] While the object of mundane testimony is generally empirical and verifiable, the object of religious testimony is generally non-empirical and non-verifiable by ordinary people. As a result, objects of religious testimony are often subject to much disagreement, which generates doubt.[43] Confirmatory knowledge is then needed to remove doubt. However, when a given piece of testimony concerns empirical objects that we encounter in our everyday life, as long as doubt and disagreement fail to arise, there is no need to acquire confirmatory knowledge prior to acting with respect to the object of testimony. Why? Because soon enough, as a result of our ordinary dealings in the world, we will know whether our testimonial belief is true or not.[44]

Jayanta provides two examples that show the negative epistemic and practical ramifications of requiring confirmatory knowledge for all testimonial beliefs. In the Sick Patient example, Jayanta describes a sick patient who, wanting to get better, visits a doctor who prescribes medicine. However, the sick patient lacks additional evidence that the doctor's prescription is reliable. The sick patient can do one of two things. On the one hand, the sick patient can follow the doctor's prescription in the absence of counterevidence. On the other hand, she could refuse to take the prescription until she has independent evidence of its efficacy. Jayanta argues that were sick individuals to, as a rule, doubt the advice of doctors, even in the absence of counterevidence, they would remain sick more often.[45] An ordinary person, that is, someone who is not a medical expert, would require a good amount of time and effort to gather independent, non-testimonial evidence demonstrating the reliability of medical advice.

The second example concerns the Judicious Student. A student desires to study a particular text. As she reads the first few pages of the text, she comes to know the subject matter and purpose of the text. However, she lacks confirmatory evidence that the text's statements about its content and purpose are reliable. What should the student do? Should she pause her study of the text until she has independent evidence of the text's reliability? Or, should she continue to read the text as long as she has no reason to doubt its reliability? Jayanta argues that were students to stop and raise doubts about everything that they read, then they would never commence (or finish) the study of a text.[46] Instead, Jayanta argues that students should not be so squeamish in studying a new text because there is the possibility of a worthwhile goal: acquiring knowledge about a previously unfamiliar subject matter. In a short time, the student will know whether the claims of the text seem doubtful.

The two preceding examples—the Sick Patient and the Judicious Student—show that requiring confirmatory knowledge in mundane cases of testimony would impede many of our epistemic and practical goals. First, we would end up with less knowledge overall. Second, our incessant doubting would lead to less activity overall. For example, the sick patient would remain sick longer and the judicious student would study fewer texts. Jayanta questions the rationality of doubting each claim for which we do not have confirmatory evidence, since this doubt seems contrived, that is, it seems to stem from a hypothetical scenario of unreliability, rather than concrete evidence indicating unreliability. The two examples above seem to distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable doubt. If the sick patient or judicious student had evidence that the doctor or text was unreliable, then they would have doubt that is epistemically significant. This doubt would then reasonably prevent action until it was removed. However, doubt that is connected to the mere *possibility* that a testimonial source might be unreliable is not epistemically significant. If it were, then rational people would cease to act even in scenarios where action would be considered rational.

On the other hand, Buddhist epistemologists would argue that these cases concern reasonable, or epistemically significant doubt, and that, in fact, intelligent people often act on the basis of awareness events that are not produced by reliable epistemic instruments.[47] For example, in his analysis of scripture, Dharmakīrti argues that while scripture is not a source of knowledge, rational people still act on the basis of a critically examined scripture because there is no other way to proceed with respect to religious goals.[48] This is a plausible response as long as one is willing to accept the rift between knowledge and successful action. It seems as if Buddhist epistemologists would like to assert that rational people, while generally acting on the basis of knowledge, could act on the basis of doubt when no epistemic instrument is available to resolve the matter in question. However, Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers also believe that knowledge is a precondition to successful action.[49] If this is the case, then Buddhist epistemologists need to explain why the actions we take based on what others tell us are often successful, even when preceded by the lack of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

Nyāya and Buddhist debates over the status of testimony as a source of knowledge reveal contrasting attitudes regarding our epistemic dependence on others. For Nyāya, testimony is an independent source of knowledge. This means that the assertions of trustworthy people, being a well-functioning epistemic instrument, can independently produce knowledge for an epistemic agent, regardless of whether the epistemic agent knows, or reflects upon, the reliability of those assertions. On this account of testimonial knowledge, it is the epistemic community in which the individual knower finds herself, that carries most of the epistemic burden in testimonial exchanges. On the other hand, Buddhist epistemologists argue that testimonial knowledge is dependent upon inferential knowledge. This means that, in order to acquire knowledge from the statements of others, we must possess additional, non-testimonial evidence that indicates that the testimony in question is reliable. While Buddhist epistemologists disagree about what this sort of evidence might look like, they agree on the fact that it is necessary. On this account of testimonial knowledge, the primary epistemic burden is placed squarely on the epistemic agent.

This disagreement over the role played by the epistemic agent in testimonial exchanges has important consequences for the status of many of our testimonial beliefs. On Nyāya's account, testimonial knowledge, at least in everyday contexts, is ubiquitous and acquired automatically. On the other hand, in subsuming testimonial knowledge under inferential knowledge, Buddhist epistemologists make it more difficult to acquire knowledge from the statements of others because, in many cases, the sort of confirmatory evidence that is necessary is not had. This means that, despite the regularity with which we successfully act on the basis of what others tell us, oftentimes, we act from a place of doubt rather than knowledge.

This raises questions about the link between knowledge and successful action. In response, Buddhist epistemologists distinguish between the conditions necessary for knowledge and those necessary for rational action. While the knowledge that we acquire from the statements of others cannot arise without confirmatory evidence, rational action can take place on the basis of doubt, provided that there is no epistemic instrument capable of verifying the truth of our testimonial cognitions. However, the Buddhist epistemologist must then explain why it is that many of our successful actions are based on non-knowing cognitions. On the other hand, according to Nyāya, the fact that we often, unhesitatingly, engage in rational action on the basis of what others tell us and the general success of those actions can be explained by the fact that those actions are preceded by knowledge, that is, a cognition produced by a well-functioning epistemic instrument—testimony. Therefore, for Nyāya, our successful navigation of daily life is evidence of both the ubiquity of testimonial knowledge and the independence of testimony as a source of knowledge.

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Notes

1   For example, see Matilal and Chakrabarti (1994); Taber (1996); Ghosh and Chakrabarti (2006); Eltschinger and Krasser (2013); and Graheli (2017).

2   This period, starting with Dignāga (c. sixth century), is a fruitful one to explore as it marks the beginning of sustained and systematic critical exchange between Brahmanical and Buddhist philosophers. This is especially so regarding epistemological questions, such as whether, and the conditions under which, testimony is a source of knowledge.

3   Given that the article strives to analyse with sufficient depth the views of a limited number of authors in critical exchange with one another, it does not give full consideration to another key player during this time period in the debate around testimony: Mīmāṃsā. For a discussion on the development of, and mutual interaction

between, Nyāya and Bhāṭṭamīmāṃsā see Freschi and Graheli (2011). For a discussion on how Dharmakīrti's own view of testimonial knowledge is indebted to Śabara and Kumārila, see Kataoka (2007).

4 For more on the history and core philosophical concepts of Nyāya, see Chapter 1 in Phillips (2012).

5 On the idea that *pramāṇa* are factive, see Dasti and Phillips (2010).

6 Translation provided by Dasti and Phillips (2010, p.15).

7 In defining knowledge as a presenting awareness event, memory episodes, which are representing awareness events, even when in accordance with its object, do not count as knowledge since they are produced by mental impressions alone. Additionally, the truth of memories depends on the truth of the presenting awareness events that give rise to memory. Therefore, memory is not an independent source of knowledge since it does not generate knowledge; rather, it re-presents it.

8 NS 1.1.7.

9 ND (p. 173): *āptaḥ khalu sākṣātkṛtadharmā yathādṛṣṭasyā 'rthasya cikhyāpayiṣayā prayukta upadeṣṭā |.*

10 NM (I, p. 400): *na tu pratyakṣeṇa eva grahaṇam iti niyamaḥ anumānādiniścitārthopadeśino 'py āptatvānapāyāt ||.* Uddyotakara's commentary on NS 1.1.8 also mentions that trustworthy speakers can transfer knowledge to others about objects that they do not directly perceive, but rather, apprehend through inference. See ND (p. 179): *vaktṛbhedena vā dvaividhyaṃ dṛṣṭādṛṣṭārthapravaktṛkatvāt | pratyakṣatas upalabdhārthaḥ dṛṣṭārthaḥ | anumānopalabdhārtho adṛṣṭārthaḥ |.*

11 NM (I, p. 399): *śrotragrāhyavastukaraṇikā tadarthapratītir abhidhānakriyā itthaṃ loke vyāvahārāt |.* The term 'artha' is a notoriously tricky word to translate since it has many meanings depending on context. For realists like Jayanta, unless one was specifically talking about mental content, the meaning of words and sentences are the external objects, objective properties, and relations between them, which are denoted by statements.

12 See Mohanty (1994, pp. 30–33) for a helpful outline of these three conditions.

13 These traditionally accepted dates, which are based on Frauwallner's reconstruction, have been challenged by a few scholars including Krasser. See Franco (2018) for the debate around Dharmakīrti's dates as well as an argument against the new earlier dating (ca. 550) proposed by Krasser. Regardless of these dates, Dignāga is thought to be the founder of the Buddhist epistemological tradition and Dharmakīrti, his most famous commentator, is among the most influential Buddhist philosophers in South Asian philosophical history. For a general introduction to Dignāga's life, work, and important philosophical ideas, see Hattori (1968) and Hayes (1988). For a general introduction on Dharmakīrti's life, work, and important philosophical ideas, see Dreyfus (1997), Dunne (2004), and Eltschinger (2010).

14 This change seems to be due to both internal (philosophical) and external (socio-historical) factors. For example, pre-sixth-century Buddhist philosophical literature mostly concerned intra-Buddhist polemical issues rather than non-Buddhist doctrines and texts. However, beginning with Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, Yogācāra texts focused more on defending Buddhist claims against rival non-Buddhist traditions. Around this time, epistemological questions took centre focus and a clear demarcation was made between the jurisdictions of reasoning (which generally concerned

inference) and scripture, the latter being clearly connected to testimony. For more information on this, see Eltschinger (2013) and Eltschinger (2014, pp.191–218).

15 The following analysis is based on Krasser's (2013) reconstructed Sanskrit, which is based on Jinendrabuddhi's Sanskrit commentary, along with two Tibetan translations.

16 While Dignāga himself was an idealist, his works generally do not concern themselves with the ontological status of the external world and objects. In fact, the epistemological conclusions he draws often can be read as consistent with both realist and idealist systems. For more on this, see Eckel et al. (2016). Additionally, in the section under discussion, Dignāga seems to be engaging with a Vaiśeṣika interlocutor who accepts the existence of external objects. For a discussion on the broader structure of PS 2.5ab, see Lasic (2010) and Krasser (2013).

17 A fundamental feature of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's worldview is the radical distinction between the constructed, generic objects of conceptual awareness (which includes inferential and linguistic awareness) and the unconstructed unique particulars of perceptual awareness. The constructed entities of conceptual awareness do not correspond to any external, mind-independent objects. Instead, they exist only in the conventional sense, as convenient fictions that help us navigate reality. This is in contrast to the objects of perception, which are unconstructed and causally efficacious. For more on this, see the Introduction in McCrea and Patil (2010).

18 PS 2.5ab: *āptavādāvisaṃvādasāmānyād anumānatvam.* This verse has been translated by many modern scholars. See Lasic (2010) and Krasser (2012).

19 Krasser (2013) argues that this interpretation not only follows Dharmakīrti and his commentators—Śākyabuddhi and Karṇakagomin—but also, Vātsyāyana's comments on NS 2.1.68. Krasser also believes that Dignāga bases his distinction between the two types of inferences on Nyāya's distinction between the two types of testimony.

20 Dignāga's position is similar to many contemporary reductionist positions in the epistemologist of testimony. Reductionists believe that, in order to acquire testimonial knowledge, a recipient must have positive, non-testimonial reasons for believing that the testimony in question is reliable. For example, see Fricker (1994).

21 PVSV (110.11–110.14): *caitasyebhyo hi guṇadoṣebhyaḥ puruṣāḥ samyakmithyāpravṛttaḥ te ca atīndriyāḥ svaprabhavakāyavāgvyavahārānumeyāḥ syuḥ | vyavahārāś ca prāyaśo buddhipūrvam anyathā api kartuṃ śakyante puruṣecchāvṛttitvāt teṣāṃ ca citrābhisandhitvāt |.*

22 For example, Fricker (1994) argues a recipient should use common-sense psychology or person-theory to determine whether a speaker is trustworthy. She states, 'the hearer should be discriminating in her attitude to the speaker, in that she should be continually evaluating him for trustworthiness throughout their exchange, in the light of the evidence, or cues, available to her' (p.150).

23 In support of Dharmakīrti's position, evidence from social psychology confirms that we are poor readers of a speaker's behavioural cues. The second chapter of Shieber (2015) examines a large body of evidence from social psychology that claims we are not very good at making predictions regarding the sincerity and competency of other people.

24 PVSV (167.25–168.1): *na hi kvacid askhalita iti sarvaṃ tathā vyabhicāradarśanāt tatpravṛtter avisaṃvādena vyāptyasiddheś ca |.*

25 The general problems surrounding this inference to trustworthiness are also discussed by Kumārila in the *codanā* section of the *Ślokavārttika*. In response to these sorts of critiques, especially regarding the reliability of scriptural texts, later Buddhists and Naiyāyikas would link a speaker's reliability to their omniscience.

26 PV 1.213: *nāntarīyakatābhāvāc chabdānāṃ vastubhiḥ | nārthasiddhis tatas te hi vaktrabhiprāyascakāḥ ||.* 'Since words are not invariably connected to real entities, they do not establish real objects. They only make known a speaker's intention'.

27 PVSV (168.01–168.02): *agatyā ca idam āgamalakṣaṇam iṣṭam | na ato niścayaḥ | tan na pramāṇam āgama ity apy uktam |.* For more on this, see Krasser (2012).

28 For more on this, see Kataoka (2007).

29 Dunne (2004, p. 368, footnote 18) notes that the prefix *duḥ* expresses something more than 'difficult,' but not as forceful as 'impossible.'.

30 For example, see Patil (2009: chapter 2, section 1.3) and Phillips (2012: chapter 2).

31 ND (pp. 177–8): *āptopadeśa iti kim āptānām avisaṃvāditvaṃ vā pratipādyate āhosvid arthasya tathābhāva iti yady āptānām avisaṃvāditvaṃ pratipādyate tad anumānāt | athā 'rthasya tathābhāvaḥ so 'pi pratyakṣeṇa | yadā hy ayam artham pratyakṣeṇo upalabhate tadā tathābhāvam arthasya pratipadyata iti |.*

32 ND (p. 178): *tan na sūtrārthāparijñānāt| na ayaṃ sūtrārthaḥ āptopadeśaḥ śabda iti api tv indrayasambaddhāsambaddheṣu artheṣu yā śabdollekhena pratipattiḥ sā 'gamārthaḥ |.*

33 See ND (pp. 1 and 21) *pramāṇato'rthapratipattau pravṛttisāmārthyād arthavad pramāṇam | pramāṇam antareṇa na arthapratipattiḥ | na arthapratipattim antareṇa pravṛttisāmārthyam |* (pp. 1 and 21).

34 See ND (pp. 8 and 10): *tac ca naivam/ kasmāt? anāditvāt/...ādimati ca saṃsāra eṣa doṣaḥ kiṃ pūrvaṃ pramāṇato 'rthapratipatir āhosvit pravṛttisāmarthyam iti/.*

35 See ND (p. 10): *pramāṇapravṛttyor balābalajijñāsāyām ubhayasāmarthyapratipādanārthaṃ vākyam/ lokaḥ khalu pravartamānaḥ pramāṇena avadhārya pravartate/ sa ca tathā pravartamānaḥ phalam upalabhate/*

36 It is 'selective' in the sense that it only comments on certain aphorisms, namely, those aphorisms which provide the definitions (*lakṣaṇasūtras*) of the sixteen categories (*padārthas*). See Watson and Kataoka (2010, p. 286).

37 See NM (I, p. 403): *api ca pratibhāmātre śabdāj jāte'pi kutracit | āptavādatvaliṅgena janyate niścitā matiḥ || ata eva hi manyante śabdasyāpi vipaścitaḥ |* **āptavādāvisaṃvādasāmānyād anumānatā**|| (PS 2.5).

38 NM (I, p. 404): *kiñca śabdo vivakṣāyām eva prāmāṇyam aśnute | na bāhye vyabhicāritvāt tasyāṃ caitasya liṅgatā ||.* Compare to Dharmakīrti's own words in PV 1.213: *nāntarīyakatābhāvāc chabdānāṃ vastubhiḥ | nārthasiddhis tatas te hi vaktrabhiprāyascakāḥ ||.* 'Since words are not invariably connected to real entities, they do not establish real objects. They only make known a speaker's intention'.

39 NM (I, p. 411): *āptavādatvahetunā hi śabdārthabuddheḥ prāmāṇyaṃ sādhyate na tu saiva janyate |.*

40 NM (I, p. 411): *na ca prāmāṇyaniścayād vinā pratibhāmātraṃ tad iti vaktavyaṃ śabdārthasaṃpratyayasyānubhavasiddhatvāt ||.*

41 On the connection between knowledge and successful action, see Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara, and Vācaspati's introductory remarks on NS 1.1.1 in Dasti and Phillips (2017, pp. 14–16). Additionally, the first line of the Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu* states, 'The accomplishment of any human goal is preceded by knowledge. Therefore, this will be investigated in this treatise' (*samyagjñānapūrvikā sarvapuruṣārthasiddhir iti tad*

vyutpādyate). In his commentary, the *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*, Dharmottara, states that the subject matter of Dharmakīrti's treatise is knowledge and that the purpose of the treatise is to help people accomplish any aim they have. See NB (pp. 5–7).

42   This distinction is also referred to in NS 1.1.8.

43   For example, Jayanta claims that the Veda is criticised by rival philosophers and their 'faulty' reasoning. As a result of this, he claims that no intelligent person, whose confidence has been shaken as a result of these criticisms, would want to carry out the Veda's prescriptions, which require great effort and wealth. See NM (I, p. 7): *vedeṣu hi dustārkikaracitakutarkaviplāvitaprāmāṇyeṣu śithilitāsthāḥ katham iva bahuvittavyayāyāsādisādhyaṃ vedārthānuṣṭhānam ādriyeran sādhavaḥ |.*

44   In fact, Jayanta, arguing with a Mīmāṃsaka interlocutor over whether the truth of cognitions is self-evident or extrinsically determined, claims that when it comes to cognitions whose object is perceptible and verifiable, it doesn't really matter whether the truth of cognitions is self-evident or extrinsically determined. The best thing is to remain agnostic on the question. On the other hand, when it comes to cognitions whose objects are imperceptible and difficult to verify, like religious objects, it is not rational to act with respect to such objects without verifying that our cognitions are in fact true. This is because the sort of actions we take with respect to such objects are difficult, costly, and require much exertion. Thus, we want to make sure that our cognition of this object is in fact correct, otherwise, our endeavours might be futile. In such cases, Jayanta argues, truth is extrinsically determined. See NM (I, pp. 435–6): *pratyakṣādiṣu dṛṣṭārtheṣu pramāṇeṣu prāmāṇyaniścayam antareṇa eva vyavahārasiddhes tatra kim svataḥ prāmāṇyam uta parataḥ iti vicāreṇa na naḥ prayojanam anirṇaya eva tatra śreyān/ adṛṣṭe tu viṣaye vaidikeṣv agnitadraviṇavitaraṇādikleśasādhyeṣu karmasu tatprāmāṇyāvadhāraṇam antareṇa prekṣāvatāṃ pravartanam anucitam iti tasya prāmāṇyaniścayo 'vaśyakartavyaḥ | tatra parata eva vedasya prāmāṇyam iti vakṣyāmaḥ ||.*

45   NM (I, p. 15): *ārto hi bhiṣajaṃ pṛṣṭvā taduktam anutiṣṭhate | tasmin savicikitsas tu vyādher ādhikyam āpnuyāt ||.*

46   NM (I, p. 15): *śṛṇvanta eva jānanti santaḥ katipayair dinaiḥ | kim etat saphalaṃ śāstraṃ uta mandaprayojanam || sūkṣmekṣikā tu yady atra kriyate prathamodyame | asau sakalakartavyavipralopāya kalpate ||*

47   Patil (2009) states it well when he says that for Buddhist epistemologists, 'The standards for what counts as a knowing event are stricter than for awareness-events on the basis of which it is reasonable for us to act' (p. 186). See also Section 2.1.2 for a broader discussion between the tenth-century Naiyāyika Vācaspati and the eleventh-century Buddhist Ratnakīrti on epistemically significant doubt (*artha-sandeha*).

48   See Dharmakīrti's commentary on PS 2.5ab, especially PVSV ad PV I.213-219.

49   See fn. 41.