

## Chapter II

### Against General Evidentialism

In the last chapter we defined testimony and presented the problem of the epistemology of testimony: Precisely what sort of justification for belief can testimony give? The burden of proof is on a non-evidential view, that testimony can give a justification for belief that is not evidential. Any such view must show why we must see a particular belief as being justified, and why we cannot take that justification to be evidential. If we do not place the burden of proof on non-evidential views, we will face a proliferation of mysterious non-evidential *a posteriori* justifications.

In this and the next chapter we discuss attempts to show that testimony indeed provides a non-evidential justification for belief. We begin by separating two questions that need to be addressed, one concerning the justification for believing in testimony's general reliability and the other concerning justification for particular beliefs that particular testimony gives. In this chapter we will argue that we must have a non-evidential justification for believing in testimony's general reliability. We will show that it would be impossible to learn from testimony without this non-evidential justification. In the course of this discussion we will defend the Acceptance Principle, that a hearer is entitled to believe anything that she is told unless she has positive evidence against its truth.

The considerations that support this non-evidential justification, however, will not apply to the justification that we get from particular pieces of testimony. A radically different argument would be required to show that particular pieces of testimony give a

non-evidential justification for belief. In the next chapter we will consider the argument for the Assurance View, that testimony must provide a non-evidential justification in order to account for the teller's responsibility for her testimony. The rest of the dissertation then argues, against the Assurance View, that the evidential view of testimony can account for the justifications that testimony gives and for the way those justifications are based in the teller's responsibility for her testimony.

Section 1 of this chapter distinguishes the two evidential views in question, which I call General and Particular Evidentialism. Sections 2 through 4 provide the argument against General Evidentialism. Section 2 argues that we cannot obtain justification for belief by reducing all testimonial justifications to non-testimonial justifications; it is too difficult. Section 3 argues for the Acceptance Principle by demonstrating the inadequacy of weaker alternatives. Section 4 examines the consequences of the Acceptance Principle and concludes that we must have non-evidential justification for believing that most testimony is true, in order to make the Acceptance Principle true.

### 1. General and Particular Evidentialism

Hume formulates the traditional expression of the view that our reliance on testimony is justified by evidence, the same way that any other belief is justified:

...our assurance in any argument of this kind [i.e., derived from human testimony] is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses.... Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villainy, has no

manner of authority with us [Hume 1777, X.88, pp. 111-112; emphasis in original].

We should note, however, that Hume cites two sorts of evidence that bear on testimony.

The evidence in favor of the tenacity of the memory, humans' inclination to truth, and the overall veracity of human testimony is evidence of the first kind, bearing on testimony's general reliability. It supports the generalization that most testimony is true; any support it gives for the particular thing that we have been told comes via this generalization.

Evidence of a man's deliriousness or reputation for falsehood and villainy is evidence of the second kind, namely evidence bearing directly on the particular thing that we have just been told. This evidence has no bearing on the generalization that most testimony is true, except as it provides an instance for induction to the generalization.

These two sorts of evidence reflect an ambiguity in the question "What kind of justification can we have for relying on testimony?" This question may be about general reliance on testimony, in which case we need a justification for believing that most what we are told, taken as a mass, is true. This question may also be about relying on testimony in a particular instance, in which case we need a justification, provided by the testimony, for believing the particular thing that we have been told. (If we believe based on a justification that is not provided by the testimony, we are not relying on the testimony but believing the proposition on independent grounds.) Accordingly, our question "Do we ever have a non-evidential justification for believing what we have been told?" must be separated into a *general question*:

(General Question) Can we have a non-evidential justification for believing the claim that most testimony is true?

and a *particular question*:

(Particular Question) Can a particular piece of testimony provide a non-evidential justification for believing what is told?<sup>1</sup>

The General Question concerns the justification for believing a single statistical generalization, “Most testimony is true.” (Of course, “All testimony is true” is untenable.) The Particular Question concerns the justification for believing that a particular piece of testimony is true on a particular occasion; so if the testimony at issue is “It’s raining,” the Particular Question in this case concerns justification that the testimony provides for believing that it’s raining.

If we answer “no” to the General Question, we get what I will call *General Evidentialism* (which we will find to be false):

(General Evidentialism) A person is justified in believing the single claim that most testimony is true only insofar as she has evidence for that claim.

If we answer “no” to the Particular Question, we get what I will call *Particular Evidentialism* (which we will argue is true):

(Particular Evidentialism) Being told that  $p$  on a particular occasion only justifies a person in believing that  $p$  insofar as it gives her evidence that  $p$ .<sup>2</sup>

General Evidentialism concerns evidence for a statistical generalization, while Particular Evidentialism concerns evidence for particular statements.<sup>3</sup> A subject’s experiences provide her with whatever evidence she has (though we must not beg the question by

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<sup>1</sup> We must ask whether the testimony itself can provide a non-evidential justification for what is told, to exclude cases in which there is an independent non-evidential justification for believing what is told. For example, when one person tells another a mathematical truth, a non-evidential justification for believing the this truth might be available to anyone who proves it. If the hearer carried out the proof, the non-evidential justification she obtained would be independent of the testimony.

<sup>2</sup> General and Particular Evidentialism are much the same as Fricker’s global and local Reductionism, respectively (see Fricker 1994, pp. 133-4). We will discuss relevant differences below, when we consider Fricker’s arguments.

<sup>3</sup> Of course one person may tell another a statistical generalization, and then Particular Evidentialism will concern a kind of evidence for this statistical generalization. In these cases, however, the fact that what has been told is a statistical generalization is not relevant to the evidence given by the testimony itself; the evidence given by the testimony will be the sort of evidence that supports the particular claim “This testimony is true.”

assuming that all experience-dependent justification is evidential).<sup>4</sup> Different sorts of experience are necessary to gather evidence for statistical generalizations and for particular instances. In brute statistical terms, a general conclusion of the form “Most *F*s are *G*” can be supported by *proportional induction*, in which examining many *F*s for a property *G* leads to the conclusion that the proportion of all *F*s that are *G* is the proportion of the examined *F*s that were *G*. Then the experiences that provide evidence for the generalization are the experiences of examining the *F*s. A particular conclusion such as “This is *G*” can be supported by a *statistical syllogism*, which has as premises the particular statement “This is *F*” and the statistical generalization “Most *F*s are *G*,” supporting the particular conclusion “This is *G*”.<sup>5</sup> When the particular premise “This is *F*” is known through experience, it is this experience that provides evidence for the conclusion “This is *G*,” as well as any experiences that may provide evidence that most *F*s are *G*.

General Evidentialism states that, to be justified in believing the generalization that most testimony is true, we must have evidence for that generalization. This evidence, if it can be gathered, will be gathered by confirming instances of this generalization (or of other generalizations that support it). As we will see in this chapter, the problem will be whether we actually can have the experiences that would be required to provide this

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<sup>4</sup> This accords with the conception of justification put forth in the Appendix, according to which a subject’s experiences determine what she is justified in believing. In particular, the notion of an object or event providing objective evidence for *p* will be derivative of its providing evidence for *p* to people who experience it in particular ways. This conception of evidence will be important in undermining the motivation for the Assurance View. See section III.3 on Moran’s conception of evidence, and section VII.3 for the argument against this picture.

<sup>5</sup> See Black (1967) for a basic typology of these kinds of inductive reasoning. Here and in general we are deliberately using simpleminded notions of statistical reasoning, as opposed to more sophisticated notions (such as Bayesian notions); the points we have to make are broad enough that this does not matter. We do not mean to imply that all evidence is statistical; in Chapter V we will consider how testimony could supply non-statistical evidence.

evidence. Particular Evidentialism states that a particular piece of testimony, stating a particular proposition such as “It is raining,” can only provide justification for what is said (that it is raining) by providing evidence. Here any evidence will come from the experience of being told that it is raining, perhaps mediated by a statistical generalization concerning testimony.<sup>6</sup> There is no problem concerning whether the teller has the appropriate experience. What will be in question (as explained in Chapter III) is whether this experience provides evidence or some non-evidential justification.

In the rest of this chapter we will argue against General Evidentialism. We will first argue that we are justified in general reliance on testimony, for rejecting testimony would lead to an unacceptable skepticism (section 2). If General Evidentialism were true, this justification for general reliance on testimony would have to take the form of evidence for the generalization that most testimony is reliable. We will argue, however, that it is not possible to gather enough evidence to support this generalization without already presupposing that most testimony is true (sections 3-4). We must then have a non-evidential justification for believing that most testimony is true, or we could never acquire an evidential justification for believing this.

These arguments will not tell against Particular Evidentialism, for they will not show that any particular piece of testimony fails to provide evidence for what is told. In fact, as we will show (section IV.3 and section VI.1), our arguments against General Evidentialism prove that most particular pieces of testimony do provide evidence for what is told. Arguments against Particular Evidentialism will take a different tack, claiming that we must see particular pieces of testimony as providing non-evidential

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<sup>6</sup> In our initial approach to this question (Chapter IV), we will consider testimonial evidence as mediated by statistical generalizations. We will then refine our conception of evidence beyond the merely statistical (Chapter V).

justification in order to account for the teller's freedom in giving testimony and her responsibility for that testimony. We will set out these arguments at the end of Chapter III and rebut them in the remaining chapters.

## 2. The Indispensability of Testimony

This section argues for the indispensability of testimony as a source for justification, justification both for beliefs in general and for the specific belief in the reliability of testimony. In order to avoid skepticism, we must often rely on testimony to justify our beliefs, and we cannot gather evidence to justify this reliance without relying on testimony. This argument will disprove what Fricker calls *global reductionism*, the claim that “the blanket generalisation, ‘Testimony is generally reliable’,... can be non-circularly empirically established” (Fricker 1994, pp. 133-134). In the succeeding sections, to complete the disproof of General Evidentialism, we will show that we cannot rely on much testimony at all unless we have justification for believing the blanket generalization, “Testimony is generally reliable.” Then, since we cannot gather evidence to justify this blanket generalization, we must have a non-evidential justification for believing it.

We begin with an apology for forthcoming oversimplifications. What is indispensable is word-dependent acts in general rather than pure testimony. Recall, from section I.1, that pure testimony (according to our definition) must be intended to be believed on the speaker's say-so alone; it is not pure testimony if the speaker gives any reasons for what she says. Nevertheless, when the speaker gives reasons, she may still intend the hearer to take her say-so as an essential part of the reason for belief. For

instance, a chemistry teacher explains to the class that the solution is acidic, because the litmus paper turned red; the class can see that the paper turned red, but (in the first lecture) they must take it on the teacher's say-so that this means that the solution is acidic. A person's knowledge can be divided into that which can only be gained by relying on the word-dependent assertions of others, and that which she could gain through her own observation and reasoning. We will show that throwing out the word-dependent knowledge would result in a debilitating skepticism.

It is not strictly correct to cast this as an argument that most testimony must be true; it is an argument that most word-dependent assertions must be true. Nevertheless, any piece of testimony is a word-dependent assertion, and if most word-dependent assertions are true there is no reason to think that pure testimony would be radically unreliable.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, I will use testimony in this chapter as a stand-in for all word-dependent assertions. When we show that most word-dependent assertions must be true, and that we have non-evidential justification for believing this, this will provide an argument that most testimony must be true and that we have a non-evidential reason for believing this. It is simpler to speak of "testimony" throughout.

Given this broad use of "testimony," what others tell us in speech or writing is a rich source of what we take ourselves to know. Its importance can be seen through a parable C.A.J. Coady tells of a day in a foreign country, in the course of which one may rely on testimony in many ways. Some personal information that one relies on has been learned through testimony:

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<sup>7</sup> That is, it is implausible that testimony for which no reason *has* been given is radically less reliable than word-dependent acts in general. When the speaker is *unable* to give a reason in support of her testimony, the testimony is likely to be false. See section VII.2.

That I am so many years old; that I was born on such and such a date; that number H11200 does indeed correspond to the number the Australian passport authorities have in their files—none of these are facts of my individual observation or memory or inference from them. They are based, sometimes in a complex way, on the word of others (Coady 1992, pp. 6-7).

More directly, when one asks another the time, reads and believes a history book or the newspaper, or consults a map to see how the strange city is laid out, one is taking the word of others for something one has not verified oneself.

There are whole areas of knowledge that depend on testimony. As Sosa says, “we rely on testimony for our grasp of history, geography, science and more” (Sosa 1994, p. 59); he adds that “[m]ost of what I take myself to know about history, geography and science... is in one way or another perceptually inaccessible to me” (Sosa 1994, p. 64). If we did not take the word of others about past times, distant lands, or experiments we have not performed ourselves, we would have no way of learning about these fields. In historical cases there may be a long chain of testimony stretching back to someone who did observe the original events. Authentication that, for instance, a manuscript was written by a witness to the original events, or someone farther down the testimonial chain, is also likely to rely on testimony. In the case of science it will often be true that there is no individual who has personally observed every experiment that is used to draw a particular conclusion; then everyone’s knowledge of that conclusion, even that of the scientists, will rely on testimony concerning the results of the other experiments.<sup>8</sup>

Unless testimony often justifies our beliefs, then, we will lack justification for believing most claims of history, geography, and science, and many particular claims about ourselves and our surroundings. We will not be justified in believing that George

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<sup>8</sup> See Coady’s remarks on an experiment with 99 widely separated coauthors (Coady 1992, p. 10n14).

Washington was once president of the United States, or that the earth revolves around the sun, or (if we have not been there) that there is a continent Australia in the Southern Hemisphere, not to mention our own birthdate and ancestry. In what follows I will impose what I call the *Broad Justification Requirement*: that any account of testimony allow that we are justified in believing many of these things concerning history, geography, science, and our life and surroundings. It is part of common sense that we have some knowledge of history, geography, and science. This knowledge can only have come through testimony. So it is part of common sense that much testimony concerning these fields is true. If we are justified in believing the deliverances of common sense, we are justified in believing many of the things that we are told.<sup>9</sup>

The question now is whether we can gather evidence to justify this reliance on testimony. In order to meet the Broad Justification Requirement, this evidence must either take the form of evidence for many of the particular conclusions that we draw from testimony or evidence in support of some generalization of the form “Most [of a certain kind of] testimony is true.” To obtain evidence for such a generalization, we must either confirm its instances or infer it from other generalizations. The sort of generalizations from which it might be inferred would be statements like “People’s beliefs are generally accurate” and “People generally say what they believe,” which would in turn have to be supported by evidence. (Indeed, they may turn out to be untrue; certainly it is not part of

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<sup>9</sup> The Broad Justification Requirement gives short shrift to the skeptical worry that most of what we believe about history, geography, science, and our personal circumstances might turn out to be wrong owing to widespread falsity of testimony. Assuaging skeptical worries simply is not part of our project. If this seems unsatisfactory, consider that the epistemology of testimony must be built on a considerable foundation of anti-skepticism. If we could not know of the existence of the external world and of other minds, we could not know that we were confronted with testimony, let alone be in a position to consider whether the testimony was true. If we are to entertain skepticism about testimony, there seems to be no principled reason not to begin with these other sorts of skepticism; unless, of course, a solution to these other skeptical problems is in hand.

common sense that people's beliefs are generally accurate.) Gathering evidence in support of these latter generalizations would face the same problems as gathering evidence in support of "Most [of a certain kind of] testimony is true," so we will only consider evidence that comes from instances of testimony that are confirmed to be accurate.

Suppose, then, that we try to justify our reliance on testimony by supporting some generalization of the form "Most [of a certain kind of] testimony is true." If this generalization concerns an overly restricted subset of testimony, confirming it will not justify the broad reliance on testimony on history, geography, science, etc. that we need in order to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement. For instance, evidence that most testimony about mathematics was true would not justify us in believing what we were told about history. So, to have evidence that would justify our reliance on testimony by means of "Most [of a certain kind of] testimony is true," we would need instances of confirmed testimony on a broad variety of topics. If we seek evidence for the particular conclusions we draw from testimony, inducing to "Most testimony is true" rather than "Most [of a certain kind of] testimony is true," we clearly will also need to confirm particular pieces of testimony on a broad variety of topics. To gather evidence that most testimony is true, then, we need to confirm testimony on a broad variety of topics; the question is whether we can do so without presupposing a justification for our reliance on testimony.

Evidence that does not presuppose that testimony is at all reliable would have to consist of the investigator's own personal observations and reasoning. Gathering non-circular evidence for the general reliability of testimony thus requires personally

observing the truth of many of the things that one has been told. Yet, as Coady argues, “it seems absurd to suggest that, individually, we have done anything like the amount of field-work that [global reductionism] requires” (Coady 1992, p. 82). Let us suppose that little David Hume’s parents have told him that putting a stamped envelope in a mailbox will eventually cause a postman to deliver the letter to the appropriate address; what would Hume have to do to confirm an instance of this without relying on testimony? He is unlikely to observe the letter’s journey for himself; as Coady puts it,

there is probably no single person who has personally observed the complete path of even *one* letter from the moment it leaves the sender’s hand to the moment it reaches its destination. Hume might have observed postmen, posts, ferries, etc., but his beliefs about what they do (his belief in the postal system) [are] dependent upon a complicated web of testimony and inference, prominent amongst which would no doubt be what he was told by his teachers or parents (Coady 1992, p. 81).

So the observation of a postman emptying the mailbox would not support the conclusion that the letters were being delivered to their destinations without the additional premise that postmen perform this delivery; the observation of sacks of mail on the ferry would not support this conclusion without the premise that these had been taken from the mailbox, and were being sent on; the receipt of a postmarked letter only supports this conclusion given that the postmark is accurate, and the postmark itself is a form of testimony; and the report of the addressee that she has received the letter at the correct address is of course testimony. The recipient could prove that she had received the letter by demonstrating knowledge of its contents, but this would not show that the letter had arrived through normal channels, and it would provide only thin support for the idea that stamped letters generally do arrive at their destinations.

This example suggests the difficulties that would be encountered in verifying even a fairly simple example of testimony through personal observation and experience. Much

of what we observe must be interpreted in terms of what we have been told; when we see someone mail a letter, for instance, we only know what she is doing because we know what mailboxes are. Since we have not personally observed the workings of the postal system, this knowledge of mailboxes will depend in large part on testimony. Knowledge of history, distant geography, and science will be even less amenable to non-testimonial confirmation. (We will further discuss this sort of knowledge below in section 3, as knowledge of exotic topics.) Similarly, beliefs about general human nature that would entail the reliability of testimony could only be confirmed by observations of a far-flung sample of humanity discussing a broad variety of topics. No one will be able to perform all the required observation of most humanity; most likely you and I have not done so. Were we to suspend all beliefs that depended on testimony, then, we would not be able to justify enough of them through personal observation to show that testimony was generally reliable. This shows that we will not be able to gather evidence that testimony is generally reliable without relying on testimony, which is to say that global reductionism is false.<sup>10</sup> To complete the disproof of General Evidentialism, we will show that a reliance on testimony that meets the Broad Justification Requirement must be

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<sup>10</sup> Coady also gives an argument against global reductionism that depends on the preconditions for making sense of testimony. Coady argues that it would not make sense to interpret people as telling others things unless we interpreted them as telling the truth most of the time (Coady 1992, p. 85ff). If most testimony turns out false on our interpretation, either we have not understood what is being told or we are wrong to believe that telling is taking place at all. (Of course, we can avoid having most testimony turn out false without having most testimony turn out true, but arguably our interpretation is wrong if it is not the case that it makes most testimony true.) Since testimony cannot take place if most testimony is false, we know by contraposition (without gathering evidence) that most testimony is true if there is testimony at all. This is analogous to Davidson's argument, discovered independently (see Coady 1992, p. 154n3), that we must interpret others so that most of their beliefs are true (see Davidson 1977 and other papers in Davidson 1984). Fricker objects that the Davidsonian argument concerns beliefs about "what is too boringly obvious and familiar to be worth asserting" (Fricker 1995, p. 410), and the prospects seem considerably worse for using such an argument to establish the truth of what we in section 3 call exotic testimony. Exotic testimony will be defined as testimony that goes beyond what common sense tells us that the speaker knows, so that we can make sense of the speaker while interpreting her as wrong about the beliefs she expresses. In any case, the argument of Coady's that we discuss in the text is adequate to refute global reductionism, so we need not resolve the dispute concerning the additional argument.

grounded in a belief that testimony is generally reliable; since global reductionism is false, the justification for this belief will be non-evidential. The existence of this non-evidential justification contradicts General Evidentialism.

### 3. Acceptance Principles for Testimony

In the previous section we argued that we must be justified in relying on testimony, and that it is impossible to gather evidence for testimony's reliability without relying on testimony. To reflect the wide variety of beliefs we gain through testimony, we set forth the Broad Justification Requirement, that a satisfactory account of testimony must justify many beliefs gained through testimony concerning history, geography, science, and our personal surroundings. This raises the question of what testimony we are justified in relying on. We must have some principle for when we are justified in believing testimony, or else our account of justification will be arbitrary. As argued in the previous section, the principle "We are justified in believing testimony when this belief is grounded in non-testimonial evidence" is too weak to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement, because it would take an impossible amount of field-work to gather enough non-testimonial evidence. We need another principle for when testimony justifies belief. This principle cannot itself be justified by gathering evidence. There is not enough non-testimonial evidence to support a satisfactory principle (if there were, the principle would be a consequence of "We are justified in believing testimony when this belief is grounded in non-testimonial evidence"), and it would be circular to claim that testimony can provide evidence for the principle; for the principle itself is meant to govern when testimony may be relied on.

We seek, then, a principle that is justified non-evidentially and that governs when testimony justifies belief. The question is what this principle might be. In this section we will argue that the principle required is that we are justified in believing anything we are told, except when we have some positive reason not to believe it. In the next section we show that this principle will yield a non-evidential justification for believing the generalization that most testimony is true, which will complete the argument against General Evidentialism.

The argument of these sections will presuppose Particular Evidentialism, because if Particular Evidentialism is false the falsity of General Evidentialism follows quickly. Suppose the negation of Particular Evidentialism: that particular pieces of testimony can give a non-evidential justification for believing what is told. Then a hearer could compile many instances of testimony, each giving her a non-evidential justification for belief, to form a basis for the induction that most testimony was true. She would then have a non-evidential justification for believing the generalization that most testimony was true, and General Evidentialism would be false.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, we will concentrate on the other (and, as argued in later chapters, actual) case, in which Particular Evidentialism is true, and disprove General Evidentialism in this case.

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<sup>11</sup> It might be said that, though each individual justification for belief in testimony is non-evidential, each provides evidence for the generalization that most testimony is true. This would be a Pickwickian sense of gathering evidence for a generalization, in which a non-evidential justification became evidential when used as the basis for induction.

This should be distinguished from the important case in which, using a non-evidential justification for belief in the general reliability of testimony, the subject observes that much of the testimony she is actually confronted with is true, and thus gains an even stronger justification for believing that most testimony is true. In that case, the subject's justification for believing each individual piece of testimony is evidential, and so the subject can be seen as gathering evidence that provides additional justification for believing that most testimony is true; though if she lacked the initial non-evidential justification for believing that most testimony was true, she would not be able to gather this evidence. See also the discussion of gathering evidence that most testimony is true, at the end of section 4.

On Particular Evidentialism, if a particular piece of testimony is to give a justification for belief, it must give evidence for what is told. We have argued that testimonial justification is indispensable for beliefs concerning a broad variety of topics, including history, geography, and science, so we must consider what must hold if particular testimony on these topics is to provide evidence for what is told. In the last section, we argued that evidence that supports accepting a particular piece of testimony will usually rest on accepting other testimony; evidence that supports accepting that testimony will usually rest on further testimony. This is what Leslie Stevenson calls “a regress of dependence, justifying A’s testimony, or that of people like A, or testimony about topics like P, by appeal to the testimony of B, or of people of a kind which B exemplifies, or about topics like Q” (Stevenson 1993, p. 437); and so on until we reach a termination point of testimony that need not be justified by appeal to testimony.

Yet for a broad variety of topics we will never reach as a termination point testimony that can be justified by non-testimonial evidence; this was suggested in the last section, and will be argued for at more length below when we discuss mundane testimony. If we are to meet the Broad Justification Requirement, we will need some principle concerning a kind of testimony that we are justified in accepting even if we do not have positive evidence in favor of accepting it, so long as we have no evidence that we should not accept it. Then testimony that falls under this principle will terminate the regress of dependence; we will not need positive evidence, testimonial or non-testimonial, that will justify believing this testimony, and it can serve as evidence for the reliability of other sorts of testimony. (If we do have some evidence against accepting the testimony, it will need to be outweighed by positive evidence in support of it, and that further evidence

may be testimonial; but this will only arise when there is indeed some evidence against accepting the testimony.)

We will argue that the principle that is required in order to meet the Broad Justification Requirement is the strongest principle, the *Acceptance Principle for Testimony*:

(APT) A person is justified in believing something that she is told unless there is positive evidence against doing so.<sup>12</sup>

The alternatives to (APT) would be principles that state that we are justified in believing testimony, in the absence of positive evidence, only if it falls into a particular proper subset of testimony (or never at all). These weaker principles, I claim, face one of two problems. The first problem occurs when it would be implausible to accept the weaker principle while rejecting (APT); accepting the weaker principle and rejecting (APT) would yield counterintuitive results concerning whether certain beliefs are justified. The second problem occurs when the weaker principle is too weak to justify enough beliefs to meet the Broad Justification Requirement. I will specifically examine two alternative weaker principles implicit in Fricker's analysis, each principle facing one of these problems. The first principle is essentially that we are justified in believing what we are told before we reach full maturity, but not afterward. This will yield counterintuitive results concerning testimonial justification. The second principle is essentially that we are justified in believing testimony when we know that the teller knows whether what she

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<sup>12</sup> This derives from Tyler Burge's Acceptance Principle: "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" (Burge 1993, p. 467). For Burge, testimony is a species of the genus "presented as true," which also comprises memory and sense-perception. Also, given our assumption of Particular Evidentialism, we can replace "reasons not to [accept the testimony]" with "evidence against [believing the testimony]."

says is true. This will fail to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement; with too many topics, we will not be able to gain justified beliefs through testimony.

*The Acceptance Principle for Developmental Testimony*

We will first consider the principle that we are justified in believing what we are told in our formative stages, when we must accept this testimony in order to learn the ways of the world, but that as mature adults we cannot accept testimony without positive evidence. As Fricker points out, as children we all do accept testimony uncritically, whether or not we are justified in doing so. Indeed, much of this uncritically accepted testimony will be crucial for later confirmation of other things that we are told. Consider our example (in section 2) of the impossibility of personally verifying what we are told about the workings of the postal system. It is as young children that we are told about the postal system; the resulting beliefs, if justified, can serve as foundations for many other beliefs. For instance, once we know how the mail works, we can verify that someone is mailing a letter by watching her put it in a mailbox, and this may play a role in confirming something that she has said (for instance, that she will mail a letter). In general, it is as children that we may be told things that shape our overall view of how the world works, on which we base further beliefs. As Fricker puts it, during this “developmental phase... a person comes to know the world-picture of common sense, including the commonsense conception of the link of testimony itself” (Fricker 1995, p. 402).

As adults, however, we may be more likely to view what we are told critically. Part of what we learn in the developmental phase is that testimony is sometimes false; this is

included in the commonsense conception of the link of testimony. Thus, according to Fricker, in our mature phase “the nature of testimony, as a link which [common sense] reveals, entails that our belief in what others tell us should always be governed by our monitoring of them for trustworthiness” (Fricker 1995, p. 403). For Fricker, it is common sense not to accept what we are told unless our monitoring yields positive evidence that our informant is trustworthy.<sup>13</sup> We cannot be justified in accepting the commonsense world-picture unless we are justified in simply accepting what we are told during our developmental phase, but in the mature phase there must be positive evidence in favor of testimony for us to be justified in accepting it.

On this view, testimony gives justification according to the Acceptance Principle for Developmental Testimony:

(APDT) A person is justified in accepting something that she is told during her developmental phase, unless there is positive evidence against doing so [but she is not justified in accepting something that she is told during the mature phase, unless she has positive evidence in favor of doing so].<sup>14</sup>

(APDT) justifies us in accepting the commonsense world-picture, because that picture was acquired during the developmental phase, relying only on developmental-phase testimony. The argument of Section 2, that it is impossible to justify beliefs on a broad variety of topics without relying on testimony, does not refute (APDT). In the mature phase we may be able to gather evidence on these topics, including evidence that supports accepting testimony on these topics, by relying on the commonsense world-

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<sup>13</sup> Fricker denies that we need to perform what she calls “MI5-type ‘vetting’” (Fricker 1994, p. 150) in order to obtain this positive evidence. In her view we obtain evidence that a speaker is trustworthy when we fail to detect signs of insincerity (Fricker 1995, p. 405; Fricker 1994, p. 150). I think that this overestimates our capacity to detect insincerity, particularly in unfamiliar milieus.

<sup>14</sup> It is implausible that there is a sharp boundary between developmental and mature phases, but (APDT) need not require such a sharp boundary. The justification for belief given by simple acceptance of testimony might gradually weaken as we develop, until it is completely gone at full maturity. The resolution of this question will not affect the argument against (APDT) given in the text.

picture. For instance, when someone tells us that a check is in the mail, we may gather evidence concerning the reliability of her testimony by waiting for the check to arrive; this may then be used as evidence to accept her future testimony. This is because the operation of the mails is part of our commonsense world-picture, which we have accepted through unsupported developmental-phase testimony. So (APDT) may justify acceptance of testimonial beliefs concerning a broad enough variety of topics to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement. For the sake of argument, I shall accept that it does.

The objection to (APDT) is that it counterintuitively privileges testimony heard in the developmental phase over testimony heard in the mature phase, whereas there is no reason to think that developmental phase testimony is more reliable. On (APDT), testimony heard in the developmental phase provides justification for belief in the absence of positive evidence of its reliability, but testimony heard in the mature phase provides no justification without this positive evidence. Yet developing hearers are surely worse judges of testimony than mature hearers. In the developmental phase we are not yet familiar with the conditions under which people lie or make mistakes; we begin to learn that as we adopt the commonsense world-picture, and will learn more with mature experience. So the developing thinker is more likely to neglect something that would be evidence of testimony's unreliability for a mature thinker, and the justification that she gets from unsupported testimony is at least as weak as the justification that the mature thinker gets from unsupported testimony.

Consider two mature thinkers, Alice and Sarah, who are each wondering what the yellow boxes on street corners do. Each was once told that the boxes control traffic lights, and each has no other evidence concerning the matter or concerning the reliability

of that testimony. Alice, however, was told this in her developmental phase, and Sarah was told it in her mature phase. Surely Sarah's justification for belief is at least as strong as Alice's. After all, when Sarah was told what the boxes do, she had already mastered the commonsense criteria for when testimony is not to be believed; that she has no evidence against the testimony's reliability means that the testimony did not fail these criteria. When Alice was told what the boxes do, she had not yet mastered the commonsense criteria for accepting testimony; she might have failed to detect some signs of insincerity that would have served as evidence against the testimony, had she been more mature.<sup>15</sup> Put another way, Alice accepted what she was told at an age when she didn't find anything fishy about Santa Claus. Yet if we accept (APDT) and deny the stronger (APT), we are left with the counterintuitive result that Alice is entitled to believe what she is told and Sarah is not.

Thus we should not accept (APDT) unless we accept the stronger principle (APT). If, in our developmental phase, we are justified in accepting whatever we are told unless there is positive evidence against accepting it, then this simple acceptance of testimony is also justified in our mature phase. Otherwise what we are told as children will be privileged over what we are told as adults, though there is no reason to think that what we are told as children is more likely to be true.

### *The Acceptance Principle for Mundane Testimony*

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<sup>15</sup> It might be argued that, if Alice missed these signs of insincerity, she had evidence for the testimony's unreliability that she failed to take into account, so that (APDT) would not justify her in accepting this testimony. This, however, would throw into question our justification for accepting the commonsense world-picture even given (APDT). We would not in general know whether there was evidence against the reliability of the testimony we accepted in acquiring that picture, and so we would not know whether, according to (APDT), we had been justified in accepting this testimony. In any case, this point would not show that Alice has *stronger* justification than Sarah, which is the result we obtain if we accept (APDT) but not (APT).

(APT) may seem to treat all testimony alike in an implausible way, in that it gives equal default justification to testimony about anything whatsoever. This would run afoul of Fricker's observation that "some people or types of people on some topics are reliable, others on others aren't" (Fricker 1995, p. 407). She suggests that we may generally make the default assumption that the teller believes what she says, but that we may make the default assumption that her beliefs are correct "with respect to a subclass of tellings only, viz. those with subject matters for which commonsense psychological knowledge licenses one to expect the speaker to be competent about them, such as her name, where she lives, what she had for breakfast, what is in clear view in front of her, and so forth" (Fricker 1995, p. 405). I take it, particularly given the list of examples, that Fricker means to pick out subject matters that *all* speakers may be expected to be competent about, in the absence of evidence to the contrary.<sup>16</sup> Call these subject matters *mundane topics*; they largely comprise things that are readily available to speakers' senses and memory, as well as things almost everyone is told by someone who saw or remembered it. (Most of us know when we were born, not because we remember it but because we were told by someone who does.) We will call topics that are not mundane *exotic topics*.

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<sup>16</sup> Note that mundane topics will be relative to the speaker in that common sense tells us that each speaker knows what *she* just ate for breakfast, but it does not tell us that any speaker knows what any other speaker just ate for breakfast. See n18 below.

There will also be assumptions of competence that are licensed concerning particular speakers or speakers of particular types. Insole (2000, p. 53) gives the example that tourist guides may be expected to know where the local cathedrals are. As Insole argues (not in these terms), to treat such testimony as mundane, and to build its acceptability into the principle concerning when testimony is justified (as in (APMT), below), would be inimical to Fricker's local reductionist project. Rather than building cases into our acceptance principle, we need an account of why testimony is acceptable in certain cases and not in others. In section 4 I argue that (APT) provides a basis for such an account; see the discussion of "disaggregation."

If the only times when we may make the default assumption that the teller knows what she says are when the topic of testimony is mundane, then our justification for belief follows the *Acceptance Principle for Mundane Topics*:

(APMT) A person is justified in accepting something that she is told concerning a mundane topic unless there is positive evidence against doing so [but she is not justified in accepting testimony on exotic topics, unless she has positive evidence in favor of doing so].<sup>17</sup>

(APMT), I will argue, is too weak to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement. The problem is that too few topics of testimony are mundane. If we require positive evidence to justify believing testimony on any exotic topic, we will never be justified in believing testimony on the broad variety of topics required by the Broad Justification Requirement.

Consider as an example knowledge of historical happenings beyond living memory. Common sense does not tell us that everyone is competent concerning any but the most famous historical happenings, so history is an exotic topic. Most of our historical beliefs come from testimony somehow; what licenses us to accept this testimony? (APMT) will not directly license this testimony's acceptance. On (APMT), we are not justified in accepting testimony concerning history unless we have positive evidence that the testimony is reliable; this evidence must depend only on testimony on mundane topics, which (APMT) does justify us in accepting, and on our own observation, memory, and induction. The question is under what circumstances positive evidence for historical testimony can be accepted from these sources.

One way of gathering evidence in favor of the historical testimony is by directly establishing the teller's competence on the subject. It will be rare that we can personally

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<sup>17</sup> (APMT) is much like the principle (TCP) proposed by Stevenson (1993, p. 442). Stevenson does not make the claim that we shall argue against, that (APMT) allows us to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement.

observe something that entails this competence, particularly in the case of history which we have not witnessed ourselves. Mundane testimony, however, can sometimes establish the teller's competence concerning some exotic topic. Consider an eyewitness report concerning an event in the recent past: Suppose Janet tells Mary that the Pittsburgh Pirates won today. This is not a mundane topic, since common sense does not tell Mary that everyone knows whether the Pirates won today. Thus (APMT) does not justify Mary in accepting Janet's testimony without further support. Suppose further, however, that Janet says that she attended the game. Common sense tells Mary that Janet knows whether she attended a baseball game today, so this is mundane testimony, and by (APMT) Mary is justified in believing that Janet attended the game. This belief in turn provides evidence that Janet knows whether the Pirates won, which justifies Mary in accepting Janet's original testimony that they did win.

As a chain of testimony proceeds, however, each teller's report must grow increasingly unwieldy. Suppose Mary tells Barbara that the Pirates won today. If Mary adds that Janet told her so, this will be mundane testimony; common sense tells Barbara that Mary knows what Janet told her. So (APMT) justifies Barbara in believing that Janet told Mary that the Pirates won. The problem is that Barbara still lacks positive evidence that Janet's testimony is reliable; common sense alone does not tell Barbara that Janet knows whether the Pirates won. In order to give Barbara this positive evidence, Mary must also tell her that Janet said that she attended the game. (APMT) justifies Barbara in believing that Janet said this, since what Janet told Mary is mundane for Mary; given this, (APMT) justifies the belief that Janet attended the game, since whether she attended the game is mundane for Janet; this belief in turn provides positive evidence for the

reliability of Janet's report on the outcome of the game.<sup>18</sup> If Barbara then wishes to give anyone else justification for believing that the Pirates won, she must say that that Mary said that Janet said that the Pirates won, and also that Mary said that Janet said that she had attended the game.<sup>19</sup> This recapitulation of the whole chain of testimony will quickly become impractical, particularly for a chain beginning with an eyewitness to a historical event in the distant past.<sup>20</sup> Usually a teller does not cite even a single source.

Thus, it is extraordinarily difficult to transmit evidence for historical happenings according to (APMT). For other exotic topics, such as science, the problem is even less tractable. The conclusions of science often can only be inferred from the reports of many widely separated experimenters or observers; consider conclusions that depend on fossils gathered all over the world. The number of links in a chain of testimony that led back to these different experiments would multiply beyond belief with the teller's distance from the original experiments. If we are to accept that, say, thousands of insect species have been discovered, we cannot demand a chain of testimony that stretches back to each discovery.

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<sup>18</sup> To say that what Janet told Mary is mundane *for Mary* (but possibly not for Barbara) does not violate our stricture that all speakers may be expected to be competent about a mundane topic. Mary may be expected to be competent about what she was told, and Barbara may be expected to be competent about what *she* was told, but Barbara may not be expected to be competent about what Mary was told. See n16 above.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara could try to escape this by saying "Mary told me that the Pirates won, and she cited adequate justification for her belief." It is doubtful, however, that common sense licenses us to expect that everyone can recognize when someone has cited adequate justification for her belief. So (APMT) would not justify Barbara's hearer in believing that Mary had cited adequate justification, and the hearer would be left without positive evidence for the reliability of Mary's non-mundane testimony.

<sup>20</sup> It would not help to shorten the chain by citing written testimony, for instance eyewitness reports that have been preserved for many years. Provenancing such historical documents is not a mundane topic, so we would need positive evidence that the person who cited the document was competent to judge that the document truly was an eyewitness report (or a report of one, or...). Historical documents might be accompanied by chains of testimony attesting to their authenticity, but these chains clearly will only replicate the problem faced by Janet, Mary, and Barbara.

It will be rare, then, that (APMT) will allow us to establish the teller's competence on some exotic subject by proving that she in fact witnessed what she is telling us. Another strategy for obtaining positive evidence in favor of her testimony on an exotic topic would be to gather evidence in favor of her overall reliability. We could verify some of her other testimony and infer inductively that her current testimony was likely to be true. This strategy, however, faces a dilemma. Either the other testimony that we verify concerns mundane topics or it concerns exotic topics. Verifying the speaker's testimony on mundane topics will not provide evidence for her reliability on an exotic topic. It will only reinforce what common sense tells us, that she is competent on mundane topics (and sincere). Evidence of her reliability on exotic topics must go beyond these deliverances of common sense; that is what defines a topic as exotic.

On the other hand, if we seek to verify her testimony on exotic topics, we again face the problem of how to do so. Our discussion of historical testimony has shown how difficult it is to verify testimony on an exotic topic while relying only on one's own observations and on testimony concerning mundane topics. Only in a few cases will the hearer be able to verify what the teller has said concerning exotic topics, if (APMT) circumscribes the hearer's testimonial justification. These cases will tend to be cases in which, for instance, an eyewitness is locatable, and thus will concern things that the hearer could have learned without relying on the teller's testimony. Using (APMT) alone, the hearer will have little hope of verifying a teller's reliability on such topics as distant history or esoteric science. These, however, are the topics concerning which testimony must give justification, if our account is to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement.

(APMT), then, is too weak to allow us to gain justification on enough topics to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement. When the topic of testimony is exotic, (APMT) makes it too difficult to directly establish that the teller knows what she is telling, and it also makes it too difficult to establish her overall reliability. If we are to avoid skepticism about testimonial justification, we need a stronger principle, such as (APT).

We have considered two likely-looking weaker alternatives to (APT), and neither has proved satisfactory. This is not a knockdown proof that we must accept (APT), but it does provide a strong reason to suspect that nothing short of (APT) will satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement while avoiding counterintuitive results concerning justification. In the next section we will examine the epistemology of testimony given (APT). When we are justified in accepting any testimony unless we have positive evidence against doing so, what specific testimony gives us justification? This discussion will show that (APT) avoids counterintuitive results concerning justification and will provide further reason to suspect that (APT) is the only plausible acceptance principle.

#### 4. Epistemology under the Acceptance Principle for Testimony

The epistemology of testimony, as argued in the previous section, requires a principle governing what sort of testimony should be believed in the absence of positive supporting evidence. We have considered two principles that privilege certain testimony over the rest as entitled to this default belief, and found both wanting. In this section we will consider the consequences of (APT), the principle that any testimony whatsoever should be believed in the absence of positive supporting evidence, so long as there is no evidence against believing it. We shall show that (APT) accords with commonsense

intuitions concerning justification and that it is the principle required for our epistemology of testimony. We shall then complete the disproof of General Evidentialism by showing that (APT) is incompatible with General Evidentialism, though it is compatible with Particular Evidentialism.

Even if we accept (APT), there is still much testimony to which it will not apply directly: We will have some sort of evidence either for or against the testimony's reliability, and the evidence will determine whether we are justified in believing what we are told. This evidence can be provided by other testimony. For example, one piece of testimony whose acceptance is justified by (APT) may provide positive evidence in favor of the reliability of other testimony that accords with it. Testimony that concurs with some things that a person has said, by confirming her individual utterances, may provide evidence for her general reliability even with respect to utterances that are not independently confirmed. On the other hand, two pieces of contradictory testimony may each provide a positive reason not to accept the other. It is not that either provides evidence that the other is false; one piece of testimony would only provide the hearer evidence that the other was false if the hearer were justified in believing the former testimony. Rather, the contradictory pieces of testimony each ensure that the other falls into the category "testimony that is contradicted by an equal amount of opposing testimony." No more than half of the testimony in this category can be true, so there is reason not to believe testimony that falls into this category (unless we have further evidence concerning the reliability of one of the opposing pieces of testimony).

On the whole, the testimony that the hearer is justified in accepting given (APT) will be that which best coheres with the mass of other testimony she has heard and with her

own observations. Given this, the hearer can gain evidence that confirms a piece of testimony without doing an impossible amount of field-work, by relying on other testimony. She will thus be able to evaluate the reliability of different sources. For instance, if one history text flatly contradicts most others concerning certain historical points, there is evidence that the outlier is wrong on these points and thus unreliable on other points, unless there is other evidence to account for why the other texts might all be wrong. (APT) will thus satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement, both by justifying us in accepting testimony on any topic when we lack positive reason against the testimony and by allowing us to gather positive evidence in support of testimony on a wide variety of topics.

(APT) may, however, seem to yield counterintuitive results concerning testimonial justification, by treating all testimony alike.<sup>21</sup> (APT) treats all testimony, no matter the speaker or subject, as equally acceptable in the absence of positive evidence against its reliability. This seems to contradict our intuitions that, as Fricker observes, not all people or types of people are equally reliable on all topics; we must “disaggregate... with regard to the question of whether and when we may rightly trust without evidence” (Fricker 1995, p. 407), allowing that our default presumptions may differ depending on the person and the topic. To defend (APT), I must show that it allows this disaggregation.

It is straightforward how (APT) permits disaggregation concerning what type of person is reliable on certain topics: Our knowledge that a person is of a certain type gives us positive evidence for or against her reliability on a certain topic. Knowing that someone is a historian gives us evidence that her testimony concerning her area of history

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<sup>21</sup> The counterintuitive results that threaten here are distinct from those were shown (in section 3) to result from (APDT).

is reliable. (In terms we will use later [section V.4], we know that she has authority on the topic of her testimony.) An example of Stevenson's illustrates the other case, that knowledge of the type of teller can provide positive evidence against her testimony. Knowing that someone is a professional window-cleaner gives us reason to doubt the reliability of her stock tips, at least compared to the stock tips of someone with inside knowledge of the company in question (Stevenson 1993, p. 435). Who the teller is is relevant because it yields positive evidence for or against concerning her reliability.

We must, however, disaggregate testimony according to topic even when we lack information about the teller; even when the teller is a stranger, we will be more justified in believing her testimony on some topics than on others. The window-cleaner's stock tip is a good example. It is not that window-cleaners are particularly inept at predicting the stock market, but that stock tips in general should be presumed unreliable in the absence of positive evidence that the teller knows whereof she speaks. The subject of the stock market is a subject on which we are particularly likely to hear unreliable testimony, so that belief should not be our default stance toward what we are told on this topic. Here we might seem to have an exception to (APT): Testimony on topics such as the stock market does not justify belief in what is told, unless there is positive evidence for its reliability.

The exception to (APT) is only apparent, however. Our experience gives us positive evidence that testimony on these topics is likely to be unreliable, unless we have countervailing positive evidence that this particular teller is reliable on this topic. On most topics of testimony, we may expect people to exercise a quality that I later (section V.5) describe as *circumspection*: an unwillingness to say anything for which they do not

have at least some justification.<sup>22</sup> Someone who does not know, for instance, who won today's baseball game usually will not offer an opinion to anyone else; this circumspection is essential to our general reliance on testimony. The history of get-rich-quick schemes, however, shows that this unwillingness to broadcast unjustified beliefs does not extend to financial topics. We should learn that people often mistakenly think they are onto something that will make money and will confidently tell others about those things. The very fact that someone is giving us a stock tip thus gives us reason to believe that she is being uncircumspect, even if we know nothing else about her. This provides us with positive evidence against the reliability of the testimony and overrides (APT) in this case.<sup>23</sup> In general there are certain topics that are *suspicious* in that they are unusually likely to attract uncircumspect testimony, and we should require positive evidence that the speaker is authoritative before accepting testimony on such a topic.

We will discuss suspicious topics further when we defend Particular Evidentialism (section VI.1). The important point to make now is that we can only learn which topics are suspicious by experience, either direct experience of testimony on the topic or general experience that might explain why people would offer uncircumspect testimony on the topic. In particular, the suspicious topics are not the exotic topics. Any topic is exotic unless common sense tells us that every speaker has authority on the topic, but many exotic topics are such that people will not tell others about them unless they know whereof they speak. The winner of today's baseball game is an example: Most people

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<sup>22</sup> Circumspection is akin to *sincerity* (section V.3), our general unwillingness to say what we do not believe. Section VI.1 discusses the implications of this chapter's argument for our knowledge of people's sincerity and circumspection.

<sup>23</sup> Of course our evidence concerning get-rich-quick schemes comes largely through testimony such as newspaper reports, which we are justified in accepting because with respect to these reports (APT) is not overridden.

don't know who won, and they won't tell others their baseless opinions. It takes experience, not just common sense, to learn that people broadcast baseless opinions concerning the stock market and not concerning the outcomes of baseball games. This experience provides positive evidence that someone who is telling us about the stock market is unreliable, unless we have countervailing evidence that indicates that she is reliable. This positive evidence is what overrides (APT); it is not as though we have *a priori* reasons to doubt stock tips.

This discussion of how (APT) rejects unsupported testimony on suspicious topics indicates why (APT) is the only principle that will satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement while avoiding counterintuitive results. (APT) allows us to take into account evidence concerning general categories, such as the knowledge of human psychology that tells us that uncircumspect testimony is particularly likely on financial topics. In order for an acceptance principle concerning testimony to constitute a true alternative to (APT), the testimony that it privileges with default reliability will have to be determinable without reference to any of the hearer's experience. For example, the principle "A person is justified in accepting something she is told concerning non-suspicious topics, unless there is positive evidence against doing so" privileges non-suspicious topics, and which topics are suspicious can only be learned by experience. Thus, as we have argued, this principle will never lead to the rejection of testimony that would be accepted on (APT), because learning that a topic is suspicious amounts to gathering positive evidence against accepting testimony on that topic.

In general, suppose that an acceptance principle privileges a subset *S* of testimony, and suppose what kinds of testimony are in *S* can only be learned by experience. Then

the experience that tells us that a certain kind of testimony is not in *S* will provide positive evidence against accepting any testimony of that kind. (Otherwise the acceptance principle is wrong, because it fails to privilege a piece of testimony that should be accepted.) So testimony of this kind will be rejected by (APT). The acceptance principle that privileges *S* is not a true alternative to (APT); it counsels acceptance and rejection of exactly the same testimony as (APT) does.

True alternatives to (APT), then, cannot tacitly rely on experience. (APDT) and (APMT) are true alternatives to (APT); it takes no experience to determine whether testimony is developmental or mundane. In section 3, however, we argued that (APDT) yields counterintuitive results concerning justification, and (APMT) is too weak to satisfy the Broad Justification Requirement. It seems unlikely that there is a plausible acceptance principle that does suffer from one of these problems and that does not tacitly rely on experience.

The prevalence of evidence concerning the reliability of testimony, even when that testimony is offered by a stranger, may cause us to wonder whether (APT) ever applies at all. As Burge puts it:

Given life's complexities, this default position [supplied by the Acceptance Principle] is often left far behind in reasoning about whether to rely on a source. One might wonder, with some hyperbole, whether it can ever be the last word in the epistemology of acceptance for anyone over the age of eleven (Burge 1993, p. 468).

Burge disclaims this hyperbolic conjecture, but Fricker emphasizes the rarity of application of (APT):

[E]ven if there is such a presumptive right to believe what one is told without evidence of trustworthiness, its significance in explaining the basis on which normally knowledgeable adult humans sometimes rightfully trust testimony is negligible, since any such entitlement to believe on no evidence is simply swamped by relevant evidence in the

possession of a normally knowledgeable adult hearer (Fricker 2002, p. 379).

Fricker goes on to list sources of this swamping evidence: information that we have that conflicts directly with what we are told, information about the speaker's past reliability or incentives to tell the truth, the institutional status of the speaker (in particular, a scientist is likely to be trustworthy about her research), and cues provided by face-to-face interaction with the teller.<sup>24</sup> We may add to this the evidence that is provided for or against testimony by the knowledge of how suspicious its topic is. If virtually every piece of testimony is attended with evidence concerning its reliability, why is (APT) necessary? If we always have evidence one way or the other concerning the reliability of testimony, then we will never need to invoke (APT); we can always rely on the swamping evidence.

The importance of (APT) can be seen by looking at the source of the swamping evidence for or against the testimony's reliability. This evidence, as we argued in section 2, will usually rely on other testimony. Had we not been justified in accepting this other testimony, we would not have the swamping evidence that told us that the current testimony was reliable or unreliable. The testimony that provides this evidence need not be accepted according to (APT); there may be evidence in favor of accepting it. That evidence, however, will in turn usually rely on other testimony, and eventually we will reach testimony whose acceptance was justified by (APT). If there were not a presumption in favor of accepting testimony, the whole structure would collapse.

It may even be, as Burge hyperbolically suggests, that we never need to invoke (APT) with respect to testimony that we hear after we have passed the age of gullible trusting,

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<sup>24</sup> I believe that Fricker overestimates the evidence that can be obtained by face-to-face monitoring (see n. 13 above), but the point is not critical for the argument in the text.

while before that age we believe everything we are told with or without justification. In this case it would still make a difference that (APT) holds, even if no one ever applied it. As Fricker observes, the fact that at a young age we trust all testimony “does not preclude the Cartesian reconstructive option: identify and then suspend belief in all my simply-trusted testimonial beliefs and others based on them, and accept them again only after the trustworthiness of their source is established from the belief-base that is left” (Fricker 1995, p. 401). To accomplish this, Fricker points out, we would need evidence that did not depend on testimony for the truth of most of the beliefs we had gained through testimony. As argued in section 2, this is impossible. If we did not accept (APT), however, we would have no justification for the simply-trusted testimonial beliefs we obtained as children. This would mean that, when we drew evidence for the reliability of current testimony from those simply-trusted testimonial beliefs, we would have no justification for taking those beliefs to provide evidence, and so no justification for accepting the current testimony. Anyone who considered the foundation of her beliefs would be obliged to abandon them once she realized that her evidence rested on old simply-trusted testimonial beliefs. The role of (APT) on this scenario is to remove the necessity for Cartesian reconstruction, by providing retrospective justification for the simply-trusted beliefs that in turn provide evidence in support of our current testimonial beliefs.

Recall (from section 1) that General Evidentialism states that someone is only justified in believing the generalization that most testimony is true if she has gathered evidence in support of that generalization. In section 2, we argued that we cannot gather evidence in support of that generalization. In this and the previous section, we have

argued in favor of the Acceptance Principle for Testimony (APT), that a hearer is justified in believing anything that she is told unless she has positive evidence against the trustworthiness of the testimony. (APT), when combined with Particular Evidentialism, implies that a hearer is justified in believing the generalization that most testimony is true. Suppose that she were not justified in believing this generalization. Then, when she had no evidence for or against the trustworthiness of a piece of testimony, she would be justified in believing it, even though she was not justified in believing testimony in general to be reliable and had no reason to think this testimony more reliable than any other. Thus it would seem as though the testimony would not provide her with evidence for what was told. On Particular Evidentialism, however, testimony can only provide justification by providing evidence, and by (APT) the hearer is justified in believing this testimony. Accordingly, our supposition must be false, and the hearer is indeed justified in believing the generalization that most testimony is true. Furthermore, this justification is non-evidential, since it is impossible to gather evidence in support of the generalization. So the hearer has non-evidential justification for the generalization that most testimony is true, and so General Evidentialism is false. (Recall from the beginning of section 3 that the falsity of Particular Evidentialism would directly imply the falsity of General Evidentialism.)

At the beginning of this chapter we said that we should avoid positing unnecessary mysterious *a posteriori* non-evidential justifications. We have now posited a non-evidential justification and owe the reader an explanation of its necessity. This non-evidential justification is a justification for believing a single claim, that most testimony is true, and that claim is a sweeping generality. Perhaps it is not as rarefied as “External

objects exist” or “The world has a past and a future,” but it is more like these generalities than it is like the specific statement “It rained yesterday.” Its true analogues are the statements that allow us to learn about the external objects and the past and the future, such as “Our senses and memory are generally reliable” and “The future will resemble the past.” These latter statements are the bedrock of our justifications, for if they were not true we could not gather evidence for anything. We will be unable to gather evidence for them that does not presuppose their truth, yet we must be justified in believing them if we are to avoid skepticism. Thus we need non-evidential justifications for believing the statements that ground our basic ways of learning about the world, such as perception, memory, induction, and testimony.<sup>25</sup>

Note that the non-evidential justification for believing the generalization that most testimony is true need not be the last word concerning this generalization. With the non-evidential justification in hand, we can use (APT) to confirm and disconfirm individual testimony as described above; we should believe the testimony that best coheres with other testimony and with our personal observation. Thus we will be able to gather evidence concerning exactly how many of the things that we have been told are true. This is not the sort of evidence for the reliability of testimony that would be required by global reductionism (section 2), because the evidence itself presupposes testimony’s general reliability. Nevertheless, someone who confirms an extraordinary amount of the things that she has been told will have evidence that almost all testimony is true, while someone who can only confirm a smaller proportion of testimony will have evidence that

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<sup>25</sup> Burge (1993) emphasizes the similarities of testimony to memory and perception. Indeed, he overemphasizes them; Faulkner (2000) argues convincingly that the mediation of testimony by the actions of others constitutes a significant difference from perception and memory.

most (but not too much) testimony is true.<sup>26</sup> The person who confirmed a higher proportion of what she had been told would have more reason to believe a particular thing she had been told than (APT) would supply, in the absence of any further evidence concerning that particular piece of testimony. In general, the more coherent testimony is when taken together with an individual's personal observations, the more evidence the hearer has for a truth of an arbitrary piece of testimony. This evidence will not obviate non-evidential justification for belief in testimony's general reliability, because the evidence is obtained by using that non-evidential justification.

This chapter has argued against General Evidentialism, the idea that we need evidence to be justified in believing the generalization that most testimony is true, and in favor of the Acceptance Principle, the idea that we are justified in accepting what we are told unless we have positive evidence against it. There are two reasons for treating General Evidentialism at such length. The first is to provide a starting point for the discussion of Particular Evidentialism. We have seen in this section that, even on Particular Evidentialism, we have justification for believing much testimony without positive evidence in support of its reliability. This will be important to our argument that particular testimony never gives justification for belief except when it gives evidence, because it shows that this principle does not require us to research people's background before taking their word.

The second reason to discuss General Evidentialism is that it is easy to confuse General Evidentialism with Particular Evidentialism, the idea that particular testimony

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<sup>26</sup> If someone seemed to discover that it was not the case that most of what she has been told was true, a question would arise about whether she were interpreting others' speech correctly. Coady (1973, 1992) argues, based on considerations of interpretation, that it is not a coherent possibility that most testimony might be false. See note 10 above.

provides justification only by providing evidence. The arguments against General Evidentialism must not be taken to tell against Particular Evidentialism. In the next chapter we will discuss a different set of arguments that are meant to motivate opposition to Particular Evidentialism; in the ensuing chapters we will defend Particular Evidentialism against these arguments.