

Responsibility for Testimonial Belief

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Abstract

Much recent work in virtue epistemology has exploited the idea that what distinguishes knowledge from merely accidentally true belief is that knowledge is an achievement of an epistemic agent, something for which an epistemic agent is creditable or responsible. According to so-called “credit views of knowledge”, a subject knows that p just in case the truth of her belief is an achievement that can be properly ascribed *to her*, an achievement that is the result of the exercise of an intellectual virtue, competence, or ability of the agent. One influential criticism of the credit view of knowledge holds that the credit view has difficulty making sense of knowledge acquired from testimony. As Jennifer Lackey has argued, in many ordinary cases of the acquisition of testimonial knowledge, if anyone deserves credit for the truth of the audience’s belief it is the testimonial *speaker* rather than the audience, and so it isn’t clear that testimonial knowers are appropriately creditable or responsible for the truth of their beliefs. In this paper I argue that the credit view of knowledge can be saved from Lackey’s objection by focusing on the way in which testimonial knowledge is the result of the exercise of an *essentially social* epistemic competence, a competence that is seated in *a collective* rather than in an individual or even a combination of individuals. Even though there is indeed a sense in which a testimonial audience is only partially epistemically responsible for her testimonial belief, this is consistent with the truth of her belief being creditable to her in another sense. The truth of her belief is most saliently explained by, and hence is fully creditable to, an essentially social epistemic competence, a competence that is only partially seated in the knowing subject.