

WHAT IS NOT DISTINCTIVE OF TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT: The views of epistemic buck-passing (also known as the deferral of epistemic challenge) has been used to argue for the epistemic distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge. The overall strategy for the argumentation is to demonstrate that the epistemic distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge depends on a distinctive feature of it, i.e., epistemic buck-passing, granted the truthfulness of any of these views of epistemic buck-passing. This paper examines these views and aims to reveal that, none of them successfully motivates the claim that epistemic buck-passing is a distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge. Hence, if we aim to argue that testimonial knowledge is an epistemically distinctive kind of knowledge, some other approach is needed.

KEYWORDS: testimony, social epistemology, testimonial knowledge, epistemic authority, epistemic buck-passing

1. Introduction

If a type of knowledge has certain epistemic significance that other types of knowledge do not possess (such as a justificatory principle or warrant with *sui generis* character), there might be something epistemically distinctive of this type of knowledge. Subsequently, we might find various plausible approaches to argue for the epistemic distinctiveness of a certain kind of knowledge, such as testimonial knowledge—the knowledge we attain solely based on testimony. One approach is to argue for this by demonstrating that testimonial knowledge has a epistemically exclusive feature compared with knowledge from other sources, namely, epistemic buck-passing (also known as the deferral of epistemic challenge).¹ Generally

¹ Here are some possible options to be used to argue for the epistemic distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge: Following Craig (1990), Reynolds (2002), or Hannon (2019), one can argue that testimonial knowledge is epistemically distinctive since one of the most important objectives of doing epistemology (namely, defining the concept of knowledge) is to determine criteria that an informant who can transmit testimonial knowledge must satisfy in order to count as reliable—in which case testimonial knowledge seems to be a critical goal of human inquiry. To be clear, at least to my knowledge, neither of them explicitly has claimed this, but one can certainly argue for that based on their ideas. Also, by adopting the ideas of Faulkner (2000, 2011), Hinchman (2014), Simion and Kelp (2018), or Greco (2019), one can argue that testimonial knowledge is epistemically

speaking, epistemic buck-passing is an act or move whereby a challengee, when challenged for holding a belief *p*, shifts the burden of response to another epistemic agent who can provide more epistemic support for the content of *p*.² For instance, suppose Jeff believes he was born in 1990 because his mother told him so. When he is challenged by Mary on this belief about his birth year, he can tell Mary to ask his mother, since she must know more about it than him.³ By doing so (identifying his mother as a source of more support), Jeff attempts to pass the buck to another subject.

How does the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing entail the distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge? The overall strategy to show this entailment is to argue that a challengee is *only* entitled to pass the buck to the interlocutor who transmits the challenged proposition (*mutatis mutandis*, justified belief and knowledge) in the first place. If an epistemic agent forms the belief in challenge based on other sources (e.g., perception), she has done this job solely on her own with the result that she has no one to transfer the responsibility to. Hence, buck-passing seems to only appropriately occur in cases of testimonial knowledge, as a sort of possible movement based on a speaker's responsibility. Thus, epistemic buck-passing is a special or distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge, so to speak.

There are three views about the nature of epistemic buck-passing (and how it is an epistemic distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge): The Support View of Buck-passing (SVB), the Assertion View of Buck-passing (AVB), and the Interpersonal View of Buck-passing (IVB). The difference between these views lies in their respective explanations of *why* it is the case that the speaker (i.e., the subject who transmits information through testimony) is the exclusive receiver of the epistemic buck. According to SVB, it is because only the speaker has the direct epistemic support for the content of the challenged belief (Goldberg 2006). According to AVB, it is because the assertoric speech act should be governed by an epistemic norm so that the speaker, in making an assertion, expresses and commits

distinctive since testimonial warrant contains a unique character. Or, as van Elswyk (2023) proposes, knowledge acquisition in testimonial exchanges involves two distinctive epistemic risks. They might be what are epistemically distinctive of testimonial knowledge as well.

² The term 'epistemic support' is used broadly for the purpose of the paper. It can be reasons, evidence, justifications, and other epistemic goods that underpin one's epistemic status regarding a specific propositional belief.

³ Normally, we can legitimately challenge a person's holding a belief *p* for different sorts of reasons. It might be that the content of *p* runs counter to our evidence, *p* is formed through an unreliable process, or the doxastic justifications of *p* are limited, etc. For convenience and topic continuity, I follow the former literature on epistemic buck-passing (Nickel 2020) that the challenges to be deferred only doubt the contents of beliefs rather than other factors, such as their additional support and formation.

herself to satisfying this norm (Brandom 1983, 1994; Goldberg 2011, 2015). The commitment gives the hearer a right to pass the buck to the speaker and no one else. According to IVB, because of the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the audience, the speaker has an exclusive justificatory responsibility to receive the buck from her audience (Hinchman 2005; McMyler 2011, 2013; Backer and Clark 2018). In this paper, I argue that, all three views are unsuccessful in supporting the claim that epistemic buck-passing is a distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge. Thus, unlike what has been widely presumed or recognized, an agent's epistemic responsibility to others is not fully subjected to the propositions that she testifies.

To argue this, I will suggest that even if we assume that any one of these views is correct about the nature of buck-passing, two propositions still hold:

NON-EXCLUSIVITY: The phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately in certain cases of non-testimonial knowledge.⁴

NON-UNIVERSALITY: In many cases of testimonial knowledge, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing cannot happen appropriately.⁵

If NON-EXCLUSIVITY is true and NON-UNIVERSALITY is not, at least a proponent of one of these views can argue that testimonial knowledge is an epistemically distinctive kind of knowledge because *in all cases* of testimonial knowledge (but not in all cases of any other kind of knowledge) the epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately. If NON-UNIVERSALITY is true and NON-EXCLUSIVITY is not, one can nevertheless argue that testimonial knowledge is an epistemically distinctive kind insofar as it is only with testimonial knowledge that there are *at least some cases* where the epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately. But if NON-EXCLUSIVITY and NON-UNIVERSALITY are true,

⁴ By saying non-testimonial knowledge, I mean knowledge that is not *solely* formed through and based on testimony.

⁵ One might argue that a hearer should not pass the buck to the speaker if testimony is unwillingly given. For instance, if Jeff somehow forces his mother to speak out about his birth date, he might not be entitled to pass the buck to her, since she does not intend to tell him in the first place. However, it is questionable that we can obtain knowledge *solely* based on speaker's saying-so through unwilling or unintentional testimony. See Peet (2018) for a discussion about a special kind of cases where the speakers do intend to testify but the hearers fail to know this. In these types of situations, speaker's testimony to *p* is not motivated by her will to tell *p* but other purpose (since the testimony to *p* is unwillingly given), so the reason for us to believe the speaker tends to be irrelevant to the very act of speaker's telling. As a result, our knowledge seems to gain ground on our reasons for believing that this speaker has practical motivations to be honest in which case something other than testimony grounds our knowledge (Wright 2019, 313). Thus, the cases of involuntary testimony would not be raised to argue for NON-UNIVERSALITY.

these views are refuted.⁶ That is also to say, NON-EXCLUSIVITY and NON-UNIVERSALITY are independently necessary and together sufficient for undermining the argument that epistemic buck-passing renders testimony epistemically distinct.

The paper is structured as follows. I explore SVB (Section 2), AVB (Section 3), and IVB (Section 4) respectively to demonstrate that granted the truthfulness of any of these views, NON-EXCLUSIVITY and NON-UNIVERSALITY still hold. Hence, I contend that none of these three views successfully motivates the claim that epistemic buck-passing is an epistemically distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge (Section 5). Consequentially, I conclude that if we aim to argue that testimonial knowledge is an epistemically distinctive kind of knowledge, some other approach is needed.

2. The Support View of Buck-Passing

The extensive debate on whether testimonial knowledge is epistemically distinctive first arises as a secondary topic of the debate between anti-reductionists and reductionists in the epistemology of testimony.⁷ Goldberg (2006) initially introduces a view of epistemic buck-passing to argue for the distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge while remaining neutral towards both anti-reductionism and reductionism. According to Goldberg, the epistemic buck is a requirement to provide epistemic support for the content of the challenged belief if the challengee aim to keep holding it. For a challengee to pass the buck, she must point out a source who can provide more direct support of the content of the challenged belief, which is unknown to the challengee. Thus we arrive at:

The Support View of Buck-Passing (SVB): To pass the epistemic buck is to identify a source of direct epistemic support for the content of the challenged belief that is unknown to the challengee.

How is SVB related to the distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge? On the account of SVB, when it comes to cases of testimonial belief (justified belief and knowledge), there is a distinction between (1) the justification that a hearer has to accept what is transmitted in testimony and (2) the total epistemic support for a hearer's belief. (2) is "direct epistemic support" for the content of the hearer's

⁶ The proponents of these views do not explicitly state their opinion on whether in all cases of testimonial knowledge, buck-passing can happen appropriately. However, it can be shown that either way, my argument is valid, based on the truth of NON-EXCLUSIVITY and NON-UNIVERSALITY.

⁷ See Greco (2012) for the different positions regarding the epistemic distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge from anti-reductionists and reductionists.

testimony-based belief that the speaker holds, whereas (1) justifies only the hearer's trust that the speaker is reliable, thereby providing only "indirect epistemic support" for the content of hearer's testimony-based belief (Goldberg 2006, 138). Thus, when a hearer H is challenged on her testimonial knowledge, she possesses only (1) in her mind, with the result that if (1) cannot satisfy the challenger, she can just pass the epistemic buck by letting the challenger ask the speaker S, who possesses (2). If S to whom her hearer H passes the epistemic buck does not possess (2), S can pass the epistemic buck to her (S's) speaker, and so on, until the epistemic buck is passed to the initial speaker who obtains (2) directly.

Moreover, according to SVB, when we come to know that p through methods other than testimony (such as perception), we know things first-hand with the result that we obtain the direct epistemic support for the content of belief through the formation of belief all by ourselves (Goldberg 2006, 139). Consequently, it *seems* that we have no one to pass the buck to since others might at best hold only indirect support for the content of our challenged belief. If that is the case, it is appealing to say that given the account of buck-passing and the distinction between direct and indirect support endorsed by SVB, in cases of non-testimonial knowledge, one cannot appropriately pass the buck. Therefore, it seems promising to argue that if SVB is right, epistemic buck-passing is a distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge.

However, I argue that SVB is incompatible with the idea that epistemic buck-passing is distinctive of testimonial knowledge. Namely, given SVB's claim that 'providing direct support' is sufficient for appropriate buck-passing, epistemic buck-passing could happen regardless of whether the challengee holds direct or indirect support. Before arguing for this claim, it is worth noting that Backer and Clark (2018) raise an objection to SVB that parallels the strategy I will adopt in this paper. They contend that buck-passing on SVB's conception is not distinctive of testimonial knowledge unless it has been strengthened, since it can also happen in certain non-testimony cases.⁸ However, they fail to acknowledge that even if buck-passing in SVB's description can also happen in non-testimonial knowledge cases, testimonial knowledge retains a distinctive feature as long as NON-UNIVERSALITY is false, namely, in all cases of testimonial knowledge, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately. Neither do they articulate their view on NON-UNIVERSALITY. Thus, their objection is incomplete. To show that buck-passing in SVB cannot ground the distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge in either way, I

⁸ Since their idea belongs to IVB, I will illustrate it as well as other ideas in the same group in detail in the section on IVB.

shall defend NON-EXCLUSIVITY with my own argument and then argue for NON-UNIVERSALITY as well.

To start, consider the case raised by Goldberg to illuminate his claim that a subject whose belief is non-testimonial can find only indirect epistemic support for the content of her non-testimonial belief when she is challenged. I reformulate it as follows:

McSorley and Richardson: McSorley forms a non-testimonial belief that there was a red car in Richardson's driveway a half-hour ago through his perception. When McSorley is challenged by Richardson about his report that there was a red car in Richardson's driveway a half-hour ago, he responds that he distinctly remembers that, and adds that memory and perception are reliable belief-forming processes. But when Richardson presses McSorley *vis-à-vis* how he knows that, McSorley can only let Richardson ask the experts who work on the reliability of perception or memory. (Goldberg 2006, 138-139)

Admittedly, in this case, when McSorley lets Richardson ask the experts who work on the reliability of perception or memory, he identifies a source of indirect epistemic support for his non-testimonial knowledge that there was a red car in Richardson's driveway. As a result, McSorley does not pass the epistemic buck when his non-testimonial knowledge is challenged.⁹ However, not all conformation of non-testimonial beliefs share this outcome. If a subject knows that a rational being can provide direct epistemic support for her non-testimonial knowledge, she can pass the epistemic buck to that rational being, even if that rational being has not ever transmitted that belief to her through testimony. Here is a case:

Calculus: Newton and Leibniz invented two notational systems for calculus independently. Although there is a debate on the chronological order of their inventions, they know that both of their systems can be used for mathematical tasks. Moreover, they do not know the details of other's work entirely, though they do know that both of their systems are recognized as at least acceptable by the academic community of mathematics.

In this fictional scenario based on historical facts, if by any chance Leibniz is challenged by certain conservative mathematicians or philosophers *vis-à-vis* why his belief that the calculus can be applied to solve mathematical problems is true, he can provide all his own justifications (reasons, evidence, etc.) based on his understanding on calculus and the details of the applicable system for calculus that

⁹ Can experts working on the reliability of memory or perception be a source of direct support for McSorley's belief that memory and perception are reliable? It seems so. That being said, as the case is described, Richard does not challenge the reliability of McSorley's memory or perception, so McSorley has no challenge to defer to the experts.

he invented. If that move does not satisfy them, he still has another opinion. Instead of defending this innovative method all by himself, Leibniz can let them ask Newton about Newton's system of calculus and its mathematical usefulness. Why? Because he knows that Newton is a source of direct epistemic support for the content of his belief in challenge, to whom he can pass the epistemic buck. Leibniz knows that Newton also independently invented a system for calculus with different notations, which entails that (i) Newton must have direct epistemic support for the content of Leibniz's belief that the calculus can be applied to solve mathematical problems, and (ii) some of Newton's justifications for that belief are not only inaccessible to Leibniz but also different from Leibniz's own. The case shows that buck-passing in SVB's description can appropriately happen in some cases without involving testimony in the whole processes of belief-forming, as long as the challengee can (i) identify a rational agent who can be a source of direct epistemic support for the content of her belief (when she is challenged), and (ii) knows that the direct epistemic support that rational agent has is inaccessible to her. Thus, NON-EXCLUSIVITY is true, i.e., there are cases of non-testimonial knowledge in which epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately, granted the truth of SVB.

Turning next to NON-UNIVERSALITY with respect to SVB, that is, when considering buck-passing as an identification of a source for more support, it is not the case that it can happen in *all* cases of testimonial knowledge appropriately. Granted the truth of SVB, the possibility of buck-passing in testimonial knowledge cases is *ipso facto* based on the precondition that a speaker has some direct epistemic support for the belief, where that support is unknown to the hearer. If the latter part of that precondition is not the case (because the direct epistemic support accessible to the speaker is known to the hearer as well) and the hearer knows that that part of the precondition is not the case, she cannot and also should not pass the epistemic buck to the speaker when she is challenged. Moreover, if the hearer also does not know any epistemic agents (in addition to the speaker) who have direct epistemic support for the content of the testimonial knowledge she holds, she cannot and should not pass the epistemic buck to anyone at all. In many cases, that kind of situation happens. I will now articulate some cases to demonstrate this possibility.

First, in some cases, under certain social requirement, a hearer can get all the speaker's *transmittable* support for the belief in question through the testimonial act. Also, in some of those cases, the justification provided by a speaker is all the direct epistemic support a hearer can have, in which case the hearer cannot pass the epistemic buck to any rational beings when she is challenged. Here is an instance.

Trial: Tom is a judge. One day, he is presiding in a case of murder. Moreover, the only witness is Bob, who saw David commit the murder. Bob tells Tom all he has

witnessed in detail in his testimony to Tom in court in such a way that no additional questioning would reveal new information. And what Bob saw and testified is indeed the truth. The justification of the belief that David is the murderer in Bob's testimony is the only direct epistemic support that Tom uses to gain testimonial knowledge on who the murderer is.

When Tom is challenged on the testimonial knowledge that Bob testifies, he cannot and should not pass the epistemic buck to any rational agent, since he has all the epistemic support for his testimonial knowledge from Bob, and he knows that his testifier Bob, the only witness who saw the process of murder, cannot add more direct epistemic support—Bob has formed all the direct support via perception and has transmitted it through testimony in legal court to the maximal degree. As we can see from such a case, a hearer cannot always pass the epistemic buck to the speaker, since it is possible that a hearer has attained all of the speaker's transmittable direct epistemic support for the content of testimonial knowledge in testimony.

Moreover, in some other cases, the entirety of a speaker's direct epistemic support for the content of her belief is so narrow that she just tells it all to her hearer through her testimony. And if her hearer knows that that speaker tells it all and also knows that there is no other source of direct epistemic support, her hearer cannot pass the epistemic buck to her or any other epistemic agents appropriately. Actually, the aforementioned case of McSorley and Richardson offered by Goldberg himself is a "standard" case of that sort of scenario.

In description, Richardson knows that he knows about all of McSorley's direct epistemic support for the content of the belief that there was a red car in his driveway a half-hour ago through his challenge to McSorley. That means, if Richardson eventually forms a belief that there was a red car in his driveway a half-hour ago as testimonial knowledge solely through McSorley's words, he cannot pass the epistemic buck to McSorley when he is challenged, since *he knows that McSorley cannot provide his challenger more evidence for that belief*. What is more, as the case has been described, Richardson cannot pass the epistemic buck to any other rational beings either since others can have only indirect epistemic support for that belief. Therefore, the case of McSorley and Richardson actually shows that at least in some circumstances, a hearer has no rational being to whom she can pass the epistemic buck when she is in challenge.

As these two kinds of cases indicate, if no one can provide more direct epistemic support for the content of knowledge in challenge and the hearer/challenge knows that this is the case, then there is no one to whom she can pass the buck. Hence, NON-UNIVERSALITY also holds, namely, in many cases of testimonial knowledge, epistemic buck-passing cannot happen appropriately, even if SVB is right about the nature of epistemic buck-passing.

In conclusion, when the nature of buck-passing is defined as the identification of support, epistemic buck-passing is not unique to testimonial knowledge compared to other kinds of knowledge. On one hand, buck-passing can happen appropriately in cases of non-testimonial knowledge where the challengee has a justified belief that the epistemic agent to whom she passes the epistemic buck can be a reliable speaker (testifier) and provide direct epistemic support for the content of her non-testimonial knowledge (which is inaccessible to the challengee). On the other hand, in certain specific cases of testimonial knowledge, epistemic buck-passing cannot happen appropriately since no one can hold more epistemic support for the content of the challenged testimonial belief with the result that the challengee is unable to identify a source of support for the challenged testimonial belief. Therefore, SVB fails to argue for the epistemic distinctiveness of testimonial knowledge.

3. The Assertion View of Buck-passing

One might contend that SVB is not a satisfactory theory since it does not accurately articulate the nature of epistemic buck-passing. If epistemic buck-passing is merely an identification of a source as SVB defines it to be, then there might be no actual deferral of the challenge involved. By merely pointing at a rational subject as a possible defender of a challenged belief, one cannot ensure that this rational subject should or will fulfill that job. For instance, it is certainly possible that the pointed subject refuses to accept the buck in some situations. In the case of Calculus, Newton seems to be perfectly free to decline to provide his own evidence on the applicable potentiality of the calculus for Leibniz, say, if he thinks that Leibniz steals his ideas. After all, the bare fact of holding certain support for a challenged belief does not create any normativity governing the holder to present it when needed by someone else. Here we find a critical difference between a mere holder of direct epistemic support of *p* and a speaker who testifies that *p*. Unlike a mere holder, the speaker *S* who testifies that *p* not only has (or at least should have) epistemic support for *p* but also intends another (i.e., the hearer *H*) to believe that *p* is true. In that case, there must be some normative rules for *S* to satisfy to make sure that *H* can be justified in believing that *p* on the basis of *S*'s testimony. As a result, from the perspective of *H*, *H* can rightfully require *S* to present the support (evidence, reason, justification, etc.) in situations where *S* needs to prove that *S* responsibly testified that *p*.

Some philosophers contend that such an epistemic accountability of receiving epistemic challenge that others have confronted derives from the nature of the *assertion* that a speaker has been making through testimony (Brandom 1983, 1994; Goldberg 2011, 2015). The idea is that, when asserting things through testimony, a speaker *S* expresses herself as having epistemic authority or evidence regarding *p*.

Moreover, to express the epistemic authority of what a speaker asserts, S must satisfy certain assertion norms, though different philosophers disagree on what these requirements actually are. For instance, a speaker must know p or express the knowledge of p when asserting that p (e.g. Williamson 2000; Turri 2011). Or according to Owens (2006), a speaker must have enough justification for the belief she asserts to reliably and rationally transmit knowledge through testimony. Goldberg (2011, 2015) argues that in order for a speaker's assertion to be proper qua assertion, they must satisfy an epistemic norm of assertion. Brandom (1983, 1994) also does not explicate any specific norms or conditions that a speaker must satisfy but claims that one must take the justificatory responsibility for the assertions she makes in such a way that she must justify another's belief if that belief is held on the basis of her assertion. Following the ideas of both Goldberg and Brandom, we have a (primary) theory of successful testimony on the basis of the epistemically responsible act of assertion. On the one hand, a speaker should have epistemic authority on p (the proposition that is asserted via testimony), in which case she must be able to defend p. On the other hand, hearers can be justified in believing p based on accepting the speaker's assertion since the act of assertion indicates that the speaker has (at least should have) epistemic support on p. Hence, once a hearer finds that the speaker actually does not have enough support for p, she can blame the speaker for her irresponsible act of assertion (Goldberg 2015, 75). Likewise, if a hearer comes to believe that p by the speaker's assertion that p, she has the right to defer the later-on challenge to p to the speaker, since the speaker is justificatorily responsible for her assertion that p expressed through testimony. Here we arrive at:

The Assertion View of Buck-passing (AVB): Due to the requirement of the epistemic norms of assertion, after having come to believe that p on the basis of a speaker S's assertion that p by the acceptance of S's testimony, if a hearer H is later on challenged for holding that p, H is entitled to pass the buck to S, that is, to let S defend the truthfulness of H's belief that p instead.

In what way is AVB appropriate to the idea that buck-passing is a distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge? On the one hand, NON-UNIVERSALITY still stands when AVB is granted. Some of the objections given earlier against SVB can be applied equally well to AVB. Recall the cases in favor of NON-UNIVERSALITY in the previous section. In those cases, the hearer H knows that the speaker S has nothing more to say to defend the truthfulness of the belief that p. That is also to say, before facing challenge in later discussion, H has already got all the information H could have to ensure that S has epistemic authority on p. Hence, when facing a challenge on p, H cannot and should not defer the challenge to S. Hence, AVB is no better than SVB with respect to NON-UNIVERSALITY.

On the other hand, unlike SVB, the possible recipient of epistemic buck in AVB's account seems to be limited to speakers. If this is the case, it seems impossible that epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately in cases of non-testimonial knowledge, so NON-EXCLUSIVITY seems incorrect given the truthfulness of AVB. To see the connection between the exclusive role of the speaker (i.e., the only appropriate recipient of epistemic buck) and the possible unique feature of testimonial knowledge (i.e., epistemic buck-passing), we shall reconsider the aforementioned case of Calculus. According to SVB, Leibniz can pass the buck to Newton since Newton has particular exclusive direct epistemic support for the challenged belief, and Leibniz does not have it. However, AVB suggests that Leibniz still should not pass the buck to Newton. Leibniz comes to know the mathematical usefulness of Calculus not on Newton's assertion but on his own effort so that Newton does not have any responsibility for the challenge that Leibniz faces. Hence, AVB seems to be a plausible theoretical basis to argue for the idea that buck-passing is distinctive of testimonial knowledge, since on AVB's account, the sort of cases like Calculus are no longer counter-examples with respect to this idea.

However, we can still generate different counter-examples in which a challengee can still pass the buck to her speaker even though the challenged belief (justified belief, knowledge) is not solely testimony-based. In other words, although the recipient(s) of epistemic buck is limited to the speaker, the belief in challenge in the appropriate cases of buck-passing is not thereby limited to testimonial belief. To see why, consider the following case:

Sonorous Voice: Jack hears Mike say, in a sonorous voice, that he (to be clear, Mike) has a sonorous voice. However, Jack does not notice the sonorousness of Mike's voice at that time. As a consequence, Jack comes to believe that Mike has a sonorous voice solely on basis of Mike's testimony. The next day, Jack has recollected Mike's assertion and realized that Mike's voice is indeed sonorous based on this reliable memory. He later on meets Max and tells her that Mike has a sonorous voice. Surprisingly, Max tells Jack that she thinks that Mike's voice is not sonorous. In reply, Jack says, 'Well, Mike told me that his voice is, you can go and ask him since he would not assert it to me if he does not have good reasons to believe it!'¹⁰

Jack first forms the belief that Mike has a sonorous voice through his acceptance of Mike's testimony, in which case this belief is solely testimonial. However, he later on realizes the sonorousness of the voice that Mike makes in testifying, so this belief switches to being based on three sources (Mike's testimony, his perception of Mike's voice, and his memory of Mike's voice). So this belief is not solely testimonial when in challenge. Nevertheless, Jack indeed initially comes to

¹⁰ This case is a variation of examples that can be found in Audi (1997) and Lackey (2006).

believe that Mike has a sonorous voice only because of Mike's testifying so. Hence, if Jack finds that Mike's assertion is a mere guess, it is still appropriate for Jack to blame Mike epistemically. Likewise, Jack also has an epistemic right to pass the buck to Mike even if the belief in challenge is only partially based on (warranted by) Mike's testimony, on the account of AVB.

One might object that Mike is not epistemically responsible for Jack's belief once it is no longer solely warranted by Mike's act of assertion. However, this objection runs counter to the gist of AVB. On one hand, the norm of assertion is not invalidated by the expansion of the hearer's support for the proposition in asserting. In other words, *the fact that I know more regarding p does not make your assertion of p any less accountable*. The speaker's epistemic authority should stand if the hearer obtains more support on her own. Moreover, if the speaker's epistemic authority still stands, she still has the justificatory responsibility to the proposition she asserts with the result that a hearer can still defer the challenge (regarding the truthfulness of that proposition) to her.

On the other hand, if the supporter of AVB insists that a hearer is not entitled to pass the buck to the speaker once the speaker's act of assertion does not solely warrant the belief in challenge, then she will face unintuitive consequences in the variety of the situations where a hearer obtains more support for *p* after hearing a speaker's testifying that *p*. For instance, a person can hear two assertions whose content is the same proposition. Imagine that one day your father and mother respectively tell you that your sister has won a lottery and you come to believe this based on *their* words. In that case, your belief that your sister wins a lottery is grounded on both of their assertions, on AVB's account. Hence, your parents are both justificatorily responsible for that belief, in which case once you are questioned on it, you can ask the challenger to ask your father or/and mother. However, if we suppose that you can only pass the buck to someone whose assertion solely warrants your belief in challenge, you should not defer the challenge to either of your parents, which is unquestionably absurd. Therefore, NON-EXCLUSIVITY also stands even if we presume the nature of buck-passing that AVB gives.

In conclusion, AVB is actually unable to ground the idea that the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing is distinctive of testimonial knowledge. The critical problem that the proponents of AVB face when arguing for epistemic buck-passing as a distinguishing feature of testimonial knowledge is that it cannot rule out the possibility that a hearer *H* can pass the buck to the speaker *S* even if *H* does not acquire the later on challenged justified belief (or knowledge) solely on basis of *S*'s testimony. In result, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing can also

appropriately happen in the cases of knowledge from multiple sources, on AVB's account.

4. The Interpersonal View of Buck-passing

Putting the foregoing demonstrating cases of NON-EXCLUSIVITY and NON-UNIVERSALITY aside, there might be a reason to question that AVB actually draws the correct picture of the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing. According to AVB, the regulations on our assertoric speech generate the responsibility of being a reliable asserter in such a way that we should at least possess a good epistemic status regarding the proposition that we assert. However, it does not entail a further interpersonal responsibility that we need to illustrate our reasons for holding the proposition that we assert whenever a recipient of our assertion needs. This is to suggest; epistemic buck-passing should derive from an epistemic agent's epistemic responsibility to others rather than from her speech acts. AVB seems not to grasp the nature of buck-passing. Furthermore, it is natural to think that we are responsible for another's belief only if they are the addressees of our speech act to the extent that we intend to let them believe so and so.¹¹ But AVB seems to allow buck-passing for overheard speech. Hence, to overcome this potential problem with AVB, we might need to formulate a view that successfully argues that one is only entitled to pass the buck to an epistemic agent who is epistemically responsible for the formation and the justification of the challenged belief. Thus, if a hearer H just merely overhears a speaker S's testimony that p and forms the belief that p through way(s) other than S's testimony; S does not have the responsibility to defend H's belief that p for H. In other words, in order to pass the buck to S, S must be responsible for the formation and preservation of H's challenged belief.

How can this be possible? According to the Interpersonal View of Testimony (IVT), the act of telling creates an interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the addressed audience that creates an epistemic reason for an audience to come to believe the proposition being testified (Moran 2005; Hinchman 2005; Faulkner 2011; McMyler 2011, 2013).¹² As many opponents of IVT frequently stress, on IVT's account, such a reason is non-evidential to the extent that it cannot be arisen from treating speaker's testimony to p as an evidence for p (see, e.g., Leonard 2016). It is instead based on the *assurance* (guarantee, promise) that the speaker intentionally

¹¹ See Turri (2015) for some empirical research regarding this view.

¹² The Interpersonal View of Testimony is also named the Assurance View of Testimony. I use the former only for a practical matter. If I adopt 'the Assurance View of Testimony,' then its derivative view regarding the phenomenon of buck-passing will be called 'the Assurance View of Buck-passing,' whose abbreviation would also be 'AVB.'

gives by telling that *p* to an audience, as a sort of invitation to trust the speaker, regardless of the content of the utterance. Hence, the speaker who testifies that *p* is epistemically responsible of the audience's testimonial belief that *p*. Certain claims following to IVT make sure that the speaker has the responsibility to receive the buck from the audience when legitimately challenged by a third party on the truthfulness of the belief transmitted through the speaker's testimony (Hinchman 2005; McMyler 2011, 2013; Backer and Clark, 2018). What is more, when the audience faces the challenge, since the uptake of the challenged belief is based on the speaker's assurance, the audience can fairly maintain this belief unless it turns out that the speaker's support for it is not adequate. Thus, we can derive the Interpersonal View of Buck-passing (IVB) from IVT, where epistemic buck-passing is not only a way to defer challenge for maintaining the belief, but also a sort of basis on which the audience's acceptance of the belief is justified. We arrive at:

The Interpersonal View of Buck-passing: The speaker's testimony creates an interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the addressed audience. Given this interpersonal relationship, the addressed audience is entitled to defer the challenge to that speaker, only if the uptake of challenged belief *p* is based on the speaker's assurance that *p*.

AVB and IVB present two distinct pictures of the recognition or presumption of audience by which the acceptance of testimony is justified. And this amounts to different accounts of the entitlement to pass the epistemic buck. For AVB, the recognition is that the speaker's assertion that *p* expresses herself as having an authority on *p* in which case any hearer can be justified in believing that *p* solely based on that assertion. As a result, any hearer is entitled to defer the challenge to *p* to the speaker since such challenge questions the speaker's obedience to the assertion norms and her authoritative position on *p*. Even if the challenged belief is currently justified not only by the speaker's assertion but also by other evidence from other sources, the hearer is still entitled to pass the buck. On IVB's account, however, the recognition of the addressed audience *A* is that *A* presumes in mind that *S*'s telling assures *A* that it is *S*'s intention to get *A* to believe that *p*, rather than provides some objective evidence for *A* to evaluate. Such an assurance leads to *A*'s optimistic attitude to trust *S* that eventually makes *A* reasonably believe in *S* for *p*; and if *S*'s testimony is indeed sincere and competent, *A*'s testimonial belief *p* is warranted (Faulkner 2021). As a result, *S* is responsible for this "second-hand" belief, in which case *S* will defend *A*'s belief that *p* when a third party challenges it. Conversely, if *A* comes to believe *p* in such a way that *A* takes *S*'s testimony to *p* as reliable evidence through her own analysis on, for instance, *S*'s background knowledge or sincerity, *A*'s belief that *p* becomes first-hand and can only be evidentially justified (Hinchman

2005; McMyler 2011, Ch. 2). A's belief is now warranted on her own evidence rather than the interpersonal relationship between A and S. Hence, it is now A's own responsibility to defend p since S is not epistemically responsible for what A comes to believe on A's own.

The point is, unlike AVB, IVB would not be consistent with the claim that the audience is entitled to pass the buck to the speaker even if the challenged belief is partially based on the audience's own evidence. To see this, reconsider the case of Sonorous Voice now from the perspective of IVB. First, let us suppose that Mike intends people other than Jack to know that he (Mike) has a sonorous voice. In this scenario, Jack is not addressed by Mike since Jack just overhears Mike's testimony. Under this assumption, there is no interpersonal relationship between Mike and Jack, so Mike is not responsible for Jack's challenged belief. Given this fact, Jack cannot pass the buck to Mike when a third party challenges his belief that Mike has a sonorous voice. Alternately, we can assume that Mike intends to tell Jack that he has a sonorous voice. In this case, although Jack, as an audience of Mike's testimony, is addressed, Jack's *challenged* belief that Mike has a sonorous voice is not solely based on Mike's testimony but also on his memory and perception of the sonorous voice that Mike used. Hence, Jack's later-on challenged belief is grounded in his current first-hand evidence. Thus, Mike is not responsible for Jack's challenged first-hand belief, according to IVB. Jack can use Mike's testimony as evidence in such a way that he can infer that Mike's testimony entails that Jack has the support for the belief he testifies, but he is not entitled to pass the buck to Mike. As this reconsideration indicates, IVB avoids the problem AVB faces when used to argue that buck-passing is a distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge.

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing on IVB's account is still not distinctive of testimonial knowledge. First, the theoretical "weakness" that IVB shares with AVB and SVB is that even if we suppose the truthfulness of IVB, NON-UNIVERSALITY still holds. The reason for this is not difficult for us to see. In cases like Trial or McSorley and Richardson, the speaker S has provided all the epistemic support that she can transmit, and that is enough for the testimonial belief to be warranted. If an audience A knows this, A would discover that although S is responsible for receiving the epistemic buck, S cannot do a better job than A. Under such a circumstance, it is no use to defer the challenge—in other words, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing cannot happen appropriately. Hence, IVB is no better than SVB and AVB with respect to NON-UNIVERSALITY.

More importantly, there is another sort of non-testimonial belief case where buck-passing can appropriately happen, even if we presume IVB's characterization

of the nature of epistemic buck-passing. That is to say, NON-EXCLUSIVITY also holds on IVB's account. To see why, consider the following case:

Bachelor: Lilly and Maria are good friends. One time at a small party, Maria begins to name unmarried men at the party for Lilly. During this process, she tells Lilly that Peter is a bachelor at this party. Although Lilly knows that man is Peter, she does not know any background information about Peter (except his name). Later on, Maria comes to Lily again and tells Lily that every bachelor at this party is left-handed. Lilly trusts Maria, so she accepts all she says. In fact, Maria is trustworthy and competent with respect to the propositions that she transmits through testimony. Moreover, on the basis of Maria's words, Lilly believes that Peter is left-handed by simple syllogism (Peter is a bachelor in this party, and all bachelors at this party are left-handed; therefore, Peter is left-handed). After the conversation with Maria, Lilly goes to talk to Tom and tells him that Peter is left-handed since she believes what Maria tells to her and wants to tell Tom this. Surprisingly, Tom replies to Lilly that it cannot be true because he remembers that Peter is right-handed.

Two implications should be addressed in this case. On one hand, Maria does not directly tell Lilly that Peter is left-handed. Nor does she invite Lilly to believe or express to Lilly that Peter is left-handed. It is Lily who comes to believe it via the inference of what Maria tells her. Hence, the challenged belief (i.e., Peter is left-handed) is not testimonial but inferential. On the other hand, it seems that Lilly is still entitled to pass the buck to Maria because Maria is responsible for the challenged belief that Lilly holds. After all, Lilly's uptake of the belief that Peter is left-handed is based on Maria's assurance that Peter is a bachelor at the party and all bachelors at this party are left-handed. Besides these two propositions Maria transmits through testimony; Lilly does not have any direct support for the challenged belief. And if these two propositions are true, Lilly's challenged belief must be true as well. Consequentially, it would be absurd if Maria refuses to receive the buck from Lilly by arguing that she only tells Lilly that every bachelor at this party is left-handed and Peter is a bachelor at this party, so Lilly must find support for her own conclusion that Peter is left-handed. That would be both epistemic irresponsible and unreasonable of Maria. With respect to it, Lilly is entitled to pass the buck to Maria after facing the challenge from Tom. Therefore, it demonstrates that a challengee can appropriately pass the buck to an epistemic agent even if the challenged belief is not testimonial in a certain case, on the account of IVB.

The proponents of IVB might object to this judgment. They might argue that even deductive inference invalidates the interpersonal relationship by treating the speaker's testimony as a piece of evidence, in which case the uptake of the inferential belief is not based on speaker's assurance, so that the speaker has no epistemic responsibility of defending the inferential belief for its holder. For instance,

McMyler explicitly claims that the speaker is not epistemically responsible for the propositions that the audience infers from what the speaker asserts (2011, 64-65). Thus, they might argue that Lilly cannot pass the buck to Maria when her belief that Peter is left-handed faces challenge. However, it would also seem pretty absurd if an audience cannot pass the buck to the speaker in this type of situation.

To see this clearly, let us assume that (unlike what the original case describes) after the conversation with Maria, Lilly tells Tom that Peter is left-handed and later on tells Owen that every bachelor at this party is left-handed. Subsequently, she faces challenges from both Tom and Owen because both of them claim that Peter is not left-handed. Facing these two challenges, what is a reasonable thing for Lilly to do? Naturally, we think that the simplest and sensible way for Lilly is to defer both of the challenges to Maria by, for instance, letting both Tom and Owen ask Maria why she believes that every bachelor at the party are left-handed, including Peter. And Lilly can maintain both of the beliefs while waiting for the outcome of the inquiries.

However, according to McMyler and other possible proponents of IVB who argue that the speaker is not epistemically responsible for any inferential belief drawn from the speaker's testimony, Lilly cannot defer the challenge from *Tom* to Maria. This leads to a weird and complicated picture that could be extensively awkward for a rational epistemic agent to approve of: since Lilly has no first-hand evidence for her belief that Peter is left-handed and she cannot defer this challenge to Maria, Lilly should stop holding this belief.¹³ Meanwhile, also on IVB's account, Lilly *can* defer the challenge from Owen to Maria, since the challenged belief (i.e., every bachelor at this party is left-handed) is a testimonial belief on the basis of Maria's assurance. As a result, Lilly should continue to believe that every bachelor in this party is left-handed. Hence, following the supporters of IVB, we find that Lilly would arrive at a weird situation in which she *should not* continue to believe that Peter, a bachelor at the party, is left-handed, but *should* continue to believe that every bachelor at the party is left-handed.

It is an unpleasant outcome for the supporters of IVB if they also attempt to maintain that the speaker is not epistemically responsible for any inferential belief

¹³ What about taking Maria's testimony as *evidence* for Lilly regarding her belief that Peter is a left-handed? Is it strong enough for Lilly's inferential belief to be justifiably hold? This is controversial. Nevertheless, if it is indeed strong enough for an addressed audience to form a justified belief, the justification based on the interpersonal relationship that IVB argues for will turn out to be superfluous or needless. See Lackey (2008, Ch. 8) where she argues for this 'dilemma' of the Interpersonal View of Testimony. Hence, the proponent of IVB would not and should not agree with the idea that Lilly's inferential belief can be justified by taking Maria's testimony as evidence.

drawn from the speaker's testimony. First, it is hard to even imagine how Lilly or any epistemic agent can or should (at least reasonably) lead herself to think that way, especially compared to the aforementioned simple move for Lilly to dissolve the challenges.¹⁴ Second, if Lilly intends to solve this weird situation in her cognitive economy, the consequential possible moves would be weird as well. Given the claim that Maria is not responsible for Lilly's belief that Peter is left-handed, there would be two options for Lilly. One is to make the inference that if she is justified in maintaining in the testimonial beliefs that every bachelor at the party is left-handed and Peter is a bachelor at the party, she can be justified in keeping her inferential belief that Peter is left-handed. Then she can let Owen ask Maria for more support to see whether her belief that every bachelor at the party is indeed warranted. Also, she would ask Maria herself to confirm that her testimonial belief that Peter is a bachelor is indeed warranted. In the end, she can make another inference that since two testimonial beliefs are warranted, her belief that Peter is left-handed is warranted as well. The other option for Lilly is to find support for the inferential belief herself. For instance, she can go ask Peter and Peter's acquaintances, or look for the opportunities to see which hand Peter uses when he writes in paper. Both options seem superfluous and laborious. The whole process of the first option requires Lilly to make two similar inferences and a request for information, just to avoid directly passing the buck derived from Tom's challenge to Maria meanwhile hold the inferential belief. The second option totally disregards Maria as a source for Lilly to defense or maintain her inferential belief in which case Lilly has to do things which Maria might have done already. It is absurd to suggest that Lilly should adopt any of the options, rather than just ask (or Let Tom and Owens ask) Maria why she thinks that every bachelor in this party is left-handed, including Peter.

Not only does the claim that the speaker is not epistemically responsible for the proposition that the audience infers from what the speaker asserts generates derivative theoretical and practical worries when it is combined with IVB, but also is the claim itself problematic. Admittedly, sometimes an inference from testimony-based beliefs could be complex and lengthy to the extent that the epistemic duty as well as credit should largely or even utterly belong to the audience rather than the

¹⁴ One might argue that, in this situation, Lilly holds two incompatible but (at least *prima facie*) justified consequential beliefs about the attitudes toward two propositions in challenge. The requirements point at converse directs in her mind give her a presumable responsibility to reject one of them. Hence, she might not encounter this weird circumstance. This belongs to a topic beyond the epistemology of testimony. Nevertheless, the incompatibility of the beliefs derived from IVB and the claim that the speaker is not epistemically responsible of any inferential belief from the testimony shows that the supports of IVB should give up this claim and admit that Bachelor is a case where NON-EXCLUSIVITY holds on IVB's account.

speaker. But in some converse situations, an inference might be so distinctive that the rejection to receive the buck regarding it from the challengee indicates that speaker is not epistemic irresponsible.

Imagine that your brother told you a *red car* is outside the house, and you believe it. Further, you also infer from what he said and believe that there is a *car* outside the house. Then your uncle questions your belief that there is a car outside the house. After asking your brother to defend your belief that there is a car outside, you would think that he is actually irresponsible if he replies to you that he has told you that there is a *red car* outside the house, not a *car*, in which case you have to find the evidence for the latter on your own. Also, you would think your brother might be out of his mind if he replies to you that he can defend the belief that there is a red car but you need to make the inference on your own to defend the claim that there is a car outside the house. Both types of replies imply your brother's denial of the epistemic connection between a proposition and its deductive inference which can be easily seen by any rational epistemic agent. Therefore, this sort of move invalidates his own epistemic authority and competence in such a way that he admits himself to be an epistemically irresponsible information transmitter. That is to say, in this type of situation, the speaker should receive the epistemic buck in order to be epistemically responsible.

To clarify, I do not agree with the idea that a speaker is epistemically responsible for an audience's *every* inferential belief derived from her testimony. For instance, if your brother tells you that there is a red car outside and you infer that there is a red Ferrari from what he says (because you saw several times that there is a red Ferrari outside the house), it is fairly clear that he does not have a responsibility to defend *this* inferential belief for you. He only assures you that there is a red car outside; whether it is a Ferrari is solely your responsibility to find out. Nevertheless, as the thought experiments in the former paragraphs show, a speaker at least has an epistemic responsibility for some of the audience's beliefs (*mutatis mutandis*, knowledge) that are derived from her testimony. Therefore, epistemic buck-passing in IVB's account is not epistemically distinctive of testimonial knowledge, compared to other kinds of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

Three views of epistemic buck-passing have been examined to see whether any of them can be used to argue for the claim that testimonial knowledge is epistemically distinctive because it has a distinctive feature, i.e., epistemic buck-passing. The result is rather negative. Epistemic buck-passing is not epistemically distinctive of testimonial knowledge according to any of these three views. Specifically, SVB

defines buck-passing as an identification of a source of epistemic support, which allows the possibility that we can pass the buck to others who have epistemic support other than our own even if the knowledge in challenge is not testimony-based at all. Second, supposing the truth of AVB, buck-passing still can appropriately happen in cases of non-testimonial knowledge where a hearer H is entitled to pass the buck to the speaker S even if H's later-on challenged belief (justified belief, knowledge) is not solely testimony-based. Finally, if we follow IVB, we arrive at the conclusion that the speaker is not only epistemically responsible for the belief she intends her addressed audience(s) to possess to but also certain inferential beliefs that originated from her testimony by the audience. The audience is also entitled to pass the buck to the speaker even when the belief in challenge is not the one that was transmitted through testimony. Thus, all of these views allow the possibility that the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing can happen appropriately in certain cases of non-testimonial knowledge. Moreover, they are also consistent with the claim that in many cases of testimonial knowledge, the phenomenon of epistemic buck-passing cannot happen appropriately. In result, none of these views motivates the idea that epistemic buck-passing is an epistemically distinctive feature of testimonial knowledge.

To be clear, this conclusion does not entail that these views are problematic *qua* theories of the nature of buck-passing, although some related concerns are revealed in this paper. I mainly claim the contradiction between these views and the proposal that epistemic buck-passing is epistemically distinctive of testimonial knowledge. Another theoretical consequence three views share is that they might be used to say that something is epistemically distinctive of *testimony* rather than *testimonial knowledge*. For instance, as the counter-examples imply, epistemic buck-passing can make testimony special, as a *source* of knowledge (such that if there is no testimony involved at all in the formation of belief, buck-passing cannot appropriately happen, given AVB or IVB); but it does not make testimonial *knowledge* distinctive. Thus, some other approach is needed if we want to argue that testimonial knowledge is an epistemically distinctive kind of knowledge. One possible way is to try to formulate another view of epistemic buck-passing, which successfully rules out the possibility that buck-passing can appropriately happen in some cases of non-testimonial knowledge. A more radical proposal is that we might need to give up the idea that epistemic buck-passing is a distinguishing feature of

testimonial knowledge and find what else might be epistemically special of testimonial knowledge¹⁵.

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¹⁵ I am grateful for valuable comments from Jennifer Nado. Thanks are owed to Michael Bergmann, Paul Draper, Joe Lau, Nathaniel Sharadin, Paul Faulkner, and Qining Guo for helping improve previous versions of the paper.

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