

**PRÉCIS OF “KNOWLEDGE ON TRUST”
(OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2011)**

Paul Faulkner

The ambition of *Knowledge on Trust* is to offer a theory of testimony, or an account of how we get to know things on the basis of testimony. A very short outline of the position I develop might run as follows. One type of account – the *non-reductive theory* – proposes that facts about the rationality of speakers and what is involved in understanding underwrite a general entitlement to believe testimony. We then get to know things on the basis of testimony when the bit of testimony believed expresses knowledge. This account, I argue, is right to conceive of the epistemology of testimony in *transmissive terms*, but is wrong to propose a general entitlement to believe testimony. The problem is that giving testimony is a practical activity, so there are a multitude of explanations that can be given for any piece of testimony and a particular reason is needed for believing any bit of testimony expresses knowledge. This follows from, what I call, the *problem of cooperation*: in abstract the interests of speakers (having an influence) are orthogonal to the interests of audiences (being informed). This problem is resolvable in that we do, in fact, have ample reasons for believing testimony. Such a reason would be, for instance, the belief that the speaker had the one’s informative needs at heart, or was a reliable voice of truth, or had property X, Y or Z. The *reductive theory* of testimony then proposes that we get to know things on the basis of testimony just when and because our reasons for belief are knowledge supporting. This account, I argue, is right to demand that testimonial uptake be rationally supported, but is wrong to give it a reductive epistemology. Testimonial knowledge is transmitted and, as such, the epistemological role played by our reasons for believing testimony is just that of making it reasonable for us to believe that a bit of testimony is an expression of knowledge. Trust, I then argue, can play this epistemological role, and specifically trust in a thick normative sense, which I call *affective trust*. Affective trust is a second-personal notion in that it involves attitudes about another’s attitudes to oneself. Both reductive and non-

reductive theories then fail in not recognizing how testimony can be situated in and institute a testimonial relationship that is structured by trust and its presumptions. This fact about testimony is recognized by the *assurance theory*, and *Knowledge on Trust* offers some defence of this theory. The problem for the assurance theory is that it seems limited to face-to-face testimonial situations structured by trust; the problem is one of explanatory scope. *Knowledge on Trust* then offers a genealogical argument that takes this testimonial situation, and the problem of cooperation confronted in it, as the basic starting point and explains how our thinking about trust resolves this problem. So I argue that trust based reasons are not merely a possibility for us, and a possibility that is limited in various ways, but are fundamental to the institution of testimony.

Paul Faulkner

University of Sheffield

paul.faulkner@sheffield.ac.uk