

Preserving Reasons

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1. Can testimony preserve reasons? Can a speaker in possession of reasons for believing make those reasons available to an audience at second-hand by expressing the target belief, so that, in accepting what they were told, the audience believes for the same reasons? I shall begin to develop and to defend a view on which testimony can preserve reasons, which I'll call *preservationism*. The first question is connected with a second. It is natural to think that the faculty of memory is a power of retention, so that one who remembers retains, and so preserves, reasons for believing. The question whether testimony can preserve reasons is therefore closely connected with the question whether testimony is akin to memory in its reason preserving power, differing only in the most obvious respect: that memory, unlike testimony, is confined to intra-subject preservation. I shall suggest that the way in which testimony preserves reasons differs from the way in which memory does.

My aims are exploratory, and much of my discussion will be taken up with clarifying the preservationist position by distinguishing it from close competitors (§§2-4). In addition to emphasizing features that mark preservationism out from rivals, clarification is at the service of developing an argument against preservationism (§§3-5) and then offering a preliminary response on behalf of the preservationist. The argument is based on the idea that reasons for believing something must be reasons for coming to believe it, and so must be available to the believer in advance of forming the belief which they support.

A view of memory as retentive enables preservationism about memory to evade the argument, provoking the hope that a related defense of preservationism about testimony might be mounted. That hope is misplaced (§6), but a different line of response to the argument suggests that its driving assumption is non-obligatory. There are plausible, general grounds for denying that reasons that support knowledgeable believing must be available in advance of coming to have the belief that they support. Some such reasons

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become available to one only through one's forming the knowledgeable belief they support (§7). As far as the argument developed here goes, then, and pending consideration of other objections, preservationism about testimony remains a live, and indeed plausible, option. (Although I won't attempt to develop the thought here, I think that the problematic assumption, that reasons for believing must be available in advance of believing, has figured more widely in distorting theorizing both about testimony and about reasons for belief more generally.)

I'll assume, throughout, that the reasons with which we are concerned are facts, and that possession of a reason—that is, the relation to a reason that enables one to believe in light of it—requires occupancy of an appropriate epistemic state. The latter assumption will be sharpened in §7.

I'll begin, in the following section, by saying a little more about the problem space that preservationism is designed to occupy.

2. We sometimes know things because someone—either oneself or another—knew them earlier. Despite the intervening curtains, I know that the tree outside my window is a sycamore because I knew it this morning and I have retained the knowledge in memory. (I assume here a conception of knowledge on which one can retain knowledge of what is, and not only what was, the case.) Despite the intervening gaps in autobiographical memory, I know that I was born in Sudbury because my mother knew it and I accepted her knowledgeable testimony to that effect. In both sorts of cases, our having knowledge now seems to depend on its earlier possession. However, on ostensibly plausible assumptions, these commonplace feats would be impossible.

The first assumption is that someone who knows that p must believe that p in a way that is supported by conclusive reasons. Whether or not knowing is a form of believing, knowing plausibly entails believing. And it is natural to think that the believing that comes with knowing must be a perfect instance of its kind. Furthermore, it is natural to hold that perfect believing is held in place by reasons that guarantee its correctness, and so guarantee the truth of what is believed. Thus, it is natural to think that the believing that comes with knowing is held in place by conclusive reasons. It follows from the first assumption that someone who knows that p on the basis of the operations of memory or testimony thereby has a belief that p that is supported by conclusive reasons.

There are various ways of backing away from full endorsement of the first assumption—for example, by denying that one who knows must have reasons for believing that are conclusive, or even

by denying that they must have reasons for believing at all. However, beyond what I have just said, I do not propose to defend it. My present brief is to consider whether reflection on knowledge acquired via testimony forces one to reject it. I turn, then, to the second assumption.

The second assumption is that in cases of knowing via memory or via testimony, one's belief is now supported by reasons only because someone had prior possession of those reasons. That is, if someone hadn't possessed the reasons earlier, then the beneficiary of the operations of memory or testimony wouldn't now have a belief supported by those reasons. Focusing on the requirement that a knower must believe on the basis of conclusive reasons, support for the second assumption derives from the fact that people who acquire knowledge from memory or testimony often have no access to conclusive reasons for believing that are independent of the earlier possessor's reasons. Crudely, we often seem to know things now on the basis of memory or testimony even though we lack independent knowledge about our earlier selves, or about an interlocutor, that would suffice to exclude incompetence or ephemeral mendacity. And so, we often lack conclusive reasons for believing what we are told or what we remember that are independent of the reasons first possessed by our interlocutors or earlier selves. But it is plausible that that form of support for the second assumption is really only a symptom of deeper features of our thinking about testimony. In circumstances in which our beliefs were supported by conclusive reasons in a way that bypassed dependence on reasons possessed by our earlier selves or our interlocutors, we wouldn't think of our acquisition of knowledge as distinctively memorial or testimonial.

The third assumption is that where someone now has a belief due to the operations of memory or testimony, any reasons that support their belief must be possessed now by the believer and cannot depend *only* on their earlier possession either by the believer or by someone else. Some support for this assumption can be gleaned from the fact that someone can retain knowledge acquired via the operations of testimony when their once knowledgeable interlocutor has forgotten. Similarly, someone can know now via the operation of memory, despite the fact that earlier phases of their life during which they possessed reasons are no longer. More generally, our ordinary thinking about the ways in which beliefs can be supported by reasons seems to depend on concurrent possession of those reasons. We'll return to the third assumption in the following section.

It follows from the first three assumptions that someone who knows now, via the operations of memory or testimony, must now

possess conclusive reasons for believing, the possession of which reasons is ultimately dependent on someone's prior possession of those reasons. The fourth assumption is simply the exclusion of that possibility: one cannot now possess the required reasons just on the basis of the operations of memory or testimony: neither testimony nor memory can preserve reasons. I'll develop some putative support for applying the fourth assumption to testimony in §§3–5. In the remainder of this section, I consider some of the havoc it wreaks on our ordinary thinking about memory and testimony.

Given the four assumptions, the commonplace that we can have knowledge via the operations of memory and testimony is ruled out. Preserving the commonplace therefore requires rejecting at least one of the other assumptions. The most obvious target would be the first assumption, that one who knows believes for conclusive reasons. The idea would have to be that, despite their being inconclusive, the reasons that support an audience's beliefs that are available independently of their interlocutor's reasons—for example, general or specific reasons for believing that the interlocutor speaks truly—can suffice for the sort of believing that comes along with knowing. As I've said, I don't intend to defend the first assumption here, so I won't offer any global motives for endorsing it. However, there are two more local motives. The first is that if it is allowed that conclusive reasons are available in other sorts of case, but not in the case of memory or testimony, then this will tend to make knowledge had in the latter cases seem not only second-hand, but also second-class. The second local motive is that shedding the first assumption will tend to undermine the second, by allowing the audience's current reasons to bypass their own, or their interlocutor's, earlier reasons.

Less flat-footedly, one might try rejecting the third assumption, and so allowing that someone's belief can be supported by conclusive reasons without the believer having to possess those reasons. One troubling consequence would be that someone's belief could now be based in reasons that are no longer possessed by anyone. Another worry—a version of which is pursued further in the following section—is that it would tend to pull conditions on knowing apart from conditions on rational believing.

Naturally, people will differ in their reactions to these alternatives, and specifically as they apply to testimony rather than memory. For present purposes, the message is only that excluding the possibility of reason preservation by memory or testimony carries costs. Some may be willing to bear those costs, but they would be wise to consider whether they are forced to do so. In the following sections (§3–5), I'll begin to develop an argument to the

effect that, at least with respect to testimony, they are. I'll then explain, in §§6–7, how the preservationist can begin to respond.

3. We can begin to clarify what is distinctive of preservationism by considering an argument developed by David James Barnett against a different view, which he calls *transmissivism*:

The transmissivist's basic idea is that, in the absence of your own reasons for believing that p , you can, through the testimony of a source who tells you that p , hold a belief that p that is justified (if at all) by the source's reasons rather than your own. (Barnett 2015: 359)

Transmissivism differs from preservationism in allowing (in effect) that beliefs that are acquired via testimony can be supported by reasons that the believer does not possess. (Barnett attributes transmissivism to Owens 2000 and Schmitt 2006. As he notes, Burge's 1993 position is more difficult to place, since it can be understood as appealing to defeasible warrants (as opposed to reasons) undefeated possession of which by the recipient of testimony depends on their possession by others.) Preservationism about testimony, by contrast, requires that such beliefs are supported by reasons that are possessed by the believer, while seeking to allow that accepting testimony can ground possession. Transmissivism rejects the previous section's third assumption, that where someone now knowledgeably believes something on the basis of the operations of memory or testimony, they must now possess the reasons that support their belief.

For present purposes, we can confine attention to a sketch version of Barnett's argument against transmissivism. Consider the following case, which Barnett calls *Two Sources*:

Sherlock says that p and Clouseau says that q (where p and q are independent). Sherlock is in fact reliable and justified, while Clouseau is unreliable and unjustified. But your evidence does not favor the reliability or justification of either source over the other. You believe both Sherlock's testimony that p and Clouseau's testimony that q . (358)

With reference to this case, the argument runs as follows:

If we follow the transmissivist in saying that your beliefs in *Two Sources* are asymmetrically justified, then it is difficult to avoid the unattractive consequence that asymmetrical doxastic attitudes could be justified. More specifically, if we say that you are justified in believing Sherlock's testimony that p but unjustified in believing

Clouseau's testimony that q , then it is difficult to avoid the consequence that you could be justified in jointly believing that p and withholding belief from q . And this consequence is implausible because believing that p while withholding belief from q involves flagrant irrationality, since by stipulation, you have no reason to take Sherlock's testimony to be more credible than Clouseau's. (363)

The argument brings into contact two sets of obligations: first, those arising solely from reasons that one possesses; second, those arising from purportedly transmitted reasons that one doesn't possess, perhaps operating in conjunction with reasons that one does possess. By stipulation, the first set of reasons obligate one to treat Sherlock and Clouseau symmetrically, and so to accept testimony from Sherlock just in case one accepts testimony from Clouseau. By contrast, the second set of reasons discriminate between Sherlock and Clouseau in a way that obligates one to accept testimony from Sherlock while rejecting testimony from Clouseau. Now in the absence of any reason to prioritize the first set of reasons, we might treat this as a case in which reasons sustain obligations non-monotonically, so that the totality of the reasons to which one is subject can obligate one in ways not determined by any proper sub-class of that totality. However, Barnett assumes, quite reasonably, that obligations imposed by reasons that one possesses are connected in a distinctive way with requirements of rationality:

...it would be flagrantly irrational for one who is aware of no reason to trust Sherlock over Clouseau nevertheless to believe Sherlock's testimony that p while withholding belief from Clouseau's testimony that q . (363)

Thus, it is a plausible requirement of rationality that one should treat Sherlock's and Clouseau's respective testimonies symmetrically. And this requirement plausibly rules out the asymmetric treatment that would be imposed by transmissivism. (Some transmissivists will reject the plausible requirement in favour of a requirement framed by appeal to transmitted reasons; others will distinguish the assessment of beliefs by appeal to possessed reasons from more expansive modes of assessment, perhaps pertaining to knowing rather than rational believing. See Owens 2000, 2018: 225–230.)

As we observed, transmissivism differs from preservationism. Barnett's argument against transmissivism depends on those differences, since it relies on a distinction that need not be accepted by the proponent of preservationism, between the reasons for believing that are possessed by the producer of a piece of testimony

and those that are possessed by its consumer. His argument against transmissivism therefore furnishes no immediate objection to preservationism. However, although his argument doesn't directly exclude preservationism about testimony, the following section will seek to build on some elements of his discussion in order to begin developing a plausible—but, I will argue, ultimately indecisive—case for exclusion.

4. Let's return, then, to Barnett's *Two Sources*:

Sherlock says that p and Clouseau says that q (where p and q are independent). Sherlock is in fact reliable and justified, while Clouseau is unreliable and unjustified. But your evidence does not favor the reliability or justification of either source over the other. You believe both Sherlock's testimony that p and Clouseau's testimony that q . (358)

The case functions in Barnett's argument as one in which the reasons that one possesses for accepting what Sherlock says are no better than the reasons one possesses for accepting what Clouseau says. However, that feature of the case isn't stipulated. Rather, it is supposed to follow from features of the case that are: the stipulation that one's "evidence doesn't favour the reliability or justification of either source over the other" (358). The stipulation would have the required effect given two further assumptions: first, that one's total relevant evidence is restricted to evidence as to the *reliability* or *justification* of either source; second, that the relevant *reasons* that one possesses are restricted to those supplied by one's total relevant *evidence*.

A transmissivist can accept the consequent restriction on the reasons that one possesses on the basis of accepting testimony, since the restriction is consistent with one's beliefs' drawing conclusive support from reasons that one doesn't possess. Barnett is therefore entitled to treat the restriction as applying globally. However, the preservationist will deny that the consequent restriction is applicable to all cases in which knowledge is acquired via testimony, since they hold that in some of those cases, one comes into possession of one's source's reasons. In cases in which Sherlock has reasons for believing, and Clouseau does not, they will allow for the possibility that one can acquire Sherlock's reasons from his testimony and that one can thereby have reasons that favour believing Sherlock over believing Clouseau. (More carefully, they will deny that the restriction is applicable to a non-empty class of

cases covered by their account.) The question confronting the preservationist is whether that denial is defensible.

The issue between the preservationist and their opponent is delicate, since the opponent can allow that often—and in particular in cases in which one can acquire knowledge from testimony—one has evidence that distinctively favours the reliability or justification of one's source's belief. What they aim to rule out is the possibility that such differences could turn simply on whether or not one's source expresses a belief that is grounded in reasons. However, the preservationist can also allow that the obtaining of such evidential differences is a necessary condition on the possibility of acquiring knowledge by accepting testimony. For they can hold that awareness of such evidence is a necessary condition on one's being able to acquire one's interlocutor's reasons. So, the opponent of preservationism cannot simply stipulate that the cases at issue involve evidential symmetry. And the preservationist can't assume that the obtaining of evidential asymmetries supports their view over their opponent's.

Let's begin, then, by considering an abortive proposal for distinguishing preservationism from opposing positions, by developing an account of relevant evidential asymmetries that makes minimal play with evidential resources other than those arising from the fact that Sherlock possesses better reasons than Clouseau. Assuming that an interlocutor from whom it is possible to acquire knowledge must be one who not only possesses knowledge, but also expresses it, we can appeal to the fact that they have done so—that, in speaking, one's interlocutor has given expression to knowledge—as making the critical difference to the evidential situation. The proposal is that in order to come to possess one's interlocutor's reasons, one must first possess evidence for accepting what they said. And one comes into possession of that evidence by recognizing that one's interlocutor has expressed knowledge. Finally, in order to avoid a slide into the opponent's position, restrictions must be imposed on the resources that the preservationist will allow can be exploited in recognizing that one's interlocutor has expressed knowledge.

The attempt fails for numerous reasons and reflecting on three of them helps to illuminate the preservationist's distinctive position.

The first difficulty is the impossibility of finding a distinctively preservationist restriction on prior evidence. For it seems that the opposing view can accept any viable account of the capacity to recognize that an interlocutor has expressed knowledge in advance of accepting what they say. And they can point out that recognizing this will put one in possession of conclusive reasons for accepting

what the interlocutor has said. For if one were able to recognize, and so to know, that, in saying that p , an interlocutor had expressed knowledge that p , then one would be in a position to exploit the fact that their knowing that p entails that p in order to come to know that p . So, the attempt fails to mark out preservationism as a distinctive view.

The second difficulty is that the proposal fails to give the preservation of the interlocutor's reasons an essential epistemological role. Where one knows that one's interlocutor knows that p , one has conclusive reasons for believing that p . Coming into possession of one's interlocutor's reasons would be redundant. Given the first and third assumptions sketched in section 1, it is true that in order for one's interlocutor to know that p , they must possess conclusive reasons for believing that p . So, in order for one to know that one's interlocutor knows that p , one's interlocutor must possess conclusive reasons for believing that p . In that sense, the proposal makes one's acquisition of reasons dependent on someone's prior possession of reasons. However, the proposal assumes that one can come to know that one's interlocutor knows that p in advance of acquiring their reasons for believing that p , and so the mode of dependence on one's interlocutor's possession of reasons does not amount to interpersonal preservation of those reasons.

The third difficulty arises from the preservationist's commitment that in cases in which the preservation of reasons is not idle, one cannot come to know that p via testimony in advance of acquiring one's interlocutor's reasons. Since knowing that one's interlocutor knows that p would put one in a position to know that p , the preservationist will hold that, in the target range of cases, one cannot come to know that one's interlocutor knows that p in advance of possessing one's interlocutor's reasons for believing that p . (It can be helpful here to compare the interlocutor's own situation with respect to the fact that they know that p . The present worry can then be seen to be closely connected with objections to the idea that the fact that one sees that p might be one's reason for believing that p that have been pressed by McGinn 2012, Stroud 2002, and Travis 2004. Their worry is that recognizing that one sees that p presupposes that one knows, and so believes, that p , and so cannot provide one with an independent reason for forming that belief. Although McDowell's 1994 treatment of testimony is in some other ways similar to the preservationist's, he seems to allow that one can know that p in cases in which one's only reason for believing that p is the fact that one has been informed that p .)

The third difficulty exposes the background assumption responsible for the initial difficulty in distinguishing

preservationism from its rivals. The assumption is that preservationism should have something distinctive to say about reasons that are available to one in advance of one's accepting an interlocutor's testimony. Given that assumption, it is natural to try to discern evidential features that are available in advance of accepting a piece of testimony and that are able to underwrite the interpersonal preservation of non-redundant reasons. For example, one might try to appeal to evidence pertaining to the general reliability of testifiers, or testifiers like this, in this type of situation. But reflection indicates that there cannot be such features. In order for such reasons to be available to one in advance of accepting one's interlocutor's testimony, those reasons would have to be available to one in advance of one's coming into possession of one's interlocutor's reasons by accepting their testimony. Since one would already be in possession of sufficient reason for believing what it was that one's interlocutor had said, one would gain nothing essential by accepting their testimony and, thereby, acquiring their reasons. Dropping the problematic assumption reveals the distinctive feature of preservationism: it allows that there are reasons essential to one's acquiring a piece of knowledge that are not available to one in advance of accepting an interlocutor's testimony. Some such reasons become available to one only through one's accepting a piece of testimony.

5. We are in the process of developing an argument against preservationism about testimony. Thus far, we have considered Barnett's argument against transmissivism and found that it fails to count against preservationism. However, although Barnett's argument doesn't undermine preservationism, it provoked the question of how preservationism differs from its rivals. The answer is that preservationism is distinctive in allowing that asymmetries in the reasons made available by testimony can depend on reasons that an audience comes to possess only through accepting the testimony. That feature of preservationism forms the basis of an argument against the position.

The preservationist holds that the reasons one now possesses for holding a belief can outstrip whatever reasons one possessed when forming the belief. That feature of their position is apt to be widely accepted, since it is a commonplace that beliefs that we already hold can be bolstered—or undermined—through the acquisition of new reasons. However, the specifically preservationist form of the feature is liable to be less well-received.

According to the preservationist, there can be reasons for one to accept a piece of testimony that become available to one only

through accepting it, and so only once one has acquired the target belief. Even in cases in which one already holds the target belief—and so one’s acceptance of a piece of testimony bolsters an extant belief, rather than amounting to the formation of a new belief—the act of acceptance is akin to forming a belief afresh on the basis of a combination of reasons carried by one’s extant belief together with supplementary reasons delivered by accepting testimony. I’ll therefore focus on cases in which a new belief is formed. With respect to such cases, preservationism entails that in advance of accepting a piece of testimony, some of the reasons that there are for accepting the testimony are accessible to one only prospectively. And yet it is natural to think that accepting a piece of testimony, and so forming a belief, is an act that is subject to epistemic evaluation. In particular, it seems plausible that one can rationally form a belief only if, in advance of forming it, one possesses adequate reasons in support of forming it. Accepting preservationism therefore seems to have as a potential consequence that in accepting a piece of testimony, one is attempting to defer some of one’s cognitive responsibilities by dumping them onto one’s future self. (Compare O’Shaughnessy 2000: 162.) Preservationism flouts the plausible requirement that whatever reasons ground one’s forming a belief must be reasons that one possessed in advance of forming it—a close compatriot of our third opening assumption.

That line of argument moves too fast. It targets the core commitment of preservationism, according to which one can acquire reasons for belief by forming that belief. However, it relies on attributing to the preservationist a further commitment which they may be less willing to accept. The further commitment is that it can be reasonable to accept a piece of testimony, and so to form an appropriate belief, in the absence of prior reasons for forming that belief. Although the preservationist is committed to there being reasons for belief that only become available through acceptance, it doesn’t follow that they must accept that adequate reasons for belief are not available pre-acceptance. (They are apt to hold that such reasons as are available in advance of believing couldn’t conclusively support the belief in such a way as to sustain knowledge.) Insofar as the preservationist shirks the further commitment, their position is unthreatened.

Although the first argument was too quick, it suggests a more effective approach. The preservationist can allow that accepting a piece of testimony must be supported by reasons and that such reasons can be available in advance of acceptance. However, they cannot allow that reasons that are available in advance of acceptance make redundant reasons that are acquired only through acceptance. The argument exploits that opening.

The argument takes off from a natural thought about how the reasons requirements applies to the act of forming a belief. Matthew Soteriou puts it as follows:

If a way of acquiring a belief is to result in justified belief, then the preservation conditions for justified belief must be satisfied at the point at which the belief is acquired. For if a way of reaching a belief results in a justified belief, then there is some period of time, no matter how short, during which the justification of the belief is not lost—so there is some period of time, no matter how short, during which the conditions required for preserving the justification of the belief are satisfied. (Soteriou 2013: 358.)

The natural thought alone is not an immediate threat. For where a piece of testimony carries preservable reasons, one's accepting the testimony, and so acquiring an appropriate belief, enables one to acquire reasons, and so to meet operative conditions on the preservation of justified believing. However, the natural thought suggests another. If the act of acquiring a belief is subject to epistemic evaluation, then its evaluation must turn on the extent to which the belief so-formed will meet operative conditions on its preservation. And that suggests, in turn, that reasons that are available in advance of the act of acquiring the belief must suffice to ensure that operative conditions on the preservation of the belief are met. Otherwise, the reasons that are available in advance could not be reasons that were adequate to support the preservation, and so formation, of that very belief.

When considering the first line of argument, it seemed consistent with preservationism to allow that adequate reasons for forming a belief can be available in advance of accepting testimony. We have just suggested that the adequacy of reasons for forming a belief depends upon their also being adequate to support the preservation of the belief. However, if a belief acquired by accepting testimony were adequately supported by reasons that were available in advance of accepting the testimony, any reasons that were acquired only through accepting the testimony would be redundant.

It will be helpful to develop the argument at this point by appeal to a graded notion of degree of outright belief, understood as the degree to which one is willing to rely on the truth of a belief. (See Williamson 2000: 99. Alternative views on which the strengths of one's reasons interacts with rational requirements on one's beliefs—for example, views on which one's reasons rationally require specific beliefs about probabilities—would sustain similar lines of argument.) Rational believers not only believe in accord with

the reasons they possess, but their believing involves degrees of outright belief that accord with the strength of their reasons. To a first approximation, where one subject has stronger reasons for belief than another, and insofar as both subjects are perfectly rational, the first subject will exhibit a higher degree of outright belief than the second.

Now consider a subject who is presented with a piece of testimony. She faces not only the question whether to accept the testimony, and so whether to form the corresponding belief, but also the question of what degree of outright belief she should adopt. Focus on the latter question. There are three cases to consider.

In the first case, the subject acquires and preserves a degree of outright belief in accord with the reasons that are available to her in advance of acceptance. By assumption, the subject acquires additional reasons for belief by accepting the testimony. However, those additional reasons make no difference to her degree of outright belief. The additional reasons preserved by her acceptance of the testimony are not exploited and, having acquired those additional reasons without appropriately modulating her degree of outright belief, she manifests imperfect rationality.

In the second case, the subject acquires and preserves a degree of outright belief in accord with the reasons that only become available to her when she accepts the testimony. In that case, the subject lacked adequate reasons to adopt that degree of outright belief, since her doing so was not adequately supported by the reasons she had in advance of acceptance.

Finally, in the third case, the subject initially acquires a degree of outright belief in accord with the reasons that are available to her in advance of acceptance. Having accepted the testimony, and so formed the corresponding belief, the subject modulates her degree of outright belief in accord with the new reasons that only became available to her when she accepted the testimony. One difficulty here arises from the question whether the subject preserves for some period of time the degree of outright belief that she initially acquires. If she does, then since she acquires superior reasons for belief at the point of acquisition, there is some period of time during which she fails to exploit the reasons that are available to her and exhibits, to that extent, imperfect rationality. If she does not, then, in light of the natural thought connecting the acquisition of a belief with its preservation for some period of time, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that she initially acquired an outright degree of belief less than the one she preserves. A second difficulty arises even if we can make sense of such modulation of degrees of outright belief. For it is hard to credit the idea that recipients of testimony are able to modulate their beliefs in the requisite way.

The argument against preservationism is that none of the three cases seems to involve rational believing. The first makes preserved reasons redundant. The second makes preserved reasons unusable. And the third is independently implausible.

6. The apparent difficulty for preservationism has two sources. The first is a central commitment of preservationism, that one can acquire new, and superior, reasons for believing what one is told on the basis of accepting what one is told. The second source is the general requirement that reasons for adopting a certain degree of outright belief must at the same time be reasons for preserving that degree of outright belief. On a natural view about the nature of epistemic memory, no such difficulty arises for preservationism about memory.

The natural view of memory is one on which remembering that *p* is a matter of retaining a piece of knowledge from an earlier acquisition. (See e.g. Barnett 2015: 369–375; Malcolm 1963: 229; Ryle 1949: 257–263; Squires 1969.) On the assumption that belief is retained alongside knowledge, any reasons that one possesses only because one has that belief—that is, any preserved reasons—will be retained along with the belief. Because of that, one who now believes because they remember has whatever reasons for holding the belief they had earlier. (As noted earlier, they may also have acquired additional reasons for belief.) And since believing now, through retaining the belief, does not involve coming to believe afresh, no issue arises about how reasons for forming the belief align with reasons for preserving it.

(Although retentive memory evades the difficulty, it might be objected that although knowledge, and so belief, can be retained in memory, evidence on the basis of which one formed the belief need not be. For it seems that one can sometimes remember that *p* even having forgotten evidence that figured in one's first coming to know that *p*. (See e.g. Malcolm 1963: 229–231; Owens 2000: 147–176.) The objection will be considered briefly in the following section.)

The view that memory involves retention imposes a sharp distinction between memory and testimony. The retention model of memory finesses the difficulty for preservationism through allowing that instances of believing, and of the possession of reasons that support believing, can be retained over time, and so possessed continuously. The model treats such retention on the model of the retention of an instance of colour by curtains. (See Squires 1969.) The applicability of that model depends, in turn, on the fact that instances of believing, and of the possession of reasons, have the same subjects over time. By contrast, testimony typically involves

distinct subjects with their own proprietary states of belief and their own reasons for belief. And even where testimony is intra-individual, as when one leaves oneself a message, its effectiveness as a conduit for reasons seems to depend on there being gaps either in one's believing or in one's possession of whatever reasons for believing are made available by the message. A retention model of testimony would therefore require that an instance of belief, or of the possession of reasons for belief, could be transferred, either from one individual to another, or from an individual at one time, over a temporal gap, to the same individual at a later time. And such transfer of property instances—particular states of belief or of the possession of reasons—seems impossible, in the way that it is impossible for the scarlet of these curtains to transfer to those, or to be retained by the curtains over an interval during which they had reverted to vanilla.

One might be tempted at this point to appeal to the possibility of plural subjects. (For plural subjects in general, see e.g. Oliver and Smiley 2013. For discussion of relevant proposals about memory, see e.g. Barnett 2015; Huebner 2016; Tollefsen 2006.) If the subjects of a particular state of belief, or an instance of the possession of reasons, were, say, a pair of individuals, then that pair could collectively retain the belief-state or reasons without flouting the impossibility of property transfer, since the belief-state or reasons-possession would have the same subjects over time—that is, the same pair. An appeal to plural subjects might make space for the pair collectively to instance an analogue of memory. It might even make space for an analogue of memory on which what is retained is retained by neither member of the pair, but only by the pair taken together, or only sequentially by each member. However, it cannot furnish a retention model of testimony. For that purpose, it is required that one member of the pair's beliefs or reasons could be transferred to the other member. Since the pair's collectively believing or possessing reasons doesn't require that either member individually believes or possess reasons, it doesn't meet a minimal necessary condition on accounting for the testimonial transfer of an instance of believing, or of the possession of reasons, from one member of the pair to the other. (For relevant discussion, see Barnett 2015 and Burge 2003.)

We've just rejected one way of seeking to provide a unified treatment of memory and testimony, and thereby finessing the difficulty facing the preservationist treatment of testimony. An alternative would be to consider, in place of the retention model, a model which enabled memory to be more closely aligned with testimony. According to the alternative, instances of believing and of the possession of reasons are bound to short intervals of time

(perhaps moments), so that memory involves not their continuous instancing, but the sequential instancing of appropriately related instances of believing and of the possession of reasons of the same types. (Such models may, in turn, be motivated by views on which the subjects of these instances are not continuants, but rather sequences of appropriately related momentary individuals. For discussion of the sequential model of memory, see e.g. Barnett 2015; Burge 2003; Malcolm 1977; Martin and Deutscher 1966; Parfit 1984; Shoemaker 1970; Squires 1969.) If the alternative model were acceptable, it would reduce the distance between memory and testimony enforced by the retention model. Would it do so in a way that enabled preservationism to finesse the difficulty arising from the general requirement that reasons for forming a belief align with reasons for continuing to hold it?

In order for the sequential model to finesse the difficulty, it must furnish an account of the possession of reasons for belief at a time on which those reasons can be derived from their possession at an earlier time without needing to be acquired afresh with the formation of each new belief in the sequence. However, since on the sequential model, belief-states are formed afresh over time, rather than retained, it is difficult to see how the model can provide such an account. The model might be one on which one could possess reasons for belief prior to acquiring the new belief, but one's possession of those reasons would be tied to one's prior belief. Since that belief would lapse before one acquired the new belief, one's reasons for forming the new belief would also have lapsed, and so would be unavailable to support the formation of the new belief. At best, the sequential model would seem to support transmissivism.

Given that the sequential model has it that reason-sustaining beliefs are lost before new beliefs are acquired, appeal to the model fails to finesse the difficulty facing the preservationist. However, it might be thought that the model could sponsor a more nuanced response. Although the sequential model requires that new beliefs are formed from moment to moment, and so is required to say something about reasons for belief formation, it might be argued that the mode of belief formation to which it appeals is special, in that it depends essentially on specific features of the mode of replication of belief-type that is underwritten by memory. If it could be shown that that mode of belief formation by replication was special in such a way as to evade the requirement that reasons for holding a belief must be available in advance of forming it, then it might provide a way of avoiding the difficulty as it arises for memory. And if there were a natural way of extending such an account to testimony, then it might provide a way of avoiding the form of the difficulty that arises there.

At best, the proposed appeal to the sequential model of memory is promissory. For one thing, the required metaphysics of memorial belief is less natural, and less plausible, than that of the retention model, and so stands in need of substantial defense. For another, the special features of memorial and testimonial belief replication would need to be worked out in detail. And at least in the case of memory, there would be a remaining, closely related difficulty concerning the sources of reasons for holding, as opposed to forming, a belief. The difficulty is that since any prior reasons ensconced in prior believing would have been lost in advance of one's coming to hold a new belief, it is hard to see how holding the new belief could preserve, and so be underwritten by, reasons.

Even setting aside specific concerns about the proposal, it does not have the right form to deal with the difficulty. The difficulty arises from a general requirement on the formation of belief, according to which reasons are required for belief formation and those reasons must be adequate to support holding the belief that is formed. Since the requirement is general, it applies to every case of belief formation if it applies to any. It cannot be avoided by appeal to special features of some cases of belief formation. An adequate defense of preservationism must show that the general requirement is spurious. The following section begins to make that case.

7. The general requirement that drives the difficulty for preservationism arises from two assumptions. The first assumption is that reasons are required not only for holding a belief, but for forming the belief in the first place. It follows from that assumption that one must possess the required reasons for believing in advance of forming the belief, and so independently of holding the belief. The second assumption is that the required reasons for forming a belief must provide adequate support for holding the belief thereafter. Should the first assumption be accepted?

The question whether we should accept that reasons are required not only for holding, but also for forming a belief, is a large one. However, we can make a start on addressing it by considering how the general requirement interacts with plausible connections between knowledge and reasons for belief. Doing so will help weaken the assumption's grip, and so open the way for future consideration of preservationism's prospects.

The following comprises a schematic argument against the assumption. The main operative premise has it that one possesses a reason if, and only if, one knows that reason. (P₄ in the schematic argument.) That premise is controversial and I shall not attempt to defend it here. The purpose of the argument is to bring the premise

into contact with the target general requirement in order to raise the question of the latter's standing by comparison with the former. (Note, however, that a version of the argument could be reconstructed by appeal to a weaker condition on the possession of reasons, on which it is equivalent to reason supported belief.) Analogues of the premise connecting reasons possession with knowledge have been well-defended with respect to reasons for action, and the expansion of those analogues to take in reasons for belief is natural, if not inevitable. (Considerations in favour of the required connection between reasons possession and knowledge may be found in Alvarez 2010; Hawthorne and Magidor 2018; Hornsby 2008; Hyman 1999, 2006, 2015; Littlejohn 2018; McDowell 2013; Moore 1905–6; Neta 2009; Prichard 1932; Raz 2002; Unger 1975; Williamson 2000.) A subsidiary operative premise is that knowledge requires reasons-supported believing. (P2 in the schematic argument.) It too is controversial, and especially so in a context shaped by the knowledge requirement on reasons' possession. A full-dress argument against the target assumption would have to show that both premises are better supported than it is. With that preamble in hand, let's turn to the argument.

- (P1) If a belief is supported by reasons, it must be formed (or formable) in response to those reasons. (Target general requirement, assumed for purposes of *reductio*.)
- (P2) If one knows that p , then one believes that p and one's belief that p is supported by reasons. (Plausible view about the relation between knowledge and reason-supported belief.)
- (P3) If one's belief that p is supported by reasons, then one must possess those reasons. (Plausible view about the operative conception of support by reasons.)
- (P4) One possesses a reason—e.g., the fact that q —if, and only if, one knows that reason—e.g., one knows that q . (Reasonable hypothesis about the operative conception of reasons possession.)
- (P5) If one knows that p , then one knows reasons for believing that p —e.g., one knows that q . (P2–P4.)
- (P6) If one's belief that p is supported by reasons, then one possessed, or could have possessed, those reasons in advance of forming the belief that p . (From P1.)
- (P7) If one's belief that p is supported by reasons, then one possessed, or could have possessed, those reasons in advance of acquiring the knowledge that p . (From P2, P6.)

- (P8) If one's belief that p is supported by reasons, then those reasons must comprise some fact, or facts, distinct from the fact that p . (From P4, P7.)
- (P9) If one's belief that p is supported by reasons, then there must be some fact distinct from the fact that p —e.g., the fact that q —such that one knows that fact—e.g., such that one knows that q . (P5, P8.)

At this stage, we have that if one knows that p , then there must be some fact distinct from the fact that p such that one knows that fact. But the requirement that one know that further fact can then serve as input to another application of the argument schema, resulting in the requirement that one also knows a fact distinct from that further fact. We are therefore confronted with a trilemma closely related to Agrippa's. There are two unhappy ways of attempting to sustain the possibility of knowledge. First, one might try to defend a regress, on which in order to know that p , one must possess knowledge of infinitely many facts. Second, one might try to defend a form of circularity, on which, for example, the belief required by knowledge that p is supported via knowledge of the fact that q and where the required belief that q is supported, in turn, via knowledge that p . The alternative, holding our various assumptions and premises in place, is to deny the possibility of knowledge. Since none of those alternatives seems acceptable, we should instead reject either the operative premises or the general requirement ensconced in the opening assumption. The argument serves, then, to bring the general requirement into conflict with the operative premises. In doing so, it indicates, first, that the general requirement cannot simply be assumed and, second, that any defense of the assumed requirement would need to incorporate reasons that favour it over the other premises with which it conflicts. (Closely related arguments may be found in Littlejohn 2018 and McGinn 2012, both of which figured in the development of the present argument. See also Williams 1972: 50.)

Returning to preservationism, the result is this. We've seen that preservationism about testimony conflicts with the assumed general requirement. However, it cannot simply be assumed that preservationism, rather than the assumed requirement, is to blame. Since the requirement also conflicts with defensible premises that are independent of preservationism, it would be premature to reject preservationism on that basis.

The argument's conclusion is that there must be cases of non-inferential or basic knowledge—that is, cases of knowledgeable beliefs that are not supported by reasons that were possessed in advance of their acquisition. Although the argument fails to identify

any such cases, preservationism entails that some cases in which knowledge is acquired via the acceptance of testimony are amongst them. On the assumption that *evidence* for the truth of a proposition is restricted to reasons that are available in advance of forming a belief in the truth of that proposition, the preservationist position would make natural the idea that we can acquire knowledge by accepting a piece of testimony without thereby acquiring evidence for accepting the testimony. (See Austin 1946: 105–8, 1962: 115 and Longworth 2020 for the restriction, and Moran 2005; Owens 2000, 2018; Ross 1986; and Welbourne 1981 for different versions of the idea that testimony does not supply evidence.)

It is a consequence of the argument that one's knowing that p can provide reasons—indeed, conclusive reasons—for one's believing that p . If we assume—in addition to the operative assumption that reasons must be known—that one can know that p without knowing how one knows that p , then the argument supports the view that the reason that one's knowing that p supplies for believing that p is simply the fact that p . For if one can know that p without knowing how one knows that p , then one can know that p without possessing other candidate reasons for believing p —for instance, the fact that one was informed that p . So, the proposal would be that acquiring knowledge from someone who knows that p by accepting their testimony is coming into possession one of their reasons for believing that p —namely, the fact that p .

That might be found puzzling. One might wonder how one's knowing that p can require that one believes that p for conclusive reasons and at the same time supply a conclusive reason for so believing. And one might wonder how the fact that p can be one's reason for believing that p . Given the other assumptions in play at this point, one natural response to such puzzlement would be to deny that the belief that is acquired when one acquires a piece of non-inferential knowledge must be supported by reasons. Such a response would be consistent with the role reasons can play in providing evidence for beliefs, and so in governing cases of evidence-based belief formation or dialectical defense. However, it would be inconsistent with the role reasons play in underwriting the reasonableness of *continuing* to believe—that is, in sustaining the preservation of reasonable belief. It would be wise, therefore, to seek other cures for puzzlement before acceding to the idea that knowledgeable beliefs can be held without reason. (For further discussion of the idea that where one knows that p , one believes that p for the (conclusive) reason that p , see Longworth forthcoming.)

Let me conclude this section by noting that an analogous proposal can be used to address an objection that was mentioned in the previous section, according to which one might remember that

p without remembering evidence or reasons for believing that *p*. (See again e.g. Malcolm 1963: 229–231; Owens 2000: 147–176.) The response is that remembering that *p* entails the retention of knowledge that *p*, which in turn supplies one with a conclusive reason for believing that *p*—namely, the fact that *p*. The question whether one also retains knowledge of any *evidence* on the basis of which one initially formed the belief is distinct from the question whether one now possesses conclusive reasons for belief. (On the distinction between evidence and reasons, see again Longworth 2020.)

8. Preservationism differs from nearby views of testimony in requiring, first, that testimonial knowledge is underpinned by reasons that the knower possesses and, second, that possession of those reasons is mediated by accepting testimony. Preservationism about testimony thereby conflicts with a seemingly general requirement according to which the rational formation of belief must be underpinned by reasons that are available in advance. A natural view of memory treats it as a faculty of retention. On that view, reasons, belief, and knowledge can be retained in memory, and so preserved, without that feat requiring their reacquisition or reformation. Given the view, preservationism about memory does not conflict with the general requirement. However, that provides no succour to preservationism about testimony because the acquisition of knowledge, and so belief and reasons for belief, via testimony is not a form of retention. Defending preservationism requires a direct assault on the assumed general requirement. I've suggested that we should suspend judgment on the general requirement, and so on the standing of preservationism.

My qualified defense of preservationism leaves open a number of further questions. Prominent amongst them are questions about the mechanisms by which an interlocutor's reasons can be acquired by accepting their testimony. Relatedly, the argument I sketched against the general requirement has as a consequence that knowledge acquired by accepting testimony is a form of non-inferential knowledge. That raises the question of how, if at all, testimonial knowledge acquisition differs from the acquisition of other forms of non-inferential knowledge. It is in addressing those two questions, rather than in attempting to finesse the general requirement, that the comparison of testimony with memory—and especially the idea that both might involve modes of the replication of belief—is likely to earn its keep. (See e.g. Owens 2000; 2018.)

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