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# Communicating your point of view

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## Abstract

What is it like to give birth? Or have your first child? Or see red for the first time? Arguably, knowing how to answer these questions requires having certain experiences. Arguably you cannot get to know what it is like to give birth, for instance, by simply reading someone's birth story. If this is so, then there are certain limits on testimony as a source of knowledge. This claim is familiar: it has been argued that we cannot, or should not, rely on testimony when it comes to moral matters. And argued that we cannot, or should not, rely on testimony when it comes to aesthetic judgement. This paper aims to build an explanation of our pessimism about testimony as to what experiences are like that also covers moral and aesthetic testimony, about which we can be similarly pessimistic. And the explanation given is such that it can make good sense of the optimism we can demonstrate with respect to each of these domains.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

What is it like to give birth? Or have your first child? Or see red for the first time? Or be a bat? Arguably, knowing how to answer these questions requires having certain experiences. Arguably, you cannot get to know what it is like to give birth, for instance, by simply reading someone's birth story – their first personal description of what giving birth was like for them. When it comes to knowing what this experience is like, testimony seems to be inadequate. This *pessimism* about testimony is crisply put by David Lewis

> They say that experience is the best teacher, and the classroom is no substitute for Real Life. There's a truth to this. If you want to know what some new and different experience is like, you can learn it

> by going out and really *having* that experience. You can't learn it by being told about the experience, however thorough your lessons may be. (Lewis 1999, p. 262)

However, irrespective of what 'they say,' it also needs to be recognised that we can be quite successful at communicating what certain experiences are like. In seeing you roll your eyes in a meeting, I can get to know that you, like me, are finding this meeting extremely dull, and this is just what you intended to tell me. Moreover, we unceasingly talk to one another about our experiences and how things feel to us. We try and put our knowledge of what our experiences are like into words and communicate this, and there would seem little point in our doing so if such communication was impossible. So, in this respect at least, we seem to be *optimists*: our practices, and experiences, of communication seem to presuppose that we can communicate something of our knowledge of what our experiences are like. The aim of this paper is then to give an account of how pessimism and optimism with respect to the communication of our knowledge of our experiences can both be reasonable and, in certain ways, both be right.

This division of attitudes has been observed elsewhere. Indeed, the terms 'pessimism' and 'optimism,' as used in this way, come from Hopkins' (2007) discussion of moral testimony. Pessimists are those who think that we cannot, or should not, look to testimony for moral knowledge, and that when it comes to morality, we need to work things out for ourselves. Optimists think that just as we pass on moral knowledge to our children, we can get moral knowledge from those with better moral judgement. A popular argument for pessimism about moral testimony then focuses on the connection between moral knowledge and moral understanding (see Hills, 2009; Hopkins, 2007; McGrath, 2011; Nickel, 2001). Moral deliberation requires the active engagement of moral knowledge – or moral understanding – and this is something that testimony cannot communicate.

The same divide in intuitions has also been observed with respect to aesthetic testimony (see Hopkins, 2011; Meskin, 2004 and Robson, 2015). And pessimism about aesthetic testimony has been similarly defended on the grounds that aesthetic knowledge requires aesthetic understanding, or first-hand experience of the object the aesthetic belief concerns. Again, this is something that testimony cannot communicate.

More recently, this divide in attitudes has been observed to apply to testimony as to what an experience is like. Thus, Cath (2019) contrasts the pessimism espoused by Lewis, quoted above, and expressed in Paul's (2014) account of 'transformative experiences,' with autobiographical literature that sets out to describe what certain noteworthy experiences are like. Here, Cath (2019, p. 106) cites Karl Malantes' (2011) account of his experiences of the Vietnam War, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, where in giving this account, Malantes evinces a 'degree of optimism that his audience might *learn* something from his testimony about what it is like to have these experiences.'

Focusing on *testimony as to what an experience is like*, which I will call *experiential testimony*, an argument for pessimism can be built on Jackson's (1982) case of Mary. The advantage of turning to this case is that its extensive philosophical discussion provides material for substantiating pessimism about experiential testimony. Jackson's (1982, p. 130) case, recall, imagines Mary 'a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room *via* a black and white television monitor.' Using these online resources, Mary acquires all the knowledge there is to acquire about vision, which will largely be a matter of learning from testimony all there is to know about vision. On this testimonial basis, and her own brilliance, Mary knows a complete science of vision. Nevertheless, Jackson argues that when Mary leaves her black and white room and first picks up a red tomato, she learns something. Indeed, Jackson (1982, p. 130) argues that it 'seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it.' She will learn what it is like to experience the red tomato, to be aware of its redness. But if Mary gets to acquire knowledge of what it is like to experience the red tomato – if she gets to acquire experiential knowledge, as I'm calling it – then it follows that this kind of knowledge cannot be got from testimony because she had all the relevant testimonial knowledge there was to be had prior to leaving her room. Thus, it seems that experiential knowledge, like arguably moral and aesthetic knowledge, cannot be got from testimony.

The aim of this paper is then threefold. First, it is to give an explanation of our pessimism about experiential testimony. Second, it is to give an explanation of our pessimism about experiential testimony that equally covers

pessimism with respect to moral and aesthetic testimony. Third, it is to give an explanation of our pessimism about experiential testimony that is nevertheless consistent with optimism. As stated, the aim is to explain how pessimism and optimism can both be reasonable and, in certain ways, right.

This paper then proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I look at the different explanations tendered of Mary's learning what she does when she leaves her black and white room. What these explanations have in common, I argue, is that they identify a kind of knowledge that is perspectival. In Section 3, I consider the testimonial transmission of perspectival knowledge. In Section 4, I apply the insights so far gained to the case of moral and aesthetic testimony. Section 5 then considers a difference between experiential knowledge and moral knowledge and relates this difference to the phenomenon of imaginative resistance. The focus of all these sections is pessimism; it is developing an explanation as why we are pessimists with respect to experiential testimony that also covers our pessimism with respect to moral and aesthetic testimony. It is only in the concluding section that I turn to optimism and the explanation as to why it can be reasonable and right to be an optimist. Given I turn to optimism only late in the paper, I ask for the patience of those readers whose persuasion is optimistic.

## 2 | WHAT MARY GETS TO KNOW

Jackson's (1982, pp. 128–130) Mary case forms part of his 'Knowledge Argument' against physicalism, which is construed as the claim that all facts are physical. Roughly, this argument runs as follows: In her black and white room, Mary knows all the scientific facts about vision, which is to say all the physical facts. But on leaving this room, she learns something new: she learns what it is like to perceive colour. However, if she learns a new fact, then it cannot be that all facts are physical. So, physicalism must be false. The consensus, as far as I am aware, is that Mary does learn something new; she acquires experiential knowledge that she did not have before. Two popular defenses of physicalism then respond by claiming that this new knowledge is not knowledge of new facts, but rather know-how (Lewis, 1999) or acquaintance knowledge (Tye, 2009). Taking Jackson's claim that Mary acquires new propositional knowledge along with these two responses (which claim that she acquires new knowledge but that it is not propositional) then gives three accounts of experiential knowledge that offer to explain why it cannot be got from testimony.

According to Jackson (1982), our perceptual experiences have certain phenomenal qualities or *qualia*. Considering Mary's first experience of a coloured object – her conscious perception of a red tomato, say – what this first experience gives Mary is knowledge of the qualia her experience instantiates. Before leaving her black and white room, Mary knew a complete science of vision, so she possessed an extensive body of theoretical knowledge about qualia. She already knew about their causal and functional roles and, as such, could refer to qualia. However, insofar as she had not perceived in colour, Mary did not know the intrinsic character of the qualia instantiated by experiences such as that of the red tomato. However, once she has had this experience of the red tomato, she is acquainted with the qualia this experience instantiates. This experience then allows Mary to think about the qualia in a new way; it allows her to grasp concepts of these qualia – phenomenal concepts – that she was previously unable to grasp. It follows that Mary can understand a sentence such as 'The tomato is red' in a way that she did not before. And it is this new understanding that determines her newly acquired propositional knowledge.

Suppose that qualia are introduced into our metaphysics so that experiential knowledge is conceived to involve knowledge of the qualia an experience instantiates. On exiting her black and white room, Mary then acquires knowledge of the intrinsic character of these qualities of her experience. She thereby acquires concepts of these qualities. And these phenomenal qualities allow her to understand statements like 'this tomato is a ripe red' differently.[1] The problem is: suppose Mary, before leaving her room, received testimony to this fact — that is, she was told 'this tomato is a ripe red.' And suppose both that the speaker said this on the basis of looking at this tomato and Mary correctly understood the speaker to be referring to just this tomato on the basis of receiving a live feed on her black and white monitor of objects and events outside her room. The speaker possesses the needed phenomenal concepts

to fully understand what he tells Mary, and Mary both understands what he says and believes him. She does not possess the phenomenal concepts necessary to *fully* understand what is said, but does this lack block her acquisition of the speaker's knowledge? Arguably not. The audience who is told he has arthritis in his ankle, and not his thigh as he believed, gets to know that he has arthritis in his ankle even though he has a similarly incomplete understanding of what is said (see Burge, 1979). Mary's position then seems parallel (see Tye, 2009, p. 67). But if so, this conception of experiential knowledge fails to explain testimonial pessimism.

According to Lewis (1999), Mary does learn something new, she does acquire knowledge of what it is like to see coloured things, but this new knowledge is not propositional but a piece of know-how. Lewis (1999, p. 263) gives the example of tasting Vegemite, where he confesses, 'you may have tasted Vegemite … I never have. So you may know what it's like to taste Vegemite. I don't, and unless I taste Vegemite (what, and spoil a good example!), I never will.' But if Lewis, or someone else similarly ignorant of the taste of Vegemite were to taste it, then 'you learn what it's like, you can afterward remember the experience you had. By remembering how it once was, you can afterward imagine such an experience' (Lewis 1999, p. 288). Tasting Vegemite thereby gives you the abilities to remember, imagine and recognise. The ability to recall in a way that enables you to answer the question, 'what is it like to taste Vegemite?' The ability to imagine such things as Vegemite ice cream. And the ability both to recognise something as Vegemite and that something tastes like Vegemite. This newly acquired bundle of abilities is not a piece of propositional knowledge, but a case of know-how. This hypothesis, which Lewis (1999, p. 288) calls the 'Ability Hypothesis' then achieves two things. It explains why Mary could not achieve this knowledge in her black and white room: 'Lessons impart information; ability is something else' (Lewis 1999, p. 288). What abilities require is practice, which is this case is a matter of engaging with coloured objects, which is something Mary could not do in her black and white room. And it explains why the Knowledge Argument fails: it equivocates between different kinds of knowledge; Mary might learn something new, but she does not learn any new facts.[2]

Suppose that experiential knowledge is a piece of know-how. Of the bundle of abilities Lewis (1999) identifies, one might zero in on the ability to remember: knowing what it is like to taste Vegemite is essentially the ability to recall an occasion of tasting Vegemite in a way that puts one in a position to answer the question, 'what is it like to taste Vegemite?' On the standard semantics of know-how, the answer to this question is then propositional.[3] Thus, consider the Vegemite taster who engages in such an episode of recall and on its basis says, 'Vegemite tastes … yeasty.' Assuming the Vegemite taster believes this, their utterance would seem to be an expression of their knowledge, given that it was based upon a demonstration of their ability to recall an occasion of tasting Vegemite. But then it seems that the abilities the new Vegemite taster acquires equally generate new instances of propositional knowledge. This knowledge could then be testimonially presented: the Vegemite taster could tell someone 'Vegemite tastes … yeasty.' Thus, return to the case described above where Mary is told by a speaker through her live feed that 'this tomato is ripe red.' And suppose that the speaker's statement expresses his knowledge of what it is like to perceive this ripe red tomato. In this case, Mary's lacking the set of abilities that grounded the speaker's knowledge is no barrier to acquiring the speaker's knowledge. Just as we can acquire knowledge from a speaker when we fail to fully understand what they say – as the audience who is told he has arthritis in his ankle can get to know that this is so – so we can acquire knowledge from a speaker when we fail to fully grasp their grounds. Indeed, the arthritis example illustrates this too given that the lay audience will not fully appreciate the scientific evidence – the interpretation of the CT scan, say – that prompted that doctor's utterance. But if so, this conception of experiential knowledge equally fails to explain testimonial pessimism.

Tye (2009) agrees with Lewis (1999): Mary learns something new and the Knowledge Argument commits a fallacy of equivocation. The knowledge Mary acquires on leaving her black and white room is not factual, nor is it knowledge of what it is like to experience coloured things, since this is a kind of factual knowledge (given that it involves Mary knowing a propositional answer to the question 'what is it like to experience coloured things?'). Rather what Mary acquires is acquaintance knowledge. We distinguish seeing things and facts – for example seeing the tomato and seeing *that* the tomato is a ripe red – and we similarly distinguish knowing things and facts – for example knowing this suburban street and knowing that this suburban street is a dead end, and this epistemic

distinction is philosophically familiar since 1910 (Russell, 1910). Acquaintance knowledge is then knowledge of things.[4] What Mary gets to be acquainted with, and here Tye (2009) echoes the qualia theorist, is the phenomenal character of her experiences of coloured objects. Since Mary has never seen coloured objects before, her first experience of a red tomato acquaints her with a phenomenal character that was hitherto unknown to her. So, she learns something new. She does not learn a new fact but acquires a new bit of acquaintance knowledge: knowledge of the phenomenal character of her experience of the red tomato. However, while qualia theorists take qualia to be properties of experiences, Tye (2009, p. 119) argues, on the basis of transparency: 'When we are told to attend to the phenomenal character of our experience there is nowhere to look other than the external qualities, since phenomenal character just is the complex of external qualities.'[5] So, acquaintance with phenomenal character is, in fact, acquaintance with the seen objects and its qualities. What Mary learns when she leaves her black and white room is, in the first instance, knowledge of colour, where this is the acquisition of acquaintance knowledge.[6]

Knowledge of what it is like, on this account, is then inferred from acquaintance knowledge of phenomenal character. The inference here, Tye (2009, p. 101) suggests, is comparable to that from *seeing a thing* to *seeing that something is so*. Thus, after exiting her room, seeing the red tomato puts Mary in a position to infer that 'the tomato is red,' it puts her in a position to see that this is so: she just needs to apply these object and colour concepts to the tomato. Similarly, knowing the phenomenal character of this experience, puts Mary in a position to infer that '*this* is what it is like to experience red,' it puts her in a position to know what her experience is like: she just needs to apply this demonstrative concept to the phenomenal character.[7]

One worry about this account of experiential knowledge, raised by Crane (2012), is that Tye's notion of acquaintance knowledge is quite far from our everyday notion of objectual knowledge, or knowledge of things. Our knowledge of things admits of degrees; you get to know people and places better over time. But acquaintance knowledge is binary: it is simply possessed or not; it 'is knowledge of a sort that cannot *itself* be improved' ([Tye, 2009, p. 97] quoted [Crane, 2012, p. 193]). And our knowledge of things is a persisting state; you do not stop knowing something, your hometown or your partner, say, when you go to sleep.[8] But acquaintance knowledge holds only with conscious awareness: 'In being conscious of a particular shade of red at a particular moment, I know that shade of red. … [But] I may not know that shade of red a few moments later after turning away' ([Tye, 2009, p. 98] quoted [Crane, 2012, p. 193]). What this suggests, I propose, is that what matters to Tye's account is not so much a notion of acquaintance knowledge but rather the acquaintance relation; knowledge might be imminent in the relation, but it is the holding of the relation that matters philosophically. It is unproblematic to construe the acquaintance relation as binary, and as something that holds episodically.

Experiential knowledge, on this account then, is knowledge that is essentially tied to the holding of an acquaintance relation because it is knowledge that is grounded on a demonstrative inference from such a relation. This offers the grounds for explaining testimonial pessimism to the extent that the testimonial relation can neither make this acquaintance relation available nor allow a demonstrative inference from it.

On the face of it, it would seem plausible to claim both things. However, the worry is that if the acquaintance relation is *considered in third personal or objective terms*, then in fact the testimonial relation can support both this acquaintance relation and demonstrative inference. Thus, recall Mary's being told that 'the tomato is a ripe red,' where Mary can see the tomato through her black and white monitor, and further suppose that Mary has her 'cerebroscope' focused on the speaker so that she can physically identify the experience the speaker is having as he says this. In this position, Mary is equally able to make the demonstrative inference, '*this* is what it is like to see red.' What is Mary missing here? The obvious answer is that the inference does not proceed from an acquaintance relation to the phenomenal character of the speaker's experience. However, given transparency, this acquaintance relation is just a relation to the properties of the seen tomato, and Mary can be related to these. Moreover, the tomato's property of being red is a property that Mary can stand in an acquaintance relation to. It is just that in Mary's case this property is *conceived in scientific terms*, rather than phenomenal terms; it is just the property of reflecting light of a certain wavelength. So, the most that can be said is that Mary does not fully grasp the speaker's ground for utterance. But, as already argued, an inability to fully grasp the speaker's ground should be no more a

barrier to the acquisition of knowledge from testimony than the inability to fully understand the content said. Again, it is a commonplace that we gain testimonial knowledge even when we have only the most partial grasp of the speaker's grounds for utterance, since this is the case whenever a lay person receives expert testimony to scientific matters, and so acquires scientific knowledge.

What is missing from this account of experiential knowledge, I suggest, is the claim that the acquaintance relation, as well as being binary and holding episodically, is also essentially *a relation*; that is, it connects two relata: *a subject* and whatever the subject is acquainted with. But insofar as the subject figures essentially in the acquaintance relation, this relation cannot be conceived in objective terms. The acquaintance relation that Mary stands in to the redness of the tomato, in the case just described, is just a different acquaintance relation to the one that the speaker stands in. But this suggests that what really defines experiential knowledge is that it is knowledge that is essentially tied to a subjective point of view.

This, then, is the proposal: *experiential knowledge is knowledge that is essentially tied to a subjective point of view*. There are, I think, three advantages to this proposal. First, it offers a very simple explanation of why Mary learns things about vision on leaving her black and white room: the change in how things are for Mary subjectively is a change in Mary's experiential knowledge. Second, it is consistent with the accounts of experiential knowledge considered in this section but less theoretically committing. It involves no more than the commitment that there is a subjective point of view and knowledge of what an experience is like is essentially tied to it. This is something that, for instance, the qualia theorist would endorse, but it involves no commitment to qualia, phenomenal concepts or acquaintance relations. Third, it has precedent in Nagel's (1979, pp. 166–167) definition of consciousness as there being something it is like for the organism, where this definition then makes the subjective character of conscious states 'essentially connected with a single point of view.'

The next questions are then: how does this construal of experiential knowledge explain testimonial pessimism? And, does this construal of experiential knowledge amount to an endorsement of the Knowledge Argument? The first of these questions will be addressed in the next section. In reply to the second, the proposal certainly supports Jackson's (1982) claim that Mary acquired propositional knowledge on leaving her black and white room. But this just says that some knowledge is essentially tied to a subjective point of view. It does not amount to a claim about what things there are, and so is consistent with physicalism conceived as a metaphysical thesis, which is expressed as the view that Physics is causally closed (see Crane, 2014).

## 3 | THE TESTIMONIAL TRANSMISSION OF PERSPECTIVAL KNOWLEDGE

The idea that experiential knowledge is essentially tied to a subjective point of view, or is *essentially perspectival*, is the idea that this kind of knowledge is to be identified in terms of its grounds. The theories given in the last section, in effect, then provide different statements of these grounds – for example, that they are knowledge of qualia, a manifestation of an ability, or an acquaintance relation. But however these grounds are further specified, the idea is that what defines experiential knowledge is its grounding on facts that are only visible from a subjective point of view – its grounding on what Crane (2014, p. 293) calls *subjective facts*. Now, experiential knowledge, or knowledge of what it is like to experience something, can be propositionally stated.[9] And this proposition might be testimonially conveyed. What is problematic is then the communication of the subjective facts that make it the knowledge that it is for the speaker. But at this juncture, it is important to distinguish between the acquisition of *knowledge from testimony* and the acquisition of *testimonial knowledge*.

It is possible to treat a speaker's utterance as a piece of evidence in the same way that we treat a thermometer reading or a measles rash as a piece of evidence. Treated this way, the utterance will 'tell' us something, which may or may not be the content it presents, in the same way that the measles rash 'tells' us something. In this way, you might get to know some truth. The knowledge you thereby gain will then be supported by your grounds for taking the utterance or the rash to be the sign you took it to be. These grounds will be inductive. Reductive or Humean

theory of testimony then proposes that this is how we can acquire knowledge from testimony and how we should approach testimony.[10] I am going to assume, first, that we can, and sometimes do, treat testimony this way; but that, second, sometimes we simply trust speakers and believe what a speaker says because we trust them. Moreover, I'm going to assume that in trusting, and so deferring to a speaker, it is possible to gain knowledge from testimony. Since this knowledge is not supported by any evidence we possess as an audience, it is supported by a transmitted body of warrant. Testimonial knowledge is then knowledge acquired from testimony *that is warranted in this way*. Non-reductive and assurance theories of testimony propose that there exists such a knowledge-class, and the assumption is that they are right in this proposal.[11] The assumption is thereby that there is a distinction between acquiring knowledge for testimony (by treating testimony as evidence) and acquiring testimonial knowledge (by trusting and so deferring to speakers).

This distinction is then important because it is straightforward that we can acquire knowledge from experiential testimony. Return to Mary in her black and white room and the testimony she receives that 'the tomato is ripe red.' This testimony, we are supposing, expresses the speaker's experiential knowledge. And Mary can give an inductive justification of the truth of the proposition testimonially presented that is parallel to the justification she might give for believing that a rash indicates measles – what this speaker has said has proven true more often than not; there is a mechanism that explains this, which is the hypothesis of the speaker's trustworthiness, and so on. But in this case, the knowledge that Mary acquires from this testimony would be grounded on this justification, which is inductive or scientific in that it appeals to observations, correlations, and mechanisms. There is no reference to any facts that are visible only to a subjective point of view. There is no reference to any subjective facts. As such, the knowledge thus acquired is not experiential. Thus, the distinction between testimonial knowledge and knowledge got from testimony (where the latter is read *non-inclusively*) is important because testimonial pessimism follows immediately from the view that there is no such thing as 'testimonial knowledge.' Conversely, it is only once testimonial knowledge is recognised that it becomes an interesting question why testimonial pessimism might hold.

The question is then, why do we think you cannot acquire *testimonial knowledge* from experiential testimony? Or, more specifically, why is it that Mary, in her black and white room, cannot inherit the speaker's knowledge of what it is like to see the red tomato? As observed in the last section, we allow that testimonial knowledge can be acquired when (i) the audience does not fully understand what is said; and (ii) when the audience does not understand the grounds that determine the speaker knows what they say. To illustrate this further, consider a case where a Physicist tells a lay person that $E = mc^2$. The physicist, suppose, both understands what she says and can fully articulate the justification that grounds this bit of knowledge. The lay audience might fail on both accounts. But this failure would not prevent the lay audience getting to testimonially know that $E = mc^2$; that is, getting to know this and know it on the basis of the speaker's grounds for knowing it. Indeed, this seems to be the epistemic point and function of testimony: to enable such a thing to happen. But if this is so, what is the barrier in the case of experiential knowledge?

The barrier, I propose, is as follows: In the scientific case just described, deference to the speaker is a way of acquiring testimonial knowledge only insofar as *the speaker could articulate the grounds that would allow the audience to know at first hand or non-testimonially*. A couple of clarifications are needed here. First, 'would allow the audience to know at first hand or non-testimonially,' needs to be read as 'would *in principle* allow.' It might be that the audience's epistemic limitations are such that they could never grasp the speaker's articulated justification. But this is a limitation of fact not principle as can be seen by the fact that this articulated justification would allow another, less limited, audience to know first hand. Second, in many cases, testimonial knowledge is passed down a chain of speakers, so the speaker capable of articulating the justification that supports the transmitted knowledge might be further down the testimonial chain. And in some cases, especially scientific cases, there is no one individual speaker who could articulate the knowledge supporting justification, which is rather possessed collectively by the scientific community.[12] So, the 'speaker could articulate the grounds' needs to be qualified as 'the speaker could articulate or appropriately direct the audience to those grounds.'[13] But for the purposes of the present argument, neither of these complexities matter. The point is simply that there is a requirement on acquiring testimonial

knowledge, or on the transmission of knowledge by testimony. Most roughly, this requirement is just *that the speaker knows what they say*. Somewhat less roughly, this requirement is that *the speaker could articulate the grounds that would allow the audience to know at first hand or non-testimonially*.

An interesting consequence of this principle is that it makes sense of the old adage that *seeing is believing*. In the scientific case just described, the audience could acquire testimonial knowledge that $E = mc^2$; and this is possible in part because the requirement noted is satisfied: the speaker's articulation of the knowledge supporting justification would, in principle, allow the audience to know at first hand. But more than this, the speaker's articulation of the knowledge supporting justification would also allow the audience to know this proposition *in the same way* as the speaker. Compare this to a case where a speaker sees that something is the case, say, that the cat is on the mat and tells an audience that this is so. In this case, the audience could acquire testimonial knowledge that the cat is on the mat; and, again, this is possible in part because the requirement noted is satisfied: the speaker's articulation of the knowledge supporting justification would, in principle, allow the audience to know at first hand. But in this case, the justification that the speaker could articulate – that they can see that the cat is on the mat – would not enable the audience to know the proposition in the same way the speaker knows it. There is something to the speaker's grounds that cannot be articulated. This is the non-conceptual or phenomenal aspects of the perceptual experience, or if one rejects the idea of non-conceptual content, simply the detail of the speaker's experience. There is epistemic loss, and our perception of this loss underlies our preference for seeing things for ourselves.

Experiential knowledge is then further down this line. The claim, here, is that this principle cannot be satisfied in the case of experiential knowledge. It cannot be satisfied because the only facts that could allow an audience to possess a piece of experiential knowledge at first hand are subjective facts or facts that are only visible when occupying a subjective point of view. But the speaker's articulation of such grounds results in these facts being stated in non-perspectival terms. This is necessary if the grounds are to be communicated to a third party. What is given is a description of the experiential knowledge, but the result of this 'objectification' is that the knowledge determining subjective facts disappears from view. It follows that there is nothing that a speaker could do in principle to satisfy this condition on transmission since the subjective facts cannot be communicated without objectification. From this, it follows that this kind of knowledge cannot in principle be transmitted by testimony.

## 4 | MORAL AND AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE

Just as we have a tendency to pessimism when it comes to experiential testimony, so too do we have a tendency to pessimism when it comes to moral testimony. We think that there is something illegitimate about relying on moral testimony. Now, this claim needs to be appropriately qualified: it can be right and reasonable to seek moral advice (see Enoch, 2014; Jones, 1999; Sliwa, 2012). The pessimist's claim is only that deference is illegitimate in what McGrath (2011, p. 114) calls 'pure cases'; that is, cases where the subject is in a position to think matters through for themselves but chooses to rely on testimony instead. With respect to these cases, pessimism about moral testimony has been defended by reference to the need for moral understanding. There are two argumentative moves here.

First, it must be allowed that an audience can gain knowledge from moral testimony; '[t]estimony can make moral knowledge available to those to whom it is directed', claims Hopkins (2007, p. 626); and 'I will simply accept,' says Hills (2009, p. 97), 'that you can acquire moral knowledge through testimony.' The reason for this concession, I think, is that both Hopkins and Hills are persuaded by the thought that you can always give an empirical argument to the truth of a piece of moral testimony. And provided the testimony is true and the empirical argument adequate, it is hard to deny that the testimony, thereby, 'can make moral knowledge available' (Hopkins, 2007, p. 626). Thus, a distinction needs to be drawn between, what Hopkins (2007, p. 614) calls, *unavailability* and *unusability*, or, respectively, 'between accounts on which moral testimony does not make knowledge available, and those on which, though it does, it is not acceptable to make use of it.' Both then offer unusability defenses of pessimism with respect to moral testimony.

Second, it is then claimed that moral testimony is unusable because, and insofar as, testimony itself does not enable its recipient to understand why it is true. Hopkins (2007, p. 630) puts this in terms of the principle: '**The Requirement**: having the right to a moral belief requires that one grasp the *moral* grounds for it.' This is then echoed by Hills' claim that moral action needs to be grounded in moral understanding. On her analysis, understanding p is comparable to knowing why p is true. It is similar in that it involves the ability to reason to the truth of p, but it is different in that it also requires further abilities. Knowing why p concerns only the proposition p, understanding p also involves the ability to reason to the truth of related propositions and to the falsehood of contrary propositions. Understanding thereby involves a set of inferential abilities, and abilities, as discussed above, are not the kinds of thing that can be testimonially communicated; an audience cannot learn how to ride a bike merely from testimony.[14] Testimony might then allow its recipient to know that p is the right thing to do, but it does not itself allow its recipient to grasp the ground for the truth of p and so does not itself engender understanding p. Understanding is needed, in McGrath (2011, p. 133) terms, because it enables the agent to 'do the right thing for the right reasons'; whereas testimony merely allows knowledge of what the 'right thing' to do is. Hence, testimonial belief is of little use when it comes to moral deliberation.

Suppose that Hopkins' (2007, p. 630) **requirement** holds; and suppose that 'grasping the moral grounds of a moral belief' can be interpreted, as per Hills' (2009) suggestion, as 'understanding the moral belief.' Arguably, if understanding is conceived as a set of inferential abilities, it remains an insufficient condition on arriving at right moral judgement. To see this, consider Hills' (2009, p. 115) example of the *Knowledgeable Extremist*. 'Ron is an extremist, believing that killing a person is not generally immoral but that killing a fellow Jew is a grave sin. Ron would like to kill Tamara, but he refrains from doing so because he wants to do the right thing, and he knows (on the basis of his rabbi's testimony) that the right thing to do is to refrain from killing her.' As Hills observes, Ron does the right thing on the basis of desiring to do the right thing and knowing what the right thing to do is. But Ron does not act well, and Hills argues, he does not do so because he lacks moral understanding. This seems correct. But arguably Ron also has a further moral flaw, which is that his moral motivations are wrong. He might be morally motivated to 'do the right thing,' but once 'the right thing' is detached from moral understanding, as it is in this case, it can be conceived as 'what the rabbi says to do.' But in that case, even if Ron gets to possess the right inferential abilities – so achieves moral understanding on Hills' account – it is not clear why Ron's desire to do the right thing cannot remain fixed as the desire to do what the rabbi tells him to do. The fact that he can now reason differently need not in itself change his motivations. But what this suggests is that if moral understanding is meant to deliver right action, then it needs to have an affective or motivational component. Moral understanding cannot simply be the capacity to make the right inferences; it must include the tendency to be moved by these inferences. This, I take it, is a point that emerges clearly in discussions of virtue. Thus, and for instance, McDowell (1998) talks about the virtuous person having both the ability to reliably know why something is the right thing to do *and* the affective tendency to be moved to do the right thing. In this respect, McDowell (1998, p. 51) gives the example of the kind person whose reliable sensitivity to situational requirements – whose understanding, if you like – is 'a sort of perceptual capacity' to see reasons for being kind, where, importantly, 'seeing' these reasons is then a matter of being moved by them.

Suppose, then, that the requirement on legitimate moral belief is interpreted as the conjunctive requirement that the believer both understand their moral belief *and* be motivated by the grounds grasped in understanding this moral belief. This conjunctive requirement expresses the idea that moral understanding amounts to a moral outlook; it is not merely a set of inferential abilities. Talk of moral outlook is then captured in virtue ethics by talk of seeing things as the virtuous moral agent sees them. Since virtuous perception of the moral situation is further meant to deliver moral knowledge, the suggestion is then that moral knowledge is essentially connected with the perspective of the virtuous moral agent.[15] That is, once a motivational component is recognised as necessary for identifying right action, we reach the idea that moral knowledge is essentially perspectival. However, if this is the case, then the explanation offered of testimonial pessimism with respect to experiential knowledge can be applied to the moral case.

The explanation tendered for pessimism with respect to experiential knowledge rested on two claims and a general argument. The first claim concerned when deference to a speaker is a way of acquiring testimonial knowledge.

Simplifying slightly, deference is a way of acquiring testimonial knowledge only insofar as a speaker can articulate grounds that would allow an audience to know at first hand. The general argument is then: this condition can never be satisfied for any kind of knowledge that is essentially perspectival. This is because such knowledge is necessarily grounded on facts that are only visible from the subjective perspective. But the only grounds the speaker could articulate are, by virtue of their articulation, more objective than that. The second claim was that experiential knowledge is essentially perspectival. So too, I have now argued, is moral knowledge. It is essentially perspectival insofar as its identity necessarily requires reference to the outlook – that is, the understanding *and* motivation – of the virtuous moral agent. And if this is so, the same general argument can be applied: a speaker might be able to articulate the grounds that would allow an audience to know why a given action was right, and through consideration of related propositions, even instil understanding in an audience, but this is not sufficient for right action insofar as it is not sufficient to engender those motivations that form an essential part of the identity of right action.

The difference between this argument and the arguments for pessimism offered by Hopkins (2007) and Hills (2009) is that this argument concludes that testimony cannot make moral knowledge available. It is an *unavailability* argument. It might be recognised that testimony can allow its recipient to know a moral claim. And so be consistent with all the limitations on pessimism to do with moral advice. But, on this account, the knowledge acquired is not moral knowledge, and in regarding it as such, Hopkins (2007, p. 626) and Hills (2009, p. 97), quoted above, fail to adequately distinguish testimonial knowledge from the knowledge that can be empirically got from testimony. A speaker might possess moral knowledge and tell others what she knows. But deference to the speaker is not a way of testimonially acquiring moral knowledge because moral knowledge is a kind of knowledge that cannot get transmitted because it is an essentially perspectival kind of knowledge.

To conclude this section, consider aesthetic testimony. Hopkins (2011) argues for pessimism with respect to aesthetic testimony. It is illegitimate to rely on testimony when it comes to forming aesthetic beliefs, such as the belief that a particular painting is beautiful. The argument he gives, again, is an unusability argument that appeals to one of two principles. Either '*The Requirement (for aesthetic matters*): Having the right to an aesthetic belief requires one to grasp the *aesthetic* grounds for it' (Hopkins, 2011, p. 149). Or '*Acquaintance Principle*: Having the right to an aesthetic belief requires one to have experienced for oneself the object it concerns' (Hopkins, 2011, p. 150). Suppose that grasping the aesthetic grounds necessarily requires acquaintance. If this is the case, aesthetic knowledge is essentially perspectival. And if this is so, the above unavailability argument can be reiterated.

## 5 | ATTAINING A PERSPECTIVE

An instance of knowledge is perspectival when its grounds make essential reference to facts that are visible only from a subjective point of view. Arguably, knowledge of what it is like to have an experience – experiential knowledge – moral knowledge and aesthetic knowledge are perspectival in this sense. It is then this feature of these knowledge kinds that explains why we think their testimonial transmission is problematic, or so I have argued. However, while these knowledge kinds are all arguably perspectival in this sense, they differ significantly with respect to what is needed for the attainment of the perspective necessary for knowledge. Thus, and for instance, consider Mary in her black and white room. In this position, she cannot know what it is like to see red things; but this is something she can learn simply by leaving the confines of her room. The subjective facts needed for experiential knowledge are discovered merely through having the relevant experience. And having this experience requires no more, other things being equal, than consciously looking at red things – things like the ripe red tomato. Contrast the attainment of the perspective necessary for moral knowledge. In this case, the perspective that needs to be achieved is that of the virtuous moral agent. Achieving this then requires moral education, where for Aristotle the virtues are acquired by habituation into a way of life. What is then needed for the attainment of the moral perspective necessary for some piece of moral knowledge is quite different to what is needed for the attainment of the experiential perspective necessary for some piece of experiential knowledge. This difference is flagged, I propose, by the phenomenon of *imaginative resistance*.

Moran (1994) introduces the phenomenon of imaginative resistance through considering two changes to *Macbeth*. In the first, we are to imagine that Duncan was not murdered by Macbeth. In the second, we are to imagine that the murder of Duncan 'was unfortunate only for having interfered with Macbeth's sleep that night' (Moran, 1994, p. 95). The second of these imaginative tasks, Moran (1994, p. 95) observes, is a task 'of an entirely different order,' and it is one that we are prone to resist. Similarly, Walton (1994, p. 37) states, '[a] reader's likely response to encountering the words: "In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl," is to be appalled by the moral depravity of the *narrator*.' Though it is easy to imagine Giselda *believing* that she did the right thing, it is not easy to imagine that Giselda *in fact* did the right thing, so the likely response is to resist imagining this, and to feel distanced from the narrator, as Walton observes. The question is then why we can easily imagine such fanciful things as that Banquo returned as a ghost but that we baulk at imagining that murder is wrong only in that it causes insomnia.

Moran (1994, p. 104) answers this question through distinguishing *hypothetical* and *dramatic* imagination. Imagining that Duncan was not murdered, that Banquo returns as a ghost, or that Giselda believes that girls should be murdered are instances of hypothetical imagining: each involves no more than supposing that something is true. By contrast, imagining that Duncan's murder was wrong only because it caused Macbeth insomnia, or that murdering a baby is fine if it is a girl are instances of dramatic imagining: each involves adopting a point of view from the perspective of which the imagined proposition is true. And this is a much more demanding imaginative task. As Moran (1994, p. 105) describes it,

> imagination with respect to the cruel, the embarrassing, or the arousing involves something more like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. And imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, "trying on" the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it. It is something I may not be able to do if my heart is not in it.

Gendler (2010, p. 201) makes a similar claim: '[t]he source of [imaginative] resistance can be traced to the way in which imagination requires a sort of participation that mere hypothetical reasoning does not.' The *participation* here, I suggest, lies in adopting a point of view from the perspective of which the imagined proposition is true. It lies in imagining a moral perspective on the world. These explanations of imaginative resistance then rest on the ideas that one cannot easily change one's moral outlook and that the attainment of the perspective needed for moral knowledge is a substantial matter. Moreover, the greater the difference between a fictional moral perspective and our own, the harder it is to imagine that things are as they are stated to be. One's inability to participate in the fictional moral outlook then marks the fault line which is imaginative resistance.

The aesthetic case then seems to lie part way between the moral and the experiential cases. Insofar as the grounds for aesthetic knowledge are no more than acquaintance with the artwork the aesthetic belief concerns, aesthetic knowledge is similar to experiential knowledge. All that is needed for attaining the perspective necessary for aesthetic knowledge is having the relevant experience or looking at the right objects. However, it is arguable that while acquaintance might be necessary for aesthetic knowledge, it is not sufficient for it. What also seems to be needed is aesthetic education, or good taste. Insofar as this is true, aesthetic knowledge would then be similar to moral knowledge.

## 6 | CONCLUSION: OPTIMISM AND THE PLACE OF THE IMAGINATION

Testimony cannot make a speaker's knowledge of what it is like to have an experience available to an audience. That is, experiential knowledge cannot be testimonial; this kind of knowledge cannot be transmitted. The reason for this is quite general: experiential knowledge cannot be transmitted because of its perspectival character. For the same

reason, moral knowledge and aesthetic knowledge cannot be testimonial. However, if this theoretical claim articulates the pessimism we demonstrate when reflecting on these domains of knowledge, the question remains as to why we bother to speak of these things. Why do we talk about our experiences? Why do we offer our birthing stories? Why do we tell one another what we think the right course of action is? Or make suggestions about what films to see or books to read? Why, that is, do we try and communicate our point of view? As observed in the introduction, our practices of talking about our experiences seem to presuppose that we can communicate something of our knowledge of them. And so too do our practices of talking about moral and aesthetic matters. In this respect, we are optimists. The question is then, what sense can be made of this optimism?

A possible explanation starts from the distinction between *testimonial knowledge* and *knowledge acquired from testimony*, and the claim that we are sensitive to this distinction since it maps onto the everyday distinction between *believing a speaker* and *merely believing what a speaker says* (but not actually believing them). In being sensitive to this distinction, so the possible explanation continues, we know that while others cannot get to know testimonially from us, they can nevertheless get to know the truth of what we say. Thus, we tell others what we know about the right course of action and so forth because we want them to have this information and to then reason to its truth from the premise that we know what we are talking about. In short, we tell people about the right course of action, and so forth. because we hope that our doing so can allow them to acquire knowledge from our testimony even if it cannot allow them to acquire testimonial knowledge.

There is, I think, something right and something wrong about this explanation. What is wrong is that we never want our interlocutor to engage with what we say merely as they would engage with a piece of evidence, as is suggested. Or at least we only want this if we are attempting some kind of manipulation or deceit (such as when we are engaged in a double bluff). Assuming that as speakers we are taking, what Holton (1994, p. 66) called, the *participant stance*, we do not present our testimony as evidence but as a truth that we stand behind; that is, we place ourselves behind our telling as an authority. In doing so, we then expect our audience to respond by crediting us with this authority, and so *believing us*, where to merely treat our testimony as a piece of evidence would be to fail to do this. It would, as Moran (2005, p. 24) observes, create *disharmony* between ourselves, as speaker, and our audience. So what is wrong with the proposal is that we do not tell people things with the expectation that it will be received with an objectifying attitude, but rather tell people things with the expectation that it will be received with a participant attitude.

What is right about the idea is that we expect our audiences, in these particular testimonial cases, *to do something with the information we present to them other than simply defer and form belief*. We do not expect them to reason to its truth, but to start from the presumption of its truth – where this presumption follows from crediting our authority – and then to imaginatively engage with what is told as a presumed truth. The imagination here, to use Moran's (1994, p. 94) distinction, is dramatic. We expect, that is, our audience to try and enter our point of view. Our reason for expecting this is that the imagination – if unlimited – could then allow our audience to know what we know.

Experiential, moral and aesthetic knowledge *could be grounded on an imagined perspective to the extent that the imagination is not limited*. To illustrate this, return to Mary in her black and white room. Perceptual imagination exploits perceptual memory. Soteriou (2013, p. 169) gives the following example.

> [W]hen I perceptually imagine an acquaintance of mine playing the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth on a harmonica, although I may be imagining an event of a kind that I have never witnessed, in doing so I am exploiting perceptual memories of things that I have witnessed — for example a perceptual memory of the appearance of my acquaintance, perceptual memory of the sound of a harmonica, a perceptual memory of the sound of the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth, and so on.

Having never seen coloured objects, Mary's capacity to imaginatively engage with the speaker's testimony to the tomato being a 'ripe red' is then too limited to allow her to come to possess the experiential knowledge possessed

by the speaker. But this is not always the case; our imagination is not always so limited. So it is possible, on occasion, for us, as audiences, to sufficiently take the point of view of a speaker so that we can get to possess, on the basis of the information the speaker presents and our own imaginative resources, the perspectival knowledge that the speaker gives testimony to.[16] In this way, through relying on the imagination of our audiences, we can communicate our experiential knowledge, moral knowledge and aesthetic knowledge. Our optimism is then grounded in, and explained by, our recognition of this possibility. Our pessimism meanwhile expresses our belief in the imaginative limitations of audiences.

In conclusion, there are four features or implications of this proposal that are worth noting. First, epistemologists are wont to distinguish kinds of knowledge. A priori knowledge is distinguished from a posteriori; instances of perceptual, recollective and testimonial knowledge are recognised as unique in their own ways. This paper then supports a less familiar distinction: some knowledge is essentially perspectival, or to be identified in terms of its grounding on facts that are only visible from a subjective perspective – subjective facts. Experiential knowledge is of this kind, and so too, I have suggested are moral and aesthetic knowledge. It follows that these kinds of knowledge cannot be accounted for in scientific terms, given that science seeks objective grounds. To then recognise this impossibility is to agree with Nagel (1986), pp. 7–8) when he says that the 'subjectivity of consciousness is an irreducible feature of reality … and it must occupy as fundamental place in any credible world view as matter, energy, space, time and numbers.'

Second, a necessary condition on the possibility of communicating any essentially perspectival knowledge is arguably that one, as audience, adopt the participant stance. This is arguable because recognizing and engaging with a speaker's perspective on their utterance would seem to be the first step in imagining the speaker's point of view with respect to what is uttered. It follows that only by taking the participant stance is there any possibility of certain kinds of knowledge – experiential, moral, aesthetic – being communicated. And this gives further reason for taking the adoption of the participant stance to be a solidly epistemic matter and not a mere issue of respect or politeness (for the opposing view, see Goldberg (2020)).

Third, the difficulties of communicating these kinds of knowledge – and the pessimism that we can demonstrate about this possibility – is then a corollary of the difficulty of imaginatively occupying another subjective perspective. Some people are better at this than others. Some people are more empathetic, more understanding, better listeners. To them, the epistemic rewards. It has been recognised that the imagination can underlie our capacity for empathy and our ability to appreciate another's perspective, see Goldie (2002). Here, it is suggested here that this imaginative capacity can then play a crucial epistemic role in the communication of knowledge that is essentially perspectival.

Fourth, the difficulty of imaginatively occupying another person's subjective point of view can sometimes be such that any knowledge that rests essentially on this point of view cannot be communicated. This is the pessimism with which this paper started. On occasions, and particularly when it is a moral matter that is at issue, this pessimism can lead to the feeling that there is an unbridgeable gap between different moral outlooks. Where this is the case, the imaginative leap necessary for the communication of knowledge can only take the form of a conversion. There are then interesting questions about what makes conversion possible and rational (see Faulkner (2019).[17]

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## ENDNOTES

[1] It should be noted that the claim that Mary acquires a new set of phenomenal concepts, on exiting her room, can be detached from the qualia hypothesis. For example, Burge (2003, p. 413) argues that the sighted and blind 'have different concepts of redness,' but holds an intentional view of perception. And the possibility of recognizing phenomenal concepts while rejecting qualia then gives another response to the Knowledge Argument: Mary simply gains a new understanding of the facts she knew all along. For instance, see Papineau (1993) and Tye (1995). The argument in the text is strictly against accounting for experiential knowledge in terms of phenomenal concepts, rather than in terms of qualia.

[2] Lewis credits this response to Nemirow (1980).

[3] On the standard semantics, a knowledge-wh ascription, like knowing-how, is true just in case the subject knows a proposition that is an acceptable answer to the embedded question (see Tye, 2012, p. 301). 'Carla knows how to ride a bike,' for example, is true if and only if Carla knows a proposition that is an acceptable answer to the question 'how do you ride a bike?' An acceptable answer here is then knowing that such and such is *a way to ride a bike* (see Stanley & Williamson, 2001, p. 429). Stoljar (2016) proposes that knowing-what-it-is-like is similar in that the proposition known needs to identify a certain *way of feeling*. Thus, on his analysis, 'John knows what it is like to have toothache' means 'There is some way such that John knows that *that* way is what it feels like to have toothache' (see Stoljar, 2016, p. 1171). This proposed similarity is enough for Lewis's argument and the response to it offered here.

[4] For a recent discussion, see Duncan (2018).

[5] And, 'Thus, if I say, while viewing a ripe tomato, "*This* is what it is like to experience red," the referent of my demonstrative is simply the color represented by experience.' (Tye, 2009, p. 120).

[6] A similar response is given by Conee (1994).

[7] See also Tye (2012).

[8] Although prolonged absence can undermine acquaintance knowledge, you need to keep in touch with people to continue to know them (see Martin, 2001).

[9] *Pace* Lewis (1999) and Stoljar (2016), this is true even if one thinks of it as species of knowing-wh.

[10] See Hume (1777) and Faulkner (2011) for the reductive position generally.

[11] See Burge (1993) as an example of a non-reductive theory, Moran (2005) as an example of an assurance theory, and, again, Faulkner (2011) for these positions generally.

[12] See Burge (2013) and Faulkner (2018).

[13] Similarly, Burge (1998, p. 6) proposes this condition on the acquisition of testimonial knowledge: 'The recipient "depends" on interlocutors' justificational resources for his knowledge in the sense that if the interlocutors had lacked *or failed to indicate the existence of these justificational resources*, the recipient's warranted true belief would not have been knowledge.' My italics.

[14] Although testimony can also be necessary to the communication of abilities, see Hawley (2010).

[15] A similar claim is made by Howell (2014) who ties moral knowledge to moral character.

[16] With respect to experiential knowledge, Cath (2019, p. 113) calls imaginatively grounded instances 'silver standard' knowledge, where the 'gold standard' is the same knowledge experientially grounded and 'bronze standard' is when it is merely knowledge from testimony. On the present account, there is no bronze standard experiential knowledge, and no difference in standard between knowledge based on experience and knowledge based on the imagination. Rather, the difference lies in the capacity of these grounds for making such knowledge available.

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