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IS TRUST AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL NOTION?

Knowledge is a collective good. Only a small part of our knowledge of the world is generated by our own personal experience. Relying on what others say is one of the most fundamental ways to acquire knowledge, not only about the external world, but also about who we are, for instance about when and where we were born. To use Mary Douglas' words: "Our colonisation of each others' minds is the price we pay for thought".[1]

Traditionally, epistemology had banned from genuine knowledge beliefs acquired by trusting others. Knowledge or rational belief, as opposed to opinion, should ultimately be based on individually held clear and distinct ideas (Descartes) or sense impressions (Locke) together with sound relations among these ideas. An individualistic stance has persisted in the contemporary debate, claiming that individually held reasons and individual cognitive states are the only ground of justification of our beliefs.

Nevertheless a number of social phenomena such as the role of expertise in public decisions within democratic societies, collaborative work in "Big Science" and in the Academe, or the informational explosion due to new media and technologies have forced at least a part of contemporary epistemology to incorporate sociological notions such as *trust*, *deference* and *authority*. A division of cognitive labour is now recognized as a property of every cultural system, science included.[2]

Although there is widespread agreement that our epistemic dependence on other people's knowledge is a key ingredient of our cognitive life, the role of trust in this dependence is much more open to debate. Is trust in epistemic authority—or "epistemic trust" for short—an epistemological notion in any sense, or is it simply a bridge-concept that connects our epistemological concerns to moral issues?

Should we depict it in terms of the more familiar sociological notion of trust as a basis for cooperation? If epistemic trust and moral or social trust are different things, are they related, and how? It is obvious enough that people's trust in the "cognitive order" of their society—what rules and principles govern the distribution of knowledge in society, who are the experts, why they should be believed—influences their trust in its social order and it is influenced by it.[3] Good illustration of this was provided by recent events involving governments' invocation of Intelligence expert's dossiers on the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to justify war, and the backlash of public opinion when this expertise proved unreliable and its political exploitation disingenuous. Still, while the existence of strong relations between moral/social and epistemic/cognitive notions of trust is not in doubt, their character has not been clearly elucidated.

To contribute to such an elucidation, I will review different approaches to epistemic authority, some that come from outside of philosophical epistemology, and others developed within epistemology itself. In looking at epistemological approaches, I will pay particular attention to the tension between reductionist vs. non-reductionist approaches to trust and testimonial knowledge. Unavoidably, the accounts I will give and the contrasts I will draw will be oversimplified. Still, I hope they will suffice to give plausibility to the first main claim of this article, namely that epistemic trust is illuminated by all these diverse approaches and fully accounted for by none of them, because it genuinely involves a variety of cognitive and social mechanisms that can be normatively evaluated from several points of view. I will then present what I believe is a neglected and poorly understood form of epistemic trust involved in the pragmatics of

verbal comprehension. This pragmatic form of epistemic trust calls, I will argue, for a non-reductionist account. Therefore—and this will be my second main claim—in no domain where social knowledge relies on verbal communication can epistemic trust be fully accounted for in a reductionist way.

Non-epistemological approaches

Epistemic authority and trust are not just philosophical topics, they are important aspects of human social life. As such, they can, and indeed should, be studied as social-historical phenomena. To give just one example, in his influential book, *A Social History of Truth,* Steven Shapin (1994) reconstructs the role of gentlemanly culture in determining credibility in the scientific practices of early modern science, in particular in the constitution of the British Royal Academy and its new experimental standards for scientific discourse. Trust and civility are inseparable concepts: they define a cultural system, that is, a set of presuppositions that guides "conversation" not just in its ordinary sense but also in the Latin sense of *conversatio*, that is, the art of conducting oneself in social interactions. In this cultural system, an honourable gentleman is precisely one who deserves to be trusted. Social practices of recognition, cultural heuristics and epistemic maxims are intertwined in the cultural constitution of any body of knowledge, science included. Shapin's history of trust has the merit of embedding deference to epistemic authority in historical and practical contexts, in contrast to more abstract and formalized approaches found in philosophy. His approach converges in this respect with sociological research (and in particular sociology of science)[4] and, for that matter, sociological commonsense. In people's ordinary deference to the epistemic authority of others, epistemological, moral and cultural reasons are completely intertwined. The ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel nicely illustrated the difficulty of disentangling moral and cognitive trust when he suggested the following informal experiment: try to systematically distrust a friend's or a relative's everyday factual reports: she will find it an intolerable attack on her person and her moral integrity, and it will be hard to re-establish the relationship even after having been told of your hidden experimental agenda.[5]

Does the sociological or historical perspective show that trust or authority are just historically situated social constructions that cannot be normatively evaluated outside of their social-historical context? Does it render irrelevant philosophical issues regarding the nature and rationality of trust? It is, of course quite possible to acknowledge the fruitfulness of the social-scientific approach without embracing the kind of relativism that is frequently associated with it.

From within philosophy itself, trust in epistemic authority is being approached from a variety of perspective, and not just from a strictly epistemological one. After all, trust seems to be a crucial aspect of interpersonal relationships, of the social and political order, and of cooperation in general. Trust is seen as something that "is there" and calls for a definition. This is not to say that there is generally accepted definition of trust, far from it.

In political philosophy, trust is standardly seen as a voluntary transfer of power to those who govern, a transfer that cannot be justified simply in terms of coercion or of rational argument.[6] In social theory, trust is frequently treated as a form of rational choice to pursue ongoing cooperation.[7] In moral philosophy, trust is often considered as a social virtue that cannot be reduced to strategic thinking.[8] All these different treatments attempt to capture the elusive idea of an intentional surrender of control on one's own actions and decisions that seems difficult to reconcile with the autonomy of a rational agent. To what extent are these various approaches to trust in general relevant to the study of trust in epistemic authority? I have no general answer to propose to this question, but I will briefly consider three of specific possible contributions, from political philosophy, from social theory, and from moral philosophy. Let me first, however, express a following cautionary remark. An uncritical import of approaches to moral and social trust and authority into epistemology has failed to

sharpen the notions of epistemic trust and authority and may have indeed contributed to their vagueness. "Trust" is sometimes being used with reference to the cooperation needed within the scientific enterprise, at other times with reference to the testimonial source of most of our ordinary beliefs, and at other times yet to refer to the uncritical reliance of lay people on experts. Are we talking of the same thing in all three cases, or should we, to begin with, acknowledge that there are many sub-varieties of epistemic trust just as there are many varieties of trust in general, casting doubt on the possibility of a single integrated account? If we entertain the possibility that we may be talking, under the name of trust, about a variety of related but different attitudes, and if we adopt, at least for the time being, an aim more modest than that of a developing a general theory of trust, we may be better placed to take advantage of a variety of perspectives.

Political philosophy is a source of insight for social epistemology. In political philosophy, trust is seen as a key component of the authority relation, in which a person desists from demanding justification of the thing she is being asked to do or to believe as a condition of her doing or believing.[9] Something of this kind seems at play when the lay person blindly defers to a recognised authority, be it an expert, a "wise man" (or woman), or a religious leader. We are all familiar with such cases of blind deference. They typically involve the acceptance of beliefs that are only partially understood. I believe my doctor who tells me that my level of cholesterol is too high, and I follow her prescription, even if my understanding of what cholesterol is is quite poor, and my comprehension of its physiological role is hopelessly metaphorical.[10] Is this sort of deference ever justified in some relevant sense, and should epistemology pay attention to it? I think it should. The focus in the literature on testimony on beliefs the contents of which are perfectly clear but for which we lack direct evidence has contributed to giving an unrealistic picture of our dependence on socially distributed knowledge. It is as if the paradigmatic case of social transfer of

knowledge were that found in the community of birdwatchers. Among birdwatchers, reports such as: "A count of 32 Mediterranean Gulls was made on the Isle of Wight on the 7th" are believed without any further check, thanks to the strong mutual respect and sense of cooperation found in such communities.[11] However, in many social situations—including situations playing a major role in cultural transmission—the information exchanged is much less straightforward and raises problems not just of believability but also of comprehension. The interplay between believability and comprehension and the role of cooperation not just in epistemic but also in interpretive guidance are, I suggest, important aspects of epistemic trust.

Social theory approaches to cooperation drawing on rational choice and on game theory are another source of insight for social epistemology. Communication is a form of cooperation. As in the case of cooperation in general, it raises the question of what causes communicator to cooperate when their interests might often be better served by defecting. In many cooperation games having the structure of an iterated prisoner's dilemma, it has been shown[12] that a tit for tat strategy of one party makes defection less advantageous than cooperation for the other party (with generalisation to the many players case). In an article entitled "Epistemological Tit of Tat," Michel Blais has argued that such a game-theoretic approach might be extended to trust within a scientific community.[13] Scientists have an interest in reporting genuine observations and results, because the costs of uncooperative behaviour (i.e. cheating) is high, and typically consists in the public and permanent exclusion of the cheater from the community. This view has been criticised for placing excessive confidence in the reliability of the constraints.[14] Another possible line of criticism is to question the adequateness of the iterated game of Prisoner's Dilemma to the case of science. Something like a tit for tat strategy may be at work in the decision of scientific teams working on the same issues to share or not to share results before publication: you don't share with me, I don't

share with you. But this form of cooperation is of limited epistemic relevance. In the more epistemically significant case of the publication of observations and results, the response to the production of fake evidence is not symmetrical. It is not to produce false results in return until defectors fall back in line, it is to ostracize them. This response is not only qualitatively but also quantitatively asymmetrical, and costly not just to the defector, but also to the community at large. Why deprive the community forever from the input of competent scientists that have, typically, been carried away by their theoretical convictions, rather than punish them in proportion to the damage done and then reintegrate them? Would not this be costly enough to the perpetrators to deter scientists tempted to fake their data? Ostracism of evidence-fakers seems guided, at least in part, by a sense of moral disgust among scientists who are eager to preserve their collective self-esteem and not just the epistemic value of their output.

While a game theoretical approach may provide partial insight in accounting for trust in scientific practice, its relevance to the understanding of trust in everyday face-to-face communication is dubious. In particular, a tit for tat strategy makes sense if basically the same game with similar pay-offs is played again and again and if, in this game, defection is advantageous unless it is sanctioned. In personal relationships, however, the goals of communication are extremely varied. Most of these goals—coordination of action for instance—are better achieved through competent and honest communication. Given this, there is no systematic and obvious way of sanctioning someone who has, on a particular occasion, pursued his advantage by means of dishonest communication. Typical reactions are more of a moral than of a strategic character.[15] Trust seems to be allocated in a manner that is too context-sensitive and too morally and psychologically rich to be well captured by game-theoretical modelling.

Moral philosophy is a third source of insight on trust. It may appeal to the intuition that "trust is not the fact that one, after calculating the odds, feels no risk: It is feeling no risk without calculating the odds".[16] In moral philosophy, trust is often analysed as a particular prior commitment to a relationship and not an outcome of the cooperative behaviour between the parties. This prior commitment is not obviously purposive. I do not trust others in order to gain from my interaction. Rather, the fact that I trust them gives me an expectation to gain from interacting with them in some occasions. According to Annette Bayer, trust and distrust are feeling responses, not cognitive states, to how we take our situation to be: an accepted vulnerability to another's possible, but not expected, ill will. To what extent is such a view of trust of interest to epistemology? Does it help capture the fundamental role of trust in the acquisition of vicarious knowledge? Epistemic trust is trust, on the one hand, in the goodwill of others, and, on the other hand, in their competence. The moral notion of trust is of clear relevance to assessing goodwill, in particular in enduring personal relationships, but it seems of no relevance to the assessment of competence. Trusting the other party's willingness to take into account my own interest, either for the sake of our future relation, or simply out of an affective attitude, doesn't assure me that what I am obtaining is valuable information. The moral attitude of trust may yet influence the sharing of information in other ways. On the one hand it may cause interlocutors to do their epistemic best. On the other hand, it may cause the morally trusting receiver of information to display a *stance of epistemic trust* for the sake of the relationship. She may then either lower her epistemic criteria for accepting a belief (my friend says he is too tired to go to the cinema, I would not have thought so, but I will believe him), or remain inwardly sceptical and possibly check what she has been told on the basis of independent evidence.[17] Even in strong enduring personal relationships epistemic trust does not reduce to moral trust. Moreover, the less personal and enduring the relationship, the more limited is the relevance of the moral notion of trust to the epistemic notion.

In this section, I have briefly examined arious non-epistemological approaches to trust,

and argued that while they all had something to contribute to our understanding of the notion, none provided a comprehensive account. I now turn to epistemological approaches.

Epistemological approaches

If I grant you epistemic authority because of independent reasons—which may be direct of indirect, moral or epistemic—I have to think that you are a reliable source of information, then I'm granting you *derivative authority*. Whereas, if I suspend my reasons in granting you authority and I am willing to accept whatever you say just because you believe it, then I'm granting you *fundamental authority*.[18] This distinction between derivative and fundamental authority retraces in part the classical distinction in the philosophy of testimony between reductionists and anti-reductionists. Hume is the historical representative of the reductionist position: According to him, reliance on testimony is based on the same kind of inductive inference that justifies any other belief, that is, on the evidence of accustomed conformity of testimonies to facts. We rely on others because experience has shown them to be reliable, thus we have independent reasons to believe them. The non-reductionist view is historically represented by Thomas Reid, who considered the evidence of testimony as a fundamental category of evidence neither reducible to other forms of perceptual or inferential evidence nor justifiable in terms of them. As he famously wrote: "The wise and beneficent Author of nature, who intended that we should be social creatures, and that we should receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others, hath, for these purposes implanted in our natures two principles that tally with each other. The first of these principles is a propensity to speak truth… [the second] is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us".[19]

Both reductionist and non-reductionist views of trust have developed in recent epistemology. In his 1991 article on "The role of Trust in Knowledge" John Hardwig warned epistemologists that they should acknowledge trust as "the ultimate foundation for much of our knowledge".[20] This didn't imply, according to him, a major departure from usual epistemological concerns. According to Hardwig trusting others is normatively accountable in terms of a particular class of reasons that justifies the acquisition of knowledge through testimony: *If A has reasons to believe that B has reasons to believe that p, then A has reasons to believe that p*, even if the nature of A's reasons is irreducibly different from that of B's. A's reasons to believe that p are based in her assessment of the "epistemic character" of B and in particular of his honesty and competence, whereas B's reasons to believe that p depend on his assessment of the evidence for or against p.[21] Trust is thus a matter of assessing the moral and epistemic reliability of other people on a particular subject matter. Notice that, in this account, epistemology doesn't reduce to ethics, nor the other way around. Rather, what is claimed is that epistemology should integrate some moral standards. Trust itself reduces to a mix of epistemic and moral reasons.

Other contemporary epistemologists, Alvin Goldman and Philip Kitcher in particular,[22] develop a reductionist account of trust in which considerations of social factors contribute to reasons and justifications for holding beliefs. They integrate the kind of reasoning that justifies our trust in vicarious knowledge in an overall view of cognition that may be described as rationalist. In this perspective, trusting others means having reliable criteria to assess their competence and trustworthiness. Fine distinctions can be made among these criteria. People may have different reasons to allocate authority to others, all equally rational. A person may allocate *contextual authority* to people she judges happen to be in a better epistemic position to provide some specific information. In such a case, trusting others is a way of exploiting their perception and reasoning as proxy for one's own. We use experts as "tools"[23], as we use a telescope to enhance our perception. Understanding a social process of development and distribution of knowledge may give me *indirect* criteria for trusting specific

sources. I may have a good understanding of the process of assessing and filtering information in peer reviewed journals and evidence about the quality of this process in different journal. This provides me reasons to put greater or lesser trust in the article published in these journals. Or I can be acquainted with your track records on a particular issue and judge that you have *earned* authority or, better, *reputation* on this issue.[24] The analysis of such fine-grained criteria for the allocation of trust contributes to a better epistemological description and evaluation of various systems of distribution of knowledge (and also to the design of such systems)

It would be hard to dispute (except from a radical sceptic point of view) that we often have reasons to trust others on specific subject matters and that many of our beliefs are acquired through such reasoned trust, and justifiably so. But are vicarious beliefs generally based on such reasoned trust? And when they are not, can they nevertheless be justified? It is quite debatable whether it is ever rational to accept what another person says on the simple basis that she says it. Trust in such fundamental authority is similar to the acceptance of political authority as standardly conceived, in that it involves a form of "surrender of judgement."

The difference between derived and fundamental authority (and the associated reductive and non-reductive notion of trust) is not that one is justified and the other not, it is that people who trust derived authority attend to reasons to do so in each case, whereas people who trust fundamental authority do so without attending to reasons. Proponents of the notion of fundamental authority and of a non-reductive account of trust, on the other hand, provide justifications for such authority and such trust. Reid's justification appeals to the wisdom and beneficence of the "Author of nature." A standard move in contemporary epistemology to justify trust in fundamental authority is to view it as an extension of the necessary self-trust that we grant to our past, present and future judgements. Granting no authority to ourselves would amount to a form of hyper-scepticism about the very possibility of holding justified beliefs. But if we take our own past judgements

as proxy for present ones on no other grounds than the fact that they are our judgements, couldn't we accept other people's judgements on similar grounds? Why should we be so "egoist," to quote Richard Foley, in epistemology?

Moreover, as Gibbard has argued, other people's influence has been pervasive in our past, especially in our childhood. If we admit that our norms of reasoning today have been influenced by others, we cannot but accord legitimacy to this influence and should not exclude the legitimacy of possible influence of this kind in the future. Thus, he argues, "we must accord others some fundamental authority."[25]

How good is the analogy between the authority we grant our own cognitive mechanisms and the authority we grant others? Both our cognitive mechanisms and other people can—and often do—misinform us. So we may be justified in relying on these two source of information if, or when, we have no better choice, but we are not justified in granting them absolute authority. So far the analogy holds. Our own cognitive mechanisms typically misinform us when they are malfunctioning, but otherwise, their function is to inform us; they are working for our own good, so to speak. When others misinform us, it may be that they are themselves mistaken and cognitively malfunctioning, or it may be that they are serving their interest at the expense of ours. Here the analogy breaks down: there are specific reasons, having to do with possible divergence of interests, to mistrust others, reasons that do not apply to oneself. On the other hand, there is much more accumulated knowledge and competence in our social surroundings than inside us. There are therefore specific reasons to seek from others information that could not be found in oneself, or only less reliably. The analogy breaks down a second time. Still, it has been maintained, for instance by Ruth Millikan[26], that communication is a form of cognition by proxy, and that we are as predisposed to accept communicated information as information from our senses. To see whether this is indeed the case, we must turn to the mechanisms of verbal communication, which should be the first place

to look when looking for fundamental deference.

If trusting others is as fundamental a channel through which we acquire information as are perception or memory, this should be reflected in the functioning of linguistic communication (just as it is in the mechanisms of perception and memory). Take the role of deference in semantics analysed by Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge. In his famous 1975 article, "The Meaning of Meaning", Putnam pointed out that the use of language is intrinsically deferential: I do not need to be an expert chemist to use the word "aluminium"—even if I am not able to distinguish aluminium from steel—because the "distribution of linguistic labour" as Putnam calls it, links my use of this term to the relevant knowledge possessed by the metal experts in my linguistic community. Deference to "expert" is particularly manifest in language acquisition. A child may hear the word "bat" and start using it with little or no understanding of what bats are while still intending to refer to what adults around her would refer to in using the term and tacitly deferring to their authority.

Deference regarding meaning and reference should be distinguished from a more truly epistemic attitude of acceptance of statements. Still, viewing linguistic practices as intrinsically deferential at a semantic level goes well with seeing them as deferential at an epistemic level. It is no surprise, therefore, to see Tylor Burge argue that relying on interlocution is so fundamental that we are entitled to "accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible [to us] unless there are stronger reasons not to do so" (what he calls the *Acceptance Principle*). Note that we do not *use* this principle as a justification according to Burge: we're simply "entitled to acquire information according to the principle".[27]

In his book *Testimony*, Anthony Coady exploits the Davidsonian Principle of Charity to derive an a priori justification of testimony. Language interpretation requires a massive attribution of truths to our interlocutors. Speaking the truth and sharing public meanings are so closely intertwined that the very existence of a public language would be impossible without a strong positive correlation between the sentences uttered in that language and the facts they represent. Even reductionist approaches to testimony presuppose the existence of a public language, and therefore of at least some a priori positive correlation between testimonies and their truth, since without such a correlation, there would be no language in the first place.

Burge and Coady base an a priori justification of trust in testimony on fundamental properties of language use, although different ones. For Burge it is what he sees as the purely preservative character of successful linguistic communication that entitles us to rely on what we understand other to be saying. Just as memory, he argues, understanding an utterance preserves without any addition or transformation the content of the thought communicated, and this is what makes it unproblematically acceptable. For Coady the relevant property is that the very possibility of a common language and therefore of mutual understanding presupposes a generally truthful use of speech. Burge's idea that comprehension is preservative has been questioned by Anne Bezuidenhout.[28] It totally ignores empirical accounts of the process of comprehension: making sense of what other people say is an inferential interpretive process and not a mere decoding one. I will return to this point in the final section. Here I cannot discuss in detail Coady's insightful position. Let me just mention one possible objection. What is needed for the stabilisation of shared meanings, in his Davidsonian perspective, is a mass of true and trivial statements, as is indeed found in ordinary communication. However, what an individual is told, and in particular the non-trivial statements she particularly cares about, is not a random sample of all statements. How then should the fact that, on average, most statements are true (and trivial) justify an individual's acceptance on trust and without examination of what she is told by specific interlocutors on specific topics?

A fine-grained analysis of what is at stake in the exchange of information seems needed for a better understanding of trust in knowledge acquisition. Many of the tensions that shape the debate on trust in epistemology might be

attenuated, I believe, by looking at the very nature of communication, without which the acquisition of vicarious knowledge would be impossible.

The pragmatics of trust

While epistemology has taken an interest in the empirical study of cognition, and social epistemology in the empirical study of knowledge institutions, very little attention has been paid to the empirical study of communication, even by those who, like Burge or Coady, give a central place to the nature of communication in their account of epistemic trust. The transfer of testimonial information is typically viewed as being achieved by means of a linguistic encoding by the speaker of her meaning and a decoding of that meaning by her audience. In fact, hardly anybody involved in the empirical study of comprehension accepts this "code model" of linguistic communication. Modern pragmatics, inspired by the work of the philosopher Paul Grice,[29] takes for granted that comprehension is largely inferential. As argued by Sperber and Wilson (1995), a linguistic utterance is best viewed not as an encoding of the speaker's meaning, but as a semantically rich piece of evidence from which this meaning can be inferred. The result of linguistic decoding is typically an ambiguous and gappy conceptual structure that vastly underdetermines its interpretation. Interpretation is based on this decoded conceptual structure taken together with contextual information and guided by maxims of conversation (according to Grice) or by expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself (according to Sperber & Wilson).[30]

According to Grice, successful communication involves cooperation among interlocutors. Their conversation must have a common goal (or at least a common direction), and their utterances must be contributions to this common goal. Interlocutors should conform to maxims of conversation that guide their cooperation. Among these, there are maxims regarding truthfulness, and in particular the maxim "Do not say what you believe to be false," which Grice viewed as the more important of all. A cooperative speaker will abide by the maxims and, in particular, will speak truthfully. Accepting such an account, one might view it as going a long way towards grounding epistemic trust.[31] There is an objection: people can participate in conversation in bad faith, try to deceive their audience, and pretend to be cooperative when in fact they are not. Just as the fact that the maker of an assertion presents her assertion as true whether it is true or false and therefore cannot very well be believed just because she is making an assertion, a participant in a conversation cannot be believed just because she presents herself as cooperative and in particular as truthful. This objection is reasonable but it does not make the Gricean approach irrelevant to the study of trust. Grice is not claiming that interlocutors are always genuinely cooperative, and even less that they always follow the maxims (since overt violations of the maxims play a role in interpretation). What he is claiming is that the audience must presuppose that the speaker is cooperative and follows the maxims in order properly to infer her meaning, even if, in the process or later, they may be led to revise this presupposition. So, adopting a stance of trust in the cooperativeness and in particular in the truthfulness of the speaker is a constitutive part of the comprehension process. This stance of trust is adopted without any other reason than a desire to engage in communication and understand others. In this sense, it is a form of fundamental trust. However, this trust by default and for the sake of comprehension can very easily be rescinded when it comes not just to comprehending but to accepting the content communicated, or even in the process of comprehension.

Wilson and Sperber (2002)[32] have argued that the presumption that guides comprehension is not one of cooperativeness and truthfulness but one of relevance. According to Relevance Theory, every utterance conveys a presumption of its own relevance, and this is what guides the process of comprehension. More specifically, hearers seek an interpretation that meets the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself. That is, they adopt a stance of

trust in the relevance of the speaker in order to understand her. When truthfulness is a condition for relevance, as it often is, hearers adopt a stance of trust in the speaker's truthfulness too. To give just one illustration, consider the following utterance:

Watchmaker to Mary: It will take some time to repair your watch

Literally understood, the watchmaker's statement is a truism since repairing a watch is a process extended over time. If Mary was interpreting this utterance just on the basis of a presumption of truthfulness or of a Davidsonian principle of charity, she might be satisfied with its literal truistic meaning. Looking for an interpretation that fulfils her expectation of relevance, she understands that repairing her watch will take more time than she might have expected. For instance, if she might have expected the watch to be repaired the next day, she will understand the watchmaker as meaning that it will take several days. Why not understand him to mean that it will take an absurdly high amount of time, years for instance, since this would be even more relevant? It would be relevant only if true, otherwise it would be just a poor joke. Here relevance implies truth. Mary takes the watchmaker to be committing himself not to the truth of any interpretation of "some time" in his utterance, but to the truth of the first interpretation that is relevant enough to be worth her attention. Having understood what the watchmaker means, she may then choose to question its truth, but still, she had to adopt a stance of trust in relevance, which involved a stance of trust in truthfulness as a subpart, in order to understand what her interlocutor meant.

This is not the place to discuss the merits of different pragmatic approaches such as that of Grice and that of Sperber and Wilson. Whatever their differences, they converge in suggesting that a stance of trust (that may be directly trust in truthfulness, or that may be trust in relevance which typically implies truthfulness) is an automatic part of the interpretation process. In engaging in conversation, and through this stance of trust, people develop a "common ground" or a "mutual cognitive environment".[33] They do so at least tentatively in the context, and for the sake of the verbal exchange and of social intercourse more generally. This may ready them for a full-fledged acceptance of the contents of this common ground, but this is not automatic. The stance of trust involved in communication is both fundamental and fragile, and can easily be withdrawn when it comes to accepting the content understood. Such an approach therefore meets the anti-reductionist requirement of "non gullibility": that is, the requirement that people should not automatically accept whatever their interlocutors say.

In young children, the stance of trust needed for comprehension may extend into quasi-automatic acceptance. This may be a distinctive trait of a phase of cognitive development where language acquisition, language understanding and the acquisition of information about the world are wholly intertwined processes.[34] Once, however, children master to a sufficient level the language spoken in their community and have refined their interpretive abilities, they may display a somewhat more sceptical attitude toward information that comes from others. This doesn't mean that they systematically start checking the truth or the probability of what they are told. Rather, what they become better at is checking the intentions of their interlocutors and the reasons they have to communicate with them. Thus they may start developing more fine grained heuristics for assessing credibility and trustworthiness.

A large part of our knowledge reaches us through communication and communication is a much more creative and richly interpretive process than is usually acknowledged. We do not just accept information, but we reconstruct in a manner relevant for us. Trusting other people is involved in the constructive process of understanding. There is no passive "blind trust". There is no blind trust in communication in the same sense as there are no raw sense data in perception. A stance of trust, however, is part of the interpretive competence that grounds our capacities to understand, to learn how to communicate, and to cope with the complex social networks of knowledge that make us humans. *

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Notes

[1] M. Douglas (1975) *Implicit Meanings,* Routledge and Kegan Paul.

[2] The idea of a "division of cognitive labour" is due to Philip Kitcher. Cf. Kitcher [1993: ch.8]

[3] The mutual dependence of trust in cognitive and social order has been especially stressed by Steven Shapin : "It is not the case that the moral order fails and then the cognitive order fails, or the reverse. They fail together, just as they stabilize together." Cf. Shapin [1994:35].

[4] See for example Bruno Latour (1987) *Science in Action*: *How to follow scientists and engineers through society,* Harvard University Press.

[5] Cf. H. Garfinkel (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Prentice Hall.

[6] Cf. R. B. Friedmann (1973) "On the Concept of Authority in Political Philosophy", in R.E. Flatham (ed.) *Concepts in Social and Political Philosophy,* McMillian, London.

[7] See for example R. Hardin (2002) *Trust and Trustworthiness,* Russell Sage Foundation; D. Gambetta (1988) *Trust: The Making and Breaking of Co-operative Relations,* Basil Blackwell.

[8] Cf. A. Baier (1991) *Trust, The Tanner Lectures,* Princeton University and (1996): "Confiance" in M. Canto-Sperber (ed.) *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosphie morale*, PUF, Paris, pp. 283-288.

[9] For this definition of the authority relation, cf. R. Friedman [1973], p. 77.

[10] Partially understood beliefs have been particularly investigated by Dan Sperber. Cf. D. Sperber [1982] "Apparent Irrational Beliefs", in M. Hollis & S. Lukes (eds.) *Rationality and Relativism,* Basil Blackwell, pp. 149-180; [1997] "Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs", *Mind & Language,* 12, pp.67-83. Cf. also G. Origgi (2000) "Croire sans comprendre", *Cahiers de Philosophie de l'Université de Caen,* 34, pp. 191-202.

[11] I owe the example to Dan Sperber. The particular report quoted was taken from the web site of the British Trust for Ornitology (www.bto.org). The list of reports was dated April 8th 2004.

[12] Cf. R. Axelrod (1984) *The Evolution of Cooperation,* New York, Basic Books.

[13] Cf. M. Blais (1987) "Epistemic Tit for Tat", *Journal of Philosophy*, 84, 7, pp. 363-75.

[14] Cf. J. Hardwig (1991) "The Role of Trust in Knowledge" *Journal of Philosophy,* 87, n. 12, pp. 693-708.

[15] For an account of the asymmetry between games involved in communication and iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games, see Sperber (2001) "An Evolutionary Perspective on Testimony and Argumentation", *Philosophical Topics*, 29, 1&2, pp. 401-413.

[16] O. Lagerspetz (1998) *Trust. The Tacit Demand,* Kluwer; L. Hertzberg (1988) "On the Attitude of Trust", *Inquiry,* 31; 307-322.

[17] For the notion of "stance of trust" see Richard Holton (1994) "Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 72*, pp. 63-76, although he employs it in a quite different way.

[18] On the notion of fundamental authority see A. Gibbard (1990) *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings,* Harvard University Press, R. Foley (1994) "Egoism in Epistemology", in F. Schmitt (ed.) *Socializing Epistemology,* Rowman & Littelfield, pp. 53-73.

[19] Cf. T. Reid (1764), *Inquiry into the Human Mind,* ed. T. Duggan, 1970, Chicago.

[20] Cf. J. Hardwig [1991], p. 694.

[21] Hardwig had already stated his *Principle of Testimony* in a previous paper: Cf. J. Hardwig (1985) "Epistemic Dependence", 82, 7, pp. 335-49. For a criticism of his principle, see F. Schmitt (1988) "On the Road to Social Epistemic Interdependence", *Social Epistemology*, 2.4, pp. 297-307.

²² I gather in this perspective such different approaches as that of Philip Kitcher [1993; 1994] and Alvin Goldman [1999].

²³ Cf. J. Fodor (1996) *The Elm and the Expert,* MIT Press.

²⁴ The concept of "earned authority" is analysed in Kitcher [1992].

²⁵ Cf. A. Gibbard, *cit,* p. 180.

²⁶ Cf. R. Millikan (1984) *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories,* Mit Press. For a criticism of Millikan's view of language see G. Origgi & D. Sperber (2000) "Evolution, Communication and the Proper Function of Language", in P. Carruthers, A. Chamberlain (eds.) *Evolution and the Human Mind,* Cambridge University Press.

²⁷ Cf. T. Burge (1993) "Content Preservation" *Philosophical Review*, 101, pp. 457-88.

²⁸ Cf. A. Bezuindehout (1998) "Is Verbal Communication a Purely Preservative Process?" *Journal of Philosophy,* 107, pp. 261-288.

²⁹ Cf. P. Grice (1989) *Studies in the Ways of Words,* Harvard University Press.

³⁰ Cf. D. Sperber & D. Wilson (1986/1995) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Basil Blackwell.

³¹ For an insightful analysis of the role of the Gricean framework in understanding trust, see J. Adler (1994) "Testimony, Trusting, Knowing", *Journal of Philosophy,* 94, pp.264-275; R. Moran (1999) "Believing the Speaker", unpublished manuscript.

³² Cf. D. Wilson & D. Sperber (2002) "Truthfulness and Relevance", *Mind,* 111, n. 443, pp. 583-632.

³³ For the notion of "common ground" see D. Lewis (1983) "Languages and Language", *Philosophical Papers,* vol. 1, Oxford University Press, pp. 163-188. The notion of "mutual cognitive environment" is developed in Sperber & Wilson (1986/95) *cit.*

³⁴ Cf. P. Bloom (2000) *How Children Learn the Meanings of Words*, MIT Press; G. Origgi, D. Sperber *cit.*

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