



RHODES UNIVERSITY

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Anonymous Testimony and Epistemic Responsibility

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by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine anonymous testimony in both offline (face-to-face) and online (internet and social media) interactions and the epistemic concerns it raises in relation to belief, knowledge, justification, and normative assessments of assertions. I discuss anonymous testimony as involving a relation between the hearer and the content of the testimony in comparison to ordinary cases where the speaker of an assertion is known. In anonymous testimony, the hearer has the burden of epistemic responsibility to arrive at a testimonial belief or arguably acceptance. The hearer is also accountable for the anonymous testimony in the event of re-assertion. I also assess the norms of assertion for anonymous testimony and argue that knowledge, truth, and belief norms that apply in cases where the speaker is known should not be applied to cases of anonymous speakers. Epistemologists have paid little attention to anonymous testimony and its implications on the norms of interaction. This is a study in the epistemology of testimony and it aims at providing further understanding of the epistemic responsibility of hearers of anonymous testimony.

In Chapter One, I argue that anonymous testimony can be appropriately described as testimony; where the properties of an assertion to induce belief in the hearer are sufficient to describe the assertion as testimony. I examine the kinds of anonymity and the burden of epistemic responsibility for the hearer. I introduce *basically* anonymous testimony in offline and online contexts of interaction. A basically anonymous testimony occurs where, at the instance of receiving testimony and making an epistemic decision on it, the speaker is unidentifiable to the hearer. In Chapter Two, I discuss the kinds of epistemic attitudes hearers may have when they receive anonymous testimony. I discuss reductionism, antireductionism, and entitlement theory as accounts of the justification for believing testimony. I argue that acceptance is the appropriate attitude and the entitlement theory provides a basis for accepting anonymous testimony. I also argue that practical reasons are a sufficient to accept anonymous testimony. Also, I discuss the possibility that a hearer of anonymous testimony can make a wrongful presumption by assigning an identity to a person as the speaker of an anonymous testimony. This can cause harm to the ‘person’ of the presumed speaker such as an unwarranted credibility assessment of the person by other people in the community. I also argue that making a credibility assessment of a presumed speaker constitutes harm to a proper epistemic assessment of the content.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the possibility of trust relations between an anonymous speaker and a hearer. I argue that the hearer is solely responsible for making an epistemic decision from

anonymous testimony. I argue that anonymous testimony can be relevant to a hearer given the value of its content. In Chapter Four, I discuss the applicability of knowledge, truth, belief, reasonable to believe and supportive reasons norms for the re-assertion of anonymous testimony. Hence, I argue that the supportive reasons norm, which acknowledges acceptance of an assertion, the relevance of contexts, and admits both epistemic and practical reasons to make an assertion, should guide the re-assertion of anonymous testimony. I also argue that a hearer should be epistemically conscientiousness for responsible re-assertion of received anonymous testimony.

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INTRODUCTION

A little reflection shows that there is a never-ending need to depend on the knowledge from others in everyday activities. Children depend on their parents for information, about when they were born, how to do things, and even for fundamental explanations of the world that they find curious and inquire about. Also, we look for information about things we do not know of, such as consulting maps for directions to an unknown destination, asking a doctor for medical advice, or searching online for tools for household use.

Testimony is the act of attempting to convey information, in propositional form, through face-to-face speech act, recorded speech, written words, or digital communication. Axel Gelfert notes, generally that “what is remarkable about testimony is that, in principle, *any* knowledge claim that can be stated in propositional form can be passed on via testimony.”¹ With the advent of the internet, various search engines are available to get information about diverse topics, be it politics, climate science, medicine, education, finance or entertainment. Deborah Tollefson argues that entries on Wikipedia (and the like) count as testimony since they are intended to convey information and provide the basis of beliefs.² The same can be said of other internet platforms such as Quora, Twitter, and anonymous blogs. These platforms are sometimes used for entertainment, nonetheless, social media impacts individual and social lives in important and practical ways. Information such as weather updates and a flood-affected area if travelling, policy for international travel, and information on the spread of infectious diseases are posted. Knowledge about some of these issues is unavoidable when the need arises and having the information influences the belief and actions people take on the issues. Katherine Hawley gives an overarching characterization of testimony as encompassing “the multitudinous ways in which we purport to provide information to one another, taking in idle gossip, scientific papers, encyclopaedia articles, and kindergarten teaching, amongst much else.”³

While a lot of scholarly works are presently done in the epistemology of testimony, discussions on the epistemic responsibility of the hearer in relation to the propriety of norms and

¹ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. p.19

² Tollefson, Deborah. (2009). “Wikipedia and the Epistemology of Testimony.” p.10

³ Hawley, Katherine. (2017). “Trust, Distrust and Epistemic Injustice,” p.72

re-assertion⁴ of anonymous testimony have received little attention. Discussions on testimony in general tend to take for granted the idea that the speaker and the hearer in a testimonial transmission have some knowledge of each other. I draw attention to the instances where agents receive testimony from anonymous sources to the possible end that such hearers may have no knowledge of or about the speaker. The instances of these may be few but it is not impossible to conceive that such instance occur. In this thesis, I defend the view that a hearer of anonymous testimony is epistemically responsible for appropriate belief-formation as well as re-assertion of the content.

Furthermore, I consider reasons to re-assert the anonymous testimony. Such re-assertion forms part of the flow of knowledge in the community. Hence, appropriate norms of interaction must tell us to consider the context of anonymity to build a desirable epistemic community towards virtuous interaction. Gloria Origgi makes a vital point about interactive communication and its practical and pragmatic effects on the epistemic community.

Communication is an active process through which interlocutors not only transmit and receive information, but negotiate new epistemic standards by constructing together new reasons and justifications that are heavily influenced by moral, social or political context and by the interests at stake on both sides, the speaker and the hearer. The kind of “doxastic responsibility” hearers exercise on testimonial knowledge is sensitive to the way the communicative process takes place to the many contextual factors that influence its success.⁵

We receive statements from people whom we do not know – by name, credentials, or credibility. Even when we receive a statement from a face-to-face interlocutor, we may ask, “who told you so?” in an effort to get a warrant for the assertion we just heard. I take it that “an assertion is a speech act in which something is claimed to hold”⁶ and that an assertion is what is transmitted when testimonial interactions occur.

Where the original speaker of the assertion is known, hearers can make an assessment of the speaker for credibility. If the original speaker is unknown, more questions need to be asked. What evaluation can a hearer make, of the assertion and the unknown speaker? Should I believe

⁴ I use re-assertion as referring to cases of sharing, re-transmitting, repost or retweets, where the re-asserter has some accountability and/or responsibility for the re-asserted content.

⁵ Origgi, Gloria. (2008). “Trust, Authority and Epistemic Responsibility.” p.35

⁶ Pagin, Peter. (2011). “Assertion.” SEP

an assertion made from an unknown source? What norms should guide my belief process? Under what conditions can I utilize the assertion, for belief and action, responsibly? And as we sometimes make use of such assertions in our later interactions with other people, what justification do I have to make a re-assertion of anonymous testimony? In this dissertation, I defend answers to these questions.

The testimony which involves a known speaker is different from instances where the speaker is unknown (anonymous). The context of interaction, the content of the assertion, and the possible consequences from the act of testifying are issues the hearer must consider when making an assessment of an anonymous speaker. Speakers and hearers in anonymous testimony should be assessed differently, with respect to the context of testimonial exchange. We must also recognize the common epistemic goals that are expected from a testimonial transmission such as truth, dependence, and trust.

In this dissertation, I address the following questions: How do I assess an anonymous speaker and the assertion? Under what condition(s) does an anonymous declaration deserve our consideration for belief? Should I believe an anonymous post on the internet? Should I re-assert and will I be justified in re-asserting the anonymous testimony I received? These questions in the context of anonymity put the speaker and the hearer on the evaluative stand separately, as agents in the transmission of knowledge or belief. The hearer is the only agent who is *actually* being evaluated for epistemic responsibility.

In Chapter One, I discuss the nature of anonymous testimony, the kinds of anonymity, and the epistemic responsibility of the hearer in the context of anonymous testimony. I argue that Jennifer Lackey's idea of hearertestimony best explains how anonymous assertions can qualify as testimony. An anonymous assertion is testimony to the extent that the hearer identifies a belief-inducing content in the anonymous assertion. I discuss kinds of anonymity as intentional and unintentional anonymity. I introduce basic anonymity as instances where the speaker of anonymous testimony is unidentifiable to the hearer in the moment of epistemic deliberation on the anonymous testimony. Hence, an anonymous assertion can be referred to as basically anonymous testimony when the hearer does not have the identity of the speaker for the assessment of the content of the anonymous testimony.

On the nature of testimony, Peter Graham describes the act of testifying with a focus on the speaker in the interaction.⁷ However, the act of testifying alone cannot sufficiently capture the nature of testimonial exchange that involves another agent who receives the assertion. Graham's view suggests that the basis of assessing testifying is on the various ways by which the speaker's intention in the act of testifying is expressed. However, with regard to the intention and belief, it is appropriate that the hearer must also be assessed in the act of receiving the testimony. Jennifer Lackey provides the distinction between the position of speaker and hearers in testimonial interaction.⁸ Her explication of speaker testimony and hearer testimony provides an assessment of speakers and hearers and the context in which testimony is given, received, believed, accepted, or acted upon. The distinction provides a basis on which anonymous testimony can be properly described as testimony notwithstanding the 'absence' of the speaker in the interaction. Hence, I situate the nature of anonymous testimony as a kind of hearer testimony, where the focus of epistemic evaluation is on the recipient or hearer.

What is anonymous testimony? Anonymity can be described as unknownness, non-identifiability, unnameability, or namelessness of a person.⁹ These descriptions cover whatever extent to which a person is unknown, non-identified or unnamed: a stranger unknown to a tourist by character, a handwritten street sign that does not identify its writer or a post on the internet without the name or identity of the author. Anonymity occurs in various aspects of human activities: philanthropy, crime, politics, and media.

Sanford Goldberg, one of the few scholars who have done some work on the anonymity of assertions, argues that "anonymous assertions do not carry the same 'promise' of the speaker's relevant epistemic authoritativeness that ordinary assertions do."¹⁰ He argues that anonymous assertions have less epistemic value and authoritativeness than instances where the assertions are duly public, that is, cases where the speakers are known.¹¹ In his characterization of what anonymous assertions are, he shows how anonymous assertions affect the epistemic community in the relationship that occurs between the hearer and the content and the context of anonymity itself.¹² Goldberg's concern for the reduced epistemic quality of anonymous assertions, with

⁷ Graham, Peter. (1997). "What is Testimony?" p.227

⁸ Lackey, Jennifer, (2006). "The Nature of Testimony" pp.187-190

⁹ Bracz, Michal, et al, (2019). "The Logical Structure of Intentional Anonymity." pp.1-3

¹⁰ Goldberg, Sanford, (2013). "Anonymous Assertions." p.135

¹¹ Goldberg, Sanford, pp. 136-137

¹² Goldberg, Sanford, p. 137

particular reference to the internet, shows there is a need for increased epistemic awareness as information is transmitted. Any hearer joins the chain of communications as an epistemic agent with the potential to transmit the information to another person. The act of transmission can be taken as a re-assertion of the information where the agent (hearer) takes the place of a speaker in transmitting what she has previously received. This transmission may depend on the need for and relevance of the information. However, the anonymity of the speaker puts a hearer in a position of greater epistemic responsibility in transmitting that information. This is because if the speaker is unknown, the hearer is responsible for reasonable belief-formation and must assume accountability for the information should she re-assert the information to another person. Anonymity can occur depending on the interest of the speaker to be anonymous, which will be intentional and can also be unintentional.¹³

A speaker can be anonymous deliberately, such that from the initial assertion, the source is hidden and makes a conscious effort to remain so. This could be for reasons such as the sensitivity of the information, the safety, and protection of the source, the privacy of the speaker, or mischief on the part of the speaker. In cases of sexual harassment, racism, or whistleblowing on organized crime, anonymous sources could be victims with the intention to get justice and/or for the hearers to be informed of the effects of these issues on individuals or society. For instance, an anonymous note placed around a park that a known paedophile is present in that area could be intended to make parents more conscious and careful in watching children when playing in that park. This kind of tip is anonymous because of the sensitivity of the issues and possible backlash against the writer from those who may oppose their intentions. On the other hand, anonymity can happen when there is little to no trace of the source of the information, which is not by a deliberate act on the part of the speaker but possibly by situations such as a long stretch of the testimonial chain, where the actual source is too far removed from the immediate transmission of the information. Possibly, the original form of the content also is lost, and one reason for this is that the testimonial chain (or web) is quite intricate.

Emanuele Arielli rightly notes that "free circulation of information and opinion is an important feature of the digital age."¹⁴ The capability to transmit information at the click of a button has enabled an intricate web of information transmission. The online community is a social

¹³ Bracz, Michal et al. (2019). "The Logical Structure of Intentional Anonymity." p.5

¹⁴ Arielli, Emanuele. (2018). "Sharing as Speech Act." p.256

'space' where activities are similar to face-to-face interpersonal interactions. From asking for information, creating social bonds, giving help, and marketing products and services, a lot of activities are carried out on the internet. Individuals also use the internet for personal desires, ranging from business to leisure and entertainment. The use of the internet involves setting up direct communication with other individuals, and giving and receiving information directly from people or the general public. Social communication has widened and has become increasingly complex in recent times. The use of the internet as a platform of communication has become popular among individuals and institutions.

A speaker may be unknown to the hearer as at when she receives the testimony. The speaker's identity may be known later, yet anonymity is involved at the time the hearer received the testimony. This is because the hearer makes an epistemic deliberation with the full awareness that the speaker is anonymous. This is basic anonymity. This is the form of anonymity I focus on in my arguments. A piece of testimony is basically anonymous if, at the moment of receiving the testimony and making an evaluation of it, the speaker is unknown to the hearer.

In Chapter Two, I discuss views on the justification for anonymous testimony; reductionism, antireductionism, assurance view, and entitlement thesis. I argue that anonymous testimony can be accepted justifiedly, notwithstanding the epistemic deficiency. I argue that Tyler Burge's entitlement view provides justification for accepting anonymous testimony. Burge's view, as I adopt it, is consistent with accepting an assertion and acting as if it is true even when it is not believed or there is no sufficient basis to make a belief decision. I argued that hearers should accept anonymous testimony. They are entitled to do so given the intelligibility of the content and the use of their rational resources for deliberation.

Reductionists and anti-reductionists characterize positions regarding what kind of evidence is needed for testimony to be justifiedly believed, independent of the speaker or qua speaker. For reductionists, "the justification for testimony has to be ultimately reducible to other epistemic sources – such as perception, memory and inference."¹⁵ Reductionists argue that hearers of testimony have the epistemic duty to exercise their rational autonomy in believing responsibly by assessing an assertion in line with the available evidence.¹⁶ In receiving basically anonymous testimony, a reductionist will argue that a hearer should not believe the testimony. This is because

¹⁵ Brauer, Felix. (2020). "Looking Beyond Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism." p.1

¹⁶ Fricker, Elizabeth. (1994). "Against Gullibility." p.133

there is no knowledge of the speaker to carry out a credibility assessment. This does not mean that the hearer cannot appeal to other justificatory sources as mentioned above. The implication will be that the speaker's input in the assertion received is disregarded in the hearer's deliberation. It is appropriate that a hearer who acknowledges that an assertion was made by another person should be able to know if the person has sufficient basis for making it. If this is impossible then, the hearer has reason not to believe such an assertion.

Anti-reductionists claim that in a basic interaction, when a speaker makes an assertion, a hearer ought to believe. The act of testifying itself provides justification for the testimony to be believed. According to Coady, the speaker's telling has epistemic force for the assertion to be believed.¹⁷ There is the recognition that the speaker's intention is to communicate truly suffices to provide justification to be believed.¹⁸ This view suggests that a hearer should believe anonymous testimony. The anonymity of the speaker, notwithstanding, the assertion is produced by an act of testifying. The anti-reductionist views will suggest that the hearer should recognise this act of testifying and that it provides adequate support for believing the testimony. This epistemic attitude is inappropriate. In cases where the act of telling or testifying can be observed such as face-to-face communication or where there are available means of identifying a person as the speaker, there can be a basis for believing. This is because, in the moment of interaction, a hearer absorbs available observation to arrive at a belief. This is not so in anonymous testimony, the hearer's interaction is with the assertion only, hence arriving at a belief decision does not involve the speaker or any observation in receiving the assertion.

For entitlement theorists, sufficient reason for believing is derived from the recognition of the rational ability of agents and the intelligibility of testimonial content.¹⁹ For Tyler Burge, "entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject".²⁰ It is a default position that does not adduce any empirical principle of observation for justification when receiving the word of others. It is on this basis that I will argue that the entitlement theory can be understood as providing a reason for *accepting* anonymous testimony. The absence of a speaker or the non-identification of the source of the testimony does not imply that the hearer should believe or not believe the testimony as this will suggest a duty on the part of

¹⁷ Coady, C.A.J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. p.

¹⁸ Ross, Angus. (1986) *Why do we Believe what we are Told?* p.78

¹⁹ Burge, Tyler. (1993) "Content Preservation," p.466

²⁰ Burge, Tyler. p. 458

the hearer to know the speaker before making an epistemic decision. As a hearer receives an anonymous testimony, she may accept it in order to act as at when needed. This lays the weight of accountability on the rational capacity of hearers in receiving anonymous testimony who will have to engage appropriate norms for epistemic deliberations and possible action on the testimony.

Belief processes can result in different outcomes; belief, disbelief, or suspension of belief. This will be affected by the extent to which the agent cares about the content (even in re-assertion). She needs to be mindful that the autonomous reflection she engages in may be influenced by other social values that may not necessarily require that the credibility of the source be assessed. An agent's belief deliberation can also bring a position involving acceptance. L.J. Cohen provides a distinction between belief and acceptance as follows;

Accepting is thus a mental act ... or a pattern, system, or policy of mental action, rather than a speech act. What a person accepts may in practice be reflected in how he or she speaks or behaves, but it need not be ... Acceptance implies commitment to a policy of premissing that *p*. Belief that *p*, on the other hand, is a disposition to feel it true that *p*, whether or not one goes along with the proposition as a premiss ... One may feel convinced by the evidence of its being true that *p*, one may feel surprised to learn of an event that is evidence against its being true that *p*, one may feel pleased at its being true that *p*, and so on. You answer the question whether you accept that *p* by making or reporting a decision. You answer the question whether you believe that *p* by introspecting or reporting what you are disposed to feel about the matter (even if you have never consciously thought about it before).²¹

In accepting testimony, a hearer occupies a position where he can make a statement based on the thought that *p* may be true not that he believes *p* is true or not. A hearer seeks to believe an assertion based on the credibility, reliability, expertise or authority of the speaker or truth of the statement b factual means. When a hearer accepts an assertion, it implies that he is perchance unable to attain a position of full belief on a particular matter. Cohen notes that a person who does not fully believe *p* can justifiably accept *p*.²² Acceptance occurs within the bounds of the will of the agent to make a choice on the premise to speak or act. To (fully) believe entails having a

²¹ Cohen, L.J.,(1989) "Belief and Acceptance", p.369

²² Cohen, L.J. pp. 369-370

disposition that is not subject to the will of the person. It often occurs independent of the person's capacity for choice, such as facts.²³

What epistemic attitude must a hearer hold in response to receiving anonymous testimony? Generally, there are conditions for justifiedly believing testimony on both sides of the interaction involved. On the one hand, a speaker having adequate reasons to support making the testimony. On the other hand, a hearer must also have sufficient reasons to believe the testimony. The hearer's reason need not necessarily be related to the speaker's reason for giving the testimony. In receiving anonymous testimony, I discuss three epistemic attitudes a hearer may hold; believing, not believing and being entitled to accept the testimony. I argue that the most appropriate is for the hearer to accept the testimony, just in case the reasonable thing to do is to act as if the testimony is true. I will then argue that this provides a basis for which the hearer can be held accountable for the content of the testimony where the source is not known. This view will also enable hearers to be more aware of the context and content of the interaction they receive and the belief decisions they make. These positions can be understood in the normative frames that some views on the justification for testimonial beliefs and examine how each applies to anonymous testimony.

The boundaries set towards believing or accepting an assertion are not by any means restricted to an ideal instance.²⁴ The boundaries shift as needed in correlation to our epistemic needs, goals, and context. So, in making an assertion, I may decide to assert based on epistemic reasons while also considering non-epistemic reasons. Matt Weiner notes that there is a spectrum of possibilities between ideals and practicalities.²⁵ He argues for a pluralistic idea of epistemic norms as "there will be not just a plurality of epistemic norms but potentially an entire coordinate system of them, each appropriate to a different epistemological project"²⁶ describing what is involved in the hearer's deliberations about whether to act upon or re-assert an anonymous speaker's assertion. This implies that in the exercise of speech act, there is an interdependence that occurs as beliefs, actions and knowledge often intersect which results in making decisions in the recognition of all such that is involved. There is a complexity that comes with testimonial transmissions and the motivation to be guided by appropriate norms. This is because testimonial transmissions involve a broader social context than an assertion; contexts that do not require the

²³ Cohen, L.J., (1989) p.371

²⁴ Littlejohn, Clayton. (2014). "Introduction", *Epistemic Norms: New Essays on Action, Belief, and Assertion*. p.2

²⁵ Weiner, Matt. (2014). "The Spectra of Epistemic Norms.", p.201

²⁶ Weiner, Matt. "The Spectra of Epistemic Norms", p.202

necessary act of speech.²⁷ The interaction of the speaker and the audience should not be seen from the point of making assertions only, but also from receiving the assertions. As speaker norms guide making assertions, there are hearer norms that inform the epistemic decision to believe the assertion made. Hence, the positioning of the agents involved in the testimonial exchange determines the sort of norm applied, violations noted, or the criticism involved. The act of testifying does involve the weight of the speaker's credibility on an assertion. There are resulting social values that arise from testimonial functions that occur in our interactions that are beyond the speech acts that we make.

As earlier noted, one thing that draws our attention to the existence of a rule-governed belief or act is a violation of a rule concerning that belief or act. Hence in a single instance of testimonial exchange, it occurs that there are various kinds of reactions to beliefs and actions that denote the violation of norms which also vary and are applied and expressed in arriving at our assessment of the individuals, beliefs and actions. Hence, the propriety of norms must be applied in a manner that recognizes all the peculiarities of the instance of having a testimonial exchange. The relations of knowers in the testimonial transmission, the content of testimony, and other social indicators such as expertise and competence inform the norms that are to be applied and the responsibility that accrues to each individual involved either as a speaker or hearer. My focus, however, is towards the hearer's responsibility as an autonomous knower and as a potential re-asserter of testimony received..

I also argue that there is the possibility of wrongful presumption in anonymous testimony. A hearer presumes that a particular person, identifiable to her, is the speaker. While it is possible to be correct with the presumption, I argue that this act of attaching an identity of the speaker of anonymous testimony is an improper attitude in the assessment of the content of the anonymous testimony. If the hearer makes such a presumption, there is the possibility that the credibility assessment will in turn influence belief-formation. I argue that the hearer of anonymous testimony should engage with the content only in making an assessment. For instance, Brenda gets home from work and finds a note at her door which reads that her husband is cheating. There is no name or address of the writer, but the note is meaningful and intelligible. She has no clue who the writer is. In a moment of pondering whether to believe or not to believe the content, she thinks Felly must be the author of the note. Her assessment of Felly will depend on background beliefs, interests and

²⁷ Johnson, Casey R. (2015). "Testimony and the Constitutive Norm of Assertion." p.357

the kind of trusting relationship she has with Felly. Being right about Felly as the author of the note will be a case of luck while being wrong will be another issue altogether. It is an epistemic wrong against Felly to be presumed as the speaker and thereby assessed as such. This is a wrongful presumption if she identifies a particular person as being responsible for writing the note and then makes an assessment of the person based on her belief.

In Chapter Three, I argue that there is no substantive trust relation between a hearer and an anonymous speaker. While there may be a baseline of trust between strangers who engage in interaction, it is difficult to identify such with an anonymous speaker. The hearer must be aware that there can be no buck-passing in cases where she will need to explain the assessment of the content. I argue that the hearer of an anonymous testimony must assume epistemic responsibility for the content of the testimony. On the attribution of epistemic responsibility, who is responsible for the content believed? What epistemic responsibilities do the speaker and hearer have in each of their positions of giving and receiving testimony?

In giving testimony, it is expected that there is a relation of trust between the speaker and the hearer and that the speaker delivers both the content of testimony and a call for trust in interaction. For Jonathan Adler, “testimony only succeeds if there is trust”, and this seems so in many instances of transmission of information.²⁸ In other words, the hearer trusting the speaker as asserting truly. This implies that, if there is no trust then there is no requirement for believing the testimony, and if there is any need (such as what is at stake, given the content of the testimony) to pay attention to the assertion some kind of extra evidence may be needed. This leads to the use of critical operative resources, such as internal deliberation and checking for defeaters toward making epistemic decisions that will be epistemically rational for knowledge so gained, provided that the hearer has no conclusive reason to distrust the speaker.²⁹ Broadly, the presence of defeaters and checking alternative sources are features that show that a speaker is not reliable. Perhaps S has had previous interactions with H, where epistemic assessments have shown S to have epistemic failings such as lying. A lack of confidence or coherent delivery of S’s assertion is a defeater, although S may be reliable. The unreliability of S is also a reason not to believe her assertion, such as S not having the requisite knowledge of the subject matter of the testimony. So, the trust often depends on the level of interaction that interlocutors have with one another, and this affects the normative

²⁸ Adler, Jonathan. (1994). “Testimony, Trust and Knowing.” p. 264

²⁹ Adler, Jonathan, p. 270

attitude that H takes to S's assertion, and confirmation of testimony depends on the availability of relevance and sufficient evidence.

Testimonial transmission is often analysed as a three-component relation: the source, content, and recipient. The source is the speaker (S) of the assertion and the recipient is the hearer (H) to whom the assertion is directed. The content is the proposition or statement in transmission and this is given epistemic force or value by the reason of being asserted by the S and by the S's trustworthiness, but it can yet be evaluated independently as a proposition (by the hearer). In some cases, there is minimal or no direct interaction between the interlocutors to facilitate an expression of trust, such as when the speaker is anonymous. Where the speaker is unknown, it becomes a two-component relation; between the content and the hearer. The anonymity of the speaker has consequences for the hearer of anonymous testimony in relation to trust, evidence, credibility, justification and the further use of such testimony as re-assertion in the chain of transmission or even as the basis for action. Hence, the hearer should believe responsibly.

Gelfert expresses the fundamental challenge of the evolution of communication via the internet as follows,

As we look around us today, we see fundamental shifts in the way we receive, filter and process social information. Much communication takes place electronically, via email and social networking sites, and requests for information are increasingly fulfilled by relying on internet search engines whose algorithms, in turn, take into account information about the user – either because it was freely volunteered by the user upon registration or because it was extracted from his search history and other electronic traces. How do we assess such sources of information, given that they often lack attributability to specific epistemic agents ...? Since we can expect the line between (recognisably human) testimony and electronic information to become increasingly blurred, finding ways of accommodating such new forms of communication and learning within our philosophical theories of knowledge is an important task ... It would, of course, be naïve to expect changes in our preferred communication technologies to suddenly give rise to radical changes in our conceptions of justification, knowledge and testimony; however, it would be equally naïve to think that the dominant form of testimony will forever remain of the interpersonal, face-to-face variety that currently serves as an 'intuition pump' for many of our best-developed epistemological theories of testimony.³⁰

³⁰ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. p.225

The recognition of online posts and contents received as having epistemic value is often dependent on the hearer's epistemic assessment, which is sometimes influenced by the inability to make inquiries about the source of information. The quick rate at which information is shared across the internet and social media platforms may make it impossible to know the actual source of information that may not be traceable. The hearer is thus left with only being able to assess the content if it is of interest or relevance to her. For instance, in a case of cross-links or cross-posting, Tara opens her Facebook page and sees she has received a shared post from Instagram by a friend, she follows the link to Instagram and then discovers it was originally posted from Twitter, and she decides not to go further for want of time or lack of interest. She then looks at the content to see if it is to be believed or not to be believed. Scepticism about information from the internet is often about the source of the information, the author, and his or her authenticity or expertise. Nonetheless, recipients of these anonymous online posts use the information by sharing it with other internet users or in face-to-face interaction even when the source of the information is not confirmed.

Internet users who receive anonymous content need to accept this epistemic burden of responsibility, to be able to make more rational and responsible when they assume the role of speaker of the content. Notwithstanding the possibility of fact-checking information, individuals do belief-induced acts, some of which are made from false premises. This is at the core of the challenge to the epistemic situation on the internet. The use of the internet in the speed and reach of information has made it easy for claims and counterclaims. Sometimes, the internet user is put in a state where she may have to reason out which claim appears to have warrant to be believed. This state of epistemic choice is the daunting task that internet users must overcome or try to exercise their epistemic agency appropriately.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the re-assertion of anonymous testimony and the appropriate attitude of a virtuous hearer of anonymous testimony who decides to re-assert. The norms for hearers of anonymous testimony guide the responsible and reliable formation of testimonial beliefs. This implies that the hearer must be aware of the context in which she receives information and retain that awareness in the event that there is a possible re-assertion of the testimony. A context-dependent norm will recognise the context in which the assertion is made. Hence, it is acceptable to say that knowledge, truth, and belief may be relevant in applying the appropriate

norm in a speech act of assertion. Non-epistemic considerations may also be relevant for arriving at a proper assertion and should be considered in anonymous testimony, recognising the possibility of re-assertion. In other words, the context of testimonial interaction influences the normative attitude that is appropriate for the hearer to adopt when receiving and when making re-assertions. One medium through which this is evident and relevant is online transmissions. Retweets, reposts, and other ways of sharing online content are forms of re-assertion where a hearer transmits the content received to others. A re-asserter may not be accountable for the content but she is responsible for the transmission of it and her agency is assessed as such. I argue that the act of re-asserting anonymous testimony should tend towards building an epistemically virtuous community, both in online and offline transmissions. Individuals in ordinary interactions should pay attention to anonymous information as a duty. More importantly, when the speaker is anonymous, and the testimony may be re-asserted, the hearer as a re-asserter (becoming a speaker) should apply speaker norms in the context of the testimony received. Hence, the recipient of anonymous testimony should be guided by a norm that indicates the transition of a hearer-turned-speaker. This emphasizes the rational power to make epistemic decisions that reside in epistemic agents. Therefore, the autonomy of the re-asserter is all that is available for epistemic scrutiny as the re-transmitter of anonymous testimony.

The motivation to re-assert testimony should be determined by the content of the testimony rather than the source. There may be a non-epistemic reason to re-assert testimony - a pragmatic consideration. The reasons to re-assert an anonymous testimony may not be based on believing, the assertion, or the truth of it. The consequences that are involved in the having knowledge of the content may outweigh the epistemic reasons. Pragmatic reasons such as avoiding harm, and protecting lives and property are adequate reasons to support re-assertion. This does not imply that epistemic reasons are not considered where pragmatic reasons are forceful and epistemic reasons are minimal such as in the case of acceptance as an epistemic attitude in receiving anonymous testimony.

In re-asserting testimony from anonymous sources, the re-asserter must pay more attention to his epistemic responsibility and his mode of interaction, if the hearer does not re-assert anonymously. The re-asserter becomes the agent accountable for the re-assertion, although not responsible for generating the original testimony. Hence, transmitting under the appropriate epistemic conditions is a duty for the re-asserter who becomes epistemically accountable for the

anonymous testimony. More so, as re-asserters, agents hold a level of responsibility for re-transmitting anonymously received assertions. I situate my arguments in the framework of epistemic virtue to affirm the autonomy of the hearer in epistemic self-trust and deliberation to arrive at a reasonable epistemic decision for responsible re-assertion. As social interactions expand with more non-personal interactions due to increased digital communication, it is pertinent that individuals are conscientious of the assertions (content) they receive without the knowledge of the source. I aim to contribute to the discussion on testimony, offline or online, by paying attention to how we assess and utilize anonymous information.

CHAPTER ONE: TESTIMONY AND ANONYMITY

1.0 Introduction

One feature which distinguishes testimony from other sources of knowledge (perception, memory, and inference) is that it involves another agent in the interaction. In a basic testimonial exchange, a speaker (S) tells a hearer (H) an assertion, and H comes to believe what is asserted. There is the distinct recognition of the persons in obtaining knowledge or justification for a belief. Unlike perception, memory, and inference, testimony involves the input of the judgments of another person in acquiring knowledge or justification. The act of testifying can be taken as an action of the speaker as an agent. While the act of testifying identifies the speaker's intention, the practice of testimony involves more. For Jennifer Lackey, testimony is "an intentional activity on the part of the speaker or a source of belief or knowledge for the hearer."³¹ Testimony identifies the relationship of agents in the transmission of beliefs or knowledge. Hence, the nature of the testimony, involves having a speaker who testifies (makes an assertion) and a hearer who receives the assertion.

The nature of testimony involves a speaker's speech act of asserting (testifying) and a speaker being a source of belief for the hearer. This may also involve a hearer getting knowledge and justification from the speaker's assertion. In anonymous testimony, there is a different context in the relation between the speaker and the hearer and their relation to the assertion. The context is different due to the speaker being anonymous; in which case, the act of testifying is not observed by the hearer. Hence, the hearer is the only agent identifiable in the interaction. It is from this context that the hearer engages in deliberation to arrive at a belief.

In this chapter, I discuss the nature of testimony and testifying in relation to an anonymous speaker and the kinds of anonymity. I also discuss some mediums of interaction where the speaker is anonymous. I examine situations under which testimony involves basic anonymity, that is, in terms of non-identification and untraceability of a speaker.³² I argue that a proper understanding of anonymous testimony and specifically epistemic responsibility in testimonial transmission is contextual. It should recognise contexts in which speakers and hearers relate and identify specific

³¹ Lackey, J., (2006), "The Nature of Testimony." p. 187

³² Steve Matthews (2010), Helen Nissenbaum (1999), and K.A. Wallace (1999) have similar views of anonymity in analyses.

conditions that apply to each context. I argue that anonymous assertions are testimony to the extent that they elicit belief in the hearer. Even where there is no observed speaker-hearer relation in the interaction, the hearer has the content of the assertion to engage with to arrive at a belief, thereby taking the assertion as having the character of being testimony. Therefore, I argue that Lackey's view on the nature of testimony allows us to situate anonymous assertions as hearer testimony. This is because it identifies the relation of each agent to the content in the testimonial exchange distinct from the other agent. It also provides a characterization by which anonymous assertions can be rightly called testimony.

I also attempt to identify a parallel in the transmission of oral testimony and the sharing on the internet in recent times. Just as it may occur in oral transmissions of assertions, where the original speaker may become unknown in later transmissions, the identity of the original speaker may be lost in written or digital communication. I examine how the anonymity of the source of posts on the internet impacts recipients' use of online content. I also argue that received content from the internet should involve the application of norms that are determined by the context of the content (testimony) received, with paying attention to the content notwithstanding the anonymity of the source. I argue that interactions on the internet also involve anonymity in various forms and as well need to be assessed for epistemic propriety. I discuss briefly how internet media policies seek to regulate the use of anonymity among internet users and maintain a reasonable flow of information in society. I argue that a recipient of online content can only have a baseline of trust towards the author.

1.1 Graham and Lackey on the nature of testimony

Testimonial transmission is understood with the presupposition that a speaker (S) transmits information to a hearer (H). Also, that both S and H recognise the fundamental principles of dependence, trust, truthfulness, reasonable belief and accountability in the community of persons. These fundamental principles form part of the basis of inquiry into the different views on the nature of testimony and the implications for human interaction. In what way(s) can we situate anonymous assertions as testimony? I examine Peter Graham and Jennifer Lackey's views of testimony and situate anonymous assertions as testimony despite being epistemically impoverished.

Graham's Account of Testimony

The act of testifying focuses on the speaker in a testimonial interaction. Although testifying is an act that the speaker does, there is a presupposition that there is a hearer in the interaction, who will possibly make the act of testifying complete. Testifying is dependent on the speaker's agency, and what she should or not do when asserting.

Peter Graham argues that a speaker *S* testifies by making some statement *p* if and only if

- G1. *S*'s stating that *p* is offered as evidence that *p*
- G2. *S* intends that his audience believe that he has the relevant competence, authority or credentials to state truly that *p*
- G3. *S*'s statement that *p* is believed by *S* to be relevant to some question that he believes is disputed or unresolved (which may or may not be *p*) and is directed at those whom he believes to be in need of evidence on the matter.³³

Graham argues that in an instance of testifying, a speaker presents evidence for credibility and intention to communicate. I follow Graham in his broad use of evidence as "a statement or a fact that epistemically supports another statement or fact,"³⁴ that is, good reason to believe that *p*. In G2, there is an expectation that the audience believes based on the credibility of *S*. The situation that a speaker's statement provides warrant, is actually known and credible does not happen all the time in testimonial exchange.

We testify all the time, but we do not spread knowledge, or even provide evidence... every time we make a statement that *p* with the intention of supporting *p*.³⁵

In Graham's view, testimony can occur when the speaker makes a statement without having justification for it. So a speaker can testify only with the intention that the hearer finds her credible to support the statement. Evidence or justification is not always available when testimony occurs."³⁶ A speaker needs only to believe that *p* is relevant to the subject matter and the audience engaging in the testimonial exchange. That the speaker has knowledge of *p* is not required to make an assertion. The speaker only intends that the audience believes her credible to testify, which avoids the basic condition of actually being credible.

³³ Graham, Peter J., (1997). "What is Testimony?" 1997, p. 227

³⁴ Graham, Peter J., p. 227

³⁵ Graham, Peter J., p. 231

³⁶ Graham, Peter J., p. 232

The conditions for testimony that Graham gives are subjective to the extent that they move away from the requirements of the speaker knowing p and the hearer knowing S as credible to the speaker believing p and the hearer believing the speaker as credible. This provides a way in which one can testify based on the idea that a hearer accepts the testimony, not that a hearer will necessarily believe the testimony. This means that the hearer may receive the statement without a belief assessment, a sort of suspension of judgment, perhaps until she has access to further reason to believe. Where there is sufficient reason to support the testimony, the hearer must consider such reason. In a situation where there are restricted means of finding justification for the testimony, the statement will have to be accepted as is: it is still testimony.

Graham's account of the nature of testimony emboldens the place of the speaker in the testimonial exchange. It focuses on the intention of the speaker to make an assertion and the view that the hearer should justifiably believe. While he claims that not all instances of testimony lead to justifiably believing a speaker, his view implies that the credibility of the speaker is open to the hearer to make a belief decision. However, the credibility of an anonymous speaker is not open to the hearer either as potential or actual as Graham implies. If the nature of testimony should capture the act of communication for all agents involved in the interaction, then Graham's view does not suffice to explain instances where the act of testifying is not observed but the intention to convey information and be believed is recognised by the speaker. His view implies that the singular act of testifying is sufficient to establish that a testimonial interaction has occurred and takes for granted the hearer's part in the interaction. This does not fit with the nature of receiving anonymous assertions as it is the hearer who is the identifiable agent in the interaction. Although Graham's account of testifying does not capture the cases of speakers of anonymous assertions, it indicates that the act of testifying and receiving testimony can be distinctly analysed.

Lackey's Account of Testimony

Lackey's recognition of the difference between *testimony as an intentional activity on the part of the speaker* and *testimony as a source of beliefs or knowledge for the hearer*³⁷ provides a more plausible view of identifying anonymous assertions as testimony. The speaker-hearer interaction with the statement should be relevant for testimony to occur. Lackey agrees with Graham's view

³⁷ Lackey J., (2006). "The Nature of Testimony." p.187

which captures the idea that testimony still occurs even if it does not produce knowledge or provides justification for the hearer to believe.³⁸ However, she argues that it does not sufficiently explain the hearer's reasonably believing or knowing from the testimony or a hearer believing a statement that is not directed at her. That is, Graham's view does not capture cases of testifying where the intention to convey information is not directed at a particular person but received by someone as conveying information. For Lackey, it is not necessary that in conveying information that *p*, there must be giving and receiving information at the same instance. Also, it is not necessary that the intention of the speaker to communicate be immediately presented to the hearer when the content of the testimony. Even if the speaker's intention is not received at any other point in time, there is still a communication of content.

For Lackey, the act of communication does not have to occur close together in time such that the testimonial interaction is 'complete' having the speaker and the hearer fulfilling their epistemic roles.

I am construing the concept of an act of communication broadly. It does not require that the speaker intends to communicate to others; instead, it requires merely that the speaker intends to express communicable content.³⁹

It is the recognition of communicable content that establishes a testimonial interaction. For Lackey, communicable content comes with an intention to express it. It is perhaps a product of the intention to convey information in the act of communication.⁴⁰ This does not imply that every intelligible content expressed by an agent is communicable content. Lackey claims that communicable content has to be asserted by a speaker. So acts of communication such as bodily gestures do not count as having communicable content if not observed.⁴¹ Hence, identifying the speaker's intention to convey communicable content is distinct from the hearer receiving the content as a source of belief. She states that testimony (T) occurs when

T: S testifies that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content, (1) S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p*, or (2) *a* is reasonably taken as conveying the information that *p*.⁴²

³⁸ Lackey J., (2006). "The Nature of Testimony." p.181

³⁹ Lackey J., p. 187

⁴⁰ Lackey, J., p.187

⁴¹ Lackey, J., pp. 186-187

⁴² Lackey, J., p.193

For Lackey, the disjunction above provides a definition of testimony that encompasses both the speaker and the hearer. In the non-exclusive sense, this disjunction is admitting cases where both (1) and (2) can occur simultaneously. This view appreciates the different positioning of the speaker and hearer to the context in which a statement is made and received as distinct acts in the testimonial exchange. It shows the different epistemic relations speakers and hearers may have to the assertion.

Recognising the communicable content in the act of communication is a common factor in the interaction between the speaker and the hearer. On the part of the speaker, testifying occurs as follows:

Speaker Testimony: S testifies_s that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p* (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content.

A speaker who intends to express communicable content may not have an immediate audience, but it satisfies the condition of speaker testimony to convey information. This implies that some interactions (such as posthumous notes, autobiographies and personal diaries) which the speaker may not direct at anyone in particular, have communicable content and as such, are speaker testimony. This implies that speaker testimony elucidates the act of testifying on the part of the speaker without an attachment to the expectation to be believed or justifiedly believing on the part of the hearer.

When a hearer receives the content of an assertion, she recognises the communicative act of the speaker, not necessarily the intention to communicate. This implies that while the hearer identifies the content as conveying information, she may not identify the purpose or intention of the speaker for making the assertion. The role of the hearer in establishing that testimonial interaction occurs involves the hearer engaging with the content.

Hearer Testimony: S testifies_h that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if H, S's hearer, reasonably takes *a* as conveying the information that *p* (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content.⁴³

⁴³ Lackey, J., (2006). "The Nature of Testimony." pp. 188-190

This definition entails that when a hearer receives communicable content even without the speaker's intention to direct the assertion at her, it is hearer testimony. The recognition that a speaker intends to communicate is sufficient for the hearer to take the content of the speech as testimony.

Hearer testimony is compatible with anonymous testimony as it focuses on receiving the assertion by the hearer. It does not require that the speaker intends to convey information directly to the hearer. It follows that where the S is absent or unknown in interaction, a hearer receives testimony by taking the S's statement as having communicable content. It is within these conditions of hearer testimony, that I examine other issues such as epistemic responsibility, trust, and justification in anonymous testimony.

1.2 What is anonymous testimony?

Anonymity in testimonial transmissions involves situations when a person, the speaker, is unknown. There are different conceptions of being "unknown". An "unknown" speaker can be unidentified or untraceable. I am mainly interested in cases where the speaker is both unidentified and untraceable, but I also discuss other instances. There is a range of categories within instances of being "unknown" that suffice to regard a speaker as anonymous, and this also reflects in the epistemic relation in testimonial exchange. An identified person may be untraceable, where there are obstructions in a successful effort to trace the person. On the other hand, an unidentified person cannot be traced, where the basic indicator for tracing, such as a name, is not available.

Sanford Goldberg provides a characterization of anonymity and some epistemic implications from it as follows:

(ANON) Given a speaker/writer S who produces a message m, S is anonymous (with respect to m) relative to an audience A when (i) no one among the members of A is currently in a position to acquire knowledge to the effect that S produced m, (ii) it is reasonable (for S) to expect that no one among the members of A will come to know something to this effect, and (iii) the explanation for both of the foregoing is that S's identity, qua producer of m, is in some way 'hidden' from the members of A.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Goldberg, Sanford C., (2013). 'Anonymous Assertions', pp. 136-137

A speaker who makes an assertion (message) is anonymous depending on the context in which the interaction with the hearer occurs. Goldberg claims that (ANON) offers a sufficient condition for anonymity. In (i), ANON states a lack of knowledge to the "effect that S produced m", implying a non-identifiability of S in relation to the assertion. In (ii), Goldberg indicates S's expectation to be unidentified remains so, where no member of the audience will eventually know that S produced m, this appears more complex than (i). On the one hand, it only suggests the expectation of S to be unidentifiable. On the other hand, it suggests a speaker intentionally being unidentifiable and untraceable. However, this can also occur unintentionally. ANON is inadequate by excluding instances where the speaker is in no way intentionally anonymous such as in cases of long chains of transmissions. Hence, anonymous assertions can be unintentional, and the speaker unidentifiable and untraceable. This instance of anonymity is my focus, where a hearer cannot identify the speaker of an assertion but find the assertion as a source of belief consideration. Although I discuss other instances to elaborate various epistemic relations that occur as the categories of 'knowing' the speaker differ. One can know the name, character, profession, nationality, gender and other details about a person, separately or jointly.

The effort to trace a source may be futile given the nature of the testimonial transmission. One such is oral testimony without documentation of the information. The transmission of most information occurs in an extended chain of transmission that sometimes the source of information is no longer clearly identifiable in the testimonial chain. Digital communications over the phone and the internet also have almost the same structure. With its sporadic mode of interaction and flow of information, the internet and social media have numerous posts that become anonymous over time. As internet users move from one platform to another, they share information and may not refer to the source, and the transmission goes on. It appears that there is a means of tracking the flow of information on the internet through IP addresses. However, this is not always the case. Internet users carry out manipulations on the accuracy and frequency of information. I may see the name identification of a Facebook user, but it may be inaccurate and fake. Except in cases where the Facebook user is famous or an acquaintance of sorts in prior face-to-face interaction, I may not be able to say I know the person to develop an expectation to believe the information. For Goldberg, there is a cost to the

... privacy or secrecy that the online world affords us. In particular, insofar as the internet provides the opportunity to make claims while keeping one's identity a secret, this 'opportunity' militates against

the sort of conditions on which quality communicative exchanges appear to depend.⁴⁵

In whatever mode of communication, when a speaker makes claims, such assertions are taken as conveying content to the recipients. The act of a speaker keeping her identity secret costs us some epistemic value that comes with how we form beliefs from the assertion of others. The knowledge of a speaker, the implication of the content for the hearer, and the extent of the decision to re-assert anonymous testimony are value indicators. Even where the secrecy of the identity is not intentional, the effect bears on belief-formation. Testimonial exchanges involve conditions of communication, some of which are basic to human interaction for proper belief-formation. A hearer may have to get further justification about a speaker. This may be done directly in the face-to-face interaction or indirectly as in cases where we try to investigate other conditions of justification, such as credibility and expertise. The non-identification of a speaker may be resolved by tracing relevant means to find out. There is a possibility that with the recognition of a speaker's name, more information as to the credibility and expertise of the speaker will become known.

The implications of anonymous testimony can be moral, epistemic or legal. These implications often overlap because what we can possibly believe informs how we act, and our actions may lead to sanctions within institutional laws. This can be noted in various policies to curb the spread of fake news, misinformation and stories that incite violence or discrimination. Also, various social media platforms are moderated to check the spread of inflammatory statements by users. Grace Paterson notes that the fact of being anonymised epistemically impoverishes anonymous speech.⁴⁶ This is evident in the unavailability of the warrant that comes with cases in which the speaker is known. Although Paterson focuses on the epistemic effects mainly from the anonymous speaker's point of view, it also has epistemic effects upon the hearer. Epistemic impoverishment affects both the expectations of epistemic responsibility on the speaker and the hearer in the epistemic community towards believing. Sanford Goldberg argues that

...the fact of anonymity – the fact that one's assertion was anonymous – has implications for the warranted expectations that speakers have of their audience and that the audience has regarding the speaker. In general, when it is mutually known by all parties that a claim was made under conditions of anonymity, this has a

⁴⁵ Goldberg, Sanford, (2013). "Anonymous Assertions." p. 136

⁴⁶ Paterson, Grace, (2020). "Sincerely, Anonymous". p.3

diminishing effect on the sort of (assertion-generated) expectations
that speakers and hearers are entitled to have of one another.⁴⁷

The production and reception of anonymous assertions (testimony) are affected, as Goldberg rightly argues. However, the expectations of the speakers are not affected in the same way as the expectation of the hearers. This is because an anonymous speaker's expectation to be believed does not have the same weight as the obligation to believe in the epistemic consideration of belief-formation. The diminishing effect also applies more to the hearer than the speaker. I discuss this further in the next section. In anonymous testimony, it is arguable that the epistemic responsibility is low for the speaker (even if the expectation to be believed is high). The responsibility rests on the hearer when it cannot be determined that the speaker followed appropriate norms for asserting. The description of epistemic responsibility as high or low is useful to illustrate the relation of agents in anonymous testimony. Also, that a speaker, either anonymous or not, should have the expectation to be believed and can only be assessed based on credibility. This is relative to the conditions of giving the assertion, in which case hearers can ask questions like, how do you expect us to believe that? Or do you really expect us to believe that? These sorts of questions will show that there is a low expectation to believe the assertion.

On the other hand, when there is no possibility of engaging the speaker in a dialogue to gather more reasons to believe the assertion given, the question of high and low expectations becomes empty for the hearer. The degree of expectations (of belief) is invariably influenced by the knowledge of the persons involved and the act of giving and receiving an assertion. In other words, S's expectations of H concerning *p* will be influenced by the knowledge that H is available to receive *p* and that *p* is believed. It, therefore, suggests that in cases where the speaker is unidentified and untraceable, such expectations are non-applicable as there is no interactive knowledge of the speaker and hearer in the testimonial transmission.

The hearer engages the assertion without the knowledge of the speaker nor the consciousness of the degree of the speaker's expectations for the assertion to be believed. Hence, in the process of belief-formation from testimonial transmission, the expectations of H are not influenced by the knowledge of S and that S's expectation that *p* be believed. The hearer engages in an evaluation of the testimony as an autonomous agent.⁴⁸ The hearer becomes aware of the

⁴⁷ Goldberg, Sanford, (2013). "Anonymous Assertions." p. 135

⁴⁸ Zagzebski, Linda, (2013). *Epistemic Authority*. p.231

epistemic situation and the responsibility to follow acceptable norms of believing, acting and asserting.

The idea of knowing who made an assertion extends beyond the name of the speaker. 'Knowing who' covers the conditions of reliability and credibility, expertise and authority of the speaker; all factors that can lead to having a warrant for believing a speaker. The name or expertise, or credibility of a speaker may be unidentified. A handwritten sign without a name is unidentified, a peddler who goes around selling wares is unidentified in terms of his expertise on his products, and the credibility of a stranger who gives directions to a tourist is not available to the tourist. Although the peddler and the stranger are physically present in the interaction, one will hardly catch the name and credibility of both in a brief moment of interaction. When I pick up an article to read, I see the name of the writer, but I do not know the writer as a person to assess her credibility as such. I may refer to the name when asked about who wrote the article or where I got the information. This shows that to 'know' a speaker in testimonial transactions is as challenging as having knowledge of a person, by name or other credentials, even in cases where there is an immediate presence of the speaker in face-to-face communication. These instances mentioned above could be regarded as positions in which the hearer acquires knowledge from the speaker. However, my point is that there is an extent to which a speaker is 'unknown' to the hearer. Being 'unknown' depends on the extent to which coordinating features are available to provide the hearer to identify the speaker.

It is possible that one knows some details about an anonymous speaker. At least in the case of pseudonymity, the recipient has knowledge that; there is a person who is the author, that the identified name is not the real name of the speaker and that the pseudonymous person is the author of the work. The hearer may also be able to get some other details that is revealed by the author or inferred from what is written. This can be experienced on anonymous blogs (particularly for specific subject matters) such as *What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* A visitor to the page may rightly think that the authors of the stories on the blog are women, that they are in the academia and that they have suffered an injustice. All these details may be false. The knowledge of these details does not suffice to overlook the idea that nameability confers identification in a way that these other details does not. No doubt that these details can influence the credibility assessment of the author but the real name for identification of a person provides a broader claim to identification of the person. This claim is broader as it involves the idea that an author/speaker with the real

name for identification will find it difficult to deny or refuse creditability for the content she writes or asserts. This does not imply that name identity cannot be stolen for use by other persons.

1.3 Kinds of anonymity

Wallace notes that “anonymity may be deliberately sought or be something which occurs spontaneously from the sheer complexity of life.”⁴⁹ However, Wallace provides a distinction that covers agents’ interaction in social relations.

Anonymity may be chosen or adopted as a deliberate strategy, or it may be a spontaneous, natural or social anonymity that is the byproduct of complex social forces and arrangements. The former may serve distinct purposes and have different felt consequences from those of the latter. However, in so far as each *is* non-identifiability of a person or persons, the underlying structure of anonymity is fundamentally the same.⁵⁰

As a social tool in interaction, anonymity may not be evaluated separately from the consequences. Either as deliberate or spontaneous the end it produces is that the speaker is unknown. More so the description of anonymity as originating from the person's agency or social forces makes it open to evaluation alongside the consequences. In other words, anonymity can occur depending on the interest of the speaker to be anonymous or the conditions and the contexts within which the information is transmitted. These contexts and conditions affect the normative implications for believing the testimony. The hearer is open to assessment without knowing whether or not S's assertion was a responsible one.

However, in the cases in which S's identity is hidden by others or S's choice to be anonymous is supported by others, we may trust (and hold accountable) the people responsible for hiding S or supporting S's anonymity. On the one hand, there are instances where the speaker sets out to make an assertion with the aim to be unknown to the hearers. The reasons and the extent to which this may successfully happen vary. On the other hand, there are instances where the speaker is unknown by the circumstance of complex social arrangements such as long chains of transmissions or inattentiveness of hearers to the identity of the speaker. This is because if the speaker is unknown, the hearer must assume accountability for the information should she assert

⁴⁹ Wallace K.A., (1999). ‘Anonymity.’ p.23

⁵⁰ Wallace, K.A., p.24

the information to another person.

Intentional anonymity occurs when the source is deliberate about its anonymity. From the initial assertion, the speaker is hidden and makes a conscious effort to remain so. There is no disclosure of the speaker's identity and in some cases, this could be for reasons such as the sensitivity of the information, the safety, and protection of the source, the privacy of the speaker, or just mischief on the part of the speaker. Michal Bracz et al. describe anonymity as a means to an end and give the structure of anonymity as intentional.⁵¹ For them,

Anonymity is a tool which is usually used in an adversarial environment; someone who seeks anonymity believes that others will try to prevent him from achieving his goals or ends.⁵²

The intention of a speaker to be anonymous is to see that what she intends to communicate is not hindered by her identity. Hence, the value that anonymity produces in its end is context-dependent: in relation to the social setting in which actions are produced anonymously. An author may anonymise her writing by a pseudonym. Using a pseudonym is often associated with the intention of attracting a readership base that is not achievable by using the real name of the author, while the evaluation of the author that comes with the use of the real name. Readers read the book with an identity created by the author and not the author's real identity. This happens in cases of social discrimination and, sometimes, aesthetic appeal. Female writers in history are known to write under pseudonyms that appear masculine to gain acceptability so that discriminatory evaluation of their writings does not trump the value of their writings and their ambitions. Some writers use a pseudonym for aesthetic appeal so that the name the readers associate with the work sounds in a manner becoming of authors, and for marketability.

Online users also engage in intentionally anonymising information in a variety of ways. For instance, an individual may have two or more social media accounts under different names (pseudonyms). Such a person makes posts on each of these accounts with the identity he creates for each of the social media accounts. He posts content he desires visitors to see on the identity of a particular social media account. On Wikipedia, information can be added to entries by people whom recipients of the information may not identify. Some people make anonymous entries under pseudonyms.

⁵¹ Bracz, Michal, et al, (2019). "The Logical Structure of Intentional Anonymity." p. 1

⁵² Bracz, Michal, et al., p.2

In cases of sexual harassment, racism or whistleblowing on organised crime, anonymous sources could be victims with the intention to get justice and/or for the hearers to be informed of the effects of these issues on individuals or society. In legal cases, a court may make a witness anonymous for the protection of his life. Sometimes sensitive legal cases where substantive testimony from a witness is key may require that the identity of the witness not be revealed to the public so that harm will not come to the witness either physically or psychologically. News media outfits may anonymise their sources to protect them from undesirable consequences that could arise from making public the information they give. It is pertinent to note that in these cases of intentional anonymity, there is something to hide or protect from the hearer. These instances of intentional anonymity are documented and can be traced even if being discoverable is not desirable for the speaker or testifier.

As a civic duty, someone may anonymously place a note at a park to give information that a suspected paedophile is present in that area. The author, who may be untraceable, intends to make parents more conscious and careful in watching their children when playing in that park. This kind of tip may be anonymous because the paedophile knows the author. So the author may be anonymous out of fear. Also, it may be that the author suspects someone to be a paedophile in the area and fears that she may be questioned for her suspicion. So, giving the information with her identity may shift the focus away from the sensitivity of the issue and taking such information seriously. Paterson describes this sort of interaction as "communicatively anonymised."⁵³ It is the intentional blocking of the hearer from identifying the speaker in a manner that is open to all involved in receiving that information.

Intentional anonymity can be removed by tracing the route of information to identify the source or speakers. This may be relatively easy in cases of pseudonymity of books, witness protection and media sources. However, it may not be easy as such for online transmission of information. The economy of time and the lack of technical know-how to trace the flow of information on the internet are challenges to unravelling the identity of a source. Most laypeople, with technology, will rather move on with their lives than spend hours searching for the source of information, so the information remains anonymous to such people.

Unintentional anonymity happens when the identity of a source or speaker is unknown, not by a deliberate act on the part of the speaker but rather by situations such as a long stretch of the

⁵³ Paterson, Grace, (2020). "Sincerely, Anonymous." pp. 6-7

testimonial chain, where the actual source is too far removed from the immediate transmission of the information. The speaker may be unaware that her identification as the source of the testimony has been removed and may not be able to provide any confirmation of her testimony. Possibly, the original form and the author's identification with the content are lost. This may happen with having a web of transmission that is intricate. This suggests that apart from the testimony being epistemically impoverished, the speaker is also vulnerable in her inability to confirm the accuracy of the content when it is shared anonymously and possibly distorted. Stranger testimony and forms of oral history can be regarded as unintentionally anonymous. An interaction with a stranger may be a one-time event without getting the name of the stranger; however, the information can be re-transmitted subsequently. For example, Pat was driving in an unfamiliar area. He stopped someone cycling and asked if she lives in the area. She affirms so and Pat asked for directions to his destination. The lady cycles away before Pat could ask for her name or other identification. If Pat is asked who gave him directions, he will not be able to go beyond the fact that the person is a lady, was cycling and was accosted on a particular road. He does not have what is regarded as the basic identifying mark of a person which is a name. While the lady may not have the intention of being anonymous, her identity becomes unknown in that transmission.

Social media platforms such as Twitter, with a high speed of dissemination, have more intricate patterns of transmission than offline and face-to-face interactions. With the quick rate at which information is shared across the internet and different social media platforms, the actual source of information may not be traceable. The hearer is thus left with only being able to assess if the content is of interest to her or worth believing. For instance, Tara opens her Facebook page and sees she has received a shared post from Instagram by an acquaintance; she follows the link to Instagram and then discovers it was initially posted from Twitter. She decides not to go further for want of time or lack of interest, then looks at the content to see if it is of any value, to be believed or not, to be re-transmitted or not. Let us imagine further that she decides to give a 'like' emoji to the content of the post and decides to copy and paste it on her Facebook timeline, signing it anonymously. Tara may have intentionally re-posted it but it remains unintentionally anonymous.

A testimony is *basically anonymous testimony* if at the moment of receiving the content the hearer cannot identify the speaker, in the process of making an epistemic decision. Basic anonymity of a speaker can occur whether the speaker intends to be anonymous or not. Assertions

which are basically anonymous are therefore dependent on the autonomy of the hearer in responding to the anonymous content and making an epistemic decision. The context of the interaction and the relevance of the content to make an epistemic deliberation. For instance,

ANONYMOUS TIP: Nate walks with his child in the community park and sees a note that says there is a paedophile wandering around the park. There is no name or any identifying mark of the author. Nate believes this content of the tip is worth acting on because of the potential harm it will hold for the community and considers sharing it with others.

This tip is intentionally anonymous, Nate has made an epistemic decision without further investigation about the content or even the source. The question may arise about Nate's epistemic decision if it was reasonable or appropriate to believe the note. Nate's actions may also involve issues such as the context of receiving the testimony, justification for accepting the assertion, the propriety of norms for believing, and accountability for the virtuous re-assertion of the anonymous tip. I will be discussing these issues in the remaining chapters of this thesis. Although the above example shows the basic anonymity of an intentionally anonymous speaker, it can also occur with unintentional anonymity. Unintentionally anonymous assertions will be, invariably, basically anonymous to those who hear them as assertions in the chain of transmission. The hearers only have the content available for belief assessment. The transmission of the information in a testimonial exchange under basic anonymity expresses an interaction between the recipient and the content only.

A recipient who does not know the speaker has no access to the speaker's credibility that may help his belief-formation. Our dependence on basically anonymous testimony influences our lives and it is valuable to our body of beliefs and actions. Even when we care little about our source of information, we still make use of it. As Coady notes,

In our ordinary dealings with others, we gather information without this concern for inferring the acceptability of communications from premises about the honesty, reliability, probability, etc., of our communicants.⁵⁴

The above implies that a hearer makes a deliberation to arrive at reasonable belief, perhaps with less attention to the source and focus on the content. We may be in a better epistemic state to make a belief decision when we know the speaker than when the speaker is anonymous. This puts more

⁵⁴ Coady, C.A.J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study.* pp.143-144

epistemic burden on the hearer as she cannot pass the buck to any identifiable person. The values that influence belief decisions such as honesty and reliability will not be presently available in cases where basic anonymity is involved, and the hearer is unable to obtain it. Sometimes there may be due attention to the medium of receiving the content where there is an involvement of intermediate sources from whom the hearer receives the content.

The identification that basically anonymous testimony refers appears to be name-identification. It can be argued that this will exclude instances where the hearer can in some way identify the speaker by some other details. However, the basic identity for any person is the name. As I argued in the previous section, the name of a person carries with it some quality that other characters of a person may not have. A person who reads posts on *What it is like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* is right to think that authors on the blog are women, the same can be said for other anonymous outlets. Nameability is a primary form of identification that other characteristics of a person cannot trump. Hence, basically anonymous testimony retains its feature of non-identification of the speaker by name, although it allows for the knowledge of other details of the speaker.

1.4 Transmission of oral testimony and internet sharing: a parallel?

Often re-tellings occur in the community about everyday issues. Cultural and traditional practices where oral-based interactions are made are sometimes done without identifying the original source. In such societies, people are dependent on the memory and authority of the immediate speaker who is known not to be the original source of the testimony. In "Oral History and the Epistemology of Testimony", Tim Kenyon notes that

We may distinguish oral history, meaning oral testimony from a purported direct witness to historical events, from traditional oral history, meaning a testimonial tradition handed down over generations—even, in theory, from the very distant past.⁵⁵

Statements of facts that are in oral history sometimes have no known original source. The reference to the source will only lead to speakers who have also picked up the content from communal use.

One problem noted with oral transmission is the loss of accuracy of the original information. Kenyon notes that even where there is a commitment to preserve oral speech in oral

⁵⁵ Kenyon, Tim. (2016) "Oral History and the Epistemology of Testimony." p.49,

traditions, preserving the chronological accuracy of information is not guaranteed. This opens the community to the possibility of false elements that speakers in the chain of transmission may introduce in oral history.⁵⁶ This defeats the reliance that may be attached to oral history when there is a willingness to use it. Even with this problem, Kenyon argues that "oral history and its methods are valuable for directing our attention to some underemphasised aspects of testimonial contexts and the uses of testimony."⁵⁷ One of such context is anonymity in testimonial transmissions. Testimonial interactions that are only verbal exchanges can involve the anonymity of the speaker.

Kenyon admits that sometimes the accuracy of re-tellings in oral history without knowing the original source can be vouched for. This is because the wide acceptance of oral testimony is based on communal trust and the validation that such testimony has been received over time.⁵⁸ An individual who re-tells an assertion from oral history may not admit to the responsibility of the content of the re-tellings. This is because the stories are re-tellings and not made solely out of their own epistemic effort. The possibility that storytellers may decide to own these re-tellings either by modifying them or accepting to take up enquiries about the re-tellings does not imply that the story originated from them, at least in the original form. As such, they may take epistemic responsibility in so far as they have epistemic input on the re-telling. However, the epistemic responsibility that derives from the original source of testimony will not be the same for such re-telling.

Oral history, in the broadest sense, highlights the extent to which the epistemic value of testimony is a function of ways by which testimonial contexts are actively constructed by speakers, audiences, institutions and whole societies. It also indicates the epistemological importance of social, cognitive and epistemic properties of the audience, when much philosophical focus has typically been on the properties of the testifier. And it introduces a wider range of respects in which testimony is truth-conducive than the fairly limited sense...oral testimony in low-information default acceptance contexts, in which the audience possesses or deploys little evidence about the speaker's record of reliability, or the facts on which the testimony bears, seems better suited to reveal minimally sufficient acceptability conditions for testimony.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Kenyon, Tim, (2016). "Oral History and the Epistemology of Testimony." p.60

⁵⁷ Kenyon, Tim, p.46

⁵⁸ Kenyon, Tim, p.47

⁵⁹ Kenyon, Tim, pp.47-48

Generally, we cannot hold the immediate speaker of a re-telling responsible for the information, but she is responsible for the act of re-telling it. We can describe such information as being transmitted "from all to all". The search for reliability and evidence for oral testimony from an immediate speaker will lead to travelling down the chain of transmission towards the source, or it will demand of the immediate speaker something she may not successfully provide. Coady notes that the reliability of such oral testimony is possible depending on the knowledge structure the community adopts in entrusting people with information.

Another aspect of the oral transmission of history is that there are ways in which the reliability of the witnesses in the chain can be made very high. Much oral tradition in societies without writing is strongly institutionalised so that specially selected people are given the privilege and onerous duty of being the custodians of the society's past. The histories are often in the form of songs or poems, and they are learnt off by heart by specialists from specialists. In some societies, there are not only privileges for such people but heavy ritual sanctions against mistakes. It is an interesting aspect of the study of such communities that *accuracy* of transmission seems to go with the *frequency* of transmission.⁶⁰

The accuracy and frequency of transmission draw on epistemic responsibility and the pragmatic effect of the information among interlocutors. Custodians and specialists on the content of oral history are held responsible for the preservation of the accuracy of the content. While these custodians are known not to be the sources of history, the community relies on their ability to recant the information just as it was received. Alvin Goldman notes that "a hallmark of human culture, however, is to enhance the social fund of knowledge by sharing discovered facts with one another."⁶¹ Although documentary transmission has greater reliability than oral transmission, 'all written history is underpinned in certain complex ways by oral tradition.'⁶² That the transmission lacks documentation does not imply that its epistemic import is lost. It may be weak compared to instances where the testimony is documented, but we do receive oral history, even with inadequate backing for accepting and believing it. Coady notes that

... oral history need not be as weak a reed as those in literate cultures have tended to think, but I am happy to concede the case that written records establish a security against memory lapses and similar

⁶⁰ Coady, C.A.J., (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. p.221

⁶¹ Goldman, Alvin, (1999). *Knowledge in a Social World*. p.118

⁶² Coady, C.A.J., (1992). p.221.

possibilities of mistake, which is a very important ingredient in the reliability of transmissions...⁶³

Written records may ensure the accurate storage of information and subsequent transmission in the preserved state in a way that memory does not. Written and signed communication can affirm and establish the accuracy of the information. The original information will remain as is given and perhaps intended if there is no attempt to tamper with documented information such as a diary or signpost. This does not make written testimony indubitable for acceptance, and it does not imply that its source can be undeniably known. This mode of preservation also allows tracing for epistemic accountability. Some oral testimony may get scrutinised and revised somewhere in the chain of transmission; however, the fundamental nature of their original source remains unidentified. Independent evidential confirmation to back oral testimony is thus an epistemic challenge. One sort of oral testimony without the backing of communal trust is that from a stranger.

In modern times, the internet has presented a platform for the rapid spread of information. Just a click of a button can make millions of internet users receive information that may be solicited or unsolicited. The description of various communities on the internet shows that there is a close replication of societal interaction in the space, albeit digital. The dependence on the internet for information is undeniable. There are various terms describing the community of users on some of these platforms, "tweeps, tiktokers, netizens" are a few. These individuals have carved for themselves a community of those who arguably view internet interaction as having similar features to face-to-face communication. The parallel between oral testimony and internet sharing can arguably be identified here. The spread of information online generates interest in certain individuals who have common interests and form a sort of communal base of interaction. Such groups are on Facebook and other platforms. Individuals in the group may share various contents that are related to their interests even when the author is unknown. While not all individuals in the micro-community may accept or believe such shared content, those who do may do so on the basis that it was shared by a trusted member and that the shared content aligns with the interest of the group. This implies that just as in oral history where the original speaker is unknown, receiving the content can be based on the reliability of the sharer.

Even where the interaction does not occur within the group settings on social media, individuals in random interactions with internet users pick up content from each other. In such

⁶³ Coady, C.A.J. p.216

cases, the sort of reliability may be different as it is synonymous with an interaction between strangers but it portrays some of the fundamental character of interacting with strangers in face-to-face communication.⁶⁴

1.5 Online interactions

Internet users interact with people unknown to them, particularly on social media platforms. Individuals may have discussions with other people without necessarily knowing them, by an acquaintance or having any special relationships with them, whereby information is transmitted and beliefs are formed. As internet users cross-interact, the web of interaction and the flow of information on the internet can become intricate and extensive. Just as in face-to-face interaction, there could be the formation of a belief from an online acquaintance's testimony that the recipient does not know or have any intention of even knowing. Hence, an internet user can also receive basically anonymous testimony.

In the recognition that technology has modified the structure of social interactions, I think it is essential that the online community makes use of appropriate norms of testimonial transmission in the context of their interaction. There is the issue of admitting internet communication as testimony as it seems to filter out the very features that make the transmission of information testimony. It can be argued that anonymous assertions online are not to be regarded as testimony because such content does not have the epistemic character of an assertion. This will imply that we are not required to pay attention to such information or regard it as having any epistemic value.⁶⁵ However, anonymous online content can be said to have the nature of testimony, it can be regarded as valuable in so far as it elicits belief, provides justification for our knowledge and also gives preservation of content in our store of beliefs.

There are various platforms on the internet – general encyclopedias, specialised encyclopedias, social interaction platforms, and anonymous blogs. I will examine one encyclopedia (*Wikipedia*), one interactive social platform (*Quora*), one microblogging app (*Twitter*) and two anonymous blogs (*What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* and *Academics Anonymous*). The activities on these platforms may involve the various kinds of anonymity discussed earlier.

⁶⁴Ivy, Veronica. (2021). "Yikkity Yak, Who Said That?: The Epistemology of Anonymous Assertions", p. 468

⁶⁵Sullivan, Emily, (2019). "Beyond Testimony: When Online Information Sharing is not Testifying." pp. 22-26.

Some of the content on these platforms are moderated by administrators to censor content that does not conform to their policy of use (for example, *Twitter*). There is an effort to engage the right to privacy, free speech, and correct information to produce a proper knowledge community. A less-moderated internet platform (for example, *Wikipedia*) has these rights conflicts, and falsehood is more likely to be transmitted. Moderations are guided by policies and legislation targeted at the use of the internet so that society is protected from falsehood and the attendant problems that will arise from it. I discuss internet regulations on the anonymity of internet users generally to identify the extent to which anonymity is protected on the internet, the misuse of it and the vulnerability of the recipients. Although internet regulations recognise the use of anonymity and the various reasons speakers may be anonymous, there are still challenges in arriving at a social space where falsehoods are not received, believed and acted upon from an anonymous online source. I discuss the anonymity of authors on the one hand and, on the other hand, the normative attitude of the audience to believe.

Wikipedia and Quora

Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia to which the general public has access to make entries. It is also described as the "free online encyclopedia that anyone can edit,"⁶⁶ There have been concerns about the quality of the information on *Wikipedia* due to the process of gathering the information.⁶⁷ P. D. Magnus argues that *Wikipedia* fails to be trusted on the conditions of reliability and stability of the entries and the credibility of the authors.⁶⁸ He notes that "when you consult a *Wikipedia* entry at a particular time, you might capture it at a well-tended or fib-ridden moment."⁶⁹ Also, the credentials of authors on *Wikipedia* are not known, so the audience may not be able to establish that an author is giving expert information on a particular entry. For Magnus, trust or assurance for truth is core to the character of testimonial transmission, and these seem to be lacking in the manner in which *Wikipedia* operates.

Axel Gelfert's description of the source of information's elusiveness on *Wikipedia* is quite apt.

⁶⁶ Fallis, Don. (2008). "Towards an Epistemology of Wikipedia." p.1662

⁶⁷ Wray, Brad. (2009). "The Epistemic Cultures of Science and WIKIPEDIA: A Comparison." p. 46-47

⁶⁸ Magnus, P.D. (2009) "On Trusting Wikipedia", *Episteme*, p. 75

⁶⁹ Magnus, P.D., p. 77

What makes the case of *Wikipedia* interesting is not only its character as a form of collaborative testimony but its status as an *anonymous source*. Although in principle, every edit to an entry is logged, and users can view the history of each page, in many cases, it would be *de facto* impossible for a user to identify the first time a particular claim found its way into a Wikipedia entry. And even if, by luck or through sheer determination, the user could identify the corresponding entry in a page's history, more often than not, what she may find is a pseudonymous user name or possibly, an IP address – neither of which will contain much information about the epistemic credentials of the user who edited the page. This contrasts sharply with the more standard case of testimony that is uniquely attributable to its originators.⁷⁰

Gelfert's description of Wikipedia captures the non-traceability and non-identifiability of anonymous sources. We do find true information on Wikipedia. Still, there is the epistemic challenge of not being able to ascertain the credibility of the source of the content due to its being anonymous. The internet user may make further enquiries to ascertain the truth of the content. Having the knowledge of the person who made the entry may influence, in a different manner, how that audience will receive or believe the content. Sometimes users may verify information on Wikipedia that is hyperlinked to other sources. The anonymity of information on Wikipedia does not stop it as a valuable resource for enquirers. Nonetheless, those who access information on Wikipedia should make appropriate belief assessments as responsible epistemic agents.

Entries on Wikipedia can be described as testimony on Lackey's idea of hearer testimony due to having communicable content. Tollefson's view aligns with this.

Many Wikipedia entries are written with the intention of conveying information or providing evidence or can reasonably be seen as conveying information or evidence ... It is probably true that not every statement on *Wikipedia* should be conceived of as testimony... But the fact that not all of the statements on *Wikipedia* are best conceived of as testimony does not mean that all *Wikipedia* entries do not offer us a testimony.⁷¹

Tollefson argues that some information on *Wikipedia* can be called testimony in the most general sense of transmission of information from one person to another. Tollefson argues that there may insufficient reason to adopt a default acceptance of *Wikipedia* entries due to the "doxastic

⁷⁰ Gelfert, Axel, (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. p. 28

⁷¹ Tollefson, Deborah, (2009). "Wikipedia and the Epistemology of Testimony." pp. 9-10

instability”⁷² of entries. Authors are not known by credentials or credibility. Also, there is limited possible interaction between a contributor and the audience that will allow for clarity of information as in some other online interactions that are not anonymous. Tollefson argues that *Wikipedia* entries are testimony to the extent that the audience accepts or believes the entries as assertions. She further implies that *Wikipedia* satisfies the conditions for group testimony, as some entries have a kind of moderation provided by a community of authors.⁷³ She nonetheless identifies the complexity of the structure of *Wikipedia* which does not allow for a generalisation of its character.

Quora is also another platform that shares some of the concerns above. It is a “platform where you can read important insights that have never been shared anywhere else, from people you could never reach any other way.”⁷⁴ *Quora* is a question-and-answer website where people ask questions, answer questions, and follow other users. The platform requires that users register with their real names, though verification is not mandatory. This is to establish credibility for answers given by users. However, posting a question, answering a question, responding or making comments on posts does not require the user's name to be shown to the public as the responder can decide to be anonymous.⁷⁵ Hence, the name description will be ‘*Quora* user’, as “*Quora* does not associate such content with the user ID and other profile data”⁷⁶ when the user sets their activity to be anonymous.

It does happen that sometimes users check out the profiles of other people on the platform, their profession, hobbies and whatever else they put on their profile. Having visible identifying information on posts gives credibility to users' contributions, particularly on topics that require expert knowledge. Anonymous posts on *Quora* are sometimes met with hesitation by some users, especially when commenting on factual issues. In my experience of being a user on *Quora*, the reaction to the response to posts from 'nameless' users is dismissive, especially when the topic of discussion is empirical or relates to lived experience. Other users who view these anonymous posts may respond in a manner that denotes that the user's anonymity detracts from their credibility to make authoritative comments. The indicators that can make readers trust the author, such as being

⁷² Tollefson, Deborah, p. 19

⁷³ Tollefson, Deborah, p.16

⁷⁴ [Quora.com/about](https://www.quora.com/about)

⁷⁵ [Quora.com/about/privacy](https://www.quora.com/about/privacy)

⁷⁶ [Quora.com/about/privacy](https://www.quora.com/about/privacy)

identifiable by name and/or expertise on the subject matter are unavailable. While this is defensible, it does not imply that the posts should not be believed or are not worthy of any belief consideration. Internet users should give attention to the content of a post for assessment rather than discredit it based on its being anonymous.

Twitter

This is a microblogging platform where users post and interact with messages from others known as "tweets". Users can post, like and retweet tweets, but unregistered users can only read them.⁷⁷ Twitter users can use names that are not theirs to register an account. As Lance Ulanoff notes,

... beyond the blue check, Twitter has never really thought much about identity. Like many other online communities, it's allowed people to identify themselves however they wanted. All you need is a verifiable email address.⁷⁸

Even so, Ellen Tannem describes that with some technological effort, the real identity of users may be uncovered,

Metadata types gleaned from tweets and analysed through machine-learning algorithms included a number of favourites, Twitter followers and time published. Obfuscating the datasets didn't make it much harder for researchers to identify even completely anonymous accounts.⁷⁹

Generally, going through such a process as Tannem describes above is not possible for an average user. The scrutiny of Twitter posts may not be feasible beyond the admissibility of the content of the post to the recipient. Sometimes, posts on Twitter are evaluated on the credibility of the Twitter handle owner as known in society. Well-known individuals tend to get a good number of visits to their pages. Some of their followers and visitors have the disposition to take with credibility whatever they post, out of their expertise or in deference to them. The possibility of fake identities on Twitter may not be a challenge as much as the spread of retweets. This does not imply that people should not hide their identities, at least when they are not infringing on the rights of others

⁷⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>

⁷⁸ Ulanoff, Lance, "Dear Jack, Please kill anonymity on Twitter" <https://medium.com/s/story/please-jack-kill-anonymity-on-twitter-60ff79bf8ec4>

⁷⁹ Tannam, Ellen, "Your secret Twitter account may not be as anonymous as you think" <https://www.siliconrepublic.com/enterprise/twitter-privacy-anonymous>

to have true information. Some of these retweets, transmitted via a lot of users, are known to spur Twitter wars that divide people into different social and political belief systems.

This is relevant because there are cases of error in the information that cannot be traced to a particular individual as the original poster. Cross-posting also occurs - when an individual posts the same content on various social media accounts, and these are picked up by other users. In some cases, information on Twitter is linked to multiple sources on other social media platforms, which may help verify the information or spread its falsehood if it is false. Even so, tracing the platform of the original post may be challenging. The lack of internet data for further information or not having enough time to pursue tracing the links may hinder the user from doing so within the frame of time for belief decisions. Hence, the post is received as basically anonymous to the user and the same can be transmitted to another person online or by word of mouth in face-to-face interaction.

Anonymous blogs

In the blog, *What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?*⁸⁰, authors share experiences as women in a profession that is regarded as male-dominated and characterised by injustices towards the females who find themselves in the profession. Although not all of these experiences detail oppression and subjugation, they tell of the power dynamics in such workspaces and how socio-political co-ordination does little to dissipate the conflict. Some of the contributors to the blog describe how the models of oppressive attitudes are shifting and changing positively.

Another blog is *Academics Anonymous*⁸¹ which is operated by The Guardian, UK. It is a forum for people to share their academic journey without naming themselves or any of the individuals involved in their stories. In *Academics Anonymous*, authors share their experiences in their academic journey, how social structures and strictures affect their academic work and achievements, particularly the injustices they experience.⁸²

Authors share their experiences on these blogs about related subject matters. It does not require the author's name to be shared with visitors to the site or posting content. It is quite plausible that,

Anonymity's contributions are manifold. Surely they include those to radical political action, as anonymity can not only help to evade and

⁸⁰ <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>

⁸¹ <https://medium.com/@anonacademics/welcome-to-anonymous-academics-5d1a689576cf>

⁸² <https://www.theguardian.com/education/series/academics-anonymous>

fight surveillance, but it can also enable particular forms of equality or certain forms of speaking out and speaking up.⁸³

Hence, it is obvious that the vulnerability of the authors of anonymous blogposts' is a crucial reason for anonymity. However, when users read these experiences and information, they will express various attitudes that influence their beliefs about the subject matter and the unknown authors. This impacts how the community is affected by such content and the context in which it is shared.

The truth-responsiveness that speakers expect from recipients becomes threatened as it makes their challenge of the injustice of no effect. As Frost-Arnold notes, just as speakers face the decision to be anonymous, they also need to find the right internet platform - a subcommunity, where the subject matter of their posts is likely to be received with an appropriate response.⁸⁴ Again, this is relevant in intentionally anonymous posts, such as *What it is like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* Authors have the expectation that their posts will be received with the trust of the audience. If this expectation is not met, then the purpose of sharing the post is not fulfilled.

On the other hand, posts on an online platform such as *Twitter* are open to manipulating original stories/posts by anonymous speakers. This reduces the trust-responsiveness that the speaker intends to receive from the recipients, which may lead to the original stories not being heard, as a matter of fact. In unintentional cases of anonymity, the recipient of online content can only respond with an attitude of general online trust. In the frame of epistemic duty, a recipient of an anonymous online post with the time and resources may seek to trace the source, but as earlier noted, few have the means to do this. As users shuffle through the vast amount of information online, it is tempting that they avoid giving attention to anonymous posts unless it strikes a related personal or societal need for them.

1.6 Internet media regulations

In this section, I examine briefly how social institutions have identified some of the problems that are associated with the use of internet media and how they try to regulate it to maintain a reasonable flow of knowledge in communication. The internet has been widely accepted as a channel of communication, and this makes it reasonable that there are procedures for the responsible use of webspace. There are search engines, encyclopedias, social media apps, and professional pages,

⁸³ Götz Bachmann, Michi Knecht & Andreas Wittel, (2017). "The social productivity of anonymity." p.242

⁸⁴ Karen Frost-Arnold, (2016). "Social Media, Trust and The Epistemology of Prejudice," p.527

among others. As noted in Chapter One, these platforms enable people to interact via question and answers or present experiences. Individuals can also get information without soliciting it as well as give information without an immediate interlocutor to provide further explanation to affirm the truth or credibility of the information received. Hence, using the internet in transmitting information may involve the attendant possibility that one of the parties in the transmission is anonymous (even in a loose sense).

If we ask how anonymisation in a digital environment can be achieved and maintained, it makes sense to knock on the doors of today's specialists for such an endeavour: computer scientists. Here we can learn that anonymity is attained by blurring either the sender in larger sets of senders, or the receiver in larger sets of receivers, or the message in a larger set of messages, or some, or all of these elements in their respective sets – potentially in combination with blurring the respective sets in even bigger sets... Such blurring in 'anonymity sets' prevents an 'attacker' from singling out specific entities in the blur of the set.⁸⁵

The identification of specific sets, particularly of senders (speakers) is the common instance, and this is what is relevant for my purpose in this study. This is so given that a speaker often, always speaks, shares or gives information with a basic expectation; that the information is believed. On the other hand, the recipient does receive the information, whether it counts towards an expectation or not. In other words, the recipient may fail to recognize the intention of the speaker at all; she might not care about the information or deliberately sought it. The speaker's identity does not count for intention until the recipient acts upon the information in the cycle of transmission, where there may be a need to consider the credibility of the source of information.

The use of digital technology makes the idea of anonymity in the strict sense less convincing. There are various ways that digital media companies and governments can trace an internet user through their internet activities. Anonymous posts and information can be traced to a user by IP addresses and other channels of digital use and entries, although user anonymity on some internet platforms is restricted. ARTICLE 19⁸⁶ recommends that anonymity should be an

⁸⁵ Bachmann, Götz et al, (2017). "The social productivity of anonymity." p. 249

⁸⁶ **Article 19** (stylised **ARTICLE 19**) The organisation takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_19

open choice on social media. ARTICLE 19 is a British human rights organisation with a specific mandate and focus on the defence and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide founded in 1987. It is an “international community of activists, legal specialists, and subject experts working together to protect the basic freedoms of many communities throughout the world.”⁸⁷ One of the recommendations of ARTICLE 19 states,

Social media platforms and news sites should not require the use of real-name registration systems. At the very least, internet companies should ensure anonymity remains a genuine option.⁸⁸

The use of real-name registration does not meet the criteria of non-identification and untraceability for strict anonymity. Hinging on the right to free speech is the privacy and protection of an individual to give, access and assess information anonymously.

However, the exercise of this right is limited by the various real name verifications that some social media platforms require from users. The request for the disclosure of the identity of persons behind the anonymous post is regarded as an infringement upon the rights of internet users.⁸⁹ Sophia Qasir argues that rather than legislations focusing on identity on the internet focusing on the disclosure of anonymous users and thereby violating their rights, legislation should focus on finding a balance between the rights of individuals (to freedom of expression and privacy) and the harms of exercising those rights in an unrestricted manner.

Just as the valuable transmission of information is done on the internet, harmful practices are also carried out in the spread of rumours, fake news and misinformation which are epistemically undesirable in any community. It is evident that as much as anonymity in the digital community is acceptable for the protection of the rights of individuals, it is “also connected to cybercrime, such as fraud, identity theft, cyber stalking, bullying, phishing, and trolling.”⁹⁰ Some individuals' abuse of these rights shows that the social norms that guide interaction among people need to be at pace with evolving technology. Sometimes, these cases do not get to government agencies to provide justice for the victims of abuse. The victims only do what they can as individuals which sometimes leads to grievous consequences such as depression and suicide. Often abusers who use anonymous online speech as a means of oppression and injustice are

⁸⁷ www.article19.org/what we do/

⁸⁸ Article 19, *Anonymity and Encryption Report: Right to Online Privacy*, 2015 p.26

⁸⁹ Qasir, Sophia, (2013). “Anonymity In Cyberspace: Judicial and Legislative Regulations.” p. 3653

⁹⁰ “How to deal with privacy and anonymity”, *Take back the Tech*

shielded by privacy rights, but the content of the online speech they make goes on to impact the lives of recipients. Recipients who are not intellectually, emotionally and psychologically equipped to manage the impact of these anonymous posts that are abusive often turn inwards on themselves. This also involves the epistemic and moral dimensions of social interaction. There are a number of support programs to help such victims of online abuse (gender violence, trolling, body shaming, rape, and so on) survive the impact of these contents on their lives.

Hence, the ordinary internet user who is browsing for general information, targeted content or even some entertainment, may be exposed to the vices that come along with anonymous posts. As noted in the previous chapter, time and resources may not be available to search for the credibility of the source of a post, and the epistemic decision on the content lies with the recipient. To the ordinary internet user, the non-identification and untraceability of an anonymous source are in relation to the conditions of receiving the information to count it as anonymous. For instance, I may have a post pop up on my Facebook page that catches my attention and form a belief *B* about it, but the author's name is unfamiliar and did not register in my mind. Besides, I may be unable to trace the author within the time frame and whatever links I utilise. For this scenario, it is acceptable to say that information leading to my belief *B* is anonymous.

With the knowledge of what online communication involves, the recipient of anonymous online content must apply an appropriate epistemic assessment of statements such that vices in society can be reduced. This can be done when assessing content from anonymous blogs that report vice or from anonymous sources that are prone to incorrect information. The effort to identify content as detached from the source and correctly use online information is a challenge with anonymous posts, especially when the posts have epistemic and moral assessments from the source that impact the recipient. The interaction of a recipient with an online anonymous post requires epistemic attention to the content and its relevance to the individual and society. The ability to identify what quality a piece of information has will help to manage epistemic decisions carefully and subsequently, actions that may arise from them.

Background beliefs and various other mechanisms influence belief-forming processes. The mechanism that the individual applies contributes to how she assesses information and forms beliefs. As Elzinga notes, we all align with a form of belief mechanism, reliable belief-forming processes that may "involve multiple agents, institutions, environmental features and so on."⁹¹

⁹¹ Elzinga, Benjamin. (2020). "Echo Chambers and Audio Signal processing," p. 11

This implies that in trying to sort out true beliefs diligently, one must determine if one's belief-forming mechanism is truth-conducive and, if so, trust its processes as reliable. Elzinga argues that much more than focusing on the epistemic injustice and vice that trail these supposedly closed belief mechanisms, truth-conduciveness is what matters to the epistemic community, in which case they will not be so closed anymore. This implies that there will invariably be an interaction among various belief-mechanism settings in an epistemic community where there are diligent news consumers; this is what an epistemically virtuous online community looks like. This leads to how to evaluate information received online and the normative requirement for believing reasonably and responsibly.⁹²

In this chapter, I have argued that Lackey's distinction between speaker testimony and hearer testimony on the nature of testimony presents an acceptable view of understanding anonymous assertions as testimony. It allows for the context in which the hearer receives the content of an assertion while not having access to the speaker's intention or credibility. Notwithstanding the speaker being intentionally or unintentionally anonymous, I argue that a piece of testimony is basically anonymous to a hearer if, at the moment of making an epistemic decision on the content, she has no identity of the speaker which may influence her decision. I also argue that online interaction has similar characters to oral testimony (and face-to-face communication) on the bases of communal trust, dependence and responsibility on the sharer or re-teller in the interaction. I also argued that hearers should be aware of the level of mediation with online interaction and should recognise the context and medium of interaction in making epistemic deliberations on online content. I discussed internet media regulations as a means of controlling how interactions online can have the stability of a proper flow of content that is true and avoid the pitfalls of false information. These regulations show the extent to which the hearer of anonymous testimony online must be aware of the responsibility for receiving anonymous content.

⁹² I discuss this in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO: EPISTEMIC ATTITUDES TO ANONYMOUS TESTIMONY

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter One, I argued that anonymous assertions can be regarded as testimony with the consideration that a hearer identifies the assertion as having communicable content which may elicit belief. I also argued that the testimony is basically anonymous if, in the process of epistemic deliberation, the hearer has no knowledge of the identity of the speaker. Basic anonymity places more burden of epistemic responsibility on the hearer alone in arriving at a belief.

Anonymity influences epistemic attitudes toward anonymous testimony. A hearer can simply dismiss an anonymous testimony⁹³ where it has no stake whatsoever for the hearer, but when there are consequences to the content that cannot be overlooked, there is a further choice to be made than dismissal or mere suspension of belief. Hence, the hearer is put in a different epistemic situation to cases where the speaker is present or known, and an assessment of the speaker is possible. For whatever reason (privacy, security) or circumstance (intentional, unintentional), when a speaker is anonymous, the hearer may assume responsibility for the information. We thus have, in that instance of transmission, the hearer and the content in the scope of the evaluation. We can then ask under what condition does a hearer of anonymous testimony believe an anonymous assertion? A hearer may also, in an effort to make a belief assessment, make a presumptive move to identify the unknown speaker. Such effort without having any indication of the identity of the speaker may involve wrongful presumption and thereby cause harm to the presumed speaker.

In this chapter, I discuss the hearer's epistemic position in believing anonymous testimony. The speaker's anonymity can influence the belief of the hearer, or at least the process of arriving at a belief. I defend the view that the various conception of justification for believing an assertion provides support for different epistemic attitudes towards believing assertions depending on the context of interaction. These epistemic positions also inform the tendency to believe and act according to a particular norm. For anonymous testimony, expressing epistemic attitudes indicates that the hearer pays attention to the content before making a judgment. In discussing the above

⁹³ I use 'testimony' instead of 'assertion' here since the hearer must make an assessment to decide if the assertion has any stakes for her or not. In other words, paying attention to the assertion for possible belief-formation entails that the assertion was taken as testimony.

views on the justification for believing anonymous testimony, I examine epistemic attitudes in relation to three possible norms of justifiedly believing anonymous testimony: (i) A hearer should not believe anonymous testimony (reductionism). (ii) A hearer should believe anonymous testimony (antireductionism). (iii) A hearer is entitled to accept anonymous testimony (entitlement theory). I argue that hearers of anonymous testimony are entitled to accept the content and act as if the anonymous testimony is true, depending on the context and content. Hearers should be cautious not to summarily dismiss anonymous testimony and conclude that an anonymous testimony has no justification to believe it. An anonymous testimony, as earlier argued in Chapter One, can have some value of considerable impact on the community. I argue that the entitlement theory is consistent with accepting and acting as if an anonymous testimony is true and an appropriate epistemic attitude towards receiving anonymous testimony. By virtue of the context of anonymity, a hearer's attitude to receiving anonymous assertions must recognise the content. The content of the assertion influences the epistemic attitude most appropriate to the context. An appropriate disposition to anonymous sources will enable the recipient in rational deliberation and the process of deliberation so that the recipient does not run into the circle of epistemic vice by abandoning her epistemic responsibility.

I also argue that a hearer of anonymous testimony must be aware of the possibility of making unwarranted assumptions about the unknown speaker as this can lead to an error of judgment and may constitute potential harm to the circulation of such belief. The autonomy of the hearer as an epistemic agent becomes more central to responsible belief-formation. There is minimal influence of the reliability or credibility of the speaker on her belief decision.

2.1 Justificatory accounts of testimony and epistemic attitudes to anonymous testimony

In this section, I briefly discuss reductionism, anti-reductionism, entitlement thesis and assurance theory on the justification for believing testimony. I then examine these views in relation to the appropriate epistemic attitude for a hearer of anonymous testimony. Reductionists argue that there is a need for independent evidence to believe testimony. Anti-reductionists argue that a speaker's assertion can be sufficient evidence in an instance of ordinary interaction for a hearer to accept the testimony. Other anti-reductionists' views, assurance and entitlement theorists claim that the justification for testimonial beliefs is vested on the agency and rational capacity of the agents (speaker and hearer) in the testimonial exchange, not on the availability of evidence for justifiedly

believing the testimony. My argument on the acceptance of anonymous testimony aligns with Tyler Burge's entitlement thesis with the claim of the intelligibility of the assertion. I argue that other accounts do not fit into the nature of anonymous testimony to justify believing as they do not take into consideration the speaker's anonymity. Burge's view admits the idea of hearer (anonymous) testimony and consequently hearers' responsibility for testimonial beliefs.

Reductionists argue for the need for evidence to believe. There must be reasons for believing testimony. The reliability of the testimony is essential, and it counts towards epistemic duty on the part of the hearer. Hence, there must be reasons for a speaker to be regarded as honest, reliable, and competent as each of these values fit. David Hume is often referred to as the first proponent of reductionist views of testimony. For Hume, the believing testimony of miracles by the mere word of the speaker is unjustified.⁹⁴ Hume requires that evidence for the reliability of testimony provides sufficient justification for the testimony to be believed. In other words, the evidence has to be non-basic, not in recourse to testimonial beliefs, and should be independent of the testimony in its justification. This could be empirical evidence for the justification of the testimony.

Hume argues that the misconception about believing testimony without independent evidence comes from an assumed relation between facts and reports. The conformity observed between reports and reality is regarded as insufficient evidence to justify believing testimony.⁹⁵ This, in principle, points attention to the possibility of human failings and vulnerability involved in transmitting knowledge. The possibility of lying, misinformation, and insincerity makes reductionism a convincing epistemic position. However, Hume's reductionism requires perhaps too much for the human ability to achieve reliable testimony of a large body of received knowledge. This Humean view is sometimes regarded as global (extreme) reductionism, while Elizabeth Fricker's version is considered as local reductionism.⁹⁶

Local Reductionist Claim: It can be the case that, on a particular occasion θ when a speaker S makes an utterance U and in doing so asserts that P to a hearer H , H has, or can gain, independent evidence sufficient to warrant her in taking S to be trustworthy with respect to U .⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Hume, David, "Of Miracles", An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748)

⁹⁵ Hume, David, "Of Miracles", An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748)

⁹⁶ Fricker, Elizabeth. (1994). "Against Gullibility," p. 136

⁹⁷ Fricker, Elizabeth. (1994). "Against Gullibility," p. 133

Fricker's version of reductionism focuses on an indexical utterance received by a hearer at an instance and critical use of the rational and autonomous capacity of the hearer to arrive at a reasonable belief from (utterance) the testimony.⁹⁸ A hearer can focus on a piece of testimony and attempt to assess its reliability from the speaker with the task of finding out the conformity of the testimony to fact or independent evidence.

Fricker argues that a hearer has no "presumptive epistemic right to trust an arbitrary speaker."⁹⁹ The presumptive right thesis is an anti-reductionism claim that a hearer should trust a speaker's testimony without the need for independent evidence. Fricker's view cautions hearers about falling into an epistemic disadvantage in a testimonial transmission due to uncritical acceptance of testimony. Fricker claims that sufficient evidence to give warrant to believing testimony is achieved through the critical use of the rational resources of the hearer. When available, a hearer should assess independent evidence as sufficient to support the testimonial belief. Although we may have a right to assume that people are generally honest, we need to recognize our vulnerability in being presented with falsehoods and avoid being gullible. But the mechanism for identifying 'the falsehood' may be a challenge. An eloquent and articulate speaker can give an utterance in the most convincing manner such that a hearer may feel that seeking independence evidence may not be needed. Also, a lack of resources, such as time, may deter the hearer from engaging in a critical assessment of the speaker for reliability. These instances of believing testimony will be what Fricker describes as an uncritical acceptance of testimony.

Fricker admits that the context of interaction influences how testimony is justifiably believed, such as in expert testimony. A cancer patient may not be able to do a substantive critical assessment of the oncologist if she is not an expert in that field. But the credibility of the oncologist may at least be checked. So it does happen that,

By trusting the speaker, the hearer essentially 'taps into' whatever justification the speaker may have had – even though he may not be able to engage in the activity of *justifying* his beliefs in quite the same way as the speaker.¹⁰⁰

Hence, the epistemic responsibility lies on the hearer to ensure that her testimonial beliefs are formed based on sufficient justification and credibility of the source of her testimony. The hearer

⁹⁸ Fricker, Elizabeth, p. 134

⁹⁹ Fricker, Elizabeth, p. 125

¹⁰⁰ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*, p.77

is therefore accountable for the testimonial beliefs she arrives at. The speaker's epistemic responsibility in the testimonial exchange reduces to a sort of mere interaction since it is the duty of the hearer to believe responsibly by sufficient evidence. However, the requirement of independent evidence for the reductionist for justifying testimony may not be achieved. Where there is no such evidence it does not imply that testimony has not occurred, only that the required conditions for justification are not available.

Coady's anti-reductionist view claims that a speaker's assertion serves as the source of justification. In other words, the assertion itself gives warrant to justifiedly believing. It is assumed that a hearer owes it as a duty to believe the speaker regarding the speaker as truth-tellers. Thomas Reid argues for this based on two principles; the principle of veracity and the principle of credulity.¹⁰¹ By intelligible reasoning, we can infer that persons as social creatures have the propensity to speak the truth, and such disposition justifies us in believing what we are told.¹⁰² Coady notes Reid's view of testimony as a social operation of the mind.

He defined these operations as those which 'necessarily suppose an intercourse with some other intelligent being' and instanced commanding, questioning, and promising as falling into this category, along with testifying.¹⁰³

These instances of interaction mentioned above are fully ingrained into social practices such that the progress or stability of social life is somewhat dependent on them. As a speaker recognizes the agency of the hearer as another 'intelligent being,' she recognizes the norms governing social interactions. These interactions have been validated in everyday life, and we cannot deny them.¹⁰⁴ This is opposed to the (individualistic) epistemic independence to arrive at testimonial beliefs that reductionists' views imply. For Coady, social interactions are fully ingrained into practices that enable the progress and stability of social life and these social interactions engender human flourishing. This brings about human socio-epistemic dependence among themselves for forming beliefs and having knowledge. Coady argues that success in communication is made possible by the recognition that a speaker uses language and that norms are followed and no independent evidence is required. Under ideal conditions, a speaker will make true assertions and the default

¹⁰¹ Reid, Thomas, *Inquiry and Essays*, R. Beanblossom & K. Lehrer (eds.), 1983, pp.94-95

¹⁰² Adler, Jonathan, (2012). "Epistemological Problems of Testimony." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

¹⁰³ Coady, C.A.J.(1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*,, p.26

¹⁰⁴ Coady, C.A.J. p.38

response by the hearer is to believe it. Hence, in the context of a community that follows the norm of truth-telling, a speaker's assertion serves as the source of justification for the testimony.

For anti-reductionists, the need for evidence other than S's telling in testifying is unnecessary.¹⁰⁵ Coady affirms that,

One who testifies must be seen as providing evidence for the truth of the relevant proposition *p*, ... By testifying that *p* one vouches for an ascertained connection between how one says things are and how they are actually...In the case of testifying, ... the way of achieving the point is through the speaker's status as one having a particular kind of authority to speak to the matter in question, a matter where evidence is required.¹⁰⁶

Coady suggests above that evidence can be a reliance on the authority of the speaker. This does not explicitly say the kind of authority with which a speaker's testimony should be believed, but his view is suggestive of the rational authority of the speaker, where it is thought that the speaker follows the basic norms of human interaction in language and communication. A speaker's assertion thereby carries the epistemic force to be believed. Coady argues that fundamental human interaction and success in communication are made possible by the presupposition that a speaker uses language in recognition of convention, and no independent evidence is required. However, in the testimonial exchange, the hearer also has roles to play apart from believing the speaker,

Our definition of testimony naturally concentrates upon the speaker or testifier, and what it is about his or her performance that constitutes its testimony, but a full understanding of testimony would be incomplete without some explication of the characteristic part played by the hearer. When we believe testimony, we believe what is said because we trust the witness. This attitude of trust is very fundamental, but it is not blind ... the critical attitude is itself founded upon a general stance of trust...¹⁰⁷

The above indicates the recognition of the epistemic duty of the hearer in the testimonial transmission and formation of beliefs. The critical attitude of a hearer is to exercise trust in believing the testimony, not in the reflective assessment of the speaker. Coady argues that the default response to receiving testimony should be unreflective, as opposed to forming testimonial beliefs by critical reflection on belief indicators.

¹⁰⁵ Coady, C.A.J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, p.42

¹⁰⁶ Coady, C.A.J. p.43

¹⁰⁷ Coady, C.A.J. p.46

What happens characteristically in the reception of testimony is that the audience operates a sort of learning mechanism which has certain critical capacities built into it. The mechanism may be thought of as partly innate, though modified by experience, especially in the matter of critical capacities. It is useful to invoke the model of a mechanism here since the reception of testimony is normally unreflective but is not thereby uncritical. We may have 'no reason to doubt' another's communication even where there is no question of our being gullible; we may simply recognize that the standard warning signs of deceit, confusion, or mistake are not present. This recognition incorporates our knowledge of the witness's competence, of the circumstances surrounding his utterance, of his honesty, of the consistency of the parts of his testimony, and its relation to what others have said, or not said...¹⁰⁸

One can argue that Coady's description of the learning mechanism also seems to support a reductionist view because it recognizes other aspects surrounding the testimony. As mentioned in the quotation above, other indicators in some contexts of receiving testimony may be described as evidence to arrive at testimonial belief, thereby it is not purely a non-basic justification. It is assumed that the speaker 'knows' what she is saying and also that she is aware of the dependence of the hearer on her for the testimony. This dependence requires that the speaker is accountable for the belief-formation of the hearer and has epistemic responsibility for the testimonial transmission. Generally, an individual who makes an assertion is accountable for the truth of it. However, the vulnerability and curiosity of persons as intelligent beings may bring about the request for a further justification of sorts for an assertion. This will require that the speaker, if available, provides such justification. In the case that the speaker is not available for further enquiry on the subject matter, the hearer must assume responsibility for believing the testimony as there is inadequate justification.

The assurance view is also regarded as an anti-reductionist view of testimonial justification. It claims that

... a speaker's assertion is not evidence for what he believes or the truth of what he asserts. The hearer's entitlement to belief resides in the speaker's standing behind his word, giving his assurance.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Coady, C.A.J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, p.47

¹⁰⁹ Adler, Jonathan, (2012), "Epistemological Problems of Testimony." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

A hearer is morally justified to believe the speaker's testimony. Although it is not the testimony itself that is a priori believed, there is the moral justification for testimonial belief as a result of the speaker's assurance by giving testimony. In the acceptance of this offer of assurance, we do not just infer the likely truth of the testimony but also hold the speaker responsible for the content offered as true and the belief formed from it. Our right to form testimonial beliefs arises from the offer of assurance the speaker makes in her assertion.¹¹⁰

In giving testimony, the speaker delivers both the content of the testimony and a call for trust in communication. For Ross,

If it means anything to say that we are entitled to believe what we are told, it means, that where we have been told (and have believed) something false, although what we believe will then be open to criticism, we will not ourselves be open to criticism for having believed it. It means that we are in this circumstance absolved from the charge of not having taken due care over what we believe. If anyone is to be criticised on that score, it will be our informant, or perhaps his informant.¹¹¹

This implies that whatever fault arises regarding the formation of testimonial beliefs, the hearer is excusable from the outcome of what is believed and the epistemic value it holds in the community of persons. Hence, the moral and epistemic burden of testimonial beliefs is not on the hearer. The speaker takes the criticism for any epistemic failing arising from the testimony.¹¹² Although Ross notes that this in a way de-emphasizes an obligation to believe a speaker, it does not in any way presuppose that the consequence of a testimonial exchange is insignificant prior to the scrutiny of it. In other words, the hearer's belief attitude or position in receiving testimony in the moment of interaction may not be subject to criticism, but this does not mean she should disregard the implications the testimony may have when acted upon.

Ross's argument hangs on the view that rationality guides us in the commitment to trusting a speaker.¹¹³ We cannot divest reason from the authority (respect) of a speaker as a member in the shared standards of communication, and subsequently, on the subject matter of which she testifies. For Ross, it is the "respect for a speaker's authority as the judge of the matter on which she speaks

¹¹⁰ Ross, Angus, (1986). "Why do we believe what we are told?" p.79

¹¹¹ Ross, Angus, pp.82-83

¹¹² McMyler, Benjamin, (2011). Testimony, trust and authority. pp. 61-62

¹¹³ Ross, Angus, (1986). p.81

that is the source of the entitlement and obligation to believe her.”¹¹⁴ It is rational to believe what we are told by speakers whose authority we respect. To not believe such speakers is in conflict with the authority of the speaker as a moral agent.¹¹⁵ This attribution of authority to a speaker is supported by a special relation between the speaker and the hearer.¹¹⁶

Richard Moran, also an assurance theorist, notes that recognition of the special relation between the speaker and the hearer is in the communicative context that obtains and the interdependence among persons. Moran presents his assurance view as follows:

... it is the special relations of telling someone, being told, and accepting or refusing another’s word that are the home of the network of beliefs we acquire through human testimony. And these relations ... provide a kind of reason for belief that is categorically different from that provided by evidence.¹¹⁷

The place of evidence independent of the speaker, while not totally rejected, does not have a primary influence on believing testimony. There is a recognition of agency among persons; the idea that there are moral demands in interaction that engender the expectation to speak the truth and to trust. Furthermore, the cognitive processes of believing and knowing by testimony are described by Moran as involving building credibility for the speaker where what is asserted is true.

... when someone makes an assertion we may not only learn about what he believes, but if the assertion is *true*, we may also learn the truth of what is asserted. And if our interpretation is guided by principles of charity, we will indeed take most of what people say to be true, even in cases where we have no independent reason for thinking it true. In this way, the fact of the other person’s belief (as interpreted by us) may function as *our* reason for believing the same thing. We thus gain true beliefs about persons as well as about the world they are talking about.¹¹⁸

So, the speaker’s assurance for testifying truly and intuitively validates the hearer’s dependence upon it in believing it and possibly acting on it. The view that people testify truly is inferred from the notion that being in a position to testify, we will testify truly. So, we are entitled to believe what she testifies as true even in the absence of independent evidence. This, however, implies there may arise a conflict between believing reasonably and the overlooking error even when evidence is

¹¹⁴ Ross, Angus. (1986). “Why do we believe what we are told?” p. 82

¹¹⁵ Ross, Angus. pp.79-80

¹¹⁶ Ross, Angus. p.84

¹¹⁷ Moran, Richard. (2005)“Getting Told and Being Believed,” *Philosophers’ Imprint*, 2005, p.3

¹¹⁸ Moran, Richard. (2005) p.5

available. The availability of independent evidence constrains us to form beliefs in accordance with it, while the principle of charity guides us to downplay the evidence to believe.¹¹⁹

The entitlement thesis is anti-reductionist but focuses more on the hearer's recognition rational capacity of agents to act within the demands of norms of interaction. The reason for believing is derived from the recognition of the rational capacity of individuals and the intelligibility of testimonial content. For Tyler Burge, justification for testimonial beliefs should be *a priori*, this is because the justificational force is not derived from empirical reasons.¹²⁰ In a testimonial interaction, there is the justification of belief directly from the presentation of it by the speaker. Burge argues that this should not be regarded as empirical. In other words, he draws our attention to the content of the speaker's assertion as distinct from the act of speaking. When a speaker produces a coherent set of sentences, which is heard as intelligible to the audience, one may be entitled to form testimonial beliefs from the speaker's perceived utterances.

For Burge, the acceptance principle forms the basis of justification for the possible formation of beliefs from a speaker's assertion and this puts forward some questions; should the hearer not assess the source or content received? How about cases of lying? The acceptance principle recognizes the rationality and agency of the speaker and the hearer. These make us identify the speaker as a rational source of beliefs and, therefore, testimonial beliefs. The hearer is also an intelligible agent whose entitlement to believe may be subject to assessment. A hearer, *a priori*, may be entitled to regard her informant as a source of truth and accept as true, the information given.

We are *a priori* entitled to accept something that is *prima facie* intelligible and presented as true. For *prima facie* intelligible propositional contents, *prima facie* presented as true bear an *a priori prima facie* conceptual relation to a rational source of true presentations-as-true: Intelligible propositional expressions presuppose rational abilities and entitlement; so intelligible presentations-as-true come *prima facie* backed by a rational source or resource of reason; and both the content of intelligible propositional presentations-as-true and the *prima facie* rationality of their source indicate a *prima facie* source of truth. Intelligible affirmation is the face of reason; reason is a guide to truth. We are *a priori prima facie* entitled to take intelligible affirmation at face value.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Price, H.H. (1969). *Belief*. p.113

¹²⁰ Burge, Tyler. (1993). "Content Preservation," p.466

¹²¹ Burge, Tyler. (1993). pp.472-473

Burge's entitlement thesis provides a hearer to make a weaker claim as "I am justified to believe because S told me". Burge places emphasis on the justification for belief in accepting the word of others. Hence the justificatory claim on the epistemic rationality of hearer to support his view to accepting the word of others since, "we are rationally entitled to rely on interlocution because we may presume that it has a rational source."¹²² The intelligibility of the proposition and reasoning are pivotal to the entitlement for Burge. When a hearer receives testimony, recognizing the intelligibility of the propositions, requires that she has the ability to interpret what was presented to her correctly. Furthermore, implicit in arriving at intelligibility is the understanding of the normative context (language and semantics) applicable. The content of an intelligible message presented as true marks an *a priori* prima facie connection to truth.¹²³ Thus the hearer is in a default position to accept the testimony. But Adler explains this as follows:

The hearer does not begin in the neutral position of treating the speaker's act of assertion as requiring evaluative certification as a condition of its acceptance. The entitlement is conferred by the nature of the testimonial setting. The entitlement applies independent of whether the hearer has any particular reasons to trust the speaker.¹²⁴

This explanation of the entitlement thesis indicates the extent to which the hearer can make use of her rational resource to trust a speaker. This implies that even when a hearer trusts a speaker, it is not a condition for accepting the speaker's testimony, since being entitled to believe will achieve accepting the testimony as well. It is suggestive that the hearer starts from an unbiased position of acceptance for the assertion as regards the entitlement thesis. For Burge, the idea of trust to whatever degree already admits some level of bias. Also, the link between entitlement and justification is in the recognition that the speaker has put to use rational capacities for her assertion to be accepted as true. Hence there is a basis for justification not as a matter of seeking a posteriori evidence but from the mechanism of rationality. This justificational force that is derived from rationality provides the basis for the acceptance principle in acquiring testimonial beliefs as epistemically justified.¹²⁵

¹²² Burge, Tyler. (1993). "Content Preservation." p.470

¹²³ Burge, Tyler. (1993). p.471

¹²⁴ Adler, Jonathan. (2012). "Epistemological Problems of Testimony." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

¹²⁵ Burge, Tyler. (1993). p.466

Acceptance principle vis-à-vis Justification: A person is apriori entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so, because it is prima facie preserved (received) from a rational source or resource for reason; reliance on rational sources or resources for reason – is, other things equal, necessary to the function of reason.¹²⁶

The rationality of a source, however, is questionable for reasons such as the abandonment of the exercise of reason and norms such as lying. On the part of the hearer, the awareness that the testimony comes from a rational source without available reasons, to the contrary, absolves her in whatever testimonial belief she forms. For Burge, the content of the testimony has the same impact as the rational resource to arrive at the justification of testimonial beliefs. For Burge,

It is not just the rationality of a source that marks an apriori prima facie connection to truth. The very content of an intelligible message presented as true does so as well. For content is constitutively dependent, in the first instance, on patterned connections to a subject matter, connections that insure in normal circumstances a baseline of true thought presentations. So presentations having content must have an origin in getting things right. The prima facie rationality of the source intensifies a prima facie connection to truth already present in the prima facie existence of presented content.¹²⁷

This (entitled) acceptance as the epistemic default position for the hearer as a rational agent is dependent on the intelligibility of the content as true in presentation, independently of its presentation from a rational source. This suggests that Burge's acceptance principle fails to apply when the rationality of the source is questionable as well as when the content presented lacks a reasoned connection to truth. Burge recognizes that certain aspects of rationality may go contrary to true presentations: in other words, there is the possibility of rational lying (intentional lying). This brings about a "disunity of reason."¹²⁸

Burge's entitlement thesis appears compelling with regard to paying attention to the content of testimony and the exercise of the agent's rational resource to arrive at justified belief from testimony. However, justification need not be linked to this entitlement since seeking purely rational justification for testimonial beliefs may be impossible. The preservation of content in a rational source, presented as true, is with the intention to create a belief in the recipient. The value

¹²⁶ Burge, Tyler. (1993). "Content Preservation." p.467

¹²⁷ Burge, Tyler. (1993). p.471

¹²⁸ Burge, Tyler. (1993). p.475

of the intention, epistemically or morally, may be questionable, but a piece of information or content with an intention is presented anyway. I follow this line of thought in discussing anonymous testimony to the extent that the content of testimony where intelligible to the hearer and should get more attention from the hearer for belief-formation. The presentation of content in anonymous testimony satisfies the requirements of entitlement and justification as given by Burge. For me, while that the anonymity of a speaker may be a viable reason not to believe the testimony, the intelligibility of the content as presented to the hearer suffices to make the hearer evaluate the acceptance of testimony.

When we receive anonymous testimony, the object of cognitive interest is the content and the subject matter. We do not perceive the attitudes of the source; we merely understand the content and try to reason out the intention or motivation in trying to form a belief. The epistemic status of the anonymous speaker as a rational source can only be inferred from the intelligibility of the content. Anonymity releases the speaker from being responsible for the belief-formation of the hearer. This is because any entitlement to accept the content of testimony will mean that the hearer draws justification from her rational resources only.

2.1.1 Hearers should not believe anonymous testimony

In this section, I argue that Elizabeth Fricker's reductionism entails that the hearer should not believe anonymous testimony. I have noted earlier in Chapter One that the presence or identity of the speaker provides input for credibility in epistemic deliberation. The bodily gestures of a speaker can be an indicator of assessing a speaker's credibility. A resident who gives directions to a tourist, with his bodily presence, provides more input for credibility than directions on a signpost on the street. The identity of the speaker serves as a basis (evidence, reason) for a hearer to believe the testimony. Hence, the unavailability of this in anonymous testimony may suggest that a hearer should not believe anonymous testimony.

The reductionists' claim that justifiedly believing testimony is reducible to the evidence available to support the testimony. The need for independent evidence, that is evidence other than the speaker's testifying, is the basis for the reductionists' view for believing an assertion. It has been argued in various ways that "the justification for testimony has to be ultimately reducible to other (non-testimonial) epistemic sources – such as perception, memory, and inference."¹²⁹ Thus

¹²⁹ Brauer, Felix. (2018). "Looking Beyond Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism." p.2

in anonymous testimony, there is no sufficient reason for the hearer to find the testimony reliable. Therefore holding that the hearer of anonymous testimony should not believe, where there is no established reliability of the speaker, will lead to a dismissal of the content.

As earlier noted, for Fricker, an attempt to establish the general reliability for each testimony we receive may not be possible, *some* evidence to support the general reliability of the speaker is admissible. As a hearer receives an assertion, she must assess the trustworthiness of the speaker in relation to that particular assertion to be justified in believing the testimony. The reliance on the speaker on a particular occasion should not be based on the general reliability of testimony. Fricker notes that we may regard a speaker as trustworthy where there is a record of reliability for that person in interaction with the speaker.¹³⁰ Hence, a speaker is assessed for reliability on each occasion of interaction and this implies that a speaker may be truthful on one occasion and give false assertions on another.

Fricker claims that a hearer should assess independent evidence regarding whether it is sufficient to support the testimonial belief. Although we may have a right to assume that people are generally honest, we need to recognise our vulnerability in being presented with falsity and avoid being gullible.¹³¹ The mechanism for identifying any falsity may be a challenge. An eloquent and articulate speaker can give an utterance in the most convincing manner such that a hearer may feel that seeking independent evidence may not be needed. Also, a lack of resources, such as time, may deter the hearer from engaging in a critical assessment of the speaker for reliability. Fricker's view cautions hearers about falling into an epistemic disadvantage in a testimonial transmission due to uncritical acceptance of testimony. The hearer should engage her rational and autonomous capacity to arrive at a reasonable belief from the testimony.¹³² In some cases, such as expert testimony, it may be easier to assume the trustworthiness of the speaker. A patient should trust the doctor to accurately diagnose her ailment, adjudging the doctor as competent and sincere in carrying out the job. This is not the same as a stranger relying on a resident in giving her directions. This implies that the way in which the stranger should be aware of her vulnerability to falsehood and gullibility is not the same as that of the patient to the doctor, even when both of them need to assess the trustworthiness of their interlocutors. The stranger who is in doubt may need to ask

¹³⁰ Fricker, E. (1994). "Against gullibility." p.133

¹³¹ Fricker, E. (1994). p.145

¹³² Fricker, E. (1994), p.134

another resident to confirm the direction. If she is unable to make that confirmation, she may have to follow the direction she received even if it turns out false. A patient can rely on the accredited status of the expertise of the doctor. A patient in doubt can make enquiries about the doctor's competence for her ailment, perhaps from the relevant professional body or authority.

The requirement of independent evidence for the reductionist for justifying testimony may not be achieved even with the requirements of sincerity and competence of the speaker. Fricker argues that a hearer has no "presumptive epistemic right to trust an arbitrary speaker."¹³³ The presumptive right thesis is the idea that a hearer should trust a speaker's testimony without the need for independent evidence that the assertion is true. A hearer may not be able to establish that an arbitrary speaker is trustworthy. Anonymous testimony on Fricker's views is not achievable on the trustworthiness of the speaker to provide some form of support for believing. An anonymous speaker is an "arbitrary" speaker to the extent that the identity of the speaker is not known to the hearer and there is no identifiable relation between them that can serve as a basis for assessing trustworthiness.

Even where a hearer is aware of her gullibility, an effort to make an assessment of the trustworthiness of the speaker is hindered by the basic anonymity of the speaker, where the speaker is unknown to the hearer at the moment of receiving the testimony. As Fricker notes, independent evidence for an assertion and evidence for *p* from *S*'s assertion are two different things. As Fricker argues, there should be a separating "out of *H*'s total evidence for '*P*', two different strands: the independent evidence for '*P*' which *H* already has; and the evidence for '*P*' which *H* gets, given what she knows from *S* from the fact that *S* has asserted it."¹³⁴ A hearer can seek evidence in relation to a speaker's trustworthiness, with indicators to provide a warrant for testimony such as sincerity and competence. Where a hearer cannot establish these indicators, she should not believe. According to Fricker's view, it will follow that this epistemic position aligns with the justification of testimony due to the availability of independent (empirical or non-testimonial) evidence.

Fricker argues that a hearer does have the duty to seek and obtain confirmation about the trustworthiness of a speaker.

... a hearer should always engage in some assessment of the speaker for trustworthiness... that the hearer should be discriminating in her attitude to the speaker, in that she should be continually evaluating

¹³³ Fricker, E. (1994). "Against gullibility." p.125

¹³⁴ Fricker, E. (1994). p.130

him for trustworthiness throughout their exchange, in the light of the evidence, or cues, available to her.¹³⁵

The hearer assumes no duty to believe until the hearer secures evidence for the trustworthiness of the speaker. The hearer, generally, as an agent, has the duty to be epistemically virtuous. This is because the hearer's rational autonomy as an agent should be reflected in the process of epistemic deliberation and testimonial belief-formation. Having an adequate reason to doubt, such as the presence of a defeater, does not imply that there is a duty to commit to acquiring evidence of the truth of the testimony. There could be enough reason for a tourist to doubt a (true) proposition from a stranger or accept a (false) proposition from a friend. In the case of the tourist and a local, who is a stranger, there is the recognition of the intelligibility of the stranger as a person in an epistemic community. The physical presence of the stranger influences what attitude the tourist will take towards believing. The tourist can choose to follow the direction. He may take the information hoping that he has been given the correct information due to the need at hand – direction to an unknown area in the city. The tourist may also find reasons not to follow the directions. Perhaps the local was exhibiting an offhand attitude to giving directions. The tourist may decide to seek additional, independent evidence other than the speaker's direction. So while the tourist recognises the local as an epistemic agent, he still engages his autonomy to confirm what he has been told. These instances of these interactions cannot be described as basically anonymous since the local is in some way known, to the extent that he is observable, to the tourist. A hesitation to believe the local resident can be due to having no relationship to warrant the trustworthiness of the locals.

I have earlier argued that the hearer must only engage with the content of an anonymous testimony to arrive at a belief decision. We cannot properly justify such belief decisions with Fricker's local reductionism on believing testimony. With Fricker's view, the epistemic attitude that a hearer should not believe where there is no reliability or some form of evidence will tend to a dismissal of the content. Hence, following such a norm will imply that the audience of an anonymous blog should not believe the content. Also, anonymous tips should not be believed. This is not an appropriate epistemic position for the context where the rational autonomy of the hearer must be rightly expressed.

¹³⁵ Fricker, E. (1994). "Against gullibility." p.126

2.1.2 Hearers should believe anonymous testimony

I argue in this section that Coady's antireductionism and Moran's assurance view entail that hearers should believe anonymous testimony. For Coady, justification for believing or accepting testimony can be derived from the hearer's reliance on the speaker's assertion. It is the speaker's assertion that provides the warrant for believing the testimony. The need for evidence other than S's telling (assurance and rational support) in testifying is unnecessary.¹³⁶ A hearer may do more than simply have a default belief in the testimony.

Coady explains that the default response to receiving testimony may be unreflective, not because hearers cannot exercise doubt but due to trust in speakers.¹³⁷ The hearer trusts the speaker's capacity as an agent, with a belief that the mechanism by which beliefs are formed is subject to reasoning and experience, and critical reflection may apply according to context. The recognition of the roles speakers and hearers play in interaction indicates the recognition of the obligation of each of them to arrive at justified belief. So while the hearer may have a default attitude in believing the speaker's assertion, it should not be an obstruction to a critical attitude on the part of the hearer.

In the absence of reasons to doubt a speaker's assertion, a hearer maintains the default belief of the testimony. This does not imply that the hearer is uncritical in receiving assertions.¹³⁸ Interactive abilities make people aware of defeaters when receiving assertions and making a belief decision. It could be background beliefs about the speaker such as expression of a lack of seriousness when interacting, prior knowledge of the subject matter, or inconsistencies in the assertion that will indicate an error in the testimony. This implies that persons have the capacity to internalise these defeaters that present reasons to doubt a speaker. As a hearer receives testimony, this mechanism helps process how she receives it uncritically and unreflectively. Where the hearer notices no signs of defeaters, she is justified in believing the assertion. The demand on the hearer is the recognition of the rational effort of the anonymous speaker and that he had delivered the assertion while being guided by the norms of interaction. According to Coady, a hearer should believe S's assertion in recognising that S makes the assertion with an understanding of the norms of assertion. In other words, believing an anonymous speaker will be appropriate as the hearer expects that the speaker is delivering the truth. It implies that it is epistemically responsible that

¹³⁶ Coady, C.A.J. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. p.42

¹³⁷ Coady, C.A.J.(1992) p.46

¹³⁸ Coady, C.A.J.(1992) p.47

the hearer believes the speaker (perhaps a duty to the believed speaker). This sense of duty is inappropriate to lay on the recipient of anonymous testimony.

In the same vein, Richard Moran's assurance view focuses on the relationship that agents have in interaction. The justification for believing testimony is claimed to be situated in the speaker's assurance given in his observed testimony. When a speaker makes an assertion, it is an invitation to the hearer to believe the assertion as true. The speaker assures the hearer of the truth of what she says, persuading the hearer not to look for evidence other than what she has asserted. Richard Moran describes the speaker-hearer relationship in a testimonial exchange as,

... the mutual recognition of intention can play the role for the audience of providing him with a reason for belief, because he sees the speaker as presenting himself as accountable for the truth of P, and asking, through the recognition of his intention, that this offer of his assurance be accepted.¹³⁹

The speaker recognises that in wilfully giving an assertion, he is presenting himself as taking accountability for the belief and the idea that his utterance is to be taken as an assurance that the assertion is true.

This assurance, according to Moran, by itself, justifies the audience's belief in the assertion. Therefore, the speaker expects that the hearer also recognises the speaker's intention to be believed. Hence, Moran argues that the "dependence on someone's freely assuming responsibility for the truth of P, presenting himself as a kind of guarantor, provides me with a characteristic reason to believe, different in kind from anything provided by evidence alone."¹⁴⁰ By accepting the speaker's offer of assurance, we accept the truth of the testimony and hold the speaker responsible for the content offered as true and the belief formed from it. So the audience can rightly pass the buck to the speaker with the right to form testimonial beliefs and hold the speaker accountable for cases of error arising from that belief.¹⁴¹ So, in giving testimony, the speaker delivers both the content of testimony and commitment to speaking truly. There is a recognition of agency among persons, the idea that there are demands in interaction that engender the reliance on speakers to speak the truth and the expectation of trustworthiness. The epistemic burden is on the speaker to meet the hearer's expectation. The speaker's assurance that she is speaking truly is a reason to believe the assertion.

¹³⁹ Moran, Richard, (2005). "Getting Told and Being Believed," pp. 17-18

¹⁴⁰ Moran, Richard, (2005). p.7

¹⁴¹ Ross, Angus, (1986). "Why we believe what we are told." p.79

The process of believing testimony involves building credibility for the speaker if what is asserted is true. If the testimony is false or unjustified, the hearer may express disappointment, anger, frustration, and so on. She will find the speaker blameworthy because the speaker assured her of something which turned out to be false. As Moran notes, the hearer places the burden of responsibility for testimonial beliefs and criticism for any epistemic failing arising from the testimony of the speaker.¹⁴² This implies the hearer is excusable for whatever fault arises regarding the formation of testimonial beliefs.

The speaker's assurance as a reason for believing a piece of testimony raises a problem for a hearer of anonymous testimony. The assurance view may well be applicable in a context where the speaker's utterance is observed and/or the speaker's identity is known. Anonymous speakers do not fit properly with the context. In the cases of anonymous blogs and other moderated online content, authors do not make such explicit invitations to be trusted on testifying truly. Even in the instance where the post may contain a direct request to be trusted or a plea to be believed, the anonymous speaker does not stand to give an assurance that justifies believing the content. This is because the explicit intention to be believed does not follow the intention to be explicitly responsible for the assertion. An intention to be responsible will be based on the ability to identify and direct praise or blame to the speaker. As earlier noted, it is difficult to succinctly identify the kind of trust relationships that can exist in cases of anonymous testimony. The same may hold for anonymous posts on Wikipedia and other anonymous blogs. This then leads to the question of accountability for belief. If accountability is based on the speaker's assurance, and this assurance cannot be determined in the context of the speaker's anonymity, then the responsibility falls on the hearer. The hearer becomes the sole agent in making a belief decision within her rational capacity. If there is an epistemic failing from the testimony, the hearer can only express disappointment towards herself in believing.

Having this epistemic position that a hearer should believe anonymous testimony ignores the consideration that anonymous assertions are epistemically deficient. It gives credence to the view that hearers be open to believing any assertion they receive. However, this is not appropriate. The only appeal of this attitude is that the anonymous speaker is recognised as an agent with a rational capacity in the interaction. However, without the ability to hold an anonymous speaker accountable for beliefs, this epistemic attitude is inappropriate. A recipient of an anonymous post

¹⁴² McMyler, Benjamin. (2011) *Testimony, Trust and Authority*. pp.61-62

does not have a duty to believe. She can give attention to the post due to the recognition of its being asserted by a presumed norm-conforming author. It does not mean she should believe it. The duty to believe an anonymous testimony suggests that the speaker is an active participant in the process of belief-formation, which is not so.

2.1.3 Hearers should accept anonymous testimony

For Tyler Burge, when a speaker makes an assertion, the audience should, by default, accept the observed testimony. This default acceptance provides an alternative to believing the testimony. This default acceptance is linked to a moral demand on the part of the hearer to accept the testimony. I had earlier noted that in assessing anonymous testimony a hearer may suspend judgment. However, a position of suspension of judgment is compatible with accepting the content for practical purposes. In other words, a hearer utilising the content of anonymous testimony is not to affirm its being believed but to indicate the practical worth as if the testimony were to be true. Acceptance has been noted as a distinct epistemic state from believing.

The distinction between belief and acceptance is in the exercise of the agent's cognitive process and the purpose that the process aims. While both believing and accepting an assertion can be admitted as cognitive acts, accepting does not require a warrant for whatever conclusion is arrived at. Believing is regarded as an involuntary state of mind where the cognition of truth is the aim. It is characterised also by evidence-related justification.¹⁴³ Acceptance, on the other hand, is characterised by being voluntary or intentional and it does not aim at the truth but at utility or success. It does not require evidence for holding it.¹⁴⁴ Engel¹⁴⁵ and Tuomela¹⁴⁶ also note these characterisations of belief and acceptance. While Cohen and Tuomela argue that acceptance does not entail belief and is independent of it, Engel argues that acceptance is a specie of belief. For Engel, the main feature of belief is that it is in degrees and this is what distinguishes it from acceptance. For him acceptance is only a stage of belief. There can be full belief and partial belief, where acceptance will be described as partial belief. I do not wish to pursue further the discussion on the distinction here.

¹⁴³ Cohen, L.J, (1989). 'Belief and Acceptance.' pp. 368-375

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, L.J., (1989) .pp.36-375

¹⁴⁵ Engel, Pascal, (1998). "Believing, Holding True and Accepting." pp.143-144

¹⁴⁶ Tuomela, Raimo, (2000). "Belief versus Acceptance." pp. 123-124

The relevance I wish to draw out here is that hearers can accept anonymous testimony without necessarily committing to the truth of the content. However, they are responsible for its acceptance and in the event that they act as if the content is true. The character of acceptance as a disposition to a practical end and not necessarily cognitive success is appropriate to understanding how a person can proceed to respond to anonymous testimony. The commitment to accepting the anonymous testimony is not a commitment to the truth of it. Thus acceptance accommodates my argument on the epistemic responsibility of the hearer of anonymous testimony to engage with the content in an epistemically responsible manner. This does not call for evidence, nor does it place the burden of duty to the speaker on the hearer. As Cohen argues, acceptance “executes a choice - the acceptor's choice of which propositions to take as his premises.”¹⁴⁷ This implies that the recipient of anonymous testimony in deliberation to make an epistemic choice has the capacity to hold an epistemic position of acceptance. For Cohen, “what a person accepts may in practice be reflected in how he or she speaks or behaves, but it need not be.”¹⁴⁸ This view agrees with Tyler Burge’s idea of entitlement and his acceptance principle in relying on the word of others. I will now examine Burge’s view.

My argument that we should pay attention to the content of anonymous testimony is consistent with Burge’s view of entitlement. The claim of the intelligibility of the assertion is a sufficient basis for the hearer to assess the anonymous testimony. The acceptance is derived from recognising the rational capacity of individuals as manifested in the intelligibility of testimonial content. Burge draws our attention to the content of the speaker’s assertion as distinct from the act of speaking.¹⁴⁹ The intelligibility of the testimony entitles the hearer to accept testimony. When a hearer hears an assertion, recognising the intelligibility of the proposition requires that she can interpret what was presented to her. Furthermore, implicit in arriving at intelligibility is understanding the normative context (language and semantics) applicable—the content of an intelligible message presented as true marks an *a priori* prima facie connection to truth.¹⁵⁰ Thus the hearer is in a position to accept the testimony.

When a speaker produces a coherent set of sentences, which is heard as intelligible, the hearer is entitled to form testimonial beliefs from the speaker’s perceived utterances, unless there

¹⁴⁷ Cohen, L.J.(1989). “Belief and Acceptance.” p.371

¹⁴⁸ Cohen, L.J. (1989). p.369

¹⁴⁹ Burge, Tyler (1993). Content Preservation.” pp.472-473

¹⁵⁰ Burge, Tyler. (1993). p.471

are defeaters. Burge places emphasis on the justification for accepting the word of others. Hence the justificatory claim on the epistemic rationality of the hearer supports his view of accepting the word of others since "we are rationally entitled to rely on interlocution because we may presume that it has a rational source."¹⁵¹ The acceptance principle recognises the intelligibility of the assertion and through it the rationality and agency of the speaker and the hearer.¹⁵² The link between entitlement and justification. Entitlement gives a kind of justification for acceptance. The hearer's justification derives from the hearer's recognition that the speaker has exercised her rational capacities in presenting the assertion. This justification derived from rationality provides the basis for the acceptance principle in acquiring testimonial beliefs as epistemically justified.¹⁵³ However, a source of testimony can be questionable. Intelligibility does not rule out lying and other cases where the abandonment of the use of reason and norms may occur. On the part of the hearer, the awareness that the testimony comes from a rational source without available reasons, to the contrary, absolves her in whatever testimonial belief she forms. For Burge,

It is not just the rationality of a source that marks an *apriori prima facie* connection to truth. The very content of an intelligible message presented as true does so as well. For the content is constitutively dependent, in the first instance, on patterned connections to a subject matter, connections that insure in normal circumstances a baseline of true thought presentations. So presentations having content must have an origin in getting things right. The *prima facie* rationality of the source intensifies a *prima facie* connection to the truth already present in the *prima facie* existence of presented content.¹⁵⁴

This (entitled) acceptance as the epistemic default position for the hearer as a rational agent is dependent on the intelligibility of the content as true in presentation, as well as its presentation from a rational source. If the sources of contents are not intelligible, there are reasons not to be entitled to accept testimony as true. Burge's acceptance principle is defeated when other considerations indicate that the content presented lacks truth. Burge recognises that certain aspects of rationality may go contrary to true presentations: in other words, there is the possibility of rational lying (intentional lying).

¹⁵¹ Burge, Tyler. (1993) p.470

¹⁵² Burge, Tyler. (1993) p.467

¹⁵³ Burge, Tyler. (1993) p.466

¹⁵⁴ Burge, Tyler. (1993). "Content Preservation." p.471

In Burge's view, hearers are entitled to accept the claim of others. The focus is the content of the testimony and the exercise of the agent's rational resource to arrive at justified belief from testimony. This makes it appropriate for an entitlement to accept anonymous testimony. This is based on the idea that the testimony has come from a rational source and the preservation of content presented as true with the intention to elicit an acceptance of it by the recipient. The presentation of content in anonymous testimony satisfies the requirement of an entitlement to accept testimony as given by Burge.

The intelligibility of the content as presented to the hearer suffices to assess the hearer's acceptance of a piece of testimony. A hearer must consider, rationally, all relevant factors to accept the word of others. When we receive anonymous testimony, the object of cognitive concern is the content and its subject matter. We do not perceive the attitudes of the source; we only have the content (the context is always presented to us). The hearer can recognise the epistemic status of the anonymous speaker as a rational source from the intelligibility of the content.

Suppose that Nate receives an anonymous tip of a wandering paedophile. He is entitled to accept the tip. His understanding of what is being said and the use of his rational resources are sufficient for him to accept the tip. This argument also applies to an internet user who reads an anonymous blog. While she recognises the effort in producing intelligible content and the subject matter and the context, the entitlement to believe does not provide (necessarily) the justification for believing the blog. Hearers of anonymous testimony should "form beliefs on the say-so of others in a way that is rationally shaped by an understanding of, among other things, the risks to which one subjects oneself in accepting what people say."¹⁵⁵ Hence, the interpretation and justification of the testimony depend on the hearer's rational capacity. A hearer may accept anonymous testimony because it is presented as true, but the justification for such acceptance is derived from being entitled to accept and the hearer's concern for the context. This will involve the recognition of both the context of interaction and the appropriate attitude to it.

When a speaker is absent, and she has no obvious participation in the interaction. The hearer has the capacity to engage with the assertion only with contents of anonymous notes, anonymous blogs, and information shared with no acknowledgement of the source. As much as the hearer has the information presented to her, she can exercise the will to dispense the

¹⁵⁵ McDowell, John. (1994). "Knowledge by Hearsay," p.211

information or allow the information onto her body of beliefs. The exercise of the epistemic attitude to belief-formation from the hearer is directed only at the content of the testimony.

An entitlement to accept is most appropriate for anonymous testimony as an indication of hearer autonomy and the applicability to non-epistemic reasons for acting as if the assertion is believed. This epistemic position of the hearer of anonymous testimony does not include the identity and agency of the unknown speaker. The lack of evidence for the credibility of the speaker does not affect the autonomy of the hearer to make a reasonable decision. Where independent evidence is available to justify the assertion, the decision to believe or act on the assertion points to the hearer as responsible for the acceptance of the testimony.¹⁵⁶ This epistemic attitude is consistent with Burge's entitlement thesis for the justification of testimony.

One fundamental concern for an entitlement to accept is that it is perhaps weak to be a plausible position towards belief-formation and may allow for just any sort of acceptance from anonymous testimony. As earlier noted, the anonymity of a speaker puts the epistemic community in an epistemic standing of less credibility than cases of testimonial interactions between known and traceable epistemic agents. However, we can expect require reasonable epistemic decisions from anonymous testimony, given that the hearer will bear epistemic responsibility for it in the epistemic community as a potential re-asserter. While acceptance is consistent with entitlement, the context of the interaction and content of the assertion separates the application of both to an assertion. A hearer who is entitled to accept may still act as if the anonymous testimony is true. I consider 'acceptance' as the same as acting as if the testimony is true.

A hearer's identity is what is identifiable to the community. If the hearer has reason to re-assert or utilise the content of the anonymous testimony, she can be identified as the re-asserter. The stakes for accepting an anonymous testimony may override the need for justifying or assessing the source, such as in the case of an anonymous tip of a paedophile hanging around a park. It will be irresponsible to ignore that content. The safety of the children in the neighbourhood is of a high stake than, say, the concern to know if the note is true or not. Having an entitlement to accept will be not to try to think about the possible source of the note but what's at stake for the community, which is the safety of the children.

I have been discussing the epistemic attitudes that hearers of anonymous testimony may have in this section. I will now apply these epistemic attitudes to the earlier example of the

¹⁵⁶ Alston, William P. (1983). "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," p.116

anonymous tip, “There is a paedophile wandering around this park” and how each of these attitudes is appropriate to apply to the case.

Let’s say Nate is at the park with his child. He reads the note, and looks around in a frenzy. Thankfully, his child is safely within sight. Let’s examine the three possible epistemic attitudes that Nate can think of at that moment to arrive at an appropriate epistemic choice and action as follows:

- (i) He should not believe the tip as the source is anonymous.
- (ii) He should believe the tip.
- (iii) He is entitled to accept the tip.

Which norm is appropriate for Nate to follow? I have argued that it will be inappropriate to express (i) and (ii). In both, Nate recognises the agency of the speaker through the intelligibility of the content of the note. It appears that (i) is more reasonable due to the source being unknown, however as argued earlier, the question of a duty to seek evidence to confirm misplaces where the duty lies. Ignoring the tip due to its anonymous character will be a failing of epistemic duty and even moral obligation to protect her child. Not so much that the information is taken as reliable but that the very possibility of a paedophile around the park puts her child and other children in the community in danger, pain and hurt. In (ii) the attention is on the expectation that Nate should believe the tip which says little about the rational autonomy of Nate to make a deliberation on the note context of interaction. Therefore, the appropriate normative attitude for Nate is (iii), which allows Nate to express his autonomy to make a decision, as a responsible agent. Nate can then act as if the tip is true without any reference to actually believing the tip. Acting as if the tip is true may require Nate's re-assertion of the tip to other people. This will call for an epistemic reason to believe him as a re-asserter in the chain of communication. So Nate as a responsible agent needs to appropriately assess his re-assertion of the information within both epistemic and practical concerns. He is expected to do this as he takes accountability for the re-assertion. What is at stake is not finding the source or determining of credibility of the anonymous source but the susceptibility of children to harm if the tip is true. This is different from getting an anonymous tip about the best restaurant in town, where if the tip turns out to be false, what is at stake may not be as harmful as the roaming paedophile case. The same arguments I have discussed above on acceptance apply to online interactions. Accepting an anonymous online post does not exclude fact-checking for veracity but it does not imply that the hearer should believe or not believe. It

does not also imply that she is not justified in accepting the post and acting on it if she does so after reasonable epistemic deliberation. In acting as if the tip is true, Nate's attitude incorporates both epistemic and practical norms directed toward protecting children and the community.

2.2 Wrongful presumption and harm to an anonymous speaker

A hearer who pays attention to the context of anonymous testimony will recognise that the unknown speaker may not be sufficiently evaluated for reliability or credibility when assessing the content. Hence, an attentive hearer must ensure that she does not make an epistemic deliberation that undermines responsible belief-formation. A speaker may attempt to find the veracity of the content, not minding the source. This is different from the hearer making a fact-finding about the speaker. In being curious to know the source of an anonymous testimony, it is possible that a hearer can be drawn to attach an identity to an unknown speaker. Where a hearer makes a presumption about the speaker and attaches an identity to the speaker, the attention of the hearer to the context in which the content is received shifts. The hearer then assesses the content in the context of a known speaker which leads to a fault in responsible belief-formation.

A hearer can assess a speaker in relation to the social contexts from which they relate or interact. Background beliefs and prior interaction may serve as bases of assessments for hearers. In anonymous testimony, this may be difficult to do. Even in cases where some details about the speaker are known such as gender, race, or social class, such information may not be sufficient to provide an appropriate assessment. On platforms such as *What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* the subject of the platform may indicate the identity and power relations and their effect on interaction may be identified. Hence, harm and wrong towards the speaker may be expressed when the hearer receives the content. A hearer of anonymous testimony does wrong if s/he who fails to make the content of anonymous testimony the primary focus of attention and shifts attention to the person of the speaker. More specifically, there is harm to a presumed speaker if the hearer makes a credibility assessment in addition to assigning an identity to the speaker.

My aim is to argue that such wrongful presumption can arise from a hearer and can influence the belief decision she makes on the content. Assigning an identity to the anonymous speaker creates an error in the process of proper evaluation of the content. One such error will be making a credibility assessment of the speaker thereby neglecting the context of the anonymity of the speaker. Such a hearer denies the context of the testimony and misplaces the appropriate

attitude to the value of the testimony. The possible consequence of such an act of presumption is worth considering as re-assertion of the anonymous testimony may occur.¹⁵⁷

How do we make a credibility assessment of an anonymous speaker? In applying a credibility measure to a speaker, there must be a sort of relation between the speaker and the hearer. The relation can be interpersonal – doctor/patient, friends, acquaintances. It could also be a relationship where only a baseline of trust such as stranger/local resident interaction. The interpersonal relation may also cover the basic sense of knowing the speaker's name, occupation or any other indicator that may help the hearer make a credibility assessment. The non-participation of the speaker in anonymous testimony makes it difficult to have a relationship of trust with the hearer. The speaker (who is basically anonymous) has no participation in the testimonial interaction, either by identification or presence.

We can express trust towards a stranger from whose presence in the interaction we can have access to some details about his person. This does not mean such details will be accurate or correct but such will serve as a basis for making a credibility judgment. Barring cases of bots and automated responses online, an internet user whose name and some other details such as occupation, age, and so on appear on the post has in a way made an invitation for assessment to potential visitors to his page and content. A recipient may decide to find out more about such internet users by their names and other available information and therewith make a credibility assessment.

Perhaps one can trust an anonymous speaker by merely recognising that there is a person who made the testimony. This may serve as a basis not to dismiss the content of anonymous testimony since it can be reasonably deduced that it is from an agent. The presumptive distrust of a person denies the responsible agency of the person in social interaction. Hence, the audience of *What is it like to be a Woman in Philosophy?* can trust the authors for their posts without a presumption of their identity, although there is an attached group identity for the platform. Nate can be trusting towards the anonymous person responsible for the tip about the paedophile without making an assumption that someone whom he 'knows' is the author.

However, in anonymous testimony, the hearer can only identify that the content has come from another agent. The anonymous speaker is excluded from the cooperative practice that occurs

¹⁵⁷ I discuss re-assertion in Chapter Four

in interaction thereby denying the speaker an expression of trust and responsibility.¹⁵⁸ The hearer is thus in relation to the content only. Such a relation does not provide a sufficient basis to carry out a credibility assessment of the unknown speaker. Hence, it is rather difficult to make a credibility assessment. A hearer who makes the presumption of a speaker for anonymous testimony denies the wilful agency of the presumed speaker wilful agency in the interaction. The hearer by assigning the place of the speaker and makes an epistemic determination of what the person must have said or done thereby undermining the capacity of the person. It affects the whole credibility of the person who deserves reasonable assessment as an agent.

Consider the following examples:

1. Brenda gets home from work and finds a note at her door. It reads that her partner is cheating. It was not signed by anyone, so she has no clue who the writer is. She believes it is from Felly, one of her friends who has often shown reservations about her relationship.
2. Tade visits an anonymous blog where a story describes sexist attitudes from male academics towards female colleagues. The setting of the story seems familiar to him. He believes Brad is the author. Brad is a colleague who has been quite outspoken on such matters.
3. Nate walks around the park with his child, he sees a note that says there is a wandering paedophile around the park. He believes it was written by Jay who has often been caught in random acts of dropping notes around the park.

These examples show that arriving at an epistemic decision for the recipients of anonymous testimony involves a credibility assessment of an assumed speaker. There is an assessment of a particular person arising from the relation (the background beliefs, previous interactions) that the hearer has with that person - the assumed speaker.

My purpose is not to argue an excess or deficit in the credibility assessment or that the speaker will merit a credibility assessment from the hearer. Although, either of these may occur as a result of epistemic (bad) luck. Also, I do not intend to explore the correctness of the resultant belief or the medium from which the anonymous assertion is received. My focus is on how making a credibility assessment based on the presumption of a speaker affects the attention of the hearer to the content and how these may shift the context in which the hearer may appropriately make a

¹⁵⁸ Fricker, Miranda (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. p.145

decision. I also intend to show how it constitutes harm to the assumed speaker and the community in the possibility of re-assertion where the hearer may share the content with an attribution of a speaker. The hearer may arrive at a belief decision while assigning an identity to the anonymous speaker as well as a level of credibility that will ultimately influence her belief attitude to the assertion. Also, I aim to argue that a conscientious hearer of anonymous testimony should not assume anyone is the speaker. The hearer must, in her deliberation, consider that there is no known speaker in the interaction. The hearer must not abandon such ignorance and should make epistemic deliberation should be within the context (the character of the testimony as anonymous and the medium of the transmission) of the interaction to make the appropriate epistemic decision.

Generally, credibility assessment requires the ‘presence’ of the person being assessed. The ‘presence’ of the person can be understood to mean being identifiable in one way or another, such as a tourist to stranger interaction, a reader to an author, an audience to a news network, and so on. The type and level of communication will no doubt influence the credibility assessment of a speaker or source of information. So, there is an epistemic relation between the speaker and the hearer regardless of the mode of interaction. When a speaker is anonymous, the agential relation to the hearer is different. There is a relation in that the hearer receives the speaker’s assertion even though the speaker is not present. To an observer, the acts of exchange in anonymous testimony occur with only one identifiable agent, the hearer. The relation the hearer has is to the anonymous assertion.¹⁵⁹ In other words, all variables that are determined by the agency of persons, such as trustworthiness, are not available for assessment. The extent a hearer can go with an anonymous assertion is to find the content intelligible to her. While we may not doubt that a person made the assertion, making an appropriate credibility assessment of the speaker is unlikely. We can say there is no convincing evidence or justification available for such testimonial transmissions since the presence of a speaker may lend credibility to testimony. Even where the content of the testimony can reveal indicators of who the speaker is such as by expertise or affiliation, the speaker can yet be misidentified unless such indicators are strictly exclusive of the anonymous speaker.

There is harm to the person of the presumed speaker (even if not evidently) by conferring on the person participation in the hearer’s epistemic deliberation. Hence, the belief attitude of the hearer abandons the context from which the anonymous content is received. This can also have a

¹⁵⁹ Notwithstanding that there may be indications to some features of the anonymous speaker, such as on anonymous blogs. Even so, nothing definitive about the speaker’s identity is given.

similar effect on the community by producing less desirable epistemic conditions. Such inappropriate belief attitude can also ultimately affect the community as the flow of testimonial interaction continues. The overall epistemic practice of testimonial interaction can be affected by cases of wrongful presumption even when direct harm to the assumed or original speaker cannot be observed. An application of credibility assessment in the context of the interaction may create an obstacle to proper belief-formation. Even if the hearer becomes right in the process of socially imagining who the speaker is, there is no knowledge of that fact when all the hearer has to assess is the assertion.

Brenda holds a prejudiced belief, and will affect Felly's epistemic agency as a speaker. If Brenda's belief is shared with another person who takes Brenda's word for it, Felly will be presented with the credibility judgment of Brenda on her person. Therefore, Felly's agency (freedom of rational autonomy) is restricted in the web of transmission. It is admissible that the cognitive ability of the human mind may not be restricted to trying to have a mental representation of the speaker. However, a virtuous hearer who is a responsible agent should pay attention to the context and exercise caution in the process of deliberation.

In the cases of wrongful presumption above, Brenda, Tade, and Nate fail to engage the contents they received with the context. This is because, for these recipients, the intention to attach an assumed identity to the speaker overrides the content in their deliberation. Being able to identify a speaker, no doubt informs how a person acts on an assertion. Nonetheless, the responsibility to assess anonymous content falls on the recipients. For each case, the relation is between the hearer and the content only. Instead, they all attribute the anonymous testimony to a person who is known to them and of whom they can make a credibility judgement. Brenda blocks an attempt to pay attention to the content by making up an identity for the speaker and making a credibility assessment. She wrongfully presumes by assigning the identity of the speaker to Felly as the author of the note. In her deliberation, she makes a credibility assessment of Felly as not trustworthy. Felly had often shown displeasure about Brenda continuing in the marriage. Thus Brenda's background beliefs, perspectives and hopes, which is obstructing her from assuming a position of intellectual humility¹⁶⁰ for an appropriate response. In other words, she has failed to meet the epistemic demand required to be epistemically conscientious and virtuous, given the value of the

¹⁶⁰ Zagzebski, Linda T. (1996). *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Knowledge and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. p.114

content. She ought to be conscientious of the content of the note without tagging the note to the identity of a particular person, for which she may be in error. I noted earlier that an assumption of the speaker may be correct but that information is not open to Brenda as at when she is having an epistemic deliberation.

In the same vein, Tade's belief that Brad is the author of an anonymous post addressing sexism constitutes not only an error of attribution but harm to Brad. Tade made an epistemic assessment of Brad based on a prior credibility judgment of Brad. This in turn influences how Tade will assess the content even if Tade ends up believing the content. The identity of Brad had been introduced to the epistemic deliberation and the context of the post as anonymous removed. This indicates that the Brenda and Tade should pay attention to the context of the interaction to guide their belief assessment while recognising the context, content, value of the testimony. The issue is not to say that the recipients were right or wrong about the belief formed from the note and the blog but to see that the process of arriving at belief is faulty in attributing identities to individual as well as responsibilities. Brenda and Tade's cases are centred on beliefs that are more personal to them than how it will affect the community. Hence, the effect of wrongful presumption involved will be on the interpersonal relationship they have with their friends whom they have attributed as the authors of the anonymous content. This is not so in the case of Nate, where a community of person may be affected by an improper epistemic attitude to anonymous testimony.

In the case of Nate, he may have good reason to identify Jay as the writer but if this leads to him abandoning the context of the tip, he will be making a deliberation which will affect making a reasonable and responsible decision that will affect the community. The credibility of Jay stands as a factor in the epistemic deliberation of Nate and may also influence the re-assertion of the content. Nate may convey his beliefs along with the anonymous content to the neighbours. Doing so changes the context of the content and also hinders appropriate epistemic assessment. It diminishes the awareness that the recipients ought to have to the information and the reasonable actions that should follow. For instance, the attention may shift away from what is at stake in the content to looking for Jay to find out the truth of the note.¹⁶¹

There is the possibility of suspension of judgment about anonymous testimony, but immediate contact with a piece of intelligible information puts us in an epistemic position to form responsible beliefs. Hence, we might say that such suspension of judgment after deliberation is

¹⁶¹ I discuss responsible re-assertion in Chapter Four

also permissible. Whatever epistemic deliberation the hearer engages must be with an awareness that she is responsible for her testimonial beliefs from the anonymous testimony. Therefore, an epistemically conscientious hearer should pay attention to the content of the anonymous testimony that has some relevance, in some way, to the hearer directly or the epistemic community. If the content of anonymous testimony has any high stakes (for acceptance, or even belief) for the hearer, carrying out a credibility assessment of an anonymous speaker is inappropriate. Undoubtedly, one could always wonder who gave an anonymous testimony, but in a moment of epistemic deliberation, the primary focus should be on the content and how it influences practical interests and action.

In this chapter, I have argued that it is inappropriate to have an epistemic attitude that expresses a sort of expectation to believe (or a sort of duty to believe) towards the speaker of anonymous testimony. The demand of duty on the hearer implies a dependence on the speaker's proper exercise of her agency. Such demand also implies that the hearer can abandon an anonymous assertion where there is a lack of evidence for justification. However, hearers have the capacity to make a belief decision based on evidence while following the appropriate rules for doing so in deliberations.¹⁶² We have the capacity to influence the ends to which we make our belief decisions. A hearer is entitled to accept intelligible anonymous testimony and does not require evidence to accept. It requires the capacity of the hearer for deliberation and choice. Hence, a hearer's attitude should be one of entitlement to accept in order to pay due attention to the consequences of the testimony being true.

I have also argued that the recipient of anonymous testimony can make a wrongful presumption of the speaker which may cause harm to the presumed person and the broader community in interaction. The identity of a speaker may be desirable in making an informed belief decision about the content of an assertion but there is no possibility of an appropriate credibility assessment of a basically anonymous speaker. Just as the epistemic attitude must be appropriate to the context, the hearer must ensure that she does not engage in an uninformed credibility assessment of the anonymous speaker. Such presumption will not only constitute harm to the 'person' of the assumed speaker, but it may also affect the community to which she owes some duty. Hence, imagining the identity of someone as the speaker and making a credibility judgment of such person as the speaker constitutes wrong and potential harm to the person and the

¹⁶² Shah, Nishi.(2002) "Clearing Space for Doxastic Voluntarism." p.443

community. A hearer must be epistemically conscientious of how materials of social interactions, such as background beliefs, may influence her attitudes and affect responsible belief-formation.

CHAPTER THREE: TRUST, RESPONSIBILITY AND RELEVANCE OF ANONYMOUS TESTIMONY

3.0 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I have argued, following Burge, that hearers are entitled to accept intelligible anonymous testimony. I argued that accepting anonymous testimony is more dependent on the rational autonomy of the hearer than in cases involving known speakers. Hence, in assessing the content, the hearer of anonymous testimony cannot pass the buck to the speaker. The hearer is responsible for the epistemic attitude she holds towards the anonymous testimony. The hearer depends more on her capacity to arrive at a reasonable epistemic decision where there is an unknown and untraceable speaker.

In interactions where the speaker is known, the accessible credibility of the speaker makes an input while assessing the content. This is not so in anonymous testimony. It may be reasonable to say that anonymous testimony is epistemically deficient in having a credibility assessment of the speaker due to the lack of identity. Besides face-to-face interaction, in conventional modes of communication, such as newspapers, radio and television, we have interactions with strangers and receive testimonies from them. These modes of communication have a limited human interface like the internet. Even with audio-visual interaction on online platforms, indicators towards assessing information, such as body language and gestures, can still be hidden, unlike in a setting where the interlocutors are in the same physical space when interacting. There are also signs and symbols such as emojis to display feelings, acceptance or rejection of views on social media platforms. Internet communication has shown the need for a philosophical assessment of norms guiding the transmission of information in the epistemic community.

I have also argued that as the means of communication evolves as in online interactions, it is reasonable that conditions for accepting testimony must be appropriate to the context of anonymity to maintain a responsible online community. This is because the beliefs and actions that follow a particular content when transmitted are often beyond the interaction of the online recipients who access and then share it. Online content has as much testimonial worth as face-to-

face interlocution, even though digital technologies have made it easier for individual internet users to remain anonymous.¹⁶³

In this chapter, I examine the contexts of trust in basically anonymous testimony, the relation of the speaker and hearer and their epistemic responsibility as agents in both face-to-face interactions and online interactions. Epistemic responsibility, as it depends on each agent, emphasises the rational capacity of autonomous agents to engage in appropriate epistemic deliberation to arrive at a belief. In the context that a speaker is anonymous, the nature of the testimonial interaction cannot be the same as where the speaker is known. In such contexts, the speaker's agency is not available for any possible evaluation in the testimonial interaction, therefore, the hearer is accountable for the epistemic decision she makes and the content of anonymous testimony she holds in the event of possible re-assertion. I also discuss the value of anonymous testimony to the hearer and the community, notwithstanding its being epistemically impoverished. I argue that the value of anonymous testimony to elicit belief still holds, hence it cannot be dismissed from the aggregation of content derived from the interaction.

3.1 The relation between an anonymous speaker and a hearer

In ordinary testimonial interactions, we can identify the source/speaker, the recipient/hearer and the assertion. The speaker and hearer as agents and the asserted proposition is the object of belief. The assertion has value by being asserted by the speaker. The hearer can make an assessment of the assertion. An assertion in testimonial interaction is assessed as true or false, believable or not, and so on. The speaker and the hearer are agents participating in the testimonial interaction. This interaction involves a participant stance from both agents. A participant stance is a setting of interaction where agents have the readiness of an attitude in response toward others for certain acts. This participant stance is a reactive attitude where trust or the lack of it is expressed.¹⁶⁴ The positioning of speakers and hearers requires (active and) reactive attitudes between each other when transmission occurs. Richard Holton describes reactive attitudes as those “attitudes we normally take only towards people. We feel hurt or resentful when they let us down. Grateful, perhaps touched, when they help. In contrast, when a machine breaks down, we might feel angry or annoyed; but not... resentful.” Thus, the speaker and the hearer participating in the production

¹⁶³ This view is noted by Don Fallis, Karen Frost-Arnold, Deborah Tollefson and Helen Nissenbaum.

¹⁶⁴ Holton, Richard. (1994). “Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe.” pp.67-68

of the testimonial belief does so with an expectation of getting a reactive attitude from the interaction.

How does anonymity affect trust and the attitude to testimony? Paul Faulkner argues that “to trust is simply to make a judgement of reliability in a situation of known dependence.”¹⁶⁵ There is an instance of known dependence and expectation between a speaker and the hearer. For Faulkner, sufficiently trusting involves the speaker's recognition of the hearer's dependence and possession of the motivation to speak truly. Perhaps S has had previous interactions with H, or S comes highly recommended as credible from trusted sources to H, or H knows that S is an expert, or where epistemic assessments have shown S to have epistemic failings such as lying or S has expressed epistemic strengths in interactions. Although S may be reliable, a lack of confidence or coherent delivery of S's assertion is a defeater. Broadly, the presence of defeaters and checking alternative sources are features that show that a speaker is not reliable. The unreliability of S is also a reason not to believe her assertion, such as S not having the requisite knowledge of the subject matter of the testimony. So, trust oftentimes depends on the level of interaction that interlocutors have with one another, and this affects the normative attitude that H takes to S's assertion. Confirmation of testimony depends on the availability of relevance and sufficient evidence.

There are varying levels of trust in testimony regarding the relationship of the agents in interaction. The sort of reaction that trust and reliability bring up in persons is not the same kind as dependence on nonhuman objects.¹⁶⁶ When my car breaks down and I am annoyed, my reactive attitude will be different from when my friend lies to me. Trust also has an affective influence on the epistemic and moral relations among knowers.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, the non-realisation of the expectation from an interaction may elicit a feeling of disappointment, sadness, annoyance or even resentment. This, in turn, stirs motivation in the individual to abandon an attitude of trust in subsequent interactions. Holton describes trust as "a distinctive kind of attitude involving a distinctive state of mind" and trust in testimony as a complex attitude.¹⁶⁸ The complexity is a matter of carrying out one's epistemic duty without upsetting practical and pragmatic interests. Trust has been analysed with respect to the ends to which they aim. These kinds of trust - predictive,

¹⁶⁵ Faulkner, Paul. (2007). "On Telling and Trusting." p.880

¹⁶⁶ Holton, Richard. (1994). "Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe." p.67

¹⁶⁷ Faulkner, Paul. (2007). "On Telling and Trusting." p.883

¹⁶⁸ Holton, Richard. (1994). p.64

affective, coping, corrective, therapeutic, and hopeful trust¹⁶⁹ in testimony is broadly expressed in the categories of epistemic and moral trust.

An epistemic trust may be described as trust an individual has towards another for an epistemic reason.¹⁷⁰ In other words, the basis of trust is linked to truth, belief and knowledge. We can describe H as having epistemic trust in S to provide correct information. Furthermore, H believes that he can reliably form beliefs based on the epistemic trust in S (and S's testimony). An ideal instance will be where the hearer has both epistemic and moral trust in the speaker. Moral trust may be described as an individual's expectation that the other person will act rightly. Moral trust is intricately linked with a person's ability to act in a manner that she will be trustworthy as a moral agent. A speaker who speaks truly invites the hearer to recognise her motivation to do so and find her act of testifying trustworthy. This can be understood separately from epistemic trust, but these two categories of trust often overlap. Belief spurs individuals to action, and from actions, we also gain knowledge of attitudes and people. The sort of interaction or relationship that people have sometimes determine the kind of trust that applies and the extent to which each is expressed. Intimate and special relationships such as among family and friends can demand more moral trust, while expert relationships between doctors and patients can require more epistemic trust. Nonetheless, there may be no determinate character to the application and the extent to which epistemic and moral trust is expressed in the overlap of trust. As Linda Zagzebski argues, there is no incompatibility in believing without trusting.¹⁷¹ I can believe a proposition, without trusting the speaker. There is a presumption that what a speaker says will yield true but it may not necessarily arise from an attitude of trust, in both its epistemic and moral elements. Hence, trust in others is in fact "escapable" as she puts it.¹⁷² This escape of trust is what I argue occurs in the transmission of anonymous testimony.

As earlier noted, the speaker and the hearer are agents in a testimonial exchange and each has a participant stance in the interaction. When the speaker is anonymous, there will be no relation of trust to the hearer to the extent that there is no identifiable participant stance from the speaker. A hearer receives the content of the testimony that is intelligible. She can make an assessment of the content only, with the relevant context, to make an epistemic decision. Although

¹⁶⁹ These kinds of trust are expressed in the writings of Adler (1994), Faulkner (2007) and Frost-Arnold (2014)

¹⁷⁰ McCraw, Benjamin W. (2015). "The Nature of Epistemic Trust." p.413

¹⁷¹ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013). *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority and Autonomy in Belief*. pp.37-38

¹⁷² Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013), p.53

the content is received, it is the available component without the participation of the source to possibly provide credibility. There is a non-participant stance of the speaker. What kind of trust can a hearer express if she is to believe the anonymous testimony? One opinion is to say, as noted by Zagzebski earlier, that one can believe without trusting. On the other hand, one can argue that there is the possibility of trusting an anonymous speaker; a bare recognition that a person made the assertion. This is what Gerald Marsh describes as a baseline of trust.

For Gerald Marsh, a baseline of trust is what we “owe other human beings merely in virtue of their being human beings.”¹⁷³ This implies that even when a speaker is unknown, I can be justified in believing given on a baseline of trust in the speaker as a person. This is plausible in cases of stranger testimony or handwritten signs, where I cannot vouch for the trustworthiness of the stranger or author. Marsh further argues that it is upon this baseline of trust that interpersonal relationships are developed. Therefore, trust is characteristic of human relations, no matter how minimal, directly or indirectly. However, having a baseline of trust is often a temporal phase of social interaction. As we have subsequent interactions with people, we have more reasons to trust and then move beyond the baseline of trust. There is an increase in the level of expectation towards someone who has become a friend, even if the interaction started with being strangers. The capacity to move from a baseline of trust to a level of trust that measures up to a developed relationship is restricted in anonymous testimony.

In receiving anonymous testimony, the hearer may have a baseline of trust towards the speaker. She recognises that an agent gave the assertion. For instance, there is a written note without any name of the author, left in a community park about a paedophile hanging around. Nate gets the note. He does not know if the author is trustworthy. He cannot identify having a known relationship with the author. He can trust the note without believing the anonymous speaker or he can express a baseline of trust based on the fact that he identifies the content as intelligible from another person. The choice Nate makes may seem inconsequential as the content and context of the note may outweigh his position of trust at that moment. My point is that if there is any minimal reason to pay attention to an anonymous testimony, it is because of the recognition that a person has made an assertion. This recognition itself lends support to the idea that the hearer then expresses a baseline of trust but it does not tend towards believing an anonymous speaker. That is a separate epistemic choice that the hearer has to make. The question, therefore, is, how will this

¹⁷³ Marsh, Gerald. (2011). “Trust, Testimony and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy.” p. 286

baseline of trust influence Nate's accepting (believing) the testimony? Let's say this may make him believe the content or pay attention to the content. Trusting in this manner implies there will be a reactive attitude, at least, on the part of Nate towards the author. Nate cannot express any reactive attitude as there is no observable or identified agent to direct it. In paying attention to the content, Nate will avoid direct trust towards the anonymous speaker. He can carry out an assessment of the content by self-trust as I will argue in Chapter Four.

Both the speaker and hearer should have proper epistemic standing in interaction. They are both responsible for delivering truths and reliable belief-formation, as well as the fostering of human interpersonal relationships with credibility. Thus, it is arguable that if S is known to H, then H can assess the credibility of S to make proper assertions. The same requirement applies to the hearers in anonymous testimony and, as I will argue, with more burden of responsibility. As McHugh notes, "normal beliefs of mature believers are under epistemic guidance control ... the view that we are responsible for these".¹⁷⁴ This aligns with a default position in accepting testimony but more appropriately for anonymous testimony as the hearer has no information about the speaker. The hearer's epistemic guidance control is all there is to arrive at a reasonable and responsible belief. The hearer engages the content of the testimony as having been asserted, intended to communicate to an intelligible knower. The baseline of trust will do little to influence believing the assertion. Also, an indication of the moral element of trust will arise at another level of testimonial transmission, where the hearer may re-assert the content with participatory influence. A hearer's standing or relation to the content of an anonymous speaker puts importance on the rational disposition a hearer should have in believing responsibly to be regarded as a rational agent.

In some cases, a trusting relationship may involve other people besides from the speaker at one end of the interaction and the hearer at the other end. A speaker may be hidden by others (intermediaries) and vouched for by them. These intermediaries, therefore, provide a basis of credibility for the content. Intermediate sources or speakers may be responsible for the content of the anonymous testimony if they know the author and consent to hide the identity of the original speaker. They will be vouching for the author as speaking truly. There may be transmissions through mediums regarded as reliable in society, such as courts, and security agencies. Some of these anonymous speakers are court witnesses, whistle-blowers, and victims of sexual harassment

¹⁷⁴ McHugh, Conor. (2013). "Epistemic Responsibility and Doxastic Agency." p. 144

and racism whose identities are hidden by virtue of the information they give. Testimony of witnesses in law courts may be delivered anonymously to the audience. Also, news outlets may anonymise the authors of articles. These platforms of transmission share the responsibility of transmission of the content if the speaker's identity is hidden by them. The platforms may vouch for the reliability of the speakers, it does not imply that the audience is not vulnerable to falsity.

The speaker may also be unknown to the intermediaries in cases where the content is given to them anonymously. Security agencies may receive anonymous tips where it is not required that the speakers give their identity.¹⁷⁵ Some online platforms allow individuals to post anonymously.¹⁷⁶ These platforms while being the medium of transmission cannot be held responsible for the content of the anonymous speakers give. Although they have a responsibility to the audience to transmit credible content, if they have received the content anonymously, their epistemic capacity to adjudge the content as credible is also limited. Even in cases where there is moderation of online content, the moderator in deciding which content to make public will have to make a deliberation that aligns with the context under which the platform operates.

In all of the above instances of intermediate sources of transmission, the conditions for basic anonymous testimony still apply. The intermediate sources not being the original speaker of the assertion has no responsibility for the testimony. For instance, some internet platforms note that they are not accountable for whatever their users post anonymously, hence, they cannot be confronted for the truth of the assertion. Even if they vouch for the veracity of the assertion, they may not be accountable for it. I do not engage here if vouching for an assertion implies accountability or not. Epistemic accountability for the information may not be attributable to the intermediate source or the medium responsible for getting the assertion to the hearer. They cannot be held responsible for whatever beliefs are formed and actions that arise from the information taken up by a hearer. My view is that we should assess intermediate sources in their distinct positions as agents in the chain of interaction. Demanding accountability for an anonymous testimony to an immediate speaker is misplaced and an obstruction to proper believing.

Furthermore, the presumption that people are generally truthful is sometimes expressed online. For anonymous blogs like, *What it is like to be a woman in Philosophy?* and *Academics*

¹⁷⁵"In the Crime Stoppers file, a caller is referred to as the 'tipster'. They do not require the name of the person or any other identifying information. www.crimenb.ca

¹⁷⁶ Social media apps like Whisper allow users to sign on without 'identities' such as real names and make anonymous posts. www.wh.sh

Anonymous, the reasons for anonymity may provide good reason for believing the authors of the posts despite being anonymous, given that oppression and prejudices are frowned upon in the society. Also, these platforms are moderated and the moderators to an extent can vouch for the authors that they are reporting their experiences truly.

The act of anonymous blogging is borne out of the experience of oppression and subjugation in society, not particularly out of choice. This rightly indicates that "online anonymity (including pseudonymity) can provide critical protection to vulnerable people, including those from marginalised and persecuted groups."¹⁷⁷ In the case of the anonymous blog "*What it is like to be a woman in philosophy?*" it is required that authors not provide their names or the names of the actors in their experiences.¹⁷⁸ Sometimes subtopics are hyperlinked on *Wikipedia* for users to check, perhaps, a more credible platform. *Quora* users also attempt to clarify debated topics by referencing other information outlets that may be regarded as credible. However, the user's identity on the platform is also essential for credibility. The online community may doubt anonymous sources, and the level of trust diminishes when little or nothing is known about the social media user who posts on a topic.

Online and face-to-face trust relations can be understood separately in terms of developing and sustaining trust. This can be described with the question: Should I trust this person? Developing trust is about when trust arises while sustaining trust is about continuing to trust as a result of further actions that are consistent with prior credibility. To develop and to sustain may sometimes coincide, such as in cases of the child-parent relationship. In other cases, such as friendships, we may be able to trace the start of a trust relationship and the consequent interactions that sustain it. The online credibility of an individual may be by recommendations from others, demanding more than having general trust towards people who do not have an offline relationship. This does not suggest that such recommendations will generally lead to justifiably believing, as they can lead to false beliefs.

Most online interactions are fleeting; they rarely develop beyond general trust relationships, so developing general online trust is what mainly occurs, and as such, our epistemic conscientiousness ought to increase. Even in cases where internet users can be identified by name and other indicators, it is reasonable to hesitate in accepting information from such sources. The

¹⁷⁷ Frost-Arnold, Karen. (2014). "Trustworthiness and Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls of Internet Accountability." p. 67

¹⁷⁸ <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/ourpolicies>

hesitation in accepting information is consistent with generalised virtual trust. In other words, as recipients are aware of their epistemic vulnerability, they expect that speakers will produce epistemic acts that are consistent with appropriate epistemic norms of interaction. Although sustaining online trust may be a challenge but developing trust can be a good enough reliance for an internet user to accept information from another internet user.

An online user may not trust an anonymous post, given the non-identification of the source. If the hearer has access to the identity or affiliation of the author of a post, there may be some level of assessment that may bring about trust. On the part of the recipient, if she has reduced trust towards certain anonymous online speakers, it is an indication that the recipient is aware of her increased level of vulnerability to epistemic vices. As the recipient is put in a position to choose what to believe, the epistemic accountability for the belief is on her. Frost-Arnold argues that the motivation for being anonymous expresses the speaker's vulnerability, which calls for trust on the part of the recipient due to the content of the online post.

...social media users can experience offline retaliation and persecution for their online speech. ...Thus, speakers may choose to share their stories in a spirit of hopeful trust, but they may mitigate some of the risks they face by telling their stories anonymously. It would be interesting to empirically investigate whether such vulnerability reduction is correlated with a reduction in the efficacy of the speech act;¹⁷⁹

The speaker is vulnerable and open to vices such as prejudicial judgments experience online by trolls and stalkers and online mobs whose judgments fall short of the trust-responsiveness that speakers may need to address their stories. Speakers who use their anonymity to bring forward issues that are often received with bias and injustice in society, as pointed out in anonymous blog posts, do so with the expectation that perhaps their stories will bring about a change in the undesirable social, moral situations of which they are victims.

What kind of trust should be expressed toward online content? In some instances, trusting online content is unavoidable as genuine information may be accessed quickly, even more readily than by interpersonal face-to-face means of communication. Trusting posts online is sometimes developed by relationships with friends, family, famous people, or total strangers. For instance, following each other on Twitter and other platforms can elicit a trusting relationship. Still, it does

¹⁷⁹ Frost-Arnold, Karen, (2016). " Social Media, Trust and The Epistemology of Prejudice." p.527

not measure up to the development of trust via face-to-face interactions. Frost-Arnold makes a comparison of the trust we have towards strangers to online trust.

While the absence of embodied interaction and the ease of deception pose problems for those trying to build thick trusting relationships online, they do not pose a serious threat to generalised virtual trust. Much online trust is trust in people in general... Given what the trust or knows about the average person's dispositions and tendencies, she can rationally place trust in the unknown others with whom she interacts. Consider our trust in the strangers around us on the street not to steal our wallets... We may walk down the street with some degree of confidence that others will not steal our wallets because we have a general sense that most people are not thieves. Similarly, some online speakers may have some degree of confidence that most people will not take advantage of a fellow social media user who has made herself vulnerable by sharing something personal in an attempt to educate others. The basis for this expectation is a general sense of what most people are like.¹⁸⁰

The general sense of trust is what primarily produces social interaction among individuals. For Frost-Arnold, this general sense of trust is extended toward everyone by virtue of being human beings.¹⁸¹ Even when we have come to know our interlocutor by specific relationships as family or friends, the fundamental level of expectation is the generalised trust we have towards them as humans before hinging another level of trust. In embodied face-to-face interaction, special relationships are identified by the kind of affective responses they produce among individuals; feelings of disgust, betrayal and disappointment. Basic or general trust relationships such as we have towards strangers or mere acquaintances also produce affective responses but not with the same level of feeling. Participation in the trust economy is fundamental to the epistemic community, just as it may be challenging to have a trust relationship that will engender reciprocal attitudes online.¹⁸²

Trust relations towards family, friends or experts may also occur online, but access to affective responses and the ease of deception make it difficult to observe any response. Frost-Arnold argues that it is not impossible to develop trust relationships that are beyond the general sense of trust online. She notes that there can be a correlation between the forms of trust relations we have in face-to-face interactions in online interactions. For her, hopeful trust in online

¹⁸⁰ Frost-Arnold, Karen. (2016). "Social Media, Trust and The Epistemology of Prejudice, pp. 525-526

¹⁸¹ Marsh, Gerald. (2011). "Trust, Testimony and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy." p.287

¹⁸² Marsh, Gerald. (2011) "Trust, Testimony and Prejudice in the Credibility Economy." p. 286

interaction is what we mainly express, and it is a reasonable explanation that can be given for our vulnerability in online interactions.¹⁸³ Hence hopeful trust can be regarded as being similar to baseline trust towards strangers in face-to-face interaction. Although she argues for hopeful trust as a positive mechanism against prejudice online on the part of the speaker, it can reasonably apply to belief-formation occurring in the transmission of information online by recipients in general. The possibility of trolling and other misinformation on the internet does not imply that we do not come across truthful information on the internet. Hopeful trust presents a means by which we can have a basis to receive online information even when the credibility of the source is not available at the time of access.

The correlation between offline and online trust does not preclude the idea that relationships evolve as the expressions of trust are modified by beliefs, attitudes and responses. To a large extent, having special relationships online is dependent on having a special relationship offline. People who are friends offline most likely will be friends online, and it is reasonable that the kind of trust relationship they have offline will follow their online interaction. Most online interactions are basic trust relationships where most people are strangers to one another, but it does not mean the trust relationships cannot move beyond being basic. Social media platforms sometimes show how people develop trust relations that are sometimes comparable with offline thick trust relationships. By getting interested in and following the social media pages of individuals, observing their epistemic attitudes, political and religious interest, and social media users can develop keen affection and, as a result, have a cognitive attitude of trust. It is not surprising that individuals may talk about an online friend as if they interact face-to-face. These online trust relations may be strengthened by arranging offline interaction, in which case a thick trusting relationship will develop.

The possibility that internet users can deceive others about who they are and what they do cautions about having general online trust or developing a special trust relationship. The vulnerability of recipients of online communication does increase as the means of credibility assessment for online testifiers are limited. It may be easier to make a credibility assessment when online testifiers are also or have been offline interlocutors. In such cases, offline credibility assessment may influence online interaction. The interaction is solely online between the testifier

¹⁸³ Frost-Arnold, Karen, (2016). " Social Media, Trust and The Epistemology of Prejudice." p.527

and the recipient, thus making a credibility assessment that matches what occurs in embodied interaction impossible.

The awareness of the influence of technological manipulations on online content requires that a recipient of anonymous posts be aware of the possibility that the content she receives may not be accurate. An effort to enquire into the accuracy of the post may ultimately be challenging for her as she may want to get information and form appropriate beliefs within a frame of time of being online. Even so, such an attempt to check the facts of an anonymous online post will lean on the value of information gathered to provide sufficient evidence to the story. Trusting an online story will depend on the mechanism that the recipient uses. Given that an agent should employ epistemic rationality in assessing online posts, an online user will put,

...her trust on evidence about what people in general are capable of doing. Thus, her vision, as long as it does not appear to be wildly implausible, does appear to the online user as having some grounding.¹⁸⁴

The belief-formation that arises out of the evidence that appears sufficiently grounded still puts the epistemically conscientious individual in a position of querying at what level it is rational to trust people in relation to whatever post she receives. Having a generalised sense of trust should not make a person unguarded about trusting with a reasonable attitude.

It often happens that the content that shows societal injustices may be believed with the understanding that victims want to protect their identity and privacy. In cases where the original online speaker becomes anonymous due to reposts, retweets and copying content across a long chain of transmission, general online trust in its most basic form can be applied to arrive at a belief. At the moment of making an epistemic choice, internet users mostly engage with online content only. Time-lapse may not allow a back-and-forth interaction online to make queries and gather further information about a post. Other factors are internet users deleting their posts, platform administrators taking down posts that violate the terms of use, and the post's relevance to internet users. More so, when the source is anonymous, there is a need to be attentive to the idea that there is no credibility assessment to provide a warrant for the resulting epistemic attitude and as well as being epistemically conscious of the possibility that a re-assertion of the content may occur. The evolving character of information on social media erodes trust in information from others as well as the medium of transmission itself, the internet. It is pertinent that,

¹⁸⁴ Karen Frost-Arnold. (2016). "Social Media, Trust and The Epistemology of Prejudice," p.527

...there is a heightened need to calibrate information and knowledge behavior according to the norms of epistemic responsibility and epistemic conscientiousness; to ensure protection ... and to have rules and standards that are communally adopted to steward the social production of knowledge.¹⁸⁵

It is quite challenging to assess how well internet users are attuned to being epistemically responsible. When claims and counterclaims about the authenticity of a post are made, one needs to pay attention to the evidence presented in each case. Even so, it does not guarantee to arrive at the truth. Hence, recipients are left with relying on other trusted means of belief-formation and the responsibility to make an appropriate epistemic choice.

3.2 The burden of epistemic responsibility

In this section, I discuss attributing epistemic responsibility to agents in testimonial transmissions with the aim of identifying the extent of the responsibility for the hearer of anonymous testimony. The speaker and the hearer are participants in the testimonial exchange. The responsible act of asserting and believing is dependent on the agents in interaction. How are the speaker and the hearer responsible for the testimony? How much of the speaker or hearer's reflection on believing indicates their responsibility for a piece of testimony? These questions imply that there are normative requirements for a justification for believing responsibly. I do not take up the discussions of norms here; I discuss them in Chapter Four. The demand for agency on the speaker and the hearer makes them responsible in some ways for their actions and beliefs. The context from which a speaker makes an assertion and the context from which a hearer receives testimony also influences how we attribute epistemic responsibility. I argue that if only the hearer is the identifiable agent in an interaction, then the hearer is responsible for the testimony received.

The demand to be epistemically responsible presumes that a person is accountable for having a particular belief. This implies that when a person forms a belief, she is expected to do so reasonably by following norms and processes that will yield justified belief. In a testimonial exchange, the speaker and hearer hold beliefs in their different epistemic positions. However, it is problematic to simply say that the speaker is accountable for the assertion she makes and that the hearer is responsible for the belief she forms from testimony. Under certain conditions, a speaker

¹⁸⁵ Chun Wei Choo. (2016). "Internet Epistemology." p. 171

is accountable for the testimony and subsequent epistemic decisions that a hearer makes in addition to that. A doctor is responsible for telling the patient her diagnosis that the patient has cancer and the belief of the patient that she has cancer. So, there is buck-passing in a testimonial exchange where the hearer may hold the speaker responsible for her testimonial belief. However, there are other contexts where the buck-passing may not shift the demand for epistemic responsibility to a particular person in a testimonial exchange.¹⁸⁶

Epistemic responsibility is dependent on the ability of persons as agents. It is an indication that persons “can regulate beliefs through the activity of inquiry and, in particular, acts of judging.”¹⁸⁷ This is sometimes referred to as the agency thesis. Conor McHugh argues,

...that epistemic responsibility requires the capacity to be guided by epistemic demands, and this, in turn, explains the essential role of doxastic agency in grounding such responsibility... the idea that responsibility requires some sort of capacity to be guided by the relevant demands.¹⁸⁸

Agency, as guided by relevant epistemic demands, implies considering how appropriate it is for a person to assess and form beliefs that can be regarded as reasonable in line with rational capacity. McHugh describes this as a reasons-responsiveness view of epistemic responsibility. This is a basis to argue for the epistemic responsibility of the hearer of anonymous testimony.

In testimonial exchanges, where the speaker and the hearer are known to each other in the interaction, there is an expectation of responsibility from both sides. We may well argue that at least we are responsible for some of our beliefs.¹⁸⁹ The use of rational autonomy in a testimonial exchange and the epistemic burden of accountability should not be restricted to either of them as both are in a particular social interaction. The speaker, who asserts sincerely, recognizes her assertion as a commitment worthy of epistemic acceptance by the hearer. The speaker also recognizes the 'person' of the hearer, a presumption that, given the need for meaningful communication in the community of persons and the ethical standing of the 'person' of the speaker, she will not relay falsehood. Nevertheless, the hearer should believe responsibly. Context, authority, social relations, trust, and interpretation are interdependent for successful communication between the speaker and the hearer. Therefore, epistemic responsibility is shared

¹⁸⁶ Green, Christopher R., "Epistemology of Testimony," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

¹⁸⁷ McHugh, Conor. (2013). "Epistemic Responsibility" p. 132

¹⁸⁸ McHugh, Conor. (2013). p.141

¹⁸⁹ Such as misinterpretations of statements, perceiving objects wrongly and making incorrect inferences

in such a manner that it is quite evident in the epistemic consequence of social life.¹⁹⁰ Hence, there is a division of epistemic labour in social interaction. Adler puts this as follows:

We usefully divide roles in the kind of information we acquire and so can transmit, e.g., about world events, the weather, sports scores, which no one, nor any small group of us, could achieve on his or her own. Our reliance on the division of epistemic labor extends not just to the pronouncements of others better positioned but to their reasons or evidence.¹⁹¹

The above implies epistemic responsibility is also determined by how reasonable each agent comes to making an epistemic decision. There are instances where the epistemic responsibility of a speaker may not be an input for a justifiable belief-formation in testimonial transmission. The speaker is available for accountability, but perhaps the context of interpretation and intention has been misunderstood, thereby releasing the speaker from any de facto responsibility.¹⁹² A sincere speaker cannot be held accountable for the misinterpretation of the content (which the audience may have) of the testimony she gives. To accept responsibility for a misinterpretation is a denial of epistemic self-trust, which each individual has, even at a minimum, and it is a constraint on epistemic authority and autonomy.

Benjamin McMyler also sets out the sharing of responsibility view in testimony. He claims that the epistemic buck-passing in testimonial transmissions is the main feature of the epistemological problem of testimony. For him,

... the testimony problem draws on a deep and distinctive feature of testimonial belief, namely that a testimonial audience is entitled to pass the epistemic buck or defer justificatory responsibility for her belief back to the testimonial speaker. On the one hand, this feature of testimonial belief helps to explain the intuitive force of the testimony problem. Insofar as a testimonial audience is entitled to pass the epistemic buck, epistemic responsibility for the audience's belief appears to be shared out between the speaker and audience. On the other hand, this feature of testimonial belief also helps to explain the sense in which testimonial knowledge is the result of what Thomas Reid (2002) calls a "social operation of the mind," a distinctively social epistemic ability the exercise of which is a cooperative endeavor between speaker and audience...¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Origgi, Gloria. (2008). "Trust, Authority and Epistemic Responsibility." p.43

¹⁹¹ Adler, Jonathan. (2012) "Epistemological Problems of Testimony." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Testimony*.

¹⁹² Ross, Angus. (1986), "Why do we Believe what we are being Told?" p.73

¹⁹³ McMyler, Benjamin. (2012). "Responsibility for Testimonial Beliefs." p. 339

Epistemic agents in testimonial exchange have the capacity to engage in the social operation of the mind as a knowing subject. On the part of the hearer, she is an agent with the ability to deliberate and arrive at a testimonial belief. The ability to reflect on what to believe and achieve knowledge by the hearer makes her responsible, in part, for her belief. So, as the speaker is epistemically responsible for making true assertions from a trusting hearer, the speaker is accountable for the hearer's belief. When we grant authority to a speaker, we take responsibility for doing so. We trust the speaker to testify truly. It does not preclude the speaker's responsibility from a true presentation of her testimony. Gloria Origgi states that

... the way we gain knowledge through communication is influenced by the responsibility we take in granting authority to a source of information. Our responsibility is not just a moral quality we happen to possess or have learnt through experience, but a way of approaching our communicative interactions, a stance towards credibility and credulity that is shared, in successful cases, with our informants. It's a dynamic stance, which varies through contexts and contents at stake, but it is necessary for any epistemic enrichment of our cognitive life, apart from the marginal cases of epistemic luck.¹⁹⁴

The above presents a context-based approach to epistemic responsibility. It shows that other communicative processes occur in a testimonial exchange besides giving and receiving content. There is an implicit recognition of norms on both sides of the interaction. There is also the recognition of authority (perhaps, institutional or expert) that the speaker may have to warrant the trust of the audience. The understanding then influences our interpretation of what we believe.

It is thus the stance we take towards our informants, the way we exercise our epistemic responsibility that makes us believe or not believe what was said. Thus, the construction of testimonial knowledge is a shared responsibility between informants and hearers.¹⁹⁵

The stance we take towards our informant ranges broadly. Speakers may be experts, laypersons, friends, waitresses, and strangers, and this informs how we accept information from them. It also determines how we hold them responsible. The social relation recognized will influence the acceptance of the testimony.

¹⁹⁴ Origgi, Gloria. (2008). "Trust, Authority and Epistemic Responsibility." p.36

¹⁹⁵ Origgi, Gloria (2008). "Trust, Authority and Epistemic Responsibility." p.41.

In cases where speakers are known to hearers, the relationship tends to bring about an exercise of trust in communication and also expresses a sense of shared epistemic responsibility. Whether we accept what is said with evidence or without evidence, we enter into a commitment to "listen" to them. We owe it a duty to give attention to whoever is communicating with us. Perhaps, there may be some information of relevance in the testimony. This puts a responsibility on the hearer so as not to be in error of not being communicative.

We weigh through our interpretation, the authority and credibility of our informants according to our epistemic needs. On the other hand, the way the informants "pack in language" what they want to say has epistemic consequences on our allocation of credibility. And the epistemic duty of the informants amounts to be relevant for us in a context, thus suggesting to us some possible epistemic gains in listening to them.¹⁹⁶

The context of the interaction indicates instances where the person, credibility, the relevance of the content and any other value that may add to believing a speaker is unavailable at the moment of testimonial exchange for a hearer. This seems to be so in many instances of transmission of information. This implies that if there is no trust, there is no requirement to believe the testimony. If there is any need (such as what is at stake, given the content of the testimony) to pay attention to the assertion, some additional evidence may be needed. This leads to being more conscientious with the use of critical operative resources, such as internal deliberation and checking for defeaters toward making epistemic decisions, which will be epistemically rational for knowledge so gained, provided that the hearer has no conclusive reason to distrust the speaker.

The attribution of responsibility differs according to the nature of the testimony and according to the context. The responsibility of a known speaker and a known hearer in an interaction will align with the participation they have in the interaction. Lackey's disjunctive account of speaker-hearer testimony allows for proper attribution of responsibility for testimonial beliefs. It also provides a clear positioning of agents in epistemic responsibility. In speaker testimony, the speaker is accountable for the truth of the assertion and credible evidence for the communicable content. In hearer testimony, the hearer is responsible for believing the testimony and whatever assessment she makes of the testimony in further communication.

¹⁹⁶ Origgi, Gloria. (2008). p. 43

If a hearer of anonymous testimony decides to trust the testimony and form beliefs about it accordingly, who is accountable for it? Holton gives a suggestion close enough to explain this.

...to decide to rely on a person is to decide to trust them since in relying one automatically takes the stance of trust ... Firstly there are those cases in which I do not take the participant stance towards the person at all. Here we have a general suspension of the stance of trust. Secondly there are limited suspensions-of the stance of trust, concerning particular instances of reliance. Here the general stance of trust towards the person remains in place. An obvious case of this can come when I rely on you without your knowing, or being reasonably expected to know, that I am doing so. Here I would not feel betrayed should you let me down.¹⁹⁷

It suffices to say that a hearer cannot hold an anonymous speaker accountable for their testimony, either by expressing trust or distrust towards them. My point is to justifiably place the onus of epistemic responsibility on the hearer in anonymous testimony as she chooses to carry out her epistemic duties in an epistemically conscientious manner, the anonymity of the speaker notwithstanding.

The hearer cannot successfully pass the buck as attributing accountability, and epistemic responsibility to the speaker may require having information about the speaker's capacity to make the assertion or trust in the speaker. Therefore, the context of anonymity requires that the hearer be attuned to the demands of her epistemic situation without unnecessarily seeking to pass the buck to a speaker. There is no relation involving trust or epistemic duty between the speaker and the hearer, which can ground epistemic responsibility for the speaker. The hearer is the only agent in engaging the belief. There is no explicit cooperative social relation. The relation that can be identified is between the hearer and the content of the testimony. Therefore, the hearer holds epistemic responsibility for anonymous testimony received.

3.3 The relevance of anonymous testimony

The relevance of the content of anonymous testimony may depend on the stakes involved and/or the attitude of the hearer who intends to accept and utilise it. Although an anonymous testimony is epistemically impoverished due to the unavailability of the speaker's accountability and credibility assessment, this does not mean it is of no value what is at stake in the content of an

¹⁹⁷ Holton, Richard. (1994). "Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe." p.70

anonymous testimony may go beyond how relevant it is to the hearer. Some effort is required from a recipient of anonymous testimony to make an epistemic decision of the content in a manner that furthers achieving an appropriate epistemic attitude. A dismissal of anonymous testimony could lead to dreadful consequences for society, hence anonymous testimony that can affect the community should be attended to, just as with testimony from known sources. No doubt that there may be cases where anonymous testimony will be misleading; it will be careless not to pay attention where the stakes may be high on the value of the information with grievous consequences that are avoidable.

Therefore, a hearer who receives an anonymous assertion with intelligible content must identify if there is relevant content in the assertion. How can individuals identify what content to believe or not? How do we identify the truth from fake news and misinformation, offline or online? Is it worth paying attention to the content, just in case it needs to be re-asserted? There may be differences in how various agents receive the assertions depending on interests. An internet post that serves as mere entertainment to Nate may be of career importance to Aggrey. Nonetheless, being aware of the epistemic responsibility a hearer holds for anonymous assertions should help make choices that produce appropriate epistemic acts in re-assertion. Hence, internet users who receive such content should be able to assess it to produce beliefs that are relevant and justifiable.

There are some digital tools of interaction on the internet and social media platforms intended to mimic face-to-face communication, emoticons and various types of digital images are used to convey feelings and impressions that users may have in response to a post. These digital images do not have the same impact as when conveyed in person. Internet users may use these emojis to convey feelings about a particular post or content or make an added commentary on the post. Added commentaries may show endorsement, rejection, belief or disbelief about an original post, hence added commentaries have more assertive input in interaction. At the same time, emojis and images can convey emotions and feelings that may also be input as commentaries on posts. No doubt, added commentaries can also be misleading, but they put the recipient in a better position to make a judgment. Added commentaries sometimes influence how recipients assess the original posts. As an autonomous agent on the internet, it is dutiful that an individual applies appropriate attention to the anonymous, original content as separate from added commentaries in order to arrive at an acceptable belief-formation. This will enable the agent to examine how relevant the post from an anonymous source is as distinct from a commentary.

The relevance of an original post can be overshadowed by commentaries. Emily Sullivan notes that there are structural limits to the way an original post can change on social media. Suppose something in the original post's character has changed; a distortion of the post, in its wordings or pictures, will mean that what is received is not the true representation of the original post that the author intended. Barring manipulations of any kind, an online post is digitally documented and will appear as it was posted. However, added commentaries can affect the relevance of the original post for recipients.¹⁹⁸ This can happen when the audience abandons the original post and takes added commentaries as the premise for belief-formation on the position of the original post. Sullivan argues that there is a breakdown of trust in online sharing and, more so, "a breakdown of testimony altogether".¹⁹⁹ This is perhaps a far-reaching statement. Some original posts allow commentaries from users, and also to retweet or re-post the original content. On *Quora* and Twitter, users' reactions and commentaries to original posts are identifiable, whether endorsing the original post or making a new assertion. If a new user in the flow of information accesses this, she must pay attention to the original post that the commentaries are reacting to.

This indicates that the original post is distinguishable from the added commentaries. Furthermore, Sullivan affirms that "the purpose of recognising an instance of testimony is that it comes with a certain kind epistemic weight and norms for belief."²⁰⁰ This implies that the epistemic value of a shared online message may get lost or thwarted due to added commentaries to the original posts may be misleading in a bid to not attribute any epistemic accountability to a recipient. Suppose we suspend temporarily the intention of added commentaries to evaluate how the recipient processes the original post. In such a case, a shared post has epistemic value if (i) the original post was given with the intent to inform, or (ii) the recipient arrives at the assessment of the content as being some value in providing information to her.

Below is Sullivan's example:

Consider that, somewhere on Twitter, someone firmly believes that her child was injured by vaccines. Consider further that this person authors a tweet saying that vaccines are unsafe and cites a study that she believes provides scientific evidence that vaccines are unsafe. With this tweet she is intending to inform, and she is expressing a belief that she has. Imagine further that the tweet gains traction and starts to move through chains and chains of people. Some of these

¹⁹⁸ Sullivan, Emily. (2019). "Beyond Testimony: When Online Information Sharing is not Testifying." pp. 22-23.

¹⁹⁹ Sullivan, Emily. (2019). pp.22-23.

²⁰⁰ Sullivan, Emily. (2019). "Beyond Testimony: When Online Information Sharing is not Testifying." p. 23

people also take the tweet to be informative and pass it along to inform others. However, there are also vaccine advocates on Twitter that believe anyone who would post such a tweet is idiotic and stupid. Such an advocate retweets the tweet with the added caption "wow". This sharing of the vaccine message is not informing.²⁰¹

In Sullivan's example, being informative is associated with having a value of providing information speech acts that elicits an epistemic attitude in the hearer. The comment "wow" is a non-informative casual remark that does nothing to draw attention to the intent of the original tweet about vaccines. However, as the tweet goes through more people, the comment "wow" may be taken up as informative for someone in the event that it draws attention to the view that vaccines are unsafe.

For Sullivan, the added commentaries to the original tweet have made the original tweet evolve as non-informative in its value. Hence,

The informativeness of a message can change not only with regards to speech acts that start as non-informative and becomes informative. There are also speech acts that can start out as informative that after passing through chains of people cease to be informative.²⁰²

Sullivan focuses on the interpretations and assessments of the recipients who are retweeting the original tweet. It is this move that makes the original tweet evolve into a non-informative state, as she claims. However, the error here is the abandonment of the original post in a separate evaluation. Where someone (Sh) shares (re-asserts) with the recipient and comments on it, assessing the added commentary as the original tweet will be an error. The original content is available for R to assess, and it has primary value for belief-formation than Sh's added commentary. The appropriate attitude is that R intends to treat the added commentary as a post from the sharer as a separate piece of information. In relation to the original post, an added commentary may be an assessment of the original post by the sharer. It may be inappropriate or irrelevant to the original post. It may have no epistemic value. As such, there will be no epistemic input to the original post.

I agree that messages (testimony) may evolve, in epistemic value, as they pass through chains of people. The relevance of the value of a piece of testimony is in no way static, as different

²⁰¹ Sullivan, Emily. (2019). p.24

²⁰² Sullivan, Emily. (2019). "Beyond Testimony: When Online Information Sharing is not Testifying." p. 24

recipients may have different interpretative reflections of it. There can be no fixed character/quality to how a message transmitted will be received because the chain or web of transmission does not have a definite terminus. First, the evolution of the message is related to what interaction the recipient has with it before passing it to the next person. Second, each recipient in the chain of transmission has the cognitive input to decide if a message is valuable to them or not. The cognitive input of the recipient involves the exercise of norms applicable to epistemic attitudes in response to a testimonial transmission. This implies there is an expectation that the content received is, at least, accepted as testimony.

In this chapter, I discussed trust in anonymous testimony. I argued that there is no definite trust relation between an anonymous speaker and a hearer. While the baseline of trust is expressed towards agents in general, it is difficult to express it towards anonymous speakers as the hearer cannot express a reactive attitude towards an unknown person. I also argued that the hearer of an anonymous testimony is epistemically responsible for whatever belief formation she holds on the content of the anonymous testimony. The hearer must make conscientious epistemic deliberation, being aware that she is unable to pass the buck to an anonymous speaker. I argued that the epistemic impoverishment of anonymous testimony does not imply that the content cannot be relevant for epistemic input to the hearer. An anonymous testimony can be of value in situations where the content is true or at least provides some knowledge of a situation.

CHAPTER FOUR: RE-ASSERTION OF ANONYMOUS TESTIMONY

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I argued that a hearer of anonymous testimony is the only agent identifiable in the interaction and must assess the content and form beliefs reasonably. I also argued that a hearer of anonymous testimony must recognise the context and value of the content while engaging in deliberation. This shows the epistemic responsibility of the hearer as an autonomous agent. It is also an indicator that such a hearer tends to be virtuous in epistemic interactions. Hence it is desirable that the hearer of anonymous testimony be a virtuous epistemic agent.

When information moves along the chain of transmission, epistemic roles shift. Specifically, a hearer becomes a speaker in the act of re-asserting a previously received testimony. It, therefore, becomes appropriate that the hearer-turned-re-asserter recognises the appropriate norm of assertion as it pertains to their speech act of re-assertion. Hence, I will refer to a hearer of anonymous testimony as a re-asserter by engaging in the transmission of the testimony to another person. I will use “re-assertion” here to indicate the act of the hearer-turned-speaker in further transmission of the content of anonymous testimony.

The application of norms in re-assertion requires that the re-asserter examines all the conditions of knowing in repositioning received information to transmittable content. The re-asserter may not believe the testimony, but the act of re-assertion implies that she accepts the testimony and is “acting as if” the assertion is true, for certain purposes. Thus in re-asserting anonymous testimony, the hearer-re-asserter $H(r)$ must evaluate the content. This is because there is the possibility of cases of justified re-assertion without believing the testimony. This makes it challenging for $H(r)$ to apply norms that allow for epistemic reasons only in such cases of re-asserting without believing the testimony.

When a hearer arrives at an epistemic decision on an anonymous testimony, she can exercise her autonomy to withhold or reassert it. Why should I re-assert it? Do I have to re-assert it all? If I re-assert it, what will be the consequence of re-asserting it? If I do not re-assert it, what will happen? These questions for the re-asserter invite an exercise of the cognitive ability to resolve whatever conflict is involved in deliberation. If a re-asserter decides to transmit the anonymous testimony, there are options, she may; simply re-assert, re-assert with evidence, or re-assert with

context. I argue that re-assertion with the context of anonymity is consistent with having pragmatic reasons to re-assert and it is the reasonable option.

Generally, agents should be conscious of both speaker norms and hearer norms in making or receiving assertions, since they occupy either of these two positions across the chain of transmission at one point or another. I argue that the norm of assertion applied for anonymous testimony should recognise epistemic and non-epistemic reasons to make proper re-assertion. I argue that an appropriate norm for re-asserting anonymous testimony should accommodate non-epistemic reasons for acting as if the testimony is true. In this chapter, I discuss five norms of assertion: the knowledge norm, truth norm, belief norm, reasonable to believe norm, and the supportive reasons norm. I examine the propriety of these norms for the re-assertion of anonymous testimony. While these norms apply to various contexts of interaction, I argue that the supportive reasons norm is the most appropriate norm for receiving and re-asserting anonymous testimony. The supportive reasons norms provide justification for the re-asserter who has non-epistemic reasons to make a re-assertion.

4.1 Re-asserting anonymous testimony

Since the content of anonymous testimony is the only object of evaluation, it is appropriate that there is a demand for epistemic responsibility for the re-asserter in transmission transmitting the content. A hearer engages in the cognitive processes to identify various contents she receives. The processes also involve how she places the contents into different epistemic positions. The re-asserter filters her body of cognitive materials with the awareness of the demand that comes with possessing the contents. Some of the content will be knowledge, some will be belief and some will remain as mere materials in her cognitive capacity. Also, some will be assessed as having re-assertibility. The decision to re-assert may be from the demand of care that comes with the content: caring that she does not put out falsehood, caring that she does not make an error of judgment, caring that making a re-assertion is the responsible thing to do. As Zagzebski notes, “it is caring that gives rise to the demand to be epistemically conscientious.”²⁰³ I have argued that anonymous testimony deserves attention just as testimony with known sources due to the value of the content, which will be assessed singly for lack of the source for credibility assessment. Nate will not be

²⁰³ Zagzebski, Linda T., “Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About,” p. 376

epistemically conscientious with regard to re-asserting the anonymous tip, however, he is conscientious of knowing that an anonymous tip is available in his body of information. Perhaps, one could argue that the content of anonymous testimony may be what we do not care about, or it could even be in conflict with what we care about. Hence, an individual should conscientiously hold the content of anonymous testimony with the demand of care towards the community of people in social relations.

As indicated in the case of Nate, paying attention to the content is a step towards assessing the pragmatic need to re-assert anonymous testimony. The cognitive processes of the virtuous re-asserter will be influenced by the content and context of anonymous testimony. A re-asserter of anonymous testimony must express a reasonably justified attitude in the act of re-assertion by being conscientious of the content and context of the testimony as well as the social forms of demands and utility for the information. As the transmission of beliefs and knowledge creates a chain or web of persons, there are various reasons for making assertions, and such reasons may vary from one person to another. The act of re-assertion reinforces the interdependence of persons for beliefs and knowledge acquisition.

The relation between interlocutors may influence the acceptance of the assertion and the level of interest the asserter has on practical consequences for the relationship. For instance, the norms of friendship can conflict with epistemic norms, particularly norms that are restrictive in providing a warrant for belief-formation such as knowledge or truth.²⁰⁴ The attempt to settle conflicting norms invariably rests on identifying the context that fits the situation and which norm to apply. I discuss some of these norms in section 4.2. As rational agents, we assess the value of relationships and the practical end that making an assertion will elicit. In other words, we care about the relevance of our assertions and how beliefs arising from the assertions will influence the relationships we have²⁰⁵. Even when we only accept what someone tells us, the degree to which we hold such content is influenced by the relationship we have with that person. This is what Zagzebski refers to as the demands of what we care about, epistemically. She argues that the degree to which we actually care about the subject matter of knowledge does not have a similar structure to how we satisfy the demand for knowledge.²⁰⁶ This suggests that we sometimes carry out

²⁰⁴ Keller, Simon. (2004). "Friendship and Belief." p.330

²⁰⁵ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2004). "Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About." p.364

²⁰⁶ Zagzebski, Linda T., p. 365

demands without extending care to the subject of the demands. This sometimes happens in relationships where the demands of the relation take the central place in belief and action while the content of the demand is made secondary. Hence, aside from the desirable epistemic values, we seek to engender in society the value of what we care about while being conscientious of epistemic values.²⁰⁷ For re-asserting anonymous testimony, the practical reasons (with high stakes) outweighs other reasons not to re-assert. This does not imply that there is no epistemic support for the assertion. An agent can have pragmatic norms in addition to epistemic reasons, this does not reduce the epistemic concern of the assertion. McKinnon suggests that even when there is no certainty or sufficient warrant for the acceptance of an assertion, there is the awareness of the consequences that making an assertion could elicit towards action. This implies that epistemic conscientiousness of the norms of assertion should also align with the evaluation of the consequences. The stakes, as in the case of the anonymous tip of the paedophile, being wrong or false are low compared to the consequences of not asserting at all or withholding from asserting due to an effort to avoid incorrect or false assertions.

The motivation to re-assert a testimony could be the need for the information to be transmitted. I have affirmed that re-assertion in speech acts is intricately built into the structure of testimonial transmission. Axel Gelfert notes that

...much of the communication we engage in with others does not primarily aim at imparting knowledge – even if overtly informative speech acts are typically governed by norms of truthfulness, sincerity and accuracy – but instead seeks to strengthen social ties. Even when we volunteer testimony, we often do so not because we recognise the urgency of the informational need on the part of our interlocutor, but because we wish to be recognised as knowledgeable and helpful. There need not be anything disingenuous about behaving in this way. If knowledge is transmitted in the process of engaging in such behavior, then it is not only epistemically unproblematic, but beneficial.²⁰⁸

The above shows that the context from which an agent receives a testimony influences the motivation to re-assert the testimony. The hearer may request the need; Jake asks for directions to the library from Ford, who got directions from an anonymous source some time ago. In this instance, Ford made the re-assertion upon the request made by Jake. In another instance, the re-

²⁰⁷ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2004). pp.367-368

²⁰⁸ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. p.51

asserter may well be aware of the value of the information to the hearer, thereby making a decision to re-assert. That is, mere epistemic concerns did not engender the value of the information. For example, consider that Jake was looking confused and wandering around. Ford observed Jake's action and decided to ask what the matter was, and in the interaction, Ford gave directions to the library to Jake. Ford identified the awareness of a need: help for the wandering Jake. Note that I do not discuss the kind of relationship between Jake and Ford. Nonetheless, the actions of Ford as a re-asserter involve not only epistemic concerns but also practical reasons.

This suggests that motivation for re-assertion can be derived from the need on the hearer's part. It can also be from the awareness of the need by the re-asserter, and this may also be the case for the transmission of anonymous testimony. While there may be different motivations to re-assert, how the re-asserter delivers the content is also important. The choice to deliver the content in one way other than another indicates the kind of belief-inclination the re-asserter may have to do so. I discuss some options for the re-assertion of the content of testimony below.

(a) Simple re-assertion of anonymous testimony

A simple re-assertion of anonymous testimony is made, if the re-asserter makes an assertion that does not indicate its being from another source. Such assertion does not suggest to the recipient the appropriate epistemic status of the re-asserter in the interaction. This confers responsibility on Nate as an original source of the testimony. Unless there is further inquiry regarding justification for the re-assertion, where more details about the source and context of the content are given, the recipient can hold the re-asserter responsible for the assertion. If Nate accosts a neighbour, Paul, and says "There is a paedophile wandering around this park." This is a simple re-assertion of the content of the anonymous testimony. This does not tell Paul that Nate is not the original source nor does it indicate that Nate received the content anonymously. Hence, Paul can hold Nate responsible for the assertion, and rightly so. Simple re-assertion is an inappropriate way to transmit anonymous content as it abandons the context in which the content is received. It also makes the re-asserter stand in an improper position of responsibility for the content. Whether the transmission of the content brings a desirable consequence or not for the re-asserter and the recipient, it is not compatible with good reason to make a simple re-assertion of anonymous testimony.

(b) Re-asserting with some evidence

A re-assertion can be made with some available evidence relating to the content of anonymous testimony. A re-asserter can have background beliefs that relate to the content or receive more information about the content from interrogations with other people. Such evidence may inform believing or disbelieving the content of anonymous testimony. In this case, it may be appropriate that the re-asserter believes the anonymous testimony and has sufficient reason to transmit the content. Disbelieving is a reason not to transmit the content. However, disbelieving does not remove the cognitive awareness of the content from the re-asserter. It only indicates the epistemic decision made. This is a demand that the re-asserter has to grapple with. Another demand is being responsible for justification of evidence for the content. Is the evidence accurate? Is it sufficient to warrant the re-asserter's belief? If Nate gets some details regarding the tip, he may well re-assert with such evidence to Paul. 'There is a paedophile around the park. I saw on the news that a repeat offender who was living around escaped from jail yesterday.' Such an additional statement to the content suggests that Nate had given consideration to the truth of the anonymous testimony. Perhaps Nate may think that he has sufficient reason for the anonymous testimony he received to warrant transmission. In transmitting the content with evidence to Paul, Nate is inviting Paul to have relied on him for the truth of his statements. This is erroneous since the reliability of the anonymous testimony Nate received is not available. Nate may well have good reason to transmit for pragmatic reasons. The community should be aware and guard against the potential harm that may come to their kids. Beyond such pragmatic reasons, Nate has available evidence to provide justification for his belief attitude when queried.

(c) Re-asserting with the context

One can re-assert the content of anonymous testimony with the details that it was received anonymously. It may seem obvious that this should be the case with the transmission of the content anonymous testimony but the possibilities of other options above show us that it is not always the case. This option is consistent with the epistemic attitude of acceptance and conscientiousness to the context. A re-asserter who transmits the content with the context situates herself in the appropriate standing in the interaction, she holds no responsibility as the original source of the content. Rather, any credibility assessment by a recipient regarding the content will be done based on the context from which she re-asserter received the content. This appears to be the proper way

to transmit the content of anonymous testimony. It can be argued that the same can be done with (b) above, that is, transmit the content, evidence and context. This is possible. However, with the input of evidence, context may have no place in the deliberation. This is because the deliberation will focus on the force of available evidence and then truth. Re-asserting with the context of anonymity will appear as Nate says to Paul, “I got an anonymous tip that there is a paedophile around the park.” This approach to transmitting the content gives a holistic picture of what Nate commits to as regards his epistemic decision. The statement to Paul gives the context in which Nate receives the content. Even if Nate were to be interrogated as to the reason for transmitting it, he can adduce practical reasons which made him accept the anonymous testimony in the first place.

These options above can also be understood in relation to norms of assertoric practice. Choosing one of the options indicates that the re-asserter may be following a norm that she finds relevant to her epistemic deliberation. These norms of assertion give support for making assertions. I argue that proper assertions from anonymous testimony should follow a norm that allows for pragmatic concerns to assert and is consistent with the epistemic decision and attitude of the re-asserter in holding the content.

4.2 Norms of assertion

A re-asserter of anonymous testimony becomes a speaker in re-transmitting it. Thus in the role of a (re-asserter) speaker, she must apply the appropriate norms of (re)assertion interaction bearing in mind that she stands in the capacity of a known speaker to her audience. If we accept the view that “an assertion is a speech act in which something is claimed to hold”,²⁰⁹ then the same can be said of re-assertion. Assertions are the speech act we use to make claims about the way things are.²¹⁰ Norms of assertion are “the rules that need to be followed in order to offer a proper assertion”.²¹¹ The norms that guide speakers and hearers in testimonial exchange should be relevant to the contexts in which they occur, even as some of our epistemic actions overlap with other forms of action such as moral or prudential actions. Speakers and hearers as agents are expected to follow norms that guide beliefs and epistemic decisions. As Simon Keller notes,

²⁰⁹ Pagin, Peter. (2016). "Assertion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

²¹⁰ Benton, Matthew. (1994). "Knowledge Norms," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

²¹¹ Lackey, Jennifer. (2007). "Norms of Assertion." p.604

An epistemic norm is a truth about what you should do, insofar as you are an agent who forms and holds beliefs and who is answerable to reasons for forming and holding beliefs.²¹²

The hearer's realisation that there are rules applicable to interaction and the presence of a speaker provides support in assessing if the speaker is following the rules of interaction. For instance, a tourist asking for directions from a local resident, even though he has a map, may believe that a dialogue with the local resident ought to provide more reason to arrive at a reasonable belief of the correct direction. The tourist is mindful of the local resident's attitude and coherence of speech to make a belief decision. The patient relies on the expertise and authority of the doctor.

Some other forms of interaction may not require the presence of the speaker, such as reading authors, road signs, and the like. Although the speaker is physically absent, there is an interaction of sorts as the recipient tries to understand what is spoken, the intention of the speaker and the authority of the speaker. For instance, a letter from a friend to say she has travelled or a note on a colleague's door to say he is out of the office is different from listening to the newscaster on TV, reading an article on the web, or reading posts on Twitter. These interactions show that there will be variations in the normative requirement that will apply to testimonial interactions. The social relations that occur in the exchange of information via testimony form an important aspect of understanding the norms that are appropriate to apply. Identifying the kind of relationship interlocutors have, such as interactions with a stranger, a friend, a colleague, or a doctor, determines the normative requirement, whether knowledge, truth, belief, reasonable belief or supportive reasons.

4.2.1 Knowledge norm of assertion

The knowledge norm of assertion, according to Timothy Williamson, is that “one must: assert p only if one knows p.”²¹³ So, a person who correctly asserts p implies that she has knowledge that p. If one does not actually know that p and then exercises the authority to assert that p, then she will violate the knowledge norm. It is a violation of the KNA for an asserter to make a statement without the knowledge of it. From epistemic bad luck to having insufficient evidence that p, a

²¹² Keller, Simon. (2004). “Friendship and Belief.” p.330

²¹³ Williamson, Timothy. (2000). *Knowledge and its Limits*. p.243

person could be in violation of the KNA when he asserts *p* without knowing *p*. The knowledge norm of assertion is violated in cases such as lying, ignorance, and insufficient evidence.

According to those who defend the knowledge norm, making a proper assertion presupposes a speaker's knowledge of what is asserted; that is, to make an assertion is to know what is stated or asserted or at least that the knowledge norm is recognised in the interaction. Pascal Engel argues that where a person asserts *p* without knowing *p*, it does not imply that we cannot apply the knowledge norm. Knowledge as the norm of assertion does not cease to operate when there are cases such as lying and or merely accepting an assertion based on non-epistemic reasons occur.²¹⁴ For Engel, the dimensions of evaluation for praise or blame of the asserter do not shift due to the status of the assertion as non-epistemic. Thus the aim of making assertions presupposes that the knowledge norm is in operation even by the liar who intends that the audience recognise the knowledge that *p* from his assertion.²¹⁵ For Engel, accepting knowledge as the norm of assertion can be sustained by focusing on the regulation for making the assertion and not the act of making the assertion. However, creating this distinction between the regulation for making assertions and the act of assertion suggests that perhaps there are other norms appropriate to making assertions than the KNA. Engel's view implies that assertions aim to communicate knowledge, even where there are non-epistemic reasons.

Although Engels recognises the possibility of non-epistemic reasons to make an assertion, his defence of the KNA fails to substantiate how knowledge as the norm of assertion holds for the asserter where it is not applicable when the asserter makes the assertion and reasonably so. In the speech act of testimony, the deliberate application of the knowledge norm of assertion may seem appropriate since to testify of something is to assert it, and a testifier should have knowledge of that assertion. So, according to the KNA, a speaker *S* who testifies *p* without the knowledge of *p* violates the KNA and therefore blameworthy. Giving a testimony may not necessarily involve having a speaker's assertion as knowledge to the hearer: *S* can assert *p* on the basis of believing *p* or *S* can testify *p* because she found it reasonable to believe *p*.²¹⁶

A re-asserter who chooses to make reassertion with the context Applying the KNA will block such reasons to make assertions, where the asserter recognises that she is open to criticism

²¹⁴ Engel, Pascal. (2008). "In What Sense is Knowledge the Norm of Assertion?" p.9

²¹⁵ Engel, Pascal. (2008). p.11

²¹⁶ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. p.51

based on not knowing. There are other ways by which an assertion can be appropriately made without satisfying the standard of knowledge. This does not reduce the value of knowledge in making assertions or its desirability but allows cases in which asserters can have an appropriate warrant for making assertions in cases where such assertions may not fit the context of having knowledge of an assertion. Hence, alternative formulations try to avoid this. Hearers of anonymous testimony, while having no sufficient basis by which to claim knowledge of the testimony will not be able to operate in the knowledge norm for re-assertion. There is the possibility of other contexts and norms that may lend reasons for the re-assertion of the testimony without knowledge of it. The anonymous tip about a paedophile in the neighbourhood can be reasserted by Nate without him having knowledge of the tip. This raises the question if the applied norm is actually knowledge and not truth. Since Nate has knowledge of something (the content of the note) but seems inadequate to meet a particular condition – the condition of truth. It then remains a forceful argument against the knowledge norm of assertion that it is “context-insensitive to various ways by which beliefs are formed and conditions under which beliefs are formed.”²¹⁷ However, the place of knowledge is substituted with other epistemic conditions for the assertion, such as truth and belief.

4.2.2 Truth norm of assertion

An alternative to the knowledge norm of assertion is the truth norm of assertion (TNA) which requires that “we should assert only what is true.”²¹⁸ The TNA requires less than the KNA. Matthew Weiner one can make proper assertions without knowledge. He argues that to make proper assertions, they must be true. The speaker is aware of satisfying the condition of truth when making an assertion. Hearers expect truth with respect to the assertion made by the speaker, which may involve other norms of conversation but what is applicable as the norm in making the assertion is the truth norm since the assessment of the assertion as proper is dependent on its being true or not.

For Weiner, when the speaker does not need to be not a knower, she still makes a proper assertion if what she says is true. This, for Weiner, implies that the standard by which praise or

²¹⁷ Benton, Matthew. (1994). “Knowledge Norms”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

²¹⁸ Weiner, Matt. (2005). “Must we know what we say?” p.227

criticism of the asserter is made for following or violating a norm hangs on truth, not on knowledge.

The truth account ... predicts properly that these assertions will be permissible so long as they turn out to be true. If they turn out to be false, they will indeed have violated the truth norm; but if they turn out to be false, they do seem improper.²¹⁹

Whatever assessment or response the hearer makes of the speaker does not establish that the truth norm was applied in guiding the speaker's assertion. If assertions turn out to be false, it may well imply an error that may not necessarily be a truth/falsity situation. It also suggests that the speaker has no proper normative attitude in making the assertion.

Weiner argues that the truth norm of assertion may produce conditions where we can ascribe knowledge to an asserter, but it does not imply that knowledge was the norm of assertion applied when making the assertion. This is because truth in itself is a condition of knowing. However, the truth norm also faces some of the problems of the knowledge norm. Cases of lucky guesses for which a speaker does not receive criticism or reproach from a hearer will then be permissible under the truth norm as proper assertions. This is a problem for the truth norm. The hearer need not require that the speaker know what she is asserting, only that the speaker has a justification that the assertion is true.

This is open to criticism as it is sometimes difficult to determine the truth of the assertions at the moment it is made. It is possible that a speaker when making an assertion, cannot determine the truth of her assertion but deem it worthy of being made, just as Weiner notes that there are other norms that may be compatible with the truth norm. This suggests that other norms may be applicable to making assertions. When the condition of truth is not satisfied at the moment of making an assertion and there is a reason only to believe the assertion as true, it is permissible that the assertion is properly made.²²⁰ This implies that the condition of truth itself may not be satisfied with making proper assertions. The recourse to belief in providing a warrant for the propriety of assertions shows that truth fails to provide adequate conditions for asserting.

Re-asserters of anonymous testimony cannot apply the truth norm for re-assertion. To determine the truth of an anonymous testimony, the knowledge and credibility of the speaker will be involved. The condition of truth for anonymous testimony can be met if there is a confirmation

²¹⁹ Weiner, Matt. (2005). Must we know what we say?" pp. 231-232

²²⁰ Weiner, Matt. "p. 243

of the testimony from another source (another person or prior information on the content). Making a proper re-assertion of an anonymous testimony based on the truth norm restricts the re-asserter's ability to fulfil other acceptable conditions for re-assertion.

4.2.3 Belief norm of assertion

Belief has sometimes been claimed as having a more basic value than knowledge. Kent Bach argues that "the only relevant rule on assertion is belief" and "assertion essentially *is* the expression of belief."²²¹ Bach notes that while it is one thing to possess an attitude and another to express that attitude, it is proper that one expresses the attitude one possesses. Hence, "a speaker is sincere if he has the attitude that he expresses."²²² It is admissible to say that having a belief about a thing is sufficient to make an assertion about that thing. The belief norm of assertion (BNA) requires different conditions for making proper assertions. For Bach, if belief is a standard for making assertions, the norms that guide beliefs are applicable to guide assertions. For Bach,

...the only relevant rule on assertion is belief. For assertion essentially *is* the expression of belief. This is just a special case of a general fact about communicative speech acts, that they are expressions of attitudes, propositional attitudes in most cases. Just as a request is an expression of a desire and an apology is an expression of regret, so an assertion is the expression of a belief.⁵ Of course, it is one thing to express an attitude and another thing actually to possess that attitude. A speaker is sincere if he has the attitude that he expresses. In the case of assertion, to be sincere is to hold the belief one expresses. So we can say that belief, not knowledge, is the rule on assertion.²²³

Bach argues that belief and assertion have the same metaphysical components. This supports the view that the same norm guides both belief and assertion. For Bach, to make a proper assertion is to believe the assertion. This view requires less than knowledge and truth to be a proper norm. It does seem appealing to cases of re-assertion of anonymous testimony, since the requirement of knowledge or truth of the anonymous testimony may not be satisfied by the re-asserter.

Mona Simion argues that any commonality between belief and assertion is merely accidental. For Simion, there is no normative correspondence associated with belief and assertion.

²²¹ Bach, Kent. (2008). "Applying Pragmatics to Epistemology." p. 77

²²² Bach, Kent. (2008). p.77

²²³ Bach, Kent (2008). "Applying Pragmatics to Epistemology." p.77

This non-correspondence between the normative quality of belief and assertion is expressed in how each of it functions to arrive at an objective.

Assertion aims to transmit knowledge; therefore, it needs to be knowledgeable, to begin with in order to achieve this. Belief aims to be knowledgeable; as such, the norm governing it is going to be milder; it is going to indicate the proper procedure to reach this aim reliably.²²⁴

The above in no way implies that perhaps there is no interaction of any kind between belief and assertion. It only shows that they differ in normative requirements given the different functions and purposes they have. For Simion, "characteristically, assertions will plausibly aim at generating testimonial knowledge in the audience."²²⁵ If this is the aims of assertions, then knowledge norm of assertion seems most appropriate. However, Simion's view does little to detach the normative relation between belief and assertion. Belief as the norm governing assertion indicates that there is at least a correlation between belief and assertion either in the functions or purposes of both.

As I noted earlier, context-sensitivity influences the propriety of norms for assertion. The knowledge norm of assertion fails to admit this in its application to how beliefs are formed and knowledge acquired. Belief and assertion require the same normative input, and any distinctions are made on the bases of the contexts in which true beliefs, understanding and knowledge are desirable. The realisation of belief, knowledge or understanding depends on the context of interaction; this will involve indicators that help arrive at an epistemic decision, such as believing. Issues such as trust, credibility, and evidence are considered in believing an assertion.

We can then say assertion can generate the hearer's beliefs based on the applicability of the belief norm of assertion. It, therefore, appears that the belief norm of assertion avoids the challenge of context-insensitivity by requiring only the relevant belief attitude in the context and it avoids the stringent condition that the knowledge norm requires. If an assertion that follows the BNA is faulty, it is subject to criticism in a way that differs from the KNA and TNA. Where the KNA and TNA are violated, the process of arriving at knowledge is regarded as faulty. With the application of the BNA, the liability for violation is on the asserter.

The belief norm of assertion is inappropriate to apply for the re-asserter of anonymous testimony. There may not be sufficient reason to believe an anonymous testimony yet the hearer

²²⁴ Simion, Mona. (2019). "Saying and Believing: The Norm Commonality Assumption." p.1965

²²⁵ Simion, Mona. (2019). p.1963

can have a sense of obligation to re-assert it, given the consequences of the content. If the belief norm is applied to Nate epistemic position, the belief norm will not be appropriate. If Nate makes a re-assertion, it is not because he believes the anonymous tip. He re-asserts based on his consideration of the consequences involved for the community. In doing this, Nate does not apply the belief norm, however, he has sufficient reason not to do so given the context of the tip. What Nate does in re-assertion is to only accept the content of the tip in his epistemic deliberation since he has not been able to sufficiently arrive at belief. I have argued in Chapter Two that a hearer is entitled to accept anonymous testimony and that acceptance is an appropriate epistemic attitude towards anonymous testimony. I discuss this in relation to the relevant norm for re-assertion in section 4.2.5.

4.2.4 Reasonable to believe norm of assertion

Lackey argues that "one can properly assert that p in the absence of knowing that p , without being subject to criticism as an asserter in any sense, thereby showing that a norm of assertion has been violated".²²⁶ Even so, Lackey considers that the belief norm of assertion is subject to the weakness of requiring evidence towards believing with appropriate epistemic decisions. This is because we often make assertions that do not necessarily go through the epistemic process of considering any truth, justification and knowledge. Yet, we are governed by a norm to make those assertions appropriately.

Lackey's Reasonable to Believe Norm of assertion presents a version of the belief norm of assertion. This view claims that assertions can be properly made on the condition that an asserter has a knowledge-worthy reason, recognises the force of the reason, and does not believe that p but still asserts that p .²²⁷ Thus on Lackey's particular account, the speaker need not even believe what is asserted. For Lackey,

RTBNA: One should assert that p only if

- (i) it is reasonable for one to believe that p , and
- (ii) if one asserted that p , one would assert that p at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that p .²²⁸

²²⁶ Lackey, Jennifer. (2007). "Norms of Assertion." p.600

²²⁷ Lackey, Jennifer. (2007). "Norms of Assertion."p.599

²²⁸ Lackey, Jennifer. (2007). p.608

For Lackey, the requirement for having a reason to believe that *p* in (ii) sets the appropriateness of making an assertion. This suggests that, if there is reason to believe *p* and in deliberation, *S* is not convinced that the available reason is sufficient to believe *p*, *S* can assert *p* based on the idea that there is some reason to believe that *p*. Lackey's formulation of the reasonable-to-believe norm of assertion seems to avoid some problems associated with the KNA. It is broad enough to admit context-sensitivity. The RTBNA recognises “that assertions need not pass through the doxastic states of asserters in order to be proper, particularly when such states are riddled with prejudice or confusion.”²²⁹ RTBNA thus implies a speaker may make an assertion without believing what she asserts or making the assertion with contorted reasoning and evidence. This will still pass as appropriate since the reason to believe is dependent on the speaker. This may not be in violation of the norm, but the audience need not know that the assertion may be false.

John Turri argues that the RBTNA breaks the link between belief and assertion and does the same to knowledge and assertion. Turri grounds his argument on the linguistic patterns by which we can interrogate a speaker. The permissibility of an assertion when a speaker needs to provide a reason for asserting points to belief as the basis for asserting. A speaker is to be held accountable simply for what she believes. While Turri's argument is appealing in advocating a link between assertion and belief, it does not fault the RTBNA in admitting relevant grounds for asserting without the link between belief and assertion.

The RTBNA is also a belief norm to the extent that reasons to believe can ultimately form the basis of believing. Therefore, the propriety of RBTNA for re-asserting anonymous testimony faces the same challenge as the BNA. The conditions of a belief component in making an assertion cannot be satisfied and as such re-asserting anonymous testimony will involve other motivations besides from epistemic conditions.

4.2.5 Supportive reasons norm

McKinnon proposes the supportive reasons norm as a norm to guide making proper assertions that are not restricted to epistemic reasons only in relation to knowledge, truth or belief. For her, Lackey's reason-based RTBNA does not allow the contextual input that she posits for proper assertions. She argues that a reasons-based norm will be most applicable for proper assertions.

²²⁹ Lackey, Jennifer. (2007). p. 619

Such reason-based norms must accommodate practical reasons that are not only permissible but should be considered.

The Supportive Reasons Norm (SRN) is as follows: one may assert that p only if

- (i) One has supportive reasons for p ,
- (ii) The relevant conventional and pragmatic elements of the context are present, and
- (iii) One asserts that p at least in part because the assertion that p satisfies (i) and (ii).²³⁰

The above conditions for proper asserting are broad enough for assertoric speech and actions arising from assertions. By this, I mean that where belief tends towards actions and actions are also reported in speech acts, the SRN is an overarching norm to guide making proper assertions.²³¹ In other words, supportive reasons include pragmatic considerations for proper asserting. The support for the assertion need not be understood as epistemic reasons alone, where knowledge, truth, belief or reasonable belief will provide a warrant for assertion. That supportive reasons can be in the form of epistemic support shows that it does not deny the condition of 'at least believing in part' what is asserted. This implies that the SRN does not exclude instances where there are epistemic reasons, even if such reasons are not sufficient in themselves. Hence, the conditions of knowledge, truth and belief need not be jettisoned for non-epistemic reasons in deliberation.

However, where the asserter has a sufficient reason (epistemic or practical) to make the assertion at the moment of interaction, and the assertion turns out false, she is not deserving of criticism.²³² McKinnon argues that such cases of warranted false assertions are not epistemic failures on the part of the agent if due diligence was done to arrive at a good epistemic state. McKinnon indicates the elliptical nature of making assertions as a factor to warranted false assertions. In other words, the character of time and change sometimes affect our ability to make accurate statements.²³³ So if I say, "The 1st Highway is the quickest way to the Mall", the truth of the statement depends on epistemic and non-epistemic factors and the relevance of those factors to the context of making the assertion. McKinnon tries to explain the idea of time and change with the view that a speaker should recognise the context for arriving at the assertion in assessing an assertion as proper. This implies that we should not run into the error of attributing epistemic blame

²³⁰ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). *The Norms of Assertion: Truth, Lies and Warrant*.p.52

²³¹ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). p.3

²³² McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). pp. 54-57

²³³ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). p.56

to an agent who makes assertions under acceptable conditions of asserting but whose assertion turned out false.

When the supportive reasons norm of assertion (SRN) is applied to instances of re-assertion of anonymous testimony, a re-asserter's awareness of the context in which the testimony is received and the reasons for re-asserting it indicates propriety of re-assertion. Hence, the motivation to re-assert anonymous testimony must be such that it looks at the practical reasons for re-assertion. The supportive reasons norm thereby provides an appropriate warrant for the re-assertion of anonymous testimony. Hence it guides the hearer to acknowledge both the epistemic functions and the practical consequences of the content of the testimony to guide the act of re-assertion. The application of the SRN to the re-asserting of anonymous testimony provides the re-asserter with the capacity to assess the content for non-epistemic reasons. It does not require that the hearer necessarily establishes an epistemic relation to the source to ascertain truth or credibility. So whether the content has related evidence or not towards believing it, the re-asserter is conscious of the epistemic position she takes when re-asserting the statement and the accountability for her re-assertion.

McKinnon admits that the normative content of the SRN is highly contextual. Hence the spectrum of

...what count as supportive reasons for a given proposition, what counts as relevant, and what count as conventional and pragmatic elements possessing that relevance will each shift with context.²³⁴

The above implies that an agent must be aware of the relevance to context in engaging supportive reasons. This implied that the hearer must assess the asserter as well as the context in which the asserter made the assertion. This makes the SRN consistent with my arguments in this thesis. The relevance of the context of anonymity to believing an assertion as well as making an assertion should not be restricted to being epistemic only. Practical elements that are relevant to the anonymous testimony should be considered. Thus, the re-asserter, in making a speech act, acts as if he believes the anonymous testimony in finding a supportive reason to assert it.

In cases where epistemic support for the assertion is unavailable, practical reasons are sufficient to make assertions, and in the cases of received anonymous testimony, re-assertions. This is consistent with instances where the epistemic state of the re-asserter with regards to an

²³⁴ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). *The Norms of Assertion: Truth, Lies, and Warrant*. p.52

anonymous testimony is acceptance and not full belief. This is also consistent with the option of re-asserting with the context. While the re-asserter can be criticised for asserting without having knowledge of it or believing it, a re-asserter who has only accepted an assertion cannot be criticised for making such a choice of an epistemic position. She has reasonably exercised her rational capacity as an agent to make the most appropriate epistemic decision as at when she received the anonymous testimony. More so, the re-asserter must ensure to have the same attitude of responsibility to transmit the content in a manner that expresses her attitude on the assertion. This will provide the recipients with a proper basis from which they can make their epistemic decisions.

A hearer can re-assert anonymous testimony for practical (pragmatic) reasons.²³⁵ This fits into one of the contexts that Rachel McKinnon describes as requiring supportive reasons to warrant assertion and, in this case, re-assertion. For McKinnon, the reasons-based norms of assertion should not necessarily require that the speaker believe the assertion.

... the speaker need not believe what she asserts. Cases of warranted assertions will often involve the speaker believing what is asserted, but, provided that the appropriate conventional and pragmatic considerations are present, this is not a necessary condition.²³⁶

This is consistent with the idea that an appropriate norm of assertion should identify the contexts in which assertions are made. Believing as a necessary condition for a speaker will exclude other contexts that may obtain for the proper assertion. As McKinnon rightly notes above, where other relevant considerations are present which are not epistemic, a speaker can find a warrant in making an assertion even if not believed. As in the case of the anonymous tip of a wandering paedophile, Nate may not be able to make an epistemic decision to believe. He may only be entitled to accept the tip due to the context of anonymity.

The re-assertion of anonymous testimony does not fit neatly into the knowledge, truth and belief norms as these may require that the speaker of the testimony is assessed to arrive at an epistemic decision. Also, a reasonable-to-believe norm of assertion excludes the context-sensitivity appropriate for anonymous testimony even when the stakes of assertion are considered. This is because it requires some belief from the testimonial interaction. They are dependent on developing belief or possessing independent evidence from the uptake to the re-assertion.

²³⁵ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). p.3

²³⁶ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). *The Norms of Assertion: Truth, Lies, and Warrant*. p.3

However, this raises the objection that violating such a norm as the supportive reasons norm (SRN) is vague. As McKinnon notes,

SRN also takes the observation seriously that assertibility seems to change when the practical stakes of the context of assertion change. For example, when the stakes are higher, better reasons are required...This makes my use of “reasons,” evidence, or epistemic justification a departure from other reasons-based norms ... And as such, there currently are no other proposals in the literature for an assertoric norm quite like SRN.²³⁷

The context McKinnon gives here is not adequate to explain the context of anonymity. The higher the stake, the reasons required must be better suited to support making the assertion. The context of assertion determines the kind or level of reasons that provide support for it. So, a pragmatic reason is an adequate reason (if there are no adequate epistemic reasons) for re-asserting the anonymous tip of a paedophile in the neighbourhood. The act of assertion should follow the norm that takes into account the context of the practical effect in the epistemic community. This is one reason it is important to examine the norm for re-asserting anonymous testimony. There should not be an abandonment of epistemic responsibility due to the context of the assertion given and received. This does not mean that epistemic reasons do not count in the norm to make re-assertion, only that they are not in the same position as a practical reason in demand for asserting responsibly. For McKinnon, an assertion guided by the SRN will be distally epistemically supported.²³⁸ In other words, there may be a less compelling epistemic reason to support making a re-assertion. This applies to the instance where acceptance is the epistemic attitude of a hearer of anonymous testimony who in turn makes a re-assertion from this position with other non-epistemic reasons.

4.3 Reasonable re-assertion

The shift to speaker norms for a re-asserter is informed by the hearer norms employed in making an epistemic decision regarding anonymous testimony. I have argued earlier that the context of anonymous testimony in allowing for the autonomous epistemic deliberation of the hearer in making a reasonable epistemic decision should tend towards a hearer being entitled to accept anonymous testimony. Also the appropriate option for re-assertion is to re-assert with the context (by which the re-asserter received the content). This implies that there should be a conscious

²³⁷ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). p.56

²³⁸ McKinnon, Rachel. (2015). *The Norms of Assertion: Truth, Lies, and Warrant*. p.58

awareness of speaker and hearer norms when receiving anonymous information. It is admissible to think so even when the hearer of anonymous testimony does not yet find herself in a position to re-assert. A hearer of anonymous testimony is aware of its anonymity. Her epistemic awareness is attuned to the content of the testimony, its anonymous character and the propriety of re-assertion, and the distinction of her responsibilities as hearer and re-asserter. As such, the hearer may evaluate anonymous testimony, being aware of the propriety of re-transmission of the content. Since the H(r) acts in the re-transmission of the testimony, she ought to engage a norm that admits the context and the content of the anonymous testimony received.

The value of the content of anonymous testimony derives from its relation to what is of concern to the hearer. Epistemic goods²³⁹ such as knowledge and understanding are qualities for reference to adequate belief-formation. The intelligibility of the content in anonymous testimony can be regarded as an epistemic good. In agreement, Linda Zagzebski claims that where there are epistemic goods, there are epistemic demands. These epistemic demands require an obligation that beliefs are formed in epistemically conscientious and intellectually virtuous ways.²⁴⁰ How epistemically conscientious should a hearer of anonymous testimony be? For Zagzebski,

...to be conscientious in believing is to try to form beliefs in a virtuous manner...it is a demand of our caring, which is conditional...but being epistemically conscientious in the domains of what we care about is not optional.²⁴¹

There is an epistemic duty on the part of the hearer to be conscientious in belief-formation. It is an epistemic wrong for a hearer not to carry out this epistemic duty of being conscientious. There may not be any harm overtly done to the speaker for some reason. One of such is that anonymous speakers have their true intentions hidden; inferring the intention of anonymous testimonies accurately maybe by luck. So a hearer may not identify an instance of anonymous testimony with the intention of either playing a prank or conveying serious information.

Neglecting the content of anonymous testimony could be due to low stakes on a scale of care for the hearer, as opposed to the case of the anonymous tip about the paedophile where the stakes are high. If the practical interests attached to anonymous testimony are negligible for a hearer, there may be no reason for her to have an epistemic duty to be conscientious of it. Although,

²³⁹ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2004). "Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About." p.353

²⁴⁰ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2004). p.356

²⁴¹ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2004). p.357

it will be virtuous for the hearer to be epistemically conscientious regardless. Where a hearer recognises the possible harm neglecting anonymous testimony with high stakes can cause, being epistemically conscientious will guide in the act of re-asserting the testimony if it is needed. The shifting of roles from a hearer to a speaker (re-asserter) is the act that creates the flow of information.

When information is passed from one person to another, it is sometimes without the knowledge that the immediate speaker is not the original source of the information or a re-asserter. For instance, S tells H that p, then H tells T that p; H becomes a re-asserter in the interaction with T. If T has no foreknowledge of the subject of testimony, or H does not declare that she is re-asserting the testimony, T may regard H as the original speaker and have expectations and trust towards H. At this point in the chain of transmission, the testimony is not anonymous to T. If Nate re-asserts the anonymous tip, he is the person observable to the community as giving the information. Hence, he appears to be the immediate speaker of the assertion, although he is not the source of it. It will be expected that Nate has done some assessment of the content as worthy of re-assertion. A re-asserter may be regarded as the immediate speaker of testimony. The frame of time within receiving testimony and re-asserting it should involve epistemic evaluation, however minimal. As we compartmentalise our beliefs, we nonetheless have a disposition towards the content of testimony. As Christopher Hookway rightly notes, it is appropriate that

... the primary focus of epistemic evaluation is the activities of inquiry and deliberation, attempts to find things out. It enables us to inquire well and effectively, subjecting our inquiries to a degree of control and taking responsibility for how well they go.²⁴²

The degree of control a hearer exercises over testimony received and the epistemic evaluation of such makes her responsible for arriving at a belief that can be reasonably transmitted to another agent in re-assertion. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that a re-asserter has adjudged the assertion to be valuable and worth re-asserting. This does not imply that assertions or beliefs that have epistemically undesirable qualities do not get re-asserted. As the flow of information to a large extent is unrestricted in the social space, a receiver of fake news, lies, and fabrications is susceptible to becoming a re-asserter guilty of contributing to their social influence.

²⁴² Hookway, Christopher. (2007). "How to be a Virtue Epistemologist." p.198

The change of position of an agent along the chain of transmission sometimes occurs in quick succession. A hearer can become a re-asserter in a matter of seconds after receiving information or further in the chain of transmission. The space of time within which a hearer becomes a re-asserter in the chain of transmission can influence the re-transmission of testimony but does not necessarily do so. The need for re-assertion soon after receiving a testimony may not leave enough time to find adequate epistemic reasons for belief. A hearer may not be in a position to make an appropriate assessment for re-asserting. A re-asserter may fail to do a proper evaluation of a recently received piece of testimony. At the same time, she may succeed in properly evaluating an instance of testimony received further in the past for re-assertion. I note two concerns here in the act of re-assertion. One, the correct recollection of the content of testimony: bits of the content might have been lost in memory, or the content could have been distorted. Two, the identity of the speaker; the re-asserter may not have knowledge of the speaker of the testimony.

Whatever epistemic position an individual holds in testimonial transmission, it is expected that the recognition of basic epistemic needs and duties be fulfilled for society properly. The change of position from hearer to speaker requires that an agent operates in both speaker and hearer norms in evaluating the need for re-assertion. This implies that norms towards believing a testimony and norms towards making an (re)assertion may both be in operation for an agent who may find herself changing epistemic position in a short space of time.

In cases of known speakers, there is an awareness of, at least, a shared epistemic responsibility in re-assertion. A re-asserter can allude to the speaker for justification of the testimony, hence deferring epistemic responsibility where needed. It, therefore, implies that the re-asserter of anonymous testimony has more duty (epistemic and pragmatic) as an agent when she becomes a speaker in re-assertion. As the speaker of the content from anonymous testimony, the re-asserter assumes a level of epistemic responsibility different from the re-assertion of testimony with a known source. Hence, speaker norms that will be applicable to re-asserters of anonymous testimony must be appropriate to the context of anonymity. A re-asserter of anonymous testimony known and identifiable to her audience is epistemically accountable for re-assertion and belief by her hearer that follows from accepting the content of the anonymous testimony.

The value of the content and the context of interaction may influence the application of norms. Let us consider again the case of the anonymous note with the content that a paedophile is

roaming around the park. Nate engages in an epistemic deliberation of believing it or not and then a practical deliberation on whether to re-assert it. What motivation will Nate have to re-assert, and what norm should he follow?

Let us examine the above case from the appropriate norm of assertion. The SRN is the most appropriate norm applicable in this instance. The supportive reasons norm is consistent with the entitlement to accept the testimony for Nate as a hearer. It requires that with the condition of allowing for practical interests, Nate's deliberation encompasses the context of anonymity of the testimony, the content and the pragmatic reason. This implies that Nate must be conscientious of the pragmatic contexts that motivate re-assertion. This will influence his re-assertion and support his acting as if the tip is true. This places emphasis on pragmatic reasons for him to accept the anonymous testimony as worthy of re-transmission.

The implications of having a paedophile around and the possible actions that may follow supports the idea that accepting such information for re-transmission in the community is warranted. The content of the testimony is the only object of assessment and in it are practical concerns that should be of interest, even if minimally, the intended hearer. The motivation to carry out this duty to the epistemic community towards the safety of children in the community is a (sufficient) pragmatic reason to re-assert the anonymous testimony to other persons in the neighbourhood or even civic institutions that can take measures to safeguard the area.

Nate should be conscientious of the relevance of the content of the tip and a sense of care in various ways whether or not he is in a caring relationship with any child who may be in harm's way with the presence of a paedophile in the neighbourhood. However, it is a civic duty to act in response to having the knowledge of the anonymous testimony by re-asserting this information to the people in the neighbourhood for caution. Nate may not believe the anonymous testimony, but it will be reasonable that he exercises practical obligation in re-assertion

Therefore, the motivation to re-assert anonymous testimony may not be dependent on the truth, belief or knowledge of the anonymous testimony. However, where a re-asserter cannot epistemically justify the anonymous testimony in transmission, the re-asserter as an autonomous agent should conscientiously allow pragmatic reasons while deliberating on the need for re-asserting the testimony. Hence, the re-asserter's audience may not take the re-assertion as the re-asserter's belief in the content of the anonymous testimony. Still, the implications on social

situations may warrant that re-assertion be made in cognisance of the practical consequence of the community having the relevant information.

The ability to arrive at a reasonable epistemic decision to re-assert anonymous testimony can be described as an exercise of self-trust. This is trusting one's faculty to resolve conflicts arising from belief attitudes. The agent can exercise the capacity for self-reflection. This may well involve epistemic reasons to trust oneself to carry out the deliberation or find appropriate ways to support one's re-assertion of the anonymous testimony. This is to identify the epistemic attitude of the agent in reflection towards the assertion, in acting as if it was believed. An epistemic agent has the capacity to compartmentalise information received by the mind and sort it according to norms, need and obligation. This is understandable in light of Zagzebski's idea of the natural authority of the epistemic agent in reflective self-consciousness. She states that,

To be conscious of oneself includes consciousness of a variety of mental states that traditionally have been divided into rather vague and overlapping categories, including beliefs, desires, emotions, sensations, attitudes, judgments, and decisions, as well as imaginary versions of each.²⁴³

The variety of mental states mentioned above indicates that an epistemic agent has an awareness of the capacity to sort a particular object of attention as one mental state other than another. The reflective self-consciousness of an agent toward the truth of her belief influences the confidence in that belief. In this situation, a deliberation on sorting the mental/belief state of the anonymous testimony occurs in the self-awareness of the agent. This is akin to what Zagzebski described as dissonance, a conflict between various mental states that influence action.²⁴⁴

A mental state of conflict between beliefs and desires (to assert truthfully) is present in the re-assertion of anonymous testimony as justification for the testimony may be insufficient to warrant re-assertion. At a moment of deciding on re-assertion, there is a conflict in the re-asserter's desire to assert truthfully and a sense of duty. The dependence of the agent on the reflective self to arrive at an appropriate decision on whether to re-assert or not shows the exercise of rationality. According to Zagzebski,

Many times when there is dissonance, the self automatically adjusts by giving up one of the states that conflict. This often happens when there is conflict between a belief and a perception. I believe that I

²⁴³ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013). "Epistemic Self-Trust", p.30

²⁴⁴ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013). p.30

turned off the watering system, but then hear the sprinklers go on. I give up my belief without any thought to the conflict. The conflict is short-lived and psychic harmony is restored effortlessly and without conscious attention. I think that the awareness of dissonance resolved without effort gives us our initial model of what rationality is. I say that because I think that rationality is a property we have when we do what we do naturally, only we do a better job of it.²⁴⁵

As described above, an agent must give up one of the mental states in conflict to arrive at a harmonious mental state. Also, resolving the conflict comes through an unconscious exercise of rationality that is natural to the self. However, this may not be the case with other instances of conflict. For example, the conflict between belief and perception may be easily resolved where there is adequate evidence to give either of the mental states support to be chosen over the other. In the mental interaction above, hearing the sprinklers go on is an adequate reason to let go of the belief that the watering system is off. The norms applicable to believing, perception and truth in this instance of conflict provide an easy way to arrive at a harmonious mental state.

In a situation where the conflict is between two beliefs or two desires or two emotions, resolving the conflict requires more effort and, as such, becomes more conscious of the agent's self-reflective effort to arrive at harmony. This is because the characters of the mental states are mostly internal to the agent, unlike in an instance where there is belief and perception (with external truth indicators too). The rational autonomy of the agent self-consciously comes to the fore in resolving the conflict experienced. I think that this applies to the process of deliberating on the re-assertion of anonymous testimony even when the re-asserter may not believe the content. The re-asserter must shift epistemic deliberation to a state of self-trust. Therefore trusting oneself to re-assert is also borne out of accepting the harmony one's reflective judgment produces in a conflict. It is a state of mind we must arrive at to express our rationality as self-reflective agents. Nate must therefore resolve to re-assert based on his rational ability confidence in arriving at an appropriate epistemic attitude on the anonymous tip as well as his reliance on having pragmatic reasons to support his re-assertion.

One thing to note is that Zagzebski's view on self-trust is set to give support to rational trust in others; that is, if reflection enables us to arrive at trusting our faculties, then it can help us

²⁴⁵ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013). pp.30-31

develop trust in others. Katherine Dormandy argues that epistemic self-trust is not different from trusting others.

Although we rely on our cognitive faculties, we do – and must do – more than this. We must care about our own epistemic needs and hold ourselves to normative expectations in meeting them.²⁴⁶

Furthermore, for Dormandy, self-trust involves a normative reflection on one's faculties as well, just as one's interpersonal relations influence trust in others. The core of Dormandy's account of epistemic self-trust lies in the normative reflection of an individual, in addition to the use of cognitive abilities in arriving at an epistemic decision. Zagzebski's account of self-trust does not highlight this idea, but it does have the implications that an agent guided by self-reflection will engage in normative considerations toward epistemic decisions. Since the expression of rationality arises out of self-reflection, which is normative, such considerations are applicable to resolving conflicts in the mental state.²⁴⁷ This enables the agent to become self-trustworthy in her capabilities when engaging in deliberations to the end of producing epistemic goods.²⁴⁸

The production of epistemic goods is dependent on how much an agent can rely on her cognitive and normative considerations of beliefs and other mental states in her self-consciousness. It may seem that the inability to develop epistemic self-trust towards the production of epistemic goods indicates a failure of epistemic responsibility to the individual and her epistemic community. Also, there may be an abandonment of epistemic virtues in the acquisition and interaction of the cognitive and normative considerations of the agent in making epistemic decisions. Hence, developing epistemic self-trust can be understood as a process, just as acquiring a skill, for which the end is a virtue.

Re-asserting an anonymous tip of a paedophile requires considerations that will outweigh the anonymity of the received assertion. Potential harm to children in the neighbourhood is a practical reason, sufficient to outweigh other reasons not to re-assert the tip. The ability to arrive at the decision to re-assert is a product of reflection and self-trust, where the re-asserter identifies the adequate reason to make such a decision. Our reflective nature has the capacity to resolve conflicts within itself. Reflection is subject to reason and the possible end of the choices we make.

²⁴⁶ Dormandy, Katherine. (2020). "Epistemic Self-trust: It's Personal." p.1

²⁴⁷ Korsgaard, Christine M. (1992). "The Sources of Normativity." p. 50

²⁴⁸ This aligns with Korsgaard's idea of reflexivity on particular cases that may not be subject to general rules.

A re-asserter will reflect on how the production of epistemic goods may conflict with the possible end of a choice. This requires the skill to discern how to utilise the information she has appropriately. Hence, when conscientious of her reflective capacity, a re-asserter needs to rely on her self-trust to resolve the conflict of beliefs, norms, emotions, and desires.

Where an assertion is not accepted by the hearer, it does not easily resolve the conflict that arises in the deliberation to re-assert anonymous testimony due to the context of anonymity. Hence, the re-asserter must employ self-reflection in discerning the utility of the content of anonymous testimony. This builds her capacity for self-trust. This obligation comes with having the information and the (practical) stakes involved in re-asserting it or not.

... the first reason why trust in others strongly tends to be more effective than mere reliance also applies to trust in oneself for epistemic goods: the psychological and normative features of the person who accepts epistemic self-trust dispose her to come through.²⁴⁹

The above further shows that there is a process in developing self-trust as well as trust toward others. This process originates from the conscientiousness of the individual towards her epistemic environment and the social forms that she experiences. Hence, this process is the development of a skill. When the individual develops self-trust, she is confident that her cognitive and normative deliberations are targeted toward the production of a desirable end. Nate expresses self-trust in his being conscientious to the knowledge of the content of the anonymous tip and identifying the pragmatic reasons to re-assert. In this case, the safety of the children in the community is a desirable goal. The re-asserter's ability to exercise her self-trust is brought to the fore when the context of the testimony requires cognitive skills and normative features to arrive at a desirable goal for the community.

4.4 Pursuing epistemic virtue

A hearer can exercise self-trust to make a re-assertion even if the truth of the statement or the credibility of the speaker is not evident during the interaction. Still, there appears to be hesitation in affirming it. This can be described as a situation where the asserter tries to avoid slipping into error. In such a situation, the asserter is open to evidence that may lead to the revision of the

²⁴⁹ Dormandy, Katharine. (2020). "Epistemic Self-Trust; It's Personal." p.15

knowledge she has²⁵⁰ and where there may be a good reason not to totally rely on cognitive ability to reflect.²⁵¹ This allows for the mutable structure of experience which can be impacted by time and the environment. The concern for the accuracy of the content of the assertion suggests that the asserter is wary of violating epistemic norms applicable to the speech act of assertion and intending to transmit the information.

At the moment of deciding to re-assert an anonymous testimony, an agent has moved beyond the poor epistemic position brought by the context of anonymity. As a re-asserter, she has the capacity to produce a better belief state for the community in the act of re-assertion. Hence, she takes epistemic responsibility for the act of re-assertion, even if practical considerations led her to re-assert. In re-asserting anonymous testimony, a re-asserter who is conscientious recognises the context of receiving the testimony and she exercises epistemic self-trust for the act of re-assertion. She realises that there is no available agent in which she can place her trust. I have argued that the re-asserter relies primarily on her judgements to receive and re-assert anonymous testimony. This continues at the point where she may be making a decision to re-assert. Also, the virtuous re-asserter takes epistemic responsibility for the testimony given since she is the identifiable, immediate speaker. Even if a recipient of anonymous testimony decides not to re-assert, the decision should arise out of adequate cognitive and normative processes.

In the case of Nate as a potential re-asserter of the anonymous tip of a wandering paedophile who only accepts the tip. Being epistemically conscientious to of the content, he may reliably say that he has knowledge that there is an anonymous tip, not that he knows that the content is true. What happens next to this knowledge in the community depends on his ability to resolve any conflict that may arise from his beliefs and normative considerations. This is the point where the development of character traits is needed. In making a re-assertion of content from anonymous testimony, the context of one's social community is a factor to consider. Nate needs to employ his cognitive skills on various relevant issues, checking his background knowledge of the neighbourhood, his possible response to an enquiry on the information as a re-asserter and so on. This will enable him to choose the most effective means of making the re-assertion to ensure the safety of children. How will Nate be acting appropriately with the move to re-assert the testimony?

²⁵⁰ DeRose Keith. (1991). "Epistemic Possibilities." p. 585

²⁵¹ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013.) *Epistemic Authority; A Theory of Trust, Authority and Autonomy in Belief*. p. 244

Nate will be acting right only if he is motivated by appropriate reasons to decide to re-assert the testimony.

In other cases, such as anonymous blogs, a re-asserter of such content must be aware of the context of assertion, that is, cases of discrimination and so on. While Nate is not able to verify the truth of the content or the credibility of the author, he is certain that he has the knowledge of a wandering paedophile. Acting as if the tip is true and making a re-assertion of it with conscientiousness will tend to avoid the harm and social injustice that such tips or posts try to address, and that will be acting rightly.

Humans are active recorders of experience, within which there is the exertion of effort and use of skills. Epistemic virtues, as intellectual virtues, are traits that an agent possesses that encourage responsible belief-formation. This does not exclude cases where beliefs are not ultimately formed. An agent who engages in deliberation should aim to arrive at the most reasonable decision that is appropriate to the context of interaction she has: believe, not believe, suspend judgment or accept, and other epistemic attitudes that may be in relation to the cognitive process of belief-formation. As producers of knowledge, either directly by experience or indirectly as by testimony, acquiring epistemic virtue is necessary to sustain a community where knowledge will be responsibly acquired and shared. In light of this, the exercise of epistemic virtue is discussed in relation to epistemic responsibility. This is because acting in an epistemically virtuous manner requires that the agent is conscientious about the belief-forming processes. Hence, in a case of re-assertion, a failure in the reliability of the agent is attributed to a failure of epistemic responsibility. Charlotte Katzoff argues that this does not have to be the case.

... epistemic virtue is indeed a matter of reliable skills, habits, competencies, and the like, the exercise of which is, for the most part, involuntary and for which we cannot be held responsible in anything like a direct way. What remains to us then is merely the duty to put them in place.²⁵²

For Katzoff, the exercise of epistemic virtues need not involve imputing epistemic responsibility to an agent, at least not directly. This is in contrast to Zagzebski's view that is better suited to understanding the development and expression of epistemic virtue by agents as producers of knowledge via testimony. This also implies that understanding epistemic virtues denies the motivation and choice of the agent in deliberations that tend towards epistemic actions. If this is

²⁵² Katzoff, Charlotte. (2001). "Epistemic Virtue and Epistemic Responsibility." p. 117

accepted, in what indirect ways can responsibility be required of the agent? There is an undeniable cognitive input of the agent, directly related to the knowledge production of an epistemically virtuous agent.²⁵³ So self-trust is employed in developing skills and traits towards being virtuous. The agent also has the motivation and ability to identify, evaluate, and resolve conflicting beliefs. This provides adequate support for assuming direct responsibility for the entire process of developing the skill and the belief or knowledge the agent produces from her cognitive and normative processes. As an agent considers varying degrees of perceptual information, sifting through them through various mechanisms, intellectual skills are developed, acquired or sharpened. Whatever stage of the process of possessing intellectual virtues an agent may be, expressing that skill in arriving at a form of epistemic success is not an involuntary act, as Katzoff suggests.

Christopher Hookway notes that the cognitive ability of epistemic agents to achieve success in their knowledge inquiry goes through processes whereby the agent puts reflective consciousness to use. Reflective judgements are dependent on how we express the possession of epistemic virtues. Through the use of these virtues, an agent determines what content requires what kind of attention and evaluation.

Inquiry would be impossible if we had to consider every possible subordinate question and ask, concerning it, whether we need to answer it as a means to achieving our cognitive goal. Many familiar sceptical arguments exploit this alarming possibility. In our ordinary practice of epistemic evaluation, this does not happen...Judgement is usually involved in determining which questions occur to us as relevant: these judgements are made against an extensive background of background knowledge and experience at carrying out similar kinds of inquiries.²⁵⁴

The appropriateness of a subject matter is to be determined by the cognitive ability of the agent. The awareness of all relevant questions, main and subordinate, influences the success of our reflective assessment. Achieving success is then dependent on how attentive an agent is to relevant contexts and how adequate the process of reflection is over time. Background experience in inquiry helps in the sifting of contexts and cognitive approaches to them, such as the context of re-asserting anonymous testimony. Developing an epistemic character of virtue, as a re-asserter, will mean

²⁵³ Zagzebski, Linda T. (2013) "Epistemic Self-trust." p.50

²⁵⁴ Hookway, Christopher. (2003). "How to be a Virtue Epistemologist." p.200

possible questions are asked while reflecting. Attention is given to reason with a considerable end, showing that success has been attained with the reflective inquiry.

In this chapter, I discussed the re-assertion of anonymous testimony by a hearer. I argued a re-asserter must follow norms appropriate to the context and the reasons applicable in making a re-assertion of anonymous testimony. The shift to becoming a re-asserter of anonymous testimony calls for an obligation towards the community. Hence, a re-asserter must be epistemically virtuous in the act of re-assertion even when a warrant is found in pragmatic reasons, and it becomes an act of duty as in the case of Nate re-asserting the anonymous tip of a paedophile. The propriety of the SRN for re-asserting anonymous testimony is in the context of accommodating a non-epistemic basis for accepting a statement. Also, there is the possibility to make an assertion so long as there is an acceptable reason that provides practical support for making the assertion. Hence, it is not necessary that what is asserted is believed or known by the agent. The practical value of the information is given more consideration than truth. Therefore the SRN is appealing as a norm for accepting assertions and making appropriate re-assertions. The re-asserter of anonymous testimony can find a warrant for her act if a decision to re-assert is made on the application of this norm.

As the desire to achieve certainty is admirable, meeting the conditions for arriving at truth continues to be challenging. Re-asserting anonymous testimony is a deliberate act of transmitting the assertion, on the part of the speaker (the re-asserter), that in some cases does not meet the criteria of knowledge in the traditional sense of justified true belief. Anonymous testimony lacks the kind of support that testimony with a known source may have. The testimony may not be believed or regarded as knowledge; however, the content is for epistemic consideration. The utility of the information in society may have some value. Thus, the motivation to re-assert anonymous testimony may not align with what may be regarded as intellectually virtuous. The need to re-assert is not absent for an epistemically conscientious re-asserter of anonymous testimony; however, truth and knowledge may not be the direct motivation. Moreover, identifying practical concerns in the context of what is received, as in the case of the anonymous tip of a paedophile in the community, raises more than epistemic concerns for the agent. This will help settle the question of whether or not re-asserting anonymous testimony produces epistemic goods in society.

I have also argued that the exercise of epistemic self-trust in oneself for re-assertion of anonymous testimony is a step towards developing skills and traits that foster cognitive and

normative confidence. In other words, as a hearer, I must apply caution towards evaluating an anonymous source, and as a re-asserter, I must develop epistemic self-trust. The ability to evaluate contexts and discern what mechanism to apply is an intellectual skill needed to make appropriate epistemic judgements. Hence, in a community of virtuous re-asserters, being conscientious of the appropriate norms and practical reasons for re-asserting will be a means of reducing the uptake of manipulations and epistemic vices both in online and offline transmissions.

CONCLUSION

The transmission of information in contemporary times has the intersection of one-on-one interaction and information from the internet and this makes web of communication more intricate. People pick up information online and spread it by word of mouth or receive information from face-to-face interaction and transmit it online. Ordinary human interactions are affected by these intersections which in turn has an influence on standards of interaction among persons. Thus an effort to ensure that there is no neglect of appropriate norms should be made. The effort to create a knowledge community where there is a reduction of epistemic vice is a step towards developing a generally virtuous community. I argued that we should not ignore anonymous testimony as we come by it, and neither can we totally dispense it as having no relevance. Hence, in this thesis, I have tried to answer the questions I raised in the beginning concerning the evaluation of anonymous testimony, the appropriate epistemic attitude in accepting anonymous testimony, and the appropriate norm to guide the re-assertion of anonymous testimony when needed. This is with a view that exploring these issues will provide further insight into understanding that as testimonial interactions evolve, there is a need to assess and revise norms of interaction.

In Chapter One, I discussed anonymous testimony and the nature of testimonial transmission. I examined Graham and Lackey's views on the nature of testimony. I adopted Lackey's idea of hearer testimony to argue for anonymous assertion as testimony. Anonymous testimony is hearer testimony to the extent that the hearer receives the content with the ability to direct attention to it for belief consideration. I examine the kinds of anonymous testimony. I argued that unintentional anonymity requires more attention than intentional anonymity due to the lack of intention. This is consistent with the idea that the hearer takes responsibility for the testimony. Basic anonymity provides an adequate reason to accept that the recipient of anonymous testimony has epistemic responsibility for the content of the testimony and the belief-formation that arises. I also argued that there is almost no trust relation between the speaker and hearer in the context of anonymous testimony. I also argued that online interactions, for the most part, can be regarded as testimony, hence we can assess them as such. I briefly discussed anonymity on internet platforms: *Wikipedia*, *Twitter*, *Quora* and anonymous blogs and the use of anonymity of authors on these platforms. I argued that while recipients of anonymous online content should not dismiss the testimony, they should be aware of the context of interaction in making responsible epistemic deliberation.

In Chapter Two, I discussed three possible epistemic attitudes a hearer of anonymous testimony may hold in relation to views on the justification of testimonial beliefs; a hearer should believe anonymous testimony (anti-reductionist), a hearer should not believe anonymous testimony (reductionist), and a hearer should accept anonymous testimony (entitlement theory). I argued that the most appropriate position for a hearer is to accept anonymous testimony. The entitlement to accept anonymous testimony allows the hearer turned re-asserter to act as if the testimony is true. This also provides a basis on which a hearer of anonymous testimony need not believe an anonymous testimony before making a choice from pragmatic reasons. I also argued that a hearer who makes a wrongful presumption abandons the context of anonymity and this affects deliberation on the content. This may also harm the community with the possibility that the hearer may not deliver the content as received in the event of a re-assertion. This then creates a hindrance to the proper evaluation of the content as the original context in which it is received has been removed.

In Chapter Three, I argued that trusting an anonymous speaker is challenging. At the core of the human, face-to-face testimony is the trust relations, even towards strangers. I argued that the hearer of anonymous testimony is epistemically responsible for the belief-formation. This does not imply that she will ultimately arrive at believing the testimony. With no means to assess the credibility of the anonymous speaker, the hearer makes deliberation for a belief position as the only agent in relation to the content of the testimony. I argued that this places responsibility on the hearer for whatever position of belief the hearer assumes after deliberation. I argued that the relevance of anonymous testimony can be realised by paying adequate attention to the content. This will present to the hearer the stakes involved and the appropriate position to take with regard to believing it or having other epistemic attitudes.

In Chapter Four, I argued that a hearer who accepts anonymous testimony and decides to re-assert the content of the testimony, as a known speaker, must do so by being aware of the appropriate norm suitable to the context of re-assertion. I argued that pragmatic purposes are relevant in the sense that it provides a reason for a person to re-assert anonymous testimony. I examined norms of (re)assertion and how they are appropriate for re-asserting anonymous testimony. I argue that knowledge norm, truth norm, belief norm and the reasonable to believe norm are not appropriate as they do not sufficiently account for pragmatic reasons to assert. The supportive reasons norm is the appropriate norm for re-asserting anonymous assertions. This

allows for cases where the epistemic reasons cannot be adduced or are insufficient. I argued that an epistemic attitude of acceptance is consistent with having pragmatic reasons to make re-assertion. The contexts that therefore influence the standards of communication are broader than the epistemic. I argued that a hearer should be epistemically conscientious in the re-assertion of anonymous testimony. A hearer must apply caution towards evaluating anonymous sources, and as a re-asserter, she must develop epistemic self-trust in rational deliberation while engaging appropriate norms. This epistemic self-trust does not necessarily come from external relations with other agents, it is the capacity to attune oneself to proper ways of assessing assertions by the demands of intellectual skill. The ability to evaluate contexts and discern what standard or norm to apply to what context is an intellectual skill needed to make appropriate epistemic judgements.

Therefore, in a world where forms of communication are evolving, there is a need to be aware of how the changes will affect standards of communication. As the cross-communication between face-to-face interaction and online interaction becomes more intricate, people should be more conscientious about how the standards of communication are affected. As Gelfert rightly notes, “more so than ever before, we live in highly differentiated, technologically mediated, and increasingly globalised societies.”²⁵⁵ Either in face-to-face interaction or online interactions, agents need to be aware of the responsibility to be conscientious to proper standards of receiving and processing anonymous testimony.

²⁵⁵ Gelfert, Axel. (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*, p. 224

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