

ARTICLE

TRUST TO TESTIMONY IN EMIRICAL RESEARCH FOCUS

Artur R. Karimov^{1*}, Mikhail G. Khort¹, Alexei S. Guryanov²¹*Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, RUSSIA*²*Kazan State Power-Engineering University, Kazan State Medical University, Kazan, RUSSIA*

ABSTRACT

The article considers main approaches to assessment of testimony in modern social epistemology. The reductive approach implies that the knowledge acquired in the communication with others should have independent verification. Non-reductive approach defends the principle of trust to the testimony of others in the absence of defeaters. Recently in the literature in social psychology a series of experiments were conducted which put to doubt the non-reductive approach to testimony in philosophy. The experiments showed that the trust to the testifier is determined by irrelevant factors and also the fact that the tested subjects had problems identifying the reliable witness. As is shown in the article these arguments do not refute the non-reductive approach. To justify non-reductive approach a theory of relevant alternatives is used (Dretske). According to this theory, in order to know something, we should exclude all relevant (and only relevant) alternatives. The role of context for demonstration of trust is underlined. If the situation demands it, we should show more suspiciousness, and on the contrary, in communication with authoritative person we will likely manifest more trust than doubt.

INTRODUCTION

KEY WORDS

epistemology, social epistemology, communication, testimony, trust.

In modern social epistemology, one can speak of two main approaches to the evaluation of communicative knowledge, or the knowledge gained through testimony. According to the first approach, the initial attitude in relation to the testimony should be doubt - I do not trust the testimony of another, until I can be convinced of the testimony truth on my own experience. D. Hume is considered as the founder of this approach [1]. This approach can be called a reductive approach to the assessment of evidence, as it reduces the epistemic value of evidence to the cognitive efforts of the learning subject.

Another approach is that we have the right to trust evidence as an independent source of knowledge in the absence of opposing arguments. This position was defended by T. Reid [2]. In other words, if there is no reason to doubt, then trust should be the initial attitude towards the evidence. The second approach can be called non-reductive, since the epistemic value of evidence as a source of knowledge is not reduced to the subject's own cognitive efforts. In modern literature, J. Hardwig occupies a non-reductive position in the interpretation of evidence. Hardwig substantiates the idea of the subject's "epistemic dependence" on the communicative community and on the need of trust to the testimony of another one in these conditions [3, 4].

A number of purely philosophical arguments were put forward against this position. In particular, I.T. Kasavin substantiates the synthetic theory that incorporates reductionism and non-reductionism. He asks: "Should epistemological exclusiveness be prescribed to any source of knowledge, for example, experience or communication?" This is probably the wrong question. In fact, experience inevitably involves communication, and communication is a kind of experience" [5]. In this article, we will not consider philosophical argumentation, but would like to turn to other kinds of arguments, that modern empirical science provides against the self-worth of evidence as a source of knowledge, and critically examine them. Let's formulate a non-reductive position in relation to communicative knowledge. If the subject S perceives from another the evidence that p, and this evidence (if the arguments in favor of the opposite are absent) evokes the conviction of S that p, then S is reasonably convinced that p. An important component of the non-reductive approach is that the one who accepts the testimony relies on the sincerity and the competence of the witness. In this case, the reliability is required from the recipient to determine how trustworthy the other is.

METHODS

The following methods were used in the study: social (sociological) observation; questioning; interview; socio metric survey; testing; social (sociological) experiment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the article "Against trustfulness" J. Schrieber shows that, according to modern research in the field of social psychology, most subjects cannot reliably monitor their interlocutors to see if they lie or are trustworthy [6]. In particular, it is argued, that the factors which are absolutely irrelevant to the trust in some subject, influence people trust. From this point of view, any epistemological concept, that accepts as a condition that a subject must have the ability to determine somehow the reliability of the witness, is vulnerable to an empirical objection.

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*Corresponding Author

Email:
anthropology.ksu@mail.ru
Tel.: 89178748869

In particular, Schrieber cites an empirical study in which it was proved that people with attractive looks are more successful in convincing others than unattractive ones. Also, people are statistically more often unable to recognize lies by purely external signs, for example, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Moreover, fraudsters often use "body language" in order to appear more convincing. In particular, it was required to determine whether an absolutely unfamiliar person tells the truth or lies from a tested person. The average accuracy of lies determination did not exceed 60%. Moreover, those who are professionally required to be suspicious, for example, customs officers, police officers, were tested separately, and approximately the same results were obtained [7, 8].

People are more likely to respond to external signs of competence than to its actual presence. An experiment was conducted, consisting in the fact that the hospital nurses received a call from an unknown person, who appeared to be a doctor and asked to prescribe certain obviously unsuitable drugs in obviously inappropriate doses to a specific patient. Researchers checked which of the following factors might arouse suspicion among nurses: 1) the transfer of a prescription by telephone is prohibited by hospital rules; 2) the prescribed drug was not approved for use by this hospital; 3) the prescribed dose of the drug significantly exceeded the recommended one; 4) The recipe was obtained from a person who the nurses had never met before. 22 nurses took part in the experiment. The results were shocking. During the test, 95% of the nurses were prepared to give medications prescribed by telephone and the organizers of the experiment stopped them in time [6].

Another study shows that the interviewee was more convincing if he was dressed in the form of a guard. In particular, the subjects trusted the interlocutor in a uniform in 92% percent of cases, and only in 42% of cases to the people without a uniform [6].

In another case, in the course of a fake trial, the subjects were invited as "jurors", where they had to determine the reliability of the witness. It was found that the witness who acted as an "expert" was twice as convincing if he used complex and incomprehensible expressions than during the use of the speech understandable for "jury". Consequently, the witness was recognized as more convincing if the jury did not understand what he was saying in fact [7].

Based on all of these empirical data, Schrieber concludes that we must recognize the unreliability of our ability to recognize a reliable witness. This casts doubt on any non-reductive interpretation of evidence. Of course, the philosopher has no right to ignore these results. However, they can be interpreted in different ways. In these examples, the recipients were asked to determine whether the witness was sincere or a liar. But it is not necessary that the recipient should be able to determine whether the witness is a liar and a fraud, or whether he is trustworthy as a person. In our opinion, this requirement is too strict. In fact, you can know a person for several decades and not be completely sure whether he deserves confidence. It is enough if the recipient responds to certain situation or context markers in which he accepts the evidence. The context is important for individual cognition and for the communicative knowledge. Why is the context considered as irrelevant in the latter case?

Let's consider the example of the nurse respond to the phone call. At first glance it seems that the nurses showed gullibility. However, if we refer to the context, their reaction is quite explicable. Analyzing this case, A. Green notes that 1) in 99% of cases, people who appear to be doctors at the hospital are the doctors indeed; 2) doctors, as a rule, are qualified experts who are educated up to 10 years; 3) in addition, hospital as a health care institution, has very strict rules and regulations for patient treatment, which is conditioned, on the one hand, by the strict adherence to medical ethics, and, on the other hand, to legal consequences in the case of some medical error; 4) finally, the non-fulfillment of a doctor's prescription by a nurse is a serious violation and, as a rule, is harmful for a patient [9]. Given all these circumstances, the reaction of the nurses is justified on the whole. Indeed, the situation when someone in the hospital pretends to be a doctor is not normal in modern society. Therefore, when in this, usually epistemically friendly, context, the experimenter places someone who pretends to have authority, it is quite natural that a person makes a wrong decision to trust such a person. But is this decision intellectually non-virtuous? In our opinion, it is not. In this context, the epistemic behavior of nurses seems justified. If such a situation with false doctors in hospitals was more common, then the nurses would be more suspicious most likely.

In this sense, you can refer to the theory of relevant alternatives by F. Dretske [10]. According to this theory, it is necessary to exclude all significant (and only significant) alternatives to know something. To know that p, it is necessary to exclude not all possible alternatives to p, but only relevant alternatives. Only those alternatives are relevant for which I have any grounds. The more compelling the reasons, the more relevant the alternative. "If I see a zebra in front of me at the zoo, then I cannot exclude the alternative that I see a striped horse in front of me (assuming that I am not a zebra expert). But if I have no particular reason to think so, this is why this alternative is not significant, therefore, I know what I see a zebra in front of me. This alternative can be meaningful if I find out about the facts that zoos lack zebras and they often use painted horses to fool a gullible public. In this case, I will not be able to exclude this alternative, and then it will be true that I do not know if there is a zebra in front of me" [11].

The fact that we give meaning to the epistemic assessment of evidence is not irrelevant, on the contrary. In a situation when the context requires it, we can express more suspicion, for example, if we communicate with a sales manager. Conversely, when we communicate with a librarian, we will tend to

trust him more than a sales manager. This does not mean that sales managers cannot be honest, and librarians cannot be liars. But the consideration of the context is an important component of any cognition, including communicative. Besides, this objection is irrelevant to a non-reductive position also because it does not require the ability to recognize a reliable witness from a recipient, as she claims that the default attitude is to trust the witness in the absence of grounds for the opposite. And in this sense, it is not important whether he is attractive or not, whether he is dressed in a uniform or not, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it was shown that these empirical arguments are not fatal for a non-reductive approach to the assessment of evidence. These arguments can be interpreted differently. As has been shown, it is important to consider the context in which the evidence of the other one is assessed. In a certain context, the trust in testimony will be justified epistemically, but in some context it won't be justified. The context in this case is the epistemic environment, i.e. the level the subject is able to acquire true beliefs in this environment.

Traditionally, in philosophy, the trust in the testimony of another was discredited in favor of doubt. It is believed that we must question the knowledge that we receive in the course of communication with other people by default. But such a position is counterproductive in the current situation, when communicative knowledge is total, i.e. we gain most of our knowledge through communication with others. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the degree of confidence to the evidence. The conducted research allows to relate trust to some testimony with the epistemic context and rehabilitate trust to the extent allowed by the context. In this context, it will be more intellectually virtuous to show confidence rather than doubt in relation to the testimony.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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None

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