

### E. Fricker: Can Trust Work Epistemic Magic?

*(Note: a longer version of this talk is forthcoming soon in a special issue on epistemology of Philosophical Topics)*

**A has trust-based reliance on T to phi on O if and only if:**

- (i) T's  $\phi$ -ing on O is necessary in the circumstances, where these include A's own past and planned future actions, to ensure an outcome that is required for things to go well for A in some respect, and for her plans in this respect to be fulfilled; and
- (ii) A knows this (knows that the condition specified in (i) holds); and
- (iii) A does not have a 'Plan B'; and
- (iv) A either believes, or has an optimistic attitude to, both the proposition that 'not easily would T fail to  $\phi$  on O, due to her relevant virtues', and the proposition that 'T will  $\phi$  on O due to her relevant virtues'.

Two things are important about this definition for present concerns:

- i. it is a **non-doxastic** account of trust. that is to say, it does not require that the truster believes the trustee to be trustworthy wrt phi-ing.
- ii. It correctly describes the mechanism by which a recipient forms belief in what she is told, when she takes the speaker's word for what she states.

#### **I. How trust could work epistemic magic**

A **doxastic account of trust** is one that includes in its definition that the truster believes the trustee is trustworthy.

My account above is a **non-doxastic** account: the truster *may* believe the trustee is trustw wrt phi-ing; but this is not required by the defn - since she may merely have an optimistic attitude to her phi-ing, and this falls short of outright belief.

For a non-doxastic account of trust to have epistemic significance, it is not enough that it is *possible* to trust without belief in trustwness; trust must be able to be *justified* in the absence of belief in trustwness.

More specifically: it must be possible that **a recipient can be justified in trusting the speaker, when she lacks the evidence required to be justified in believing the speaker to be trustworthy**. Since (on the non-doxastic account) trust does not entail belief in trustworthiness, this allows the possibility that **the evidential standard for trust to be justified is lower than the standard for belief in trustworthiness to be justified**.

If this condition is fulfilled, then trust can be significant in the theory of epistemic justification: it can put pressure on Evidentialism.

**Evidentialism**, for present purposes, is the thesis that:

**Only evidence can justify beliefs.** Evidentialism rules out: that loyalty to one's friend justifies one in continuing to believe them innocent, despite strong circumstantial evidence of their guilt; and that the fact that I am more likely to recover from a serious illness if I believe that I will do so justifies me in so believing (provides a reason for me to believe it).

#### **Q: What does trusting someone have to do with forming beliefs?**

In general, when I trust someone to  $\phi$ , this does not constitutively involve my forming any new beliefs. But the case of trusting someone's testimony is (perhaps uniquely) special in this regard. When a recipient trusts a speaker wrt her testimony, her doing so consists in this: she forms belief in what the speaker states, and does so on her say-so. So, in this case, **trusting constitutively involves forming a new belief: belief in what one has been told**.

So, in this case:

IF trusting the speaker can be justified for a recipient, when belief in the speaker's trustwness is not justified for the recipient, this has immediate epistemic import: **trust, on this account, can**

**work a kind of epistemic magic: it can get one to epistemic places one could not reach without it.**

That is to say, **trust in the speaker can get one to justified belief in what one is told, when one could not get there from any justified beliefs that one has.**

(I assume that if one's trust in the speaker is justified, this entails that the upshot of one's justified trust, one's belief in what one is told, is ipso facto also justified.)

Specifically, trust can get one to justified belief in a proposition P, despite the fact that one lacks adequate evidence for P, independently of having trusted.

And, **since trust itself does not involve belief, this result is reached without having directly contradicted Evidentialism in reaching it.** The falsity of Evidentialism is an upshot, not a premiss, in the train of argument.

**CONCL of this section: if trust is non-doxastic, and can be justified when the corresponding belief in Truswness would not be; then trust can work epistemic magic.**

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Our result so far is a conditional. But so far we have seen no reason to think its antecedent is true.

My own view denies this: I hold that **trust in a speaker is epistemically justified only when belief in their trustworthiness would be justified.** Such a view dismisses the possibility of trust without belief in trustworthiness as having no epistemic significance.

(One might be *pragmatically* justified in *accepting* a speaker's testimony despite lack of evidence of their trustworthiness - when one has to act, and has nothing else to go on. But pragmatically justified acceptance is not belief; it admits of pragmatic justification while belief does not. )

But there exists a richer notion of trust, and with it the possibility of trust being justified when belief in trustworthiness is not: since on this richer account **trust, unlike belief, may be justified on non-epistemic grounds.**

Such a richer notion is invoked by Assurance theorists of testimony.

How could it be plausible that trust in a speaker is justified, when belief in her Truswness is not? - Even if we have a non-doxastic account of what trust consists in, it does not follow that trust can be justified when belief in trusw is not justified.

But - if we adopt a **thicker account of trust: reciprocal trust, involving interpersonal norms;** and then it seems at least a possible position that **trust is justified by these interpersonal norms, even when no adequate purely epistemic basis for trust exists.**

This is the position of Assurance Theorists of testimony.

I take the key feature of assurance theorists to be this:

**Assurance-Theory Fundamental Claim:** The interpersonal norms governing communication between a speaker and her intended audience (the addressee) directly impact on the *epistemology* of testimony, making available a basis for belief to the intended audience that is not accessible by overhearers.

One way of making sense of this idea, is to invoke a rich notion of interpersonal trust - Reciprocal Trust. This rich sort of trust holds between the speaker and her addressee; but not between the speaker and mere overhearers of her speech act.

AND, our assurance theorist will hold: Reciprocal Trust involves

Interpersonal Norms of Trust between speaker and addressee: on the speaker, a norm to be trustworthy; and on the addressee, a norm to be trusting.

Such a richer notion can then posit that there is normative pressure on the addressee to trust the speaker; this mandates, or permits, her to trust the speaker wrt her telling, although there is not sufficient **evidence** to believe that she is trustworthy.

In this account, we find the resources to explain why trusting the speaker may be justified, on non-epistemic grounds, when belief in the speaker's trustworthiness would not be justified; and

hence **belief in what the speaker tells is justified, though the recipient lacks sufficient evidence of what the speaker tells being true – trust works epistemic magic.**

#### CONCLUSION

I have explained how a certain account of trust, and the conditions for trust to be justified, would, if correct, allow trust to work epistemic magic: to allow one to reach justified belief (in what one is told) that could not be arrived at via a purely evidential route. The evidential route is not available, since justified belief in the speaker's trustworthiness is, ex hypothesi, not available in the case, but in contrast non-doxastic trust in the speaker is justified.

IF trust can be justified in this manner by non-epistemic factors (interpersonal norms of trust), then **a counter-example to evidentialism is generated, while not begging the question against evidentialism in its genesis.**

However, whether or not one thinks non-doxastic trust can be thus justified by non-epistemic factors will be influenced by its upshot, and one's prior tendencies. Hence, evidentialists like myself will be disinclined to think that interpersonal trust can be justified in the proposed manner. ++

Explaining the Assurance Theorist's position in this way, in terms of appeal to a rich notion of interpersonal trust, allows us to make sense of their central claim:

**That the addressee of a telling has access to a special kind of reason for believing what they are told, that mere overhearers have no access to.**

The assurance theorist maintains this: that The addressee, and not overhearers, are subject to normative pressure to trust the speaker; hence they have reason to trust what she tells, when overhearers do not.

An evidentialist has reason to deny this. Evidence is objective. And for this reason, any grounds to believe what she is told, is in principle no less available to anyone who hears and understands a telling, than it is to its addressee. **An evidentialist can have no truck with 'second-personal reasons for belief.'**

So, although a non-doxastic account of trust in principle allows a gap to open up in evidentialism, without directly begging the question against it; the evidentialist has good reason to resist the account of trust, specifically, of its conditions of justifiedness, that generates the hole.

**Conclusion** In this talk we have seen how to make sense of the claim that trust can work epistemic magic, by theorising the notion of second-personal reasons for belief stemming from interpersonal normative relations involved in non-doxastic trust.

But the evidentialist will reject such second-personal reasons playing an epistemic role. For an evidentialist, trust does not, after all, work magic in the account of epistemic justification. Trust in what one is told is justified just if one has evidence of the speaker's trustworthiness.

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