

The Role of Semantics in  
Testimonial Communication

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## **The Role of Semantics in Testimonial Communication**

According to what I call the *Semantic-Syntactic Primacy* (SSP), here represented by Elizabeth Fricker (2012) and Sanford Goldberg (2007; 2009), testimonial knowledge can only be transmitted through the strict, semantically defined contents of testifying speakers' uttered sentences. One main consequence of this view is that messages communicated beyond such strict content fail to be proper testimonial messages in the sense of failing to enable testimonial knowledge transmission. In this paper I argue against this view.

Advocates of SSP thesis holds that the primary determinants of testimonial messages for which testifying speakers are epistemically responsible must be the semantic and syntactic features of uttered sentences. However, even if such thesis is formulated in a rather permissive fashion, there are important cases in which the intuitively valid testimonial message for which a testifying speaker is epistemically responsible is not determined by these features. Therefore, we have reason to abandon SSP and look somewhere else for the determinants of testimonial messages.

To develop this argument, I first present a preliminary framing of the problem at hand. Second, I submit a common formulation of SSP's general thesis and the arguments Fricker and Goldberg give for its endorsement. Later, I offer three qualified formulations of this thesis—each less restrictive than the last—and, for each, discuss significant cases in which the testimonial messages for which testifying speakers are epistemically responsible are not semantically defined as SSP would have it. Finally, I give one last set of examples aimed to show that the general approach of SSP might be misguided in asking for a specific, semantically defined content to be the object of testimonial responsibilities. Therefore, semantics may not have the primary role SSP envisioned in characterizing testimonial messages.

### **1. Testimony, Context, and Communication**

In conveying a testimonial message, a testifying speaker presents herself as being in an epistemically privileged position regarding the truth of what she communicates. Say she presents herself as knowing that  $p$ .<sup>1</sup> In virtue of her words, under appropriate circumstances, she renders

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<sup>1</sup>This could very well vary depending on the epistemic state you prefer to define testimonial knowledge transmission. For example, another version of this statement could be 'she presents as having reasonable belief that  $p$ '. Since my

herself epistemically responsible for having the appropriate warrant regarding the truth of *p*.<sup>2</sup> When a speaker does have such appropriate warrant and her audience accepts her communicated message, *testimonial knowledge* of *p* has been transmitted by the speaker and gained by the audience.

There are at least two ways in which a communicated message can be rejected as a testimonial source of information. First, a testifying speaker could be lying or wrong. She could be too candid, ill-informed, or simply dishonest. In these cases, the message for which she is epistemically responsible is clear but the *epistemic* conditions involved in accepting her message as testimony are not fulfilled. Testimonial communication can then be said to be *unsuccessful*.

Second, we can reject a communicated message as a source of information just in virtue of the testifying speaker's communicative performance. Her communicated message may fail to be a testimonial message—she could, for instance, merely insinuate or suggest that *p*. In these cases, the communicated message cannot be taken as a testimonial message for which the testifying speaker renders herself responsible. The *communicative* conditions of testimonial communication have failed to ensue and no testimonial message to which the epistemic responsibilities of testimony apply can be discerned. In such cases, testimonial communication can be called *improper*.<sup>3</sup>

Much has been said about the *epistemic dimension* of testimony and the conditions for its *success*—about, for instance, its similarities with other epistemic sources such as perception and memory, its dependence on external or internal conditions of testifying agents, or the extent to which we are truly epistemically autonomous.<sup>4</sup> However, my argument here is limited to the *communicative dimension* of testimony and the conditions under which what a speaker communicates can be regarded or not as a *proper* instance of testimonial communication. In order to keep the dialectic of the problem as simple as possible, along the text I do not deal with non-standard epistemic contexts—deviant *unsuccessful* contexts due to epistemic reasons.

A characteristic feature of testimonial knowledge is the audience's epistemic dependence on the *speech acts* realized by a speaker. In giving testimony, a speaker *ought* not only to have knowledge but also to convey it appropriately. Her speech act ought to correctly express—and,

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argument does not hinge on this, this paper is to be read as neutral regarding this issue. I will continue using the term knowledge as vaguely defined, for Fricker and Goldberg use it this way and my argument against their view does not dwell on it.

<sup>2</sup> Again, I am being neutral regarding the kind of warrant that defines 'knowing that *p*'.

<sup>3</sup> Notice, that a proper instance of testimonial communication can be either successful or unsuccessful. In contrast, for an improper instance of testimonial communication the epistemic question of its success does not even apply.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fricker (1994; 2004); Goldberg (2007); Lackey (2008); Coady (1992); Burge, (1997); Hardwig (1991).

therefore, communicate—what she knows. The problem, of course, is that there are many ways to convey a message in conversation but not every way to do so can amount to properly communicating a testimonial message. Speakers are not epistemically responsible for every message they somehow convey.

So, a necessary (though not sufficient) step to determine how testimony works is to establish the conditions under which certain communicated contents and not others amount to proper testimonial messages for which speakers can be deemed epistemically responsible in testimonial engagements.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. SSP's thesis

Elizabeth Fricker (2012) and Sanford Goldberg (2007; 2009) defend a substantive view on the communicative conditions that define proper testimonial communication. With variations, they hold the view that the semantic and syntactic features of an uttered sentence must have the defining role in discerning the messages for which a testifying speaker is epistemically responsible—thus, the general label *Semantic-Syntactic Primacy* (SSP). Only strict, sentence-bound communication can amount to testimonial communication. Testimonial responsibilities can only be properly established in as much as they are referred to the semantically defined messages communicated by a testifying speaker's uttered *sentences*. According to this view, then, literal meaning and sentence-structure have a defining priority when it comes to testimony.

Fricker and Goldberg use somewhat different terms for their arguments and do not offer a precise definition of the strict, semantically defined content that is to type testimonial messages. However, for both of them, the content at play in testimony must be defined along the following lines: (i) it must be closely related to the truth value of the propositions carried by uttered sentences; (ii) it must minimally vary from one context to another; and (iii) it must exclude additions and alterations to the truth-values of the compositional elements of uttered sentences (cf. Goldberg, 2009, p. 73; Fricker, 2012, pp. 70-3) To generalize this view, I suggest that we should refer to the content so construed as the *semantic content* of an uttered sentence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There is an important range of different kinds of epistemic responsibilities. Henceforth, however, when I use the expression 'epistemic responsibilities' understood as the testimonial responsibilities testifying speakers hold of having appropriate warrant regarding the truth of the message they communicate. See, for instance, Miranda Fricker (2007) for another kind of epistemic responsibilities that will not be at issue in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Here I make a non-theoretic use of 'sentence'. If to the question "Is Barney ready for the exam?" I answer "no", such answer amounts to an uttered sentence carrying the semantic content 'Barney is not ready for the exam'. There is an important debate regarding the validity of the notion of non-sentential assertion (cf. Stanley (2000), Elugardo & Stainton (2004)). However, I avoid to directly address this debate and assume that grammatically incomplete

Although the details regarding the definition of this content are contentious, there seems to be a somewhat general agreement regarding its general aim, and its closeness to the semantic and syntactic features of a speaker's uttered sentences.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, this content consists on the meanings of the semantic constituents and their syntactic relations of the expression used by speakers in a given context. In detail, the semantic content of a sentence is to be understood here as the minimal, truth-evaluable proposition strictly carried by the components of an uttered sentence and by their syntactic relationship to elements of its conversational context.<sup>8</sup>

With this in place, an initial, yet partial, formulation of SSP thesis can read as follows

**SSP's General Thesis (G-THESIS):** The objects of the epistemic responsibilities of testifying speakers are determined by the semantic content of an uttered sentence.

G-THESIS states that discerning the semantic content of an uttered sentence is an essential, defining part of discerning for what a testifying speaker is epistemically responsible in testimonial communication. The strict communication of a semantic content is, roughly, what enables an instance of communication to be considered a proper instance of *testimonial* communication. SSP, then, restricts testimonial messages for which speakers are epistemically responsible with reference to the semantic content of an uttered sentence, as defined by the strict meanings of their words.

Now, as Fricker and Goldberg suggest, SSP entails there is a productive parallel between the task of discerning the semantics/pragmatics divide and the task of discerning the divide between proper and improper testimonial instance divide. So understood, semantics is in charge of discerning the strict, truth conditional (semantic) contents of an uttered sentence's semantic components and their syntactic relationships, while pragmatics is in charge of discerning pragmatic alterations or additions of meaning from the semantic content to a communicated content that could be intended or understood.

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sentences can be (non-theoretically) treated as uttered sentences. This assumption is to be taken as neutral regarding non-sentential assertion.

<sup>7</sup> King & Stanley (2005), Bach (1994; 2002), Carston (2002) and, Saul (2012), for instance, all have a similar understanding of the semantic and syntactic character of this content. They all differ, however, in the use they make of this concept and on the details of its definition. The definition here presented is very much in line with Saul's (2012) definition (cf. p. 57.)

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, 'semantic content' is understood here as what Goldberg calls the *literal content* of an utterance (2007, p. 91) and what Fricker calls the *primary message* conveyed by speaker utterance (2012, p. 70).

For our purposes, the semantic content of an uttered sentence is the threshold between semantics and pragmatics. Semantics ends just when the proposition defined by the components of an uttered sentence is discerned and pragmatics takes over whenever the communicated message differs from the semantic content of an uttered sentence.

This means that, following widespread accounts of the semantics/pragmatics divide, SSP endorses a wide conception of semantics and do not exclude *every* pragmatic process from it. For instance, in order to identify the proposition carried by an uttered sentence, some terms must be disambiguated, pronouns must be filled in (as well as indexicals and demonstratives), and even complete unpronounced components must be assumed—the utterance of “yes” to the question “have you graduated” is to be taken to have the content ‘yes, I have graduated’. So, pragmatic processes are involved in the semantic task of determining the semantic content only in as much as they allow audiences to attain the truth-evaluable content strictly carried by the speaker’s utterance (cf. Goldberg 2009, p. 70; Fricker 2012, pp, 63-65).

Borrowing Korta & Perry’s (2006) terms, we can see that, according to Fricker and Goldberg’s general idea, *near-side pragmatic* processes (the pragmatics needed to attain a truth-evaluable proposition from an incomplete utterance) are included in the semantic content of an uttered sentence, while *far-side pragmatic* processes (pragmatics used to convey a message beyond the literal proposition conveyed by some utterance) are excluded from it.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, G-THESIS allows pragmatic mechanisms in the definition of semantic contents but only in as much as they disambiguate terms, fill-in indexicals and pronouns, etc.—that is, in as much these mechanisms are near-sided.<sup>10</sup> Henceforth, unless explicitly clarified, when I refer to pragmatics, as in the semantics/pragmatics divide, I refer to the involvement of far-sided mechanisms in determining messages beyond the semantic content.

### **3. Arguments for SSP: The importance of semantic content determinants**

Before considering more specific formulations of SSP’s thesis, in this section I consider two general arguments Fricker and Goldberg give to defend their own version of SSP and the primary role semantics must play in testimonial communication. These arguments also illustrate Fricker’s and Goldberg’s general expectations of how should the restrictions of testimonial messages be

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<sup>9</sup> King & Stanley (2005) refer to this distinction as “weak” and “strong” pragmatic effects on the content of an uttered sentence and agree that only weak pragmatic effects can count as defining semantic contents.

<sup>10</sup> Near side pragmatics may resolve ambiguity cases more complex than term ambiguity such as, for example, Donnellan’s (1966) cases of referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions.

defined and the general role they see for the semantics/pragmatics divide in discerning the conditions under which a communicated message can be deemed to be a proper testimonial messages.

### 3.1 Goldberg and agent independence

Considering that in giving testimony a speaker is responsible for having the appropriate warrant regarding the truth of her message, whatever determines a testimonial message also determines what can be known in that particular instance of testimonial communication. So, Goldberg argues, unless a testimonial message is determined by the literal meaning of the components of an uttered sentence, what can be known from testimonial communication seems to be problematically contingent either on audiences' beliefs or on speakers' intentions.

Consider first the following example (Goldberg 2009, p. 66). In an evidently stormy weather, Jones utters:

(1) It is a beautiful day.

Given the situation and the weather, Smith can take Jones to have ironically communicated that it is indeed a lousy day, and can thus report that

(2) Jones communicated that it is a lousy day.

Although (2) might seem like an intuitive report about the message Jones has communicated, some variations of the context can make the opposite judgment also intuitively true. Suppose that Jones uttered (1) in a context in which everyone, except Smith, knows that Jones would never use the word 'lousy' to describe the weather. In this case, it seems intuitive to say that (2) is a false report regarding the message Jones communicated. Then, to Smith, (1) communicated that the day was lousy, while to the rest of Jones's audience it communicated something else.

Goldberg takes this result to show that 'what is communicated', generally understood, can be dependent on quite variable factors that go beyond any control of a testifying speaker.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> Goldberg's original argument is meant to deny the usefulness of the notion of *what is said* to explain testimonial communication. He understands this notion in very a pragmatically inclined way (as construed by Cappelen & Lepore, 2005), which allows determination by many pragmatic factors beyond the strict semantic content of an utterance. This, however, is a contested view of what is said (consider Bach 1994; Recanati, 1989; and Saul, 2012). In any case, Goldberg argues that a stricter notion than *what is said* is needed for testimonial communication and this entails that a stricter notion than *what is communicated* is needed for testimonial communication, since *what is*

the case considered, the individuation of a communicated message is contingent on the interests and beliefs of an audience and its specific relation to an utterance. However, it seems rather intuitive that what can be known through testimony cannot be determined by such possible and variable relations an audience might have or not with an utterance (2009, p.68). Messages for which a testifying speaker is responsible must be determined by factors that do not depend on changes of the subjective states of an audience and must be insensitive to these kinds of context variations. If they were not so, Jones would be responsible for having warrant for the message Smith understood *and* for the message the rest of her audience understood.

Consider, then, the following plausible alternative: Testimonial messages are determined by the intentions of the testifying speaker. Speaker intentions do not depend on the various possible relations audiences may have with an utterance and do seem to be under the speaker's control. It might even seem intuitive that an audience commits to the content with which she intends to commit. However, Goldberg (2007, pp. 95-5) argues, this is not a valid move either.

Suppose Anthony wants to know President Bush's whereabouts today, so he asks Charles, who is usually competent source for this kind of knowledge. Charles answers with

(3) President Bush is in Galveston, Texas.

Given (3), Anthony comes to believe that President Bush is indeed in Galveston, Texas. Nonetheless, suppose that he watches the news and learns that Bush is actually in Houston, Texas. Disappointed, Anthony confronts Charles, for he testified something false. However, imagine that Charles answers to Anthony's complaint by saying "Well, by uttering 'Galveston' I mean to refer to the city you know as Houston." Then, assuming Charles is honest, by uttering (3) he had the intention to communicate

(4) Bush is in Houston, Texas.

Evidently, Charles's answer to Anthony's complaint is not an appropriate one. Charles's use of the word 'Galveston' to refer to Houston is extremely idiosyncratic. Charles's intention was

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*communicated* here is understood as a superset of *what is said*. Therefore, his argument against the use of what is said is also an argument against the use what is communicated for discerning testimonial messages.

entirely unknown to Anthony, who could not have expected this particular use of the word ‘Galveston.’

If the content of a testimonial message is to be determined by whatever intention a testifying speaker might have, there is no way to explain what went wrong in Anthony and Charles’s case. However, Anthony *is* entirely justified in criticizing Charles’s speech act. Charles actually committed himself to a message for which he did not have appropriate warrant—worse still, he had warrant that it was false. This communication breakdown is explained precisely because Charles’s responsibility lies towards a message determined independently from his intentions. Therefore, just as with audiences’ positions towards an utterance, speaker’s intentions cannot be the determinants of testimonial messages.

Both arguments demand agent-independent determinants for the messages involved in proper instances of testimonial communication. Goldberg proceeds to define the messages for which a speaker is epistemically responsible as the contents defined by the strict semantic-syntactic features of uttered sentences—as the strict content (2009) of an uttered sentence literally construed (2007); or, in our terms, the semantic content of uttered sentences. In this sense, “what is literally said = how one is presenting things as being, insofar as one is (in one’s speech) presenting oneself as occupying a suitably privileged epistemic position regarding how things are” (2009, p. 74).

## *2.2 Fricker and proposition specification*

Elizabeth Fricker (2012) has analogous arguments for the same result. She presents a taxonomy essentially divided into two ways in which a message can be inexplicitly conveyed. First, an utterance (such as “he is there”, or “yes”) may fail to be a complete, declarative sentence and be in need of semantic supplementation to express a *primary*, truth-evaluable semantic content. Second, an uttered sentence’s content might be used to convey a different, *secondary* one. According to Fricker, only primary messages amount to proper testimonial messages.

Since secondary message conveyance relies on mechanisms that exceed the semantic features of uttered sentences, Fricker argues, there seems to be no unequivocal means to discern the specific propositions for which the speaker is epistemically responsible. Therefore, “[i]n the absence of expressions with a conventional semantics, a specific message cannot be recovered” (2012, p. 79). Thus, since secondary messages are not conveyed by a semantically defined

sentence, they cannot be specifically recovered by audiences and there is no single object to which testimonial responsibilities can be properly assigned.

Due to these “dodgy epistemics”, it is “doubtful that a specific further message is what is uniquely so implicated, rather than a fuzzy set of such” (2012, p. 88). Since testimonial responsibilities require one specific proposition to which they can be applied, says Fricker, the communication of a secondary message is an unsuited candidate to enact testimonial knowledge transmission. Consider the following example (Fricker 2012 pp. 85, 88). Say you and I are preparing for a barbeque lunch with some friends and I say “We are out of charcoal”, to which you respond

(5) There is a garage down the road

Having heard (5), I take it as an appropriate answer—due to Grice’s intentional meaning, conversational principle, and its maxims—and go to the garage to buy some charcoal. I took your uttering of (5) to convey

(6) You can find charcoal in the garage down the road.

However, say I went only to find that it was closed—and that (6) was false. Can I take you as responsible for having given me false testimony? According to Fricker, I cannot. To the accusation of being a poor testifier, you could respond “I only told you there was a garage down the road.” Since the message I took you to be communicating was inferred by me, I can only *conjecture* what was the content you intended to communicate. My claim is thusly based on an inference about your intentions, not on a publicly defined sentence determined by public semantic and syntactic norms. There is not one specific proposition for which I can hold you responsible but, at best, a set of probable and appropriate propositions.

Therefore, the only way judgments about testimonial messages can properly ensue is if such messages to which testimonial responsibilities are referred, are directly conveyed by the semantic and syntactic features of the testifying speaker uttered words.

This ‘propositional vagueness’ Fricker sees in secondary message communication brings another problem for communication beyond the semantic content. Since it is not sentence-bound communication, there is always place for denying the communicated message. Fricker

(2012) argues that one important reason speakers might have to communicate through secondary messages is “to enable a message to be conveyed, while being deniable, disavowable, by its sender.” (p. 85) Secondary message transmission seems to entail the possibility of being deniable by the speaker, even if it is in bad faith.

Put in Gricean terms, Fricker seems to suggest that speakers can always exploit the fact that, contrary to primary semantic contents, non-semantically defined messages can be cancelled without incurring into semantic contradiction. So, returning to Fricker’s example, while you cannot cancel the literal content of (5) (you cannot validly say “There is a garage down the road but there is no garage down the road”) you can, without contradiction, cancel the conveyance of (6) through your uttering of (5) (by saying, for instance, “There is a garage down the road but you cannot get charcoal there.) Further, Fricker argues, such cancelation can be uncontroversibly realized in bad faith and thus be used to deny being responsible for the communicated message. Given its cancelability, even if you did mean to convey (6) through uttering (5), you can deny having meant it without me being able to nail your epistemic responsibility for such message.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, epistemic responsibilities in testimony can only ensue if testimonial messages are bounded to the strict contents of uttered sentences.

Although Fricker’s and Goldberg’s arguments are meant to apply to communication beyond the semantic content (cf. Fricker, 2012, p. 72; Goldberg, 2007, p. 89 n. 6), they are crafted mainly in lights of communication by implicature. However, it is widely accepted that communicated messages can differ from the semantic content without being implicatures.<sup>13</sup> In the next sections I concentrate on these cases and present counterexamples of communicated messages defined

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<sup>12</sup> Fricker reinforces this argument alluding to the intuitive moral difference between the act of lying and the act of misleading—likewise, Goldberg assumes it, though without explicitly arguing for it (cf. 2007, p89 n.6). A lying speaker conveys a false primary message to deceive her audience; a misleading one conveys a false secondary message through uttering a true primary one. If your intention was to deceive me regarding me being able to find charcoal at the garage, by uttering (5) you would have misled me and by uttering (6) you would have lied to me. Fricker suggests that one of the reasons lying is perceived as morally worse than misleading is because lying is an overt betrayal of a testimonial engagement, while misleading is not and can always be denied. This gives weight to my claim that the notion of semantic content used here is appropriate to capture SSP position, since in her work about the lying/misleading distinction, Saul (2012) uses a very similar definition to distinguish these kinds of deception (cf. p. 57). However, Saul argues that there is no *moral* difference between the act of lying and the act of misleading. My argument in this paper could be read as a first step for showing that there is no *epistemic* difference between these acts either.

<sup>13</sup> Such mechanisms include, for instance, Bach’s (1994) expansions, Recanati’s (1989) enrichments, and Sperber & Wilson’s (1986) loosening.

beyond semantic contents that *should* be consider as testimony while avoiding implicatures. This for three reasons.

First, while I believe that in some cases implicatures can amount to proper testimonial communication, an argument for this view based only on counter examples will ultimately hinge on irremediably different intuitions and on particular interpretations of Grice's apparatus. Without an alternative framework and a different reconstruction of the use of implicatures in conversation that identifies agent-independent determinants of communicated messages, such argument will most certainly be incomplete.

Second, since my argument is based on counter examples, the most effective ones will be cases in which intuitions as to how utterances elicit communicated content are clear enough; cases in which, although doubts are raised regarding the epistemic function of the semantic content of an uttered sentence, clear judgments about the testimonial messages for which testifying speakers are responsible can be formulated. The primacy of semantic and syntactic features will thus be put to the test in cases for which philosophers in favor of SSP may have more unified intuitions.

Finally, since the cases submitted are not implicatures, it is not entirely clear how Fricker and Goldberg's four arguments would apply to them. None of the following cases seem to be chaotically contingent to agent determinacy, as Goldberg argues would happen with communication outside the semantic content. Further, although propositional vagueness and deniability seem to be matters outside agent determination, some of the cases I mention seem to present these features without entailing problematic judgments about the epistemic responsibilities involved.

#### **4. Formulation 1: Semantic content as dividing axis**

A testifying speaker is epistemically responsible for having the appropriate warrant regarding the truth of her message. According to Fricker and Goldberg, such epistemic responsibility cannot ensue unless it is referred to the truth of the strict content of an uttered sentence, as defined by its semantic and syntactic properties.

One way to specify the role of these properties in line with the arguments of the previous section is to take testimonial messages to be uniquely defined by the semantic contents of uttered sentences:

**SSP THESIS 1:** The objects of the epistemic responsibilities of testifying speakers are *identical* to the semantic content of an uttered sentence.

Given this thesis, SSP's account of the communicative requirements for proper testimonial communication would entail that the distinction between proper and improper testimonial messages neatly corresponds with the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. Since both distinctions would have the semantic content of an uttered sentence as their dividing axis, any kind of pragmatic communicative effect would be excluded from proper testimonial communication. No proposition different from the semantic content of an uttered sentence could be considered part of what can be known from a testimonial message. Thus, the task of finding the semantic values of uttered sentences would closely correlate, if not equate, with the task of individuating the testimonial messages for which speakers are epistemically responsible.

However, consider now the following example. At a hotel reception, you ask for the pool and the manager says:

(7) I regret to inform you that the pool is closed until further notification.

Notice that the factive verb 'regret' here is taken to inform about the state of the pool, not about the state of the speaker. That is, although the strict truth conditions of (7) are defined in reference to the propositional attitude of regret, it is to be taken to inform that

(8) The pool is closed until further notification.

Now, say that somehow I have reason to think that the decision to close the pool did not have much emotional impact on the hotel manager. That is, I have reason to doubt she does not regret that the pool is closed and, therefore, to think that (7) is false.

Does this mean that I cannot take the manager's utterance of (7) as testimony that the pool is closed? It does not seem so. The fact that the manager regrets or not that the pool is closed does not seem to be relevant for the epistemic responsibilities in the testimonial engagement at hand. Although (7) and (8) have *different* contents (different truth conditions), the pool *is* closed and we can learn so from (7), no matter how the manager feels about it. Her epistemic responsibility rests on the truth conditions of (8), rather than on the strict truth conditions of

(7). Sometimes, the use of factive verbs bypasses the variations on truth conditions entailed by the opaqueness of propositional attitudes. THESIS 1 seems too strict.

Propositional attitudes aside, the phenomenon generalizes. Say you are in Mathematical Logic class and the teacher says

(9) Gödel's Completeness Theorem establishes that every consistent, countable first-order theory has a finite or countable model.

Although the truth conditions of (9) involve Gödel's authorship of the Completeness Theorem (CT), it is taken to inform about what the theorem establishes. So, (9) can be used to inform that

(10) The Completeness Theorem establishes that every consistent, countable first-order theory has a finite or countable model.

However, say that—following Kripke's (1980) fictional story—you discover that Gödel was not the author of CT but his friend Schmidt, who had an untimely death. This scenario renders (9), but not (10), false.

Does Kripke's story entail that the testimonial responsibilities involved in the uttering of (9) were betrayed by your teacher and that you gained no testimonial knowledge? It does not seem so either. The accusation of irresponsible testimony seems odd in this case too, given the communicative setting. The epistemic focus of the engagement at hand (or at least a significant part of it) seems to be on the contents of CT, not on Gödel's authorship. Although (9) is rendered false by your discovery, your teacher appropriately presented herself in an epistemically privileged position regarding the content of the theorem, the communication of which was the objective of the class—through (9) she can render herself responsible of (10).

The way the theorem is presented in class—the way in which the information of who discovered it is introduced *in using the sentence*—makes us confident of the focus of communicative and testimonial interest. *Pace* THESIS 1, the epistemic responsibilities of your teacher seem to significantly extend to a content other than the strict semantic content of her uttered sentence.

These exceptions to THESIS 1 seem to generate whenever (i) the epistemic responsibilities of testimony rest on a proposition whose truth conditions, while embedded the semantic content

of the testifying speaker's uttered sentence, are different from the strict truth conditions defined by this semantic content; and (ii), for some epistemically irrelevant reason, the semantic content of the uttered sentence is rendered false without affecting the truth of the content on which the epistemic responsibilities at play rest.

### 5. Formulation 2: Semantic implication

THESIS 1 does not seem like proper candidate for capturing SSP position. In the previous cases, some kind of pragmatic mechanisms must enable audiences to discern the relevant proposition from the strict semantic content of the uttered sentence. Communicative contexts play an important role in defining the appropriate object of these responsibilities. Thus, the mere semantic exercise of discerning the strict content of an utterance fails to properly characterize the contents at play at a testimonial engagement. The semantic content cannot be the *sole* object of the epistemic responsibilities that define testimony.

Notice that cases involving truth disparities such as the one between (9) and (10) are somewhat hard to find. Usually, when we testify about the truth of a proposition whose truth conditions are embedded in the truth conditions of the proposition defined by the semantic content of our uttered sentences, the latter is true as well. Knowing that Kripke's story is false, we know that (9) is true and that, since the truth conditions of (10) are embedded in the truth conditions of (9), (10) is true as well. This is because, although it is a different proposition, (10) is a *semantic implication* of (9). That is, if (9) is true, (10) is necessarily true as well—if the conditions that make a proposition true obtain, so do the conditions that make true its semantic implications.

Consequently, even if (9) has some irrelevant truth conditions for the testimonial engagement at hand—such as Gödel's authorship of CT—your teacher can effectively use it to render herself responsible about one of its relevant semantic implications: (10). In such context, a proper challenge to the epistemic responsibilities enacted by your teacher's uttering of (9) would regard the content of CT and not who authored it. A testifying speaker can render herself responsible for the semantic implications of the content carried by her uttered sentence, even if in some cases such strict content is false.

The same explanation applies for the positive use of factive verbs. I can naturally say

(11) I just realized that Obama publishes in academic journals

to testify that

(12) Obama publishes in academic journals

because (12) is a semantic implication of the semantic content of (11). If I truly realized that Obama publishes in academic journals, Obama must have published in an academic journal. Therefore, the fact that I just realized such information can be taken by my audience as irrelevant to determine my epistemic responsibilities towards Obama's publication record. That, very plausibly, is why in polite communication we can add 'colorations' (such as "I regret to inform you...") that, while rendering the semantic content of our uttered sentences false, do nothing against properly establishing our testimonial responsibilities.

So, if THESIS 1 is too restrictive, an alternative formulation to cope with the former cases can read as follows:

**SSP THESIS 2:** The objects of the epistemic responsibilities of testifying speakers are the semantic content of an uttered sentence or its relevant semantic implications.

Since a speaker's epistemic responsibilities towards a message can extend to the semantic implications of the semantic content of an uttered sentence and, in some cases, these responsibilities rest only on the truth not of the semantic content but of its relevant semantic implications, THESIS 2 seems to be a proper alternative to fix the issues considered on the last section.

This way, SSP's case establishes that the semantic task of discerning the semantic content of an uttered sentence, while necessary, could be insufficient for determining testimonial responsibilities. THESIS 2 allows cases in which audiences recognize the relevant semantic implication for which a speaker renders herself responsible and still maintain the center role of the semantic content in defining the linguistic conditions of testimonial communication.

However, this formulation still fails to capture another kind of intuitively valid and natural instances of testimonial communication. Sometimes the proposition to which epistemic responsibilities apply is distinctively different from the propositions carried by an uttered sentence's semantic content and its semantic implications. Consider the case of the use of quasi-

factives, as characterized by Barceló and Stainton (2016), to testify. Say there is a current investigation regarding an unsolved murder, and I tell to a friend in private

(13) Nobody knows I am the killer.

Given this utterance, my friend can naturally take me to testify that

(14) I am the killer.

However, for all I have strictly said with (13) I could very well be innocent. If I am not the killer, nobody can know that I am the killer and, therefore, (13) would still be true. The truth of the semantic content of (13) is perfectly compatible with me being the killer and me not being the killer. Many quasi-factives cases, being reports that in most cases involve the negation of factive verbs, “debilitate the analytic implication and turn it in a, strong but cancelable, pragmatic suggestion” (Barceló & Stainton, 2016, p. 70).<sup>14</sup> While ‘I am the killer’ is a semantic implication of

(15) Everybody knows I am the killer,

it is not a semantic implication when a negation context is involved. In other words, while I can cancel the message that I am the killer having uttered (13) I cannot do so having uttered (15). I can validly, even if oddly, say “Nobody knows I am the killer but I am not the killer”; but to say “Everybody knows I am the killer but I am not the killer” would be an utter contradiction.

Indeed, (13) could be true for many reasons—for instance, me not being the killer or someone merely believing I am the killer. Even so, my audience can, rather automatically, exclude the irrelevant possible cases in which (13) could be true—say the fact that I am not the killer—and take me to assert the relevant ones—that I am the killer. As Barceló and Stainton explain, when I utter (13) to communicate that an irrelevant condition that renders it true is the case, I am not only making the semantic content of my uttered sentence trivially true but I am

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<sup>14</sup> Quasi-factives also ensue in more complex negative contexts, such as incorporated negation (“I doubt she knows that...”), interrogation (“did you know that...?”), and hypothetical suppositions (“if he finds out that...”). For our purposes, explicit negation (“nobody knows that...”) will do. Bear in mind, however, that the kind of problematic examples that arise from quasi-factives replicate with any of these negative contexts.

unnecessarily uttering a cognitively complex sentence for my intended message (cf. 2016, p 73-5). If I am not the killer or someone merely believes I am, there are much more straightforward and precise ways to communicate this. Therefore, there is a strong *pragmatic* (usually tacit) reason for my audience to take me as testifying the relevant proposition that makes (13) true; that is, (14).

If my audience discovers I am not the killer, accuses me of giving false testimony, and I am a very savvy linguist who believes in THESIS 2, I could technically say: “My testimony is true, nobody knows I am the killer.” However, regardless of what I could have intended or what my audience could have understood, such answer is a rather inappropriate excuse for making my audience believe that I was indeed the killer when I was not. (13), in the specified context, naturally leads to (14). My audience’s *inference* of my testimonial message—that I am the killer—seems to be entirely justified. In cases like this, my epistemic responsibilities seem to rest somewhere beyond the semantic content of my uttered sentence and its semantic implications.

Notice that, against what Fricker seems to endorse, at least in this case, cancelability is not deniability. Semantically speaking, after I utter (13), the message that I am the killer can be cancelled; doing so would not lead to contradiction. However, this does not mean that I can deny the responsibility of having communicated that I am the killer due to the strong pragmatic mechanism involved. Even if the communicated message is cancelable, this does not mean that any claim of cancellation can be a valid denial of responsibility.

As Grice construed the phenomenon of cancellation, a speaker cancels an implicated content by *adding* to the communicated situation a clarification that she did not intend the message required by the situation (1989, p. 39). Moreover, if a speaker did not mean such communicated content, not cancelling it or cancelling it after the speech act has been realized is a failure in communication, precisely because the conversational situation required her utterance to communicate a message different from the semantic content of the uttered sentence. Once more, there is a significant difference between discerning semantic contents and discerning testimonial responsibilities. Although “Nobody knows I am the killer because I am not the killer” may be a semantically valid cancellation, it is not an appropriate testimonial denial.

### **6. Formulation 3: Relevant inference**

Exceptions to THESIS 2 seem to ensue when a testifying speaker’s epistemic responsibilities refer to a proposition that, while easily inferable from it, is not the semantic content of my

uttered sentence nor its semantic implications. The testimonial use of many quasi-factives is a perfect way to generate these counter examples. Further far-sided pragmatics must be included in SSP's thesis. In some cases, pragmatic mechanisms must be able to let audiences recognize inferable propositions for which testifying speakers are responsible, even if they go beyond those stated by an uttered sentence's semantic content and its semantic implications.

Notice that in the example above I expect my audience to infer the relevant condition that renders the semantic content of my uttered sentence true. That is, I am uttering something true that prompts an inference about what specific proposition makes it true; and it is for that specific proposition that I am rendering myself responsible. By uttering "Nobody knows I am the killer" I want my audience to infer the relevant condition—even if it is not a semantic implication—that makes the semantic content of my utterance appropriate to testify that I am not the killer. SSP could, therefore, argue that the semantic content of my uttered sentence still determines my epistemic responsibilities in as much I render myself responsible for having the appropriate warrant regarding its truth. I am committing to the relevant proposition inferable from the fact that the semantic content of my uttered sentence is true.

The following two-step formulation covers the above considered exceptions to THESIS 2:

**SSP THESIS 3:** (i) The objects of the epistemic responsibilities of testifying speakers are the semantic content of an uttered sentence or its relevant semantic implications; (ii) these epistemic responsibilities extend to the relevant inferences obtained from the semantic content (or its relevant semantic implications) being actually true.<sup>15</sup>

These two moves cover last section's cases and preserve the defining role of the semantic content of uttered sentences in testimonial communication. According to THESIS 3, testifying speakers render themselves epistemically responsible for having warrant regarding the truth of their message, even if the specific proposition for which they are actually responsible is different, but inferentially obtainable, from the semantic content of my utterance being actually true. Although epistemic responsibilities would still have semantic contents as their focus, a very important part

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<sup>15</sup> This formulation covers mixed cases. For instance, it is conceivable to use the sentence "I regret to inform you that nobody knows I am the killer" to inform my friend that I am the killer. In this case, a testifying speaker would be responsible for the relevant inferences obtained from a semantic implication of the semantic content of her uttered sentence being true. For the sake of a clear argument, I do not consider these cases and refer only to cases in which testifying speakers are responsible for the relevant inferences obtained from the semantic content of their utterance being true.

of discerning testimonial messages would involve discerning what propositions can be inferred from the semantic content of a testifying speaker's uttered sentence.

This opens up the question about what makes certain inferences more relevant than others, for which Fricker and Goldberg give no clues. For instance, SSP philosophers would have to offer an account of why the inference from 'There is a garage down the road' to 'You can get charcoal in the garage down the road' is significantly less relevant than the inference from 'Nobody knows I am the killer' to 'I am the killer.' So THESIS 3 would entail the introduction of further, non-semantic criteria to discern agent-independent determinants for communicated messages, since such inferences are not determined nor defined exclusively by an uttered sentence's semantic content.

I am not suggesting here that such account cannot be construed—a close reading of Barceló & Stainton's discussion of the cognitive complexity involved in the use of quasi-factives might give some clues as to how to pursue such argument. Instead, I am pointing out to the fact that, in accepting THESIS 3, SSP would significantly lose the semantic stability it found in the strict, semantically defined contents of uttered sentences. Answers to questions about relevant inference must involve reference to the particular context of testimonial engagements and their participants' position in conversation, which both Fricker and Goldberg seemed eager to dispel from testimonial communication. Further, SSP would owe an account of how to deal with cancelability and how inferred propositions are to be agent-independently individuated. THESIS 3 would give SSP quite a pragmatic character.

Still, THESIS 3 misses its mark on many other seemingly valid cases of testimonial communication in which the semantic content must be taken to be false in order to make sense of the testimonial responsibilities enacted by a testifying speaker. Consider cases involving the mechanisms Bach (1994) calls *expansions*, in which, once more, negation complicates our judgments about the pertinence a semantic content's truth conditions has in determining testimonial responsibilities. Say a surgeon tells the brother of a patient who just came out of surgery that

(16) She is not going to die.

Now, say this brother is very literal-minded and accuses the doctor for offering false testimony: "Of courses she is going to die, we all will die one day." Indeed, (16) expresses a truth evaluable

semantic content, which, literally held, states that the patient will not die (period). If, following THESIS 3, the truth of the semantic content is the center of this testimonial engagement, the doctor presented herself as having sufficient warrant that the patient was not going to die or of a relevant inference the brother could have made from this fact. However, in this case, it seems clear that the literal-minded brother is wrong, and his claim of false testimony is inappropriate.

As defined by Bach, expansions ensue when an already truth evaluable proposition carried by an uttered sentence calls for *conceptual strengthening*. That is, in our terms, when the communicated message is the result enriching or developing the semantic content of an uttered sentence. So, the surgeon's uttering of (16) calls for an expansion such as

(17) She is not going to die {today/soon/from this surgery}.

However, the inference prompted by the call for this expansion involves denying the truth of the semantic content of (16). Since it is quite reasonable to think that the doctor expects her patient to die someday, the brother *should* automatically conclude that the doctor is not only limiting the epistemically relevant proposition for which she renders herself responsible but is placing it completely outside the semantic content of her utterance. While the step from (16) to (17) is not determined by the strict meanings of the words used by the testifying speaker, it does not seem dangerously subject to agent idiosyncrasies; since a strict reference to these words would quite unreasonably render her responsible for having warrant that her patient is immortal.

The communicated content of (17) is not a "mere" insinuation, it is not part of the semantically defined content of uttered sentence, and, moreover, can only be inferentially obtained if the semantic content of (16) is taken to be false. THESIS 3 does not apply when it comes to characterize the relation between the semantic content of an uttered sentence and the epistemic responsibility of the speaker. Since the conceptual strengthening (16) calls for involves a radical change of the truth conditions semantically defined by its semantic content, testimonial responsibilities cannot be understood as primarily referred to semantically defined contents. It seems that THESIS 3 does not cover these intuitive cases of testimonial communication.

In such cases a testifying speaker commits to some message different from the semantic content of the uttered sentence, precisely because this content cannot (reasonably) be true. Once more, the parallel between the semantics/pragmatics divide and the proper/improper testimonial instance divide seems to significantly break. Further and definitively non-semantic

determinants are involved in understanding the communicative conditions of testimonial communication.

### 7. Proposition identification and vagueness

Philosophers in favor of SSP may argue that the above case hinges on an arbitrary notion of semantic content. Perhaps the expansion involved in (17) can somehow be posited as part of the semantic content of (16). Goldberg (2009), for instance, briefly suggests that our intuitions regarding the message on which the responsibilities of a testifying speaker rest could be helpful to constrain our judgements about the semantic value of an uttered sentence. Perhaps in cases like the one considered above our intuitions about epistemic responsibilities give us reason to believe that content additions are part of the semantic value of the uttered sentence.<sup>16</sup>

Although the burden of the proof is arguably on SSP's ability to defend a kind of semantics that allows such judgements, here I present one final set of cases that suggests not only that THESIS-3 seems to miss its mark in discerning testimonial responsibilities but also that SSP's general conditions for individuating testimonial messages might be misguided in important cases of testimonial communication. If my argument follows, there are important cases of testimonial communication in which we ought to keep our judgements regarding semantic contents apart from our judgements about testimonial responsibilities.

Say you ask me when did Juan left the office, to which I answer

(18) He left at noon.

Further, assume you check the surveillance videos of the office and learn that Juan actually left at 12:06 p.m. Can you appropriately accuse me of being an epistemically irresponsible testifier? Given the situation, it does not seem so. The fact that I testified that Juan left at noon is compatible with his having left the office at 12:06. Blaming me for falsely testifying that he left at noon when he left at 12:06 places an excessive epistemic burden on my words, very few time

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<sup>16</sup> An argument for this this point could be made following Stanley (2000). According to Stanley, "all truth-conditional effects of extra-linguistic context can be traced to logical form" (p. 391). Consequently, the expanded, truth conditional value of (17) is to be traced to the logical form of (16). However, SSP would have to give an account of how communicating agents can make non-theoretic judgements about such complex logic structure (see also Elugardo & Stainton (2004) for compelling arguments against Stanley's view). Further, as mentioned in n.19, Fricker and Goldberg seem to be committed to the fact that the lying/misleading divide must also coincide with the proper/improper testimony divide. Following Saul (2012), this can only be achieved if Bach's expansions, such as the one (16) calls for, are excluded from the semantic content.

reports would count as successful testimonial knowledge transmission. The sentence I uttered seems to validly render me epistemically responsible for a range of cases (11: 58 a.m., 11:59 a.m., 12:01 p.m., 12:02 p.m., etc.) and not a specific one represented by my speech. Therefore, my epistemic responsibilities about the time at which Juan left seem to unproblematically also apply to the content of

(19) He left at 12:06 p.m.

The range of acceptable propositions compatible with my uttering of (18) is not specifically defined: there are no specific limits that define the precise time in which Juan leaving would have rendered my testimony false. I can be taken to render myself responsible for having appropriate warrant regarding not a specific time but an acceptable range of times in which Juan could have left. So, while I might have uttered that Juan left at noon, my epistemic responsibilities are not restricted to one specific proposition about one specific moment in which Juan left the office.

Following Sorensen (2001), such compatibility of different propositions for which I can be taken to be epistemically responsible is explained by the fact that, ‘noon’ is a *vague* term—there are no precise thresholds that define when noon begins and when noon ends. So, 12:06 belongs of a vaguely defined set of times at which we can confidently say it is noon—thus, the content of (19) belongs to a vaguely defined set of propositions compatible with the truth of (18). Consequently, such vagueness is part of the meaning of the term ‘noon’ and, therefore, my responsibility towards the semantic content of (18) is compatible with different specific times at which Juan could have actually left. SSP does not seem to be endangered by the fact that I am not an irresponsible testifier even if I could be taken to be responsible for a range of propositions for which we do not know the specific boundaries. The vagueness of ‘noon’ seems to be part of the semantics of (18).

However, consider a slightly modified case. You ask me when did Juan left the office, to which I answer

(20) He left at nine a.m.

Further, assume you check the surveillance videos of the office and learn that Juan actually left at 9:06 a.m. Can you appropriately accuse me of being an epistemically irresponsible testifier?

Again, given the situation, it does not seem so. The results of the last example replicate. Again, my epistemic responsibility of having the appropriate warrant regarding the truth of (20) seem to be compatible with the fact that Juan left at 9:06 a.m. Such testimonial engagement permits a range of valid propositions for which my epistemic responsibility applies; including

(21) He left at 9:06 a.m.

More often than not, when we testify about something happening at a given time, we are not held epistemically responsible for the exact time we report. Further, we are aware of the fact that it is significantly probable that the literal content of our words is wrong; that what we report did not happen at the exact time we are saying it did. If it were so, we would have to deem unsuccessful a vast amount of naturally successful instances of testimony involving time.

Notice, that, unlike (18), (20) *does* represent a problem for SSP. The vague range of propositions for which I am epistemically responsible is nowhere defined in the semantic content of (20)—‘nine a.m.’ is not a vague term. The strict content of (20) is a specific proposition about time. Thus, THESES 1-3 would render me responsible for having warrant that Juan left the office exactly at 9:00 a.m. However, the semantic content of my utterance is false—moreover, I should know that it is probably false—and yet, the claim that I gave false testimony does not seem appropriate; as it would be, for instance, if Juan actually left the office at 11:00 a.m. You can obtain testimonial knowledge from (20), even if you too know that the semantic content of my utterance is probably false, just as in last’s section example the truth of semantic content of my uttered sentence does not define my epistemic responsibilities.

By uttering (20), I am not uniquely committing to one specific proposition. Instead, I am rendering myself responsible for a set of sufficiently similar propositions. While (20) is not semantically vague, the nature and permissiveness of the testimonial engagement at hand allows us to treat it *as if* it were. This content alteration is nowhere to be found on the semantic components of my uttered sentence, it is the result of a far-sided pragmatic mechanism. The pragmatics of the situation involve the inference that the semantic content *should not* be taken strictly. Although the semantic content of my utterance is a specifically defined proposition regarding a specific time, the object of my responsibilities is not a proposition but a vaguely defined range of propositions. Notice that many cases of testimonial communication are permissive in this way. This pattern of testimony ensues in our reports about height (“I am 1,60

m tall”), weight (“André weighed 120 kilos”), and distance (“My house is 18 kilometers from here”).

This result contrasts not only with SSP’s project of giving a primary role to the truth of the semantic content in testimonial communication but also with its basic assumption that the objects to which testimonial responsibilities apply must be individual propositions about the world. Fricker’s arguments against vagueness are effective if testimonial responsibilities rest on specific propositions; if they do not, she argues, there is no way of determining in a principled way the object for which a testifying speaker is rendering herself responsible. Likewise, Goldberg’s suggestion that our intuitions about the objects to which epistemic responsibilities apply can help us discern issues about the semantic content of uttered sentences seems to entail that such objects must be defined as single propositions. For both Fricker and Goldberg, epistemic responsibilities rest on a proposition about the world and, since the job of semantics is to discern the strict propositions carried by our uttered sentences, they take it to be ideal to discern these responsibilities

However, cases like the one involving (20) show that testimonial responsibilities can apply not to a single proposition but to a set different, acceptable propositions. Here, testimonial responsibilities are not defined towards the uttered sentence’s semantic content but towards a range of cases made valid by the occurrence of my utterance in our testimonial engagement. Focusing on the semantic content gives us an unpalatable result: We would be responsible for the truth of the exact content of our uttered sentences regarding, for example, time and distance. Instead, losing this focus allows us to accept that in our testimonial practices the object of our epistemic responsibilities can be widely—and vaguely—defined.<sup>17</sup>

So, *contra* Fricker, it is precisely because of the propositional vagueness involved in many of our testimonial practices that we can make sense of the epistemic responsibilities accepted by a testifying speaker—testimonial messages can (and sometimes should) be vaguely defined. And, *contra* Goldberg, at least in these cases, our intuitions about testimonial responsibilities ought to be kept from our intuitions about semantic contents.

The semantic conclusion that (20) carries a specific semantic content is different from the conclusion about the vague object of my testimonial responsibilities in this case. The semantic

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<sup>17</sup> Granted, an account of how, and in which contexts such range of propositions can be established is needed. Some contexts may narrow the limits of this propositional vagueness, others can extend it or even annul it. However, such account will not have a semantic character.

task of discerning semantic contents entirely lacks the capacity of discerning the object of my testimonial responsibilities. Some other non-semantic determinants of testimonial messages seem to be involved in defining the object for which a testifying speaker is responsible.

### Conclusions

Fricker and Goldberg have voiced a legitimate suspicion: communicated content in testimony must be somehow restricted to keep epistemic responsibility in order. Their candidates for this endeavor were the semantic and syntactic norms that define the strict contents of our uttered words. Such features seemed to allow the preservation of fixed, agent-independent, non-deniable contents to which the epistemic responsibilities of testimony could safely apply. Beyond this semantic content there seemed to be chaos, eccentric communication, and psychological idiosyncrasy. Beyond this content there seemed to be, in a word, epistemic unaccountability.

If my arguments are sound, however, testimonial communication can ensue through communication beyond the semantic content. The determinants of testimonial messages must be allowed to exceed semantics. Although I have said nothing regarding how they may be possibly defined, we have seen that testimony might be permissive, context-dependent, non-semantically defined and, nevertheless, ordered in a reliable fashion. It is permissive in the sense that it is not in the business of blindly excluding messages but of *making sense* of them. And it makes sense of them by taking testimonial contexts seriously—by asking what is required by them. Rightly understood, then, testimonial communication is context-dependent in a productive way, contexts allow to determine testimonial messages beyond agent subjectivity. Therefore, it is also ordered because not every communicative move, even if not semantically defined, is allowed in testimonial contexts.

Indeed, testimonial contexts seem to objectively constrain the communicative moves we make. To deny responsibility by saying that nobody knows I am the killer because I am not the killer, while semantically valid, may be not allowed as excuse for giving false testimony. Likewise, to spurn a doctor as a liar because she falsely testified I am immortal, is a communicative error: I should know better. And, finally, certain moves may open a permissive range of cases for which I am appropriately responsible. These conclusions will surely be useful in the search for new non-exclusively-semantic determinants for testimonial messages.

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