The Epistemic Significance of Address

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If a hearer comes to believe that p on the basis of a speaker's testimony that p, does the fact that the speaker's testimony is actually addressed to the hearer make any salient difference to the epistemic credentials of the hearer's belief? In other words, do the other-directed intentions embodied in a speaker's addressing an assertion to a hearer have any distinctive epistemological significance? The overwhelming consensus amongst epistemologists is that the answer to this question is "No".[1] That a speaker's testimony is actually addressed to a hearer makes no salient difference to the epistemic credentials of the hearer's testimonial belief. Hence, if we divide a hearer's testimonial beliefs into beliefs based on testimony that is addressed to the hearer—call these *addressed-based beliefs*—and beliefs based on testimony that is not addressed to the hearer—call these *non-addressed-based beliefs*—then there is no salient epistemological difference between addressed-based and non-address-based beliefs. From an epistemological perspective, addressed-based and non-address-based beliefs are of a piece.

In this paper I argue that this overwhelming epistemological consensus is mistaken. There is indeed a salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based beliefs, and so an adequate epistemology of testimony must be in a position to account for this distinction. Section I distinguishes between two forms of the denial of the epistemic significance of address. Some epistemologists have argued for the strong claim that whether a speaker's testimony is so much as addressed to anyone at all makes no salient difference to the epistemic credentials of a hearer's belief. Others have objected to this, arguing that testimony must at least be addressed to someone in order to so much as amount to an instance of the speech act of testimony, while still endorsing the weaker claim that whether the speech act is addressed to the particular hearer in question makes no salient difference to the epistemic credentials of the hearer's belief. Section II makes what I take to be an extremely intuitive case that even such a weak denial of the epistemic significance of address is mistaken. It argues that a hearer's epistemic responsibilities with respect to address-based beliefs are very different from a hearer's epistemic responsibilities with respect to non-addressed-based beliefs. A hearer can discharge her epistemic responsibilities with respect to her address-based beliefs by "deferring to the speaker" or "passing the epistemic buck", but she cannot do this with respect to her non-address-based beliefs. Section III presents a provisional analysis of address that is in a position to mark this epistemic distinction between address-based and non-address-based belief, and section IV responds to objections.

I. Strong and Weak Epistemic Insignificance

Regardless of one's particular views concerning the nature of knowledge and justification, it seems plainly true that both address-based and non-address-based beliefs can be justified and can amount to knowledge. Whether a hearer's belief is address-based or not, it can still be the result of a reliable belief-forming process, based on

[1] A notable exception is Hinchman (2005).

sufficient evidence, responsibly formed, sensitive, safe, etc. Depending on the circumstances, both address-based and non-address-based beliefs can be perfectly well grounded, meaning that if there is a salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based beliefs, this cannot be a distinction with respect to whether the addressed or non-addressed testimony provides a hearer with good grounds for belief. The recognition that both addressed and non-addressed testimony can provide perfectly good grounds for belief may be part of what has motivated so many philosophers to deny that address is of any proper epistemological significance. However, to say that addressed and un-addressed testimony both provide perfectly good grounds for belief is not yet to say that those grounds are the same. Both my perception of a deer walking through my backyard and my perception of a deer's footprint left in the mud may provide me with perfectly good grounds for believing that there is a deer in the vicinity, but there is clearly a salient epistemological distinction between the grounds provided. In the one case my grounds are perceptual, while in the other they are inferential. This is just to say that the fact that both address-based and non-address-based beliefs can be well-grounded doesn't of itself foreclose the possibility that there is nevertheless a salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based beliefs.

Though most epistemologists share the idea that there is no salient epistemological distinction between addressed-based and non-address-based beliefs, the denial of the epistemic significance of address can take stronger and weaker forms. Some epistemologists accept the strong claim that whether an instance of testimony is so much as addressed to another person at all makes no salient difference to the epistemic credentials of a hearer's beliefs based on the testimony. We might call this a claim of *Strong Epistemic Insignificance*. According to Strong Epistemic Insignificance, if we divide a hearer's testimonial beliefs into beliefs based on testimony that is addressed to someone and beliefs based on testimony that is not addressed to anyone at all, then there is no salient distinction between the epistemic credentials of these two types of belief.

Importantly, Strong Epistemic Insignificance requires a particular conception of the kind of speech act relevant to the epistemology of testimony. If Strong Epistemic Insignificance is true, then we must be able to identify instances of testimony that are not in fact addressed to anyone. A speaker must be able to perform the speech act paradigmatically relevant to the epistemology of testimony absent the communicative intentions, whatever exactly they are, typically involved in addressing an utterance to a hearer. Along these lines, Jennifer Lackey has argued that a statement that is not intended to communicate information to anyone can nevertheless amount to testimony as long as it is intended to express "communicable content".

> [C]onsider a case in which Davis is engaged in a soliloquy in his room and, unbeknownst to him, someone in the next room overhears what he is saying. Such a soliloquy, on my view, is an example in which a speaker intends to express communicable content but does not intend to communicate; accordingly I would say that Davis's soliloquy qualifies as an act of communication. Similar considerations apply to posthumous publications of journals, private diaries, and so on. Such cases qualify as acts of communication since the speaker intends to

> express thoughts with communicable content, despite the fact that she does not intend to communicate them to anyone else. (2008: 28-29)

Lackey holds that the kind of non-addressed statements found in private soliloquies and entries in a private diary genuinely amount to testimony, to what she calls "hearer testimony" (or "h-testimony").[2] Hearer testimony amounts to an act of communication that can serve to justify a hearer's belief in the content of the testimony despite the fact that the testimony was not addressed to anyone and hence was not intended to communicate information.

> A speaker may h-testify even if she positively intends for her statement or thought never to be taken as conveying information to anyone. For example, suppose Lucy's private journal is found by the police. Suppose further that she wrote that her husband had committed the crime for which he is suspected, though she intended such thoughts only for herself—in fact, she even encrypted the entries in what she (mistakenly) thought was an unbreakable code and, thus, in no way offered such thoughts as conveying information regarding her husband's guilt. Nonetheless, according to the current proposal, Lucy's journal will qualify as h-testimony since it is taken as conveying information by the police. (2008: 31-32)

On this kind of view, oral and written statements that are made in private and are not intended to communicate information to anyone nevertheless put a hearer in a position to acquire properly testimonial belief.

Many epistemologists object to the conception of the speech act of testimony required by Strong Epistemic Insignificance while still downplaying the epistemic significance of address. For example, Elizabeth Fricker has recently claimed that assertion "must have an intended audience. Without this, there is no distinction between asserting that P—vouching for the truth of P—and merely voicing a thought of or wish that P" (2006: 597).

> Tellings, and testimony more generally, must have an intended audience, since their defining intention is to convey information or purported information, to that audience. But this intended audience may be indeterminate, perhaps thought of only existentially by the teller, as in radio broadcasts, or perhaps thought of only as a possible future audience, as in diaries written with posterity, or one's forgetful future self, in mind. (2006: 596)

Fricker thus holds that testimony, tellings, and assertions all must have an intended audience; they all must be addressed to someone.[3] Without this they cannot amount to

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[2] Lackey argues for a "disjunctivist view of the nature of testimony" according to which testimony includes both "speaker testimony" and "hearer testimony". Speaker testimony requires that a speaker intend to convey information, but hearer testimony does not. (2008: 35-36).

[3] In the quoted passages Fricker claims that these speech acts must have "an intended audience". Arguably, a speech act's having an intended audience is insufficient for the speech act's being addressed to the audience. I might intend you to be an (overhearing) audience of my soliloquy without thereby addressing the soliloquy to you. Nevertheless, I am here reading Fricker as taking "having an intended audience" and "having an addressee" to be coextensive.

instances of the relevant speech acts. Nevertheless, she still holds that whether the speaker's testimony is addressed *to the particular hearer in question* makes no salient difference to the epistemic credentials of the hearer's testimonial belief. Though testimony must be addressed *to someone* in order to so much as amount to an instance of the relevant speech act, there is nevertheless no salient epistemological distinction between the beliefs of addressees and of non-addressees. We might call this a claim of *Weak Epistemic Insignificance*. According to Weak Epistemic Insignificance, if we divide a hearer's testimonial beliefs into beliefs that are based on testimony that is addressed to the hearer and beliefs that are based on testimony that is not addressed to the hearer (but is nevertheless addressed to someone else), then there is no salient distinction between the epistemic credentials of these two types of belief.

Unlike Strong Epistemic Insignificance, Weak Epistemic Insignificance doesn't go so far as to deny that testimony must actually be addressed to someone in order to so much as amount to an instance of the relevant speech act. Nevertheless, it still denies that address is of any *direct* epistemic significance. Though Fricker accepts the idea that address is necessary for a speech act to so much as amount to testimony, she nevertheless holds that there is no salient epistemological distinction between addressees of a genuine instance of testimony and non-addressees.

> [A]lthough a telling must have an intended audience, it is not only the intended audience who can avail herself of the reason to believe made available by the act of telling. An eavesdropper can witness the same act and, providing she has an epistemic basis properly to trust the teller, may equally acquire knowledge at second hand, as the intended audience does. Moreover, her grounds or basis of entitlement is essentially the same. Unlike some, I do not think the audience/eavesdropper distinction is directly epistemically relevant. There is no special entitlement to believe (nor requirement, epistemic or moral) made available to the intended audience of the telling, which is not available to anyone else. The entitlement to believe made available by a telling, or indeed any assertion, is what economists call a public good: it is in the nature of my speech act, that I cannot, even should I want to, make available an entitlement to believe to you, without simultaneously making it available to anyone who hears and understands me doing so. Would it were so simple to restrict one's sharing of information! No, if I want to tell you that P, and I don't want anyone else in earshot to know (not just believe, but know!), it is not enough that I address you, and not the others. I have to whisper, or someotherwise make sure they do not hear what I say to you! (2006: 598)

On Fricker's view, even though a statement must be addressed to a speaker in order to so much as amount to an instance of testimony, the communicative intentions embodied in the act of addressing an utterance to a hearer do not grant the addressee any particular kind of epistemic entitlement that can't be acquired by hearers other than the addressee. Addressees and mere eavesdroppers are in an equivalent epistemic position with respect to the epistemic entitlement made available by a speaker's testimony.

In the next section I will argue that this is mistaken. There is indeed a salient epistemic distinction between addressees and mere eavesdroppers, and thus the epistemic credentials of address-based and non-address-based beliefs are in fact different. If this is correct, then even Weak Epistemic Insignificance must be mistaken.[4]

II. Deference and Address

Imagine a police detective using a wiretap to listen in on a telephone conversation between two criminals.[5] The detective hears criminal A tell criminal B that an extremely large shipment of narcotics is arriving on Wednesday. On the basis of A's testimony, both criminal B and the detective form the belief that an extremely large shipment of narcotics is arriving on Wednesday. B's belief is based on being addressed with A's testimony and so is an address-based belief. The detective's belief is not based on being addressed with A's testimony—the detective cannot be considered an addressee of A's testimony in even the widest possible sense—and so the detective's belief is a non-address-based belief. Our question, then, is this: Is there a salient distinction between the epistemic credentials of B's address-based belief and the epistemic credentials of the detective's non-address-based belief?

Provided that both B and the detective have sufficient reason to judge that A is reliable in this particular case, both B and the detective appear to be in a perfectly adequate position to acquire justification for believing that an extremely large shipment of narcotics is arriving on Wednesday on the basis of A's testimony to that effect. Moreover, if it is true

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[4] In making this argument I take myself to be expanding on a point suggested by Richard Moran. Moran writes:

> When all goes well in testimony, a speaker gives his audience a reason to believe something, but unlike other ways of influencing the beliefs of others, in this case the reason the audience is provided is seen by both parties as dependent on the speaker's making himself accountable, conferring *a right of complaint* on his audience should his claim be false. (2005: 21, my emphasis)

Moran then goes on to note that this right of complaint is acquired only by addressees of a speaker's testimony and not by mere overhearers.

> If one person gives his word on something to another, whether as promise or assertion, someone overhearing this may derive a sufficient reason to believe, say, that the speaker will in fact do what he promised or that what he asserted is true. And the overhearer improves his epistemic situation in this way without entering into the altered normative relationship of the two parties involved in giving and accepting of words. He has not himself been *told* anything, much less promised anything, and no right of complaint has been conferred on him. (2005: 22)

Moran is concerned here to insist that mere overhearers can acquire a reason for belief from a speaker's testimony only given the fact the testimony has been addressed *to someone*. Like Fricker, he wants to insist that addressive relations are ineliminably involved in constituting an utterance as an instance of testimony. However, unlike Fricker, he seems to accept that there is nevertheless a salient difference between addressees and mere overhearers. While addressees acquire a "right of complaint" if a speaker's testimony turns out to be false, mere overhearers do not. Moran doesn't have much to say about what exactly this right of complaint involves, but in the next section I will argue that addressees of a speaker's testimony acquire a right to *defer epistemic challenges* or *pass the epistemic buck* while mere overhearers do not.

[5] This example is adapted from McMyler (forthcoming).

that an extremely large shipment of narcotics is arriving on Wednesday, then both B and the detective appear to be in a position to acquire knowledge of this fact. Hence, if there is a salient epistemological distinction between B's address-based belief and the detective's non-address-based belief, this can't be a matter of whether the relevant beliefs are justified or amount to knowledge. Nevertheless, there may still be a difference in *the way in which* their respective beliefs are justified, and this can be illustrated by considering the way in which their epistemic responsibilities for their respective beliefs diverge.

Imagine that after forming their beliefs on the basis of A's testimony, both B and the detective are challenged by third parties to defend their beliefs. B is challenged by a fellow criminal who states that A has never before secured a shipment of narcotics of that size, and the detective is challenged by a fellow detective who states the same. My intuition is this: while B is entitled to defer the challenge or pass the epistemic buck back to A, whereupon A is then responsible for meeting the challenge to B's belief, the detective is not so entitled. In this respect, the two hearers' epistemic responsibilities for their respective beliefs appear to be different. Criminal A can discharge her relevant epistemic responsibilities by deferring the challenge back to criminal B, while the detective cannot. This suggests that there is indeed a salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based beliefs. The epistemic credentials of address-based beliefs involve an entitlement to defer epistemic challenges or pass the epistemic buck back to the testimonial speaker, while the epistemic credentials of non-address based beliefs do not.[6] Weak Epistemic Insignificance is therefore mistaken.

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[6] One might object to my reading of the detective case by arguing that the only reason the detective is not in a position to defer challenges is that this would blow her cover. In this sense, the detective may very well be epistemically entitled to defer challenges, but in this case it would simply be pragmatically undesirable to do so. Deferring a third-party's challenge back to criminal A simply runs the risk of revealing to A that the detective has been listening in on A's conversations. It isn't clear to me, however, that such pragmatic considerations are what best explains the case. I think it is clear that there would be something wrong with the detective's responding to the third-party's challenge by saying, "Don't ask me. A said it was coming in." Rationally speaking, the detective shouldn't respond in this way, and this is so even if there is no danger that this will somehow get back to A. It's true that when an audience defers a challenge back to a testimonial speaker this will often have the effect of the third-party proceeding to then confront the testimonial speaker with the challenge. If this were to occur in the case of the detective, this might very well out the detective, making the detective's deferral prudentially irrational. However, we can easily imagine cases in which such deferral would not be prudentially irrational. If the detective is challenged by a fellow detective who would never dream of proceeding to confront A with the deferred challenge, then there is no sense in which the detective's deference would be prudentially irrational. Nevertheless, the detective's deference still seems inappropriate, suggesting, I think, that the sense in which it is inappropriate is genuinely epistemic. One might also think that the fact that a fellow detective would never dream of confronting A with a deferred challenge itself makes it the case that deferral is here epistemically inappropriate. Perhaps deferral is only epistemically appropriate when it is practically possible to confront the speaker with the deferred challenge. But there are many cases in which an audience appears to be entitled to defer challenges despite the fact that there is no real way in which a third-party can then proceed to confront the original testimonial speaker with the challenge. Much testimonial knowledge is acquired from testimonial speakers who are long since deceased, and it seems that such knowledge still involves an entitlement to defer challenges or pass the epistemic buck. As I argue below, deferring a challenge involves holding a speaker partially epistemically responsible for one's belief, and a speaker can be so responsible even when (for non-epistemic reasons) she is not in a position to discharge this responsibility. So not only does it appear that the inappropriateness of the detectives deferral of the

The very same considerations that tell against Weak Epistemic Insignificance also tell against Strong Epistemic Insignificance. Whereas Weak Epistemic Insignificance denies that there is any salient epistemological distinction between beliefs based on testimony that is addressed to a particular hearer and beliefs based on testimony that is not addressed to the hearer, Strong Epistemic Insignificance denies that there is any salient distinction between beliefs based on testimony that is addressed to a hearer and beliefs based on testimony that is not addressed at all (assuming for the sake of argument that unaddressed statements can actually amount to instances of testimony). However, if there is a salient epistemological distinction between the beliefs of criminal B and of the detective, then there must also be a salient epistemological distinction between the beliefs of criminal B and the beliefs of someone overhearing a private soliloquy. If the detective isn't in the position to defer challenges to his perfectly well-justified beliefs based on criminal A's testimony, then surely the overhearer of the private soliloquy isn't in a position to defer challenges either. If an utterance is not addressed to anyone, then an audience of the utterance must be in the position of a mere overhearer and so cannot acquire an epistemic right of deferral. There is thus a salient epistemological distinction between beliefs that are based on testimony that is addressed to the believer and beliefs that are based on testimony that is not addressed at all. Strong Epistemic Insignificance is therefore mistaken.[7]

The very intuitive argument offered here relies on the idea that belief is a state for which subjects are *epistemically responsible*. Belief is something for which a subject is answerable, and the relevant sense of answerability at issue is an answerability to genuinely epistemic (rather than merely practical) norms. Plausibly, one aspect of the way in which subjects are epistemically responsible for their beliefs concerns their epistemic conduct in the face of reasonable challenges to their beliefs, where reasonable challenges to their beliefs involve the presentation of evidence that counts against their beliefs. Typically, when confronted with such a challenge, a rational epistemic agent ought to either find some way to meet the challenge (some basis upon which to rationally discount the evidence presented) or else give up her belief. When it comes to testimonial beliefs, however, it appears that an epistemic agent is entitled to maintain her belief without meeting the challenge herself by instead deferring the challenge back to the testimonial speaker. In this sense, epistemic agents are entitled to *defer epistemic challenges* or *pass the epistemic buck* back to the speaker from whom they acquired their testimonial belief (Brandom 1983 and 1994, Goldberg 2006, McMyler 2007 and forthcoming). If an audience comes to believe that *p* on the basis of a speaker's testimony, and if a third party challenges the audience's belief by producing evidence that tells against *p*, the audience is entitled to defer the challenge back to the original speaker.

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challenge is genuinely epistemic, but it also appears that the epistemic inappropriateness here isn't generated by anything other that the fact that the detective is a mere overhearer. I am indebted to Nat Hansen for pressing me on this issue.

[7] Is there a salient epistemological distinction between beliefs based on testimony that is not addressed at all (Lackey's hearer testimony) and beliefs based on testimony that is addressed to someone other than the believer in question? It doesn't seem to me that there is. Here I disagree with Moran (2005). It just isn't clear to me that, from a hearer's perspective, the kind of reason for belief provided by a speaker's private soliloquy is relevantly different from the kind of reason for belief provided by a speaker's addressed testimony overheard on a wiretap.

Importantly, an audience isn't entitled to defer just any epistemic challenge back to the speaker. If the challenge involves the production of evidence that tells against the trustworthiness of the testimonial speaker—say, that the speaker is an inveterate liar—rather than against the content of the speaker's testimony, then the audience is not entitled to defer the challenge back to the speaker. Nevertheless, the audience does appear to be entitled to defer challenges like that involved in the case of the detective, challenges that involve the production of evidence that tells against the content of the speaker's testimony itself.

This entitlement to defer challenges or pass the epistemic buck appears to be a distinguishing feature of a particular class of beliefs. It doesn't apply to beliefs based on perception, memory, or inference. If I perceive that p for myself or infer that p for myself, then I am not entitled to defer epistemic challenges. In perceiving something for myself or inferring something for myself, I have come to my own conclusion about things, and as such I am completely responsible for meeting epistemic challenges to this conclusion. However, not all justified beliefs involve coming to one's own conclusion about things. Some beliefs are based on "taking another's word for things" or "taking things on the authority of another", and there is an important sense in which these beliefs do not involve coming to one's own conclusion about things. They do not involve coming to one's own conclusion about things in that they seem to involve an epistemic right of deferral.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the class of testimonial beliefs ought to be identified with the class of beliefs that involve an epistemic right of deferral, with the class of beliefs that involve "taking another's word for things" or "taking things on the authority of others" (McMyler 2007 and forthcoming). This is a claim about how the epistemology of testimony is most fruitfully theorized that I don't wish to argue for here. Instead, I simply want to argue that the case of the detective shows that the entitlement to defer challenges or pass the epistemic buck only accrues to address-based beliefs. The detective is certainly in a position to treat A's testimony as a good reason for belief, but given the fact that she has not been addressed by A she is not entitled to pass the epistemic buck back to A should her non-address-based belief be challenged. Addressees and mere overhearers are thus in a different epistemic position with respect to the content of their beliefs acquired from a speaker's testimony. Addressees are in the position to discharge their epistemic responsibilities with respect to responding to challenges by deferring the challenge back to the testimonial speaker, while mere overhearers are not in a position to discharge their epistemic responsibilities in this way. Mere overhearers are themselves responsible for meeting challenges to the content of their beliefs acquired from a speaker's testimony, and if they are unable to meet such challenges themselves, then they should give up their beliefs.

Now, I have here offered an example of what I take to be a clear case of the distinction between addressees and mere overhearers. Criminal B is clearly an addressee of criminal A's testimony, and given that, unbeknownst to the criminals, the detective is listening in on their conversation over a wire-tap, the detective clearly cannot be considered an addressee of A's testimony in any relevant sense. I've thus referred to the detective as a

mere overhearer. Importantly, however, not all overhearers are mere overhearers. In many cases the distinction between addressees and overhearers is difficult to discern, and as a result conversational participants that might legitimately be referred to as overhearers are nevertheless sometimes in a position to acquire an entitlement to pass the epistemic buck.

Imagine that as students are filing out of a lecture hall after class, student A asks the professor about the due date for the final paper, and the professor tells A that the due date will be pushed back a week from what is indicated on the syllabus.[8] While leaving the room, student B overhears what the professor says and on that basis forms the belief that the due date will be pushed back a week. B later relates this fact to another student in the class who challenges her by pointing out that pushing the due date back a week will give the professor very little time to mark the papers before final grades are due. In this case, despite the fact that she was not a direct addressee of the speaker's testimony, B still appears to be in a position to defer the challenge back to the professor. B can fulfill her epistemic responsibilities with respect to the proffered challenge by deferring it back to the testimonial speaker.

Student B can legitimately be described as an overhearer of the professor's testimony, and nevertheless she appears to be entitled to defer challenges. In this sense, she is in a different epistemic position from the detective listening in over a wire-tap. She is not a *mere* overhearer. In fact, the context in which the professor's testimony is offered is one in which the professor might be conventionally understood to be addressing everyone within earshot. Clearly, there is a *direct* addressee of the professor's remark—student A, who might even be picked out by use of a vocative, as in "Well Sally, the due date for the paper will actually be pushed back a week"—but given the context in which the remark occurs, all of the remaining students in the room can legitimately be taken to be *indirect* addressees of the professor's remark. In this sense, while student B can be referred to as an overhearer in the sense that she is not the direct addressee of the speaker's testimony, she can nevertheless also be understood to be an indirect addressee. This clearly distinguishes student B from the detective. Given that the detective is listening in on criminal A's testimony over a wire-tap, there is no sense in which the detective can be understood to be an indirect addressee. As I have put it, the detective cannot be understood to be an addressee of criminal A's testimony in even the widest possible sense. In contrast, student B can be understood to be an addressee of the professor's testimony in a wide, indirect sense, and this explains why, unlike the detective, she is in a position to pass the epistemic buck.

In this way, the epistemic distinction that I have identified between address-based and non-addressed based belief is one that pertains to a wide sense of address. It is a distinction between the beliefs of addressees in a wide sense that includes student B and the beliefs of mere overhearers like the detective. In the next section I offer a general account of address that is in a position to mark this epistemic distinction.

[8] This case is adapted from McMyler (forthcoming).

III. Addressees, Participants, and Overhearers

A remarkable feature of natural language is that it not only represents the world but can also be directed to others. It is essential to the way in which natural language is a social institution that it can be directed to others—and to particular others—in such a way as to coordinate action and the dissemination of information. But what exactly is it to direct one's words to others? What is it to address someone?

I would like to propose the following provisional account of address:

> (ADD) In performing communicative act C, person A addresses person B just in case A intends B to believe that A intends B to understand C.

Two things must be noted about (ADD) straight away. First, address is here characterized as a feature of communicative acts, but I intend the category of communicative acts to be broader than the category of illocutionary acts. One can address an audience with a wink, a nod, or a gesture, none of which involve performing an illocutionary act.[9] (ADD) is thus a very broad account of address designed to capture the way in which communicative action can be directed from one person to another.[10]

Second, according to (ADD), addressing an audience with a communicative act involves performing the act with a particular intention. Importantly, however, the content of this intention *is not* that the audience understand the communicative act. Intending an audience to understand the communicative act is neither sufficient nor necessary for addressing the audience. On the one hand, a speaker can clearly intend an audience to understand the force and content of her utterance without addressing the audience. Imagine someone discussing with a friend what she would like for her birthday while knowing full well that her spouse will overhear her. The speaker might explicitly intend her utterance to be overheard and understood, even while she does not intend to be telling her spouse what she wants, perhaps thinking that such openness would be inappropriate or undesirable. (ADD) is in a position to account for this. Though the speaker intends her spouse to understand her communicative act, *she does not intend her spouse to believe that she intends her spouse to understand her communicative act*.[11]

On the other hand, a speaker can succeed in addressing an audience without actually intending the audience to understand the force and content of her utterance. Consider the following case presented by John Searle:

> Suppose that I am an American soldier in the Second World War and that I am

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[9] I have therefore formulated (ADD) in terms of persons rather that speakers and hearers. Addressors needn't be speakers, and addressees needn't be hearers. As my particular concern is with the epistemic significance of address for the beliefs of hearers, I will generally leave this complication aside in what follows.

[10] Can the notion of address apply to things that are not communicative acts, to thoughts or to utterances said under one's breath? Such things can make use of the second-person pronoun—for example, thinking "Screw you" or saying it under one's breath.

[11] This case might be modified so that the speaker does have something like this intention toward her spouse. However, to the extent that this is so, the spouse looks more and more like an indirect addressee, ceremony notwithstanding.

> captured by Italian troops. And suppose also that I wish to get these troops to believe that I am a German soldier in order to get them to release me. What I would like to do is to tell them in German or Italian that I am a German soldier. But let us suppose I don't know enough German or Italian to do that. So I, as it were, attempt to put on a show of telling them that I am a German soldier by reciting those few bits of German I know, trusting that they don't know enough German to see through my plan. Let us suppose I know only one line of German which I remember from a poem I had to memorize in a high school German course. Therefore, I, a captured American, address my Italian captors with the following sentence: *Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen*? (1969: 44)

Here the American soldier clearly addresses his Italian captors with his utterance. Equally clearly, however, he does not intend his captors to understand the force and content of his utterance. He positively intends that they will not understand what he says and that they will thereby conclude that he is a German soldier. Nevertheless, the American soldier does intend *that his Italian captors believe that he intends that they understand the force and content of his utterance*, and so (ADD) is able to account for this case.

(ADD) is an extremely useful tool for distinguishing between addressees and what I have called mere overhearers. According to (ADD), the addressees of a speaker's testimony are those hearers the speaker intends to believe that she intends them to understand her testimony. Mere overhearers of a speaker's testimony are those hearers the speaker does not intend to believe that she intends them to understand her testimony. Returning to our wiretapping case, the detective is clearly a mere overhearer. Criminal A does not intend the detective to believe that she intends the detective to understand her testimony. On the other hand, criminal B is clearly an addressee. Criminal A does intend criminal B to believe that she intends criminal B to understand her testimony. (ADD) also helps us to understand what is at issue in the more difficult case of the professor. The professor clearly intends student A to believe that she intends student A to understand her testimony. But given the broader context and the professor's conventional standing with respect to the rest of the students in the class, it's plausible that the professor should also be understood to intend that all of the students in the class, including student B, believe that she intends them to understand her testimony. On this reading, all of the students in the class can be understood to be addressees of the professor's testimony in the sense specified by (ADD).

This raises two issues. First, it appears that the relevant communicative intention involved in addressing a communicative act to an audience is something that can be at least partly determined by convention. It is largely in virtue of the professor's conventional standing with respect to her students that she can be credited with the intention that they all believe that she intends them to understand her testimony. The professor can be credited with the relevant communicative intentions in virtue of inhabiting this conventional role, and thus whom she is addressing is not strictly speaking up to her. Imagine a case in which the professor is giving a public lecture on a mature topic concerning which she doesn't want her young daughter to be informed. She has her

daughter with her, and so she arranges for her daughter to be entertained in another room. Nevertheless, curiosity overcomes the daughter and she manages to sneak into the auditorium where the lecture is being given. There the professor testifies to various facts, and despite her explicit intention not to be addressing her daughter, it seems that she addresses the testimony to her daughter, as a member of the audience, nevertheless. The context is such that the professor is conventionally taken to intend that everyone in the room believe that she intends them to understand her testimony, and so the professor addresses her daughter despite her own best intentions.

Second, according to (ADD) all of the students in the room are addressees of the professor's testimony. Nevertheless, there is clearly a sense in which student A is the *direct* addressee of the professor's testimony, while the rest of the students in the room are *indirect* addressees. In this sense (ADD) does not distinguish between direct and indirect addressees. This has an interesting consequence. If (ADD) is correct, then the second person pronoun, 'you', must refer to something more specific than the addressees of the utterance in which it occurs. 'You' refers to the direct addressees, but there are indirect addressees to which the second person pronoun does not refer.

In order to capture the way in which 'you' refers to what I've called direct addressees, Herbert Clark and Thomas Carlson develop a distinction between *addressees* and *participants* of an utterance. As Clark and Carlson use the terms, addressees are what I've called direct addressees, and participants include both addressees and what I've called indirect addressees. Clark and Carlson offer the following example:

> *Othello, to Desdemona, in front of Iago and Roderigo*: Come, Desdemona. (1982: 332)

In this case, Desdemona, Iago, and Roderigo are all participants, but Desdemona is the (direct) addressee. Here a vocative is used to pick out the (direct) addressee of Othello's order, but the second person pronoun can be employed to the same effect. Imagine Othello looking at Desdemona, in front of Iago and Roderigo, and saying "You, come." Despite the fact that Desdemona is here clearly the direct addressee of Othello's speech act, it seems plausible that Othello's order is also directed to Iago and Roderigo. Othello may in fact intend Iago and Roderigo to believe that he intends them to understand his order, even though he is not ordering them.[12] Perhaps Othello wishes Iago and Roderigo to observe Desdemona's reaction to his order. He (directly) addresses the order to Desdemona, but he also (indirectly) directs his utterance to Iago and Roderigo insofar as he intends that they believe that he intends them to understand what he is doing. This distinguishes Iago and Roderigo from mere eavesdroppers who may very well understand Othello's utterance but to whom Othello is not in any way directing his utterance.[13]

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[12] In this respect, telling (or testifying) might seem very different from speech acts like ordering. Typically, indirect addressees of a speaker's order are not thereby ordered. The only person being ordered is the direct addressee, the person in a position to be picked out by the use of a vocative. If what I have argued is correct, however, then the indirect addressees of testimony are typically being testified to.

[13] Of course, we might imagine situations in which Othello is in fact directing his utterance to everyone in earshot, perhaps making a display of his power over his new wife. In such a case, everyone in earshot would amount to what I have called an indirect addressee.

(ADD) is not in a position to pick out what Clark and Carlson refer to as addressees, namely "the participants who are, or could be, designated vocatively in the utterance" (1982: 343). (ADD) is designed to pick out the broader class of what Clark and Carlson refer to as participants, but there seems to be ample justification for using the term "addressee" to refer to this broader class. Imagine a judge instructing a witness on the stand to "address the court" rather than the defendant. Here it doesn't seem that the court is an entity that might be designated vocatively in the witness's testimony. The judge is instructing the witness to design her testimony so as to treat all of the members of the court as what Clark and Carlson call participants, and nevertheless appeal to the concept of address in this case is clearly apt. In this sense, there seems to be good reason for using the notion of address in the broad way proposed by (ADD) even while recognizing that there are important distinctions to be made within the broad class of addressees, particularly between what I have called direct and indirect addressees.

More to the point, the salient epistemic distinction between address-based and non-address-based belief identified in the previous section is one that depends on the broad understanding of address proposed by (ADD). As illustrated by the wire-tapping and professor cases, the epistemological distinction between beliefs that involve an entitlement to defer challenges and beliefs that do not involve such an entitlement is a distinction between the beliefs of addressees and the beliefs of mere overhearers, not between the beliefs of (direct) addressees and the beliefs of participants.

IV. Radio Broadcasts and Secret Diaries

I have argued that the epistemic significance of address lies in the fact that there is an entitlement to defer challenges or pass the epistemic buck that is possessed by addressees of a speaker's testimony but not by mere overhearers. I have also provided a provisional account of address that is in a position to mark this epistemologically relevant distinction between addressees and mere overhearers. With these materials in hand, we are now in a position to assess some of the reasons standardly offered for thinking that there is no salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based belief.

As we've seen, Fricker holds that even though address is necessary for constituting an utterance as an instance of the speech act of testimony, there is nevertheless no salient epistemological distinction between the beliefs of addressees and of mere overhearers. This isn't simply to say that both addressees and mere overhearers can acquire knowledge and justified belief from a speaker's testimony. Rather, Fricker is claiming that "[t]here is no special entitlement to believe (nor requirement, epistemic or moral) made available to the intended audience of the telling which is not available to anyone else" (2006: 598).

> It is not merely that overhearers, as well as addressees, can acquire knowledge. The basis for knowledgeable belief available to the addressee is no different from that available to overhearers. She does not have a different type of, nor a stronger, basis for belief. (2006: 598)

Fricker thus denies that the way in which address-based beliefs are justified is any different from the way in which non-address-based beliefs are justified. She attempts to support this with the following example:

> Suppose that O overhears S telling H about the relative merits of computer game packages. O knows S well, and knows that she is an expert on this, and is moreover a very reliable informant generally. In contrast, S is a stranger to H. In this situation S has far stronger grounds for belief in what she hears S tell to H, than H does. Moreover, S should be more offended if O later exhibits doubt regarding what S said, than if H does. O should know that S is to be trusted about these things, and S is properly offended if she doubts her. But H, who is a stranger, has no particular reason to trust S; so S has no reason to feel offended if H is reluctant to accept her word without further corroboration, on this very contestable topic. Indeed, she might regard H as foolish to do so, without knowledge of her credentials! (2006: 599)

Fricker is here claiming that an overhearer can in fact be in a better position than the addressee to acquire an entitlement to believe from a speaker's testimony. This seems plausible. If the overhearer has good reason to believe the speaker trustworthy on this particular occasion, while the addressee does not, then the overhearer looks to be in a better position to acquire knowledge and justified belief from the speaker's testimony. Nevertheless, even though the overhearer may have "stronger grounds for belief", this is not yet to say that these grounds are such as to entitle the overhearer to defer challenges. Returning to the case of the detective, we might imagine that our detective has far greater and more intimate knowledge of criminal A's competence and sincerity with respect to particular issues than does criminal B. Like Fricker's overhearer, the detective might thus be in a far better position than criminal B to acquire knowledge and justified belief from criminal A's testimony. Nevertheless, there still seems to be a salient distinction between the stronger grounds to believe available to the detective and the weaker grounds available to criminal B. Only the weaker grounds entitle the hearer to pass the epistemic buck. If a third party challenges the detective's belief by producing evidence that tells against the content of the belief, the detective does not appear to be entitled to defer the challenge back to criminal A. So even though the hearer may have stronger grounds for belief, these grounds are not such as to entitle the overhearer to defer challenges.

This is to cast the overhearer in Fricker's example in the position of what I've called a mere overhearer. Notably, it is not abundantly clear from Fricker's example whether her overhearer is actually a mere overhearer, like our detective, or something more like an indirect addressee, like our student B. This unclarity may then help to fuel the idea that there is no real distinction between the grounds for belief available to the addressee and the grounds for belief available to the overhearer. If the context in which the overhearing occurs is one in which the speaker can be understood to be indirectly addressing the overhearer, intending the overhearer to believe that the speaker intends the overhearer to understand her communicative act, then the overhearer can indeed acquire a right to pass the epistemic buck, just as can the direct addressee. In such a case, the grounds for belief available to the overhearer and the direct addressee appear to be the same. But if the

speaker cannot be understood to be indirectly addressing the overhearer, then there is indeed a salient distinction between the grounds for belief available to the overhearer and the direct addressee. The grounds for belief available to the direct addressee entitle her to pass the epistemic buck, while the grounds for belief available to the overhearer do not.

Fricker concludes that "[t]elling is like radio broadcasting. Anyone who can tune her radio into the wavelength can pick up on the signal. Similarly, anyone who tunes into the speech act, correctly latching onto its content and force, and who in addition has a basis properly to trust the source, can pick up the information purportedly thereby offered" (2006: 599). Fricker's point, again, is that there is no salient epistemological distinction between address-based and non-address-based beliefs. The grounds for belief made available by a speaker's testimony are available to anyone who may stumble across it, regardless of whether the person is an addressee of the testimony in question. Remarkably, however, the analogy that Fricker draws between telling and radio broadcasting is radically incapable of making this point. *Broadcasting* one's testimony out over the radio is an activity whereby one is conventionally understood to be addressing everyone who tunes in to the wavelength.[14] This is radically unlike addressing one's testimony to a particular hearer and then having many others merely overhear. In broadcasting one's testimony, one is addressing everyone who tunes in—one intends everyone who tunes in to believe that one intends them to understand one's communicative act—and so everyone who tunes in is in a position to acquire grounds for deferral.[15] But this is simply because there are no mere overhearers of a radio broadcast, and so this is completely consistent with there being a salient epistemological distinction between the beliefs of addressees and of mere overhearers.[16]

But what if we're doing the opposite of broadcasting out testimony? What if we're trying to keep it private as in the case of a secret diary? David Owens argues that a hearer can learn from a speaker's unaddressed testimony in just the same way that she can from testimony that is addressed to her. He thus endorses Strong Epistemic Insignificance.

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[14] Fricker seems to recognize this herself in a passage that I cited earlier:

> Tellings, and testimony more generally, must have an intended audience, since their defining intention is to convey information or purported information, to that audience. But this intended audience may be indeterminate, perhaps thought of only existentially by the teller, as in radio broadcasts, or perhaps thought of only as a possible future audience, as in diaries written with posterity, or one's forgetful future self, in mind. (2006: 596)

[15] Clark and Carlson note that the dialogue between two or more individuals on radio and television broadcasts is often explicitly designed so as to include the radio or television audience as participants (or what I've called indirect addressees) (1982: 339).

[16] Nevertheless, I think that the intuition behind Fricker's analogy is a common one. It is commonly assumed that speech is in the first instance directed, as it were, "to the cosmos", where this involves being somehow directed simultaneously to no one and to everyone. This is something like the default status of an utterance. An utterance may then be addressed to particular others in virtue of additional particular communicative intentions of the speaker, but in the first instance all speech is directed to the cosmos. The problem is that it's not at all clear what this could possibly involve, and so it obscures the way in which speech is in the first instance a much more finely grained communicative device employed in the service of social action.

> Think of a secret diary containing one's most intimate thoughts. It is not just that the author of this diary has no intention of communicating these thoughts to others by writing them down; he has every intention of not communicating them and is careful to keep his diary secret. Such a diary may be filled with assertions but assertions which lack an intended audience and are not meant to assure anyone of anything…
>
> Suppose that, unbeknownst to the speaker, I read his secret diary (or bug his private monologues). Here the diarist may have specifically intended to keep his diary away from me. Still, can't I learn from the author's diary in just the way I learn from his conversation, or his published works? True, he may not have told *me* anything, but his diary has and to believe his diary is to believe him, to take his word for it. (2006: 117-118)

In effect, I have already argued that belief based on bugging a private monologue is insufficient to generate an epistemic right of deferral. If the detective cannot acquire a right to defer challenges from overhearing criminal A's testimony on a wiretap, then bugging criminal A's private monologues would seem to put her in no better position. Actual cases of diary writing are more difficult, however. This is because the very medium of the written word seems to acquire a good deal of its significance from the way in which it serves to concretize addressive relations over time and space. Part of the point of keeping a secretive, private diary may be to address one's speech to a distant, perhaps wholly imaginative person or community. For example, at the beginning of Orwell's *1984*, Winston Smith begins keeping a secret diary, and he wonders explicitly about to whom his secret diary is being addressed:

> He wondered again for whom he was writing the diary. For the future, for the past, for an age that might be imaginary. And in front of him there lay not death but annihilation. The diary would be reduced to ashes, and himself to vapor. Only the Thought Police would read what he had written, before they wiped it out of existence and out of memory. How could you make appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive?...He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long, as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage. He went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote:
>
> *To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:*
>
> *From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of double think—greetings!* (1949: 26-27)

In this sense, the statements of a secret diary can clearly be addressed to someone, and insofar as they can be addressed to someone, it seems that they can put the addressee in a

position to acquire an epistemic right of deferral. Nevertheless, we can imagine cases of diary writing that are far less addressive. As we've seen, Lackey imagines a case in which the diarist encrypts her entries in what she takes to be an unbreakable code (2008: 31-32). Unlike Winston Smith, this diarist may not want to communicate her thoughts to anyone, not even to an imagined future person or community. But insofar as this is the case, does cracking the diarist's code and deciphering her entries put one in a position to pass the epistemic buck? This seems far from clear. It seems to be a significant feature of diary writing that the addressive relations involved therein can often shade off and become unclear, but if we stipulate that we are imagining a case in which a diarist's statements are not addressed to anyone, then I think it's far from clear that reading the diarist's statements puts one in a position to defer challenges.

Importantly, bugging a person's private monologues or cracking a diarist's secret code can certainly give one very good reason to believe that what the person says or writes is true. It can give one very good grounds for belief. All I have claimed is that the grounds for belief thereby provided do not entitle one to defer epistemic challenges to one's belief, to pass the epistemic buck back to her. This is sufficient to vindicate the claim that there is a salient epistemic distinction between address-based and non-address-based belief. The grounds for belief available to a hearer when a speaker addresses her testimony to the hearer put the hearer in a position to acquire an entitlement to pass the epistemic buck. The grounds for belief available to a hearer when a speaker does not (even indirectly) address her testimony to the hearer do not put the hearer in a position to acquire such an entitlement. The communicative intentions involved in addressing one's testimony to an audience are in this sense genuinely epistemically significant.

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